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# The "Wrong" Gender: Is Social Capital more accessible to Men?

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## Abstract

*The creation of farmer groups has been a popular strategy in rural development to work with farmers in an organized way. Being organized as a group strengthens farmers' capacities to access markets and gives them a voice that is otherwise not heard. Being in a group also allows people to increase their number of social relations, creates trust and other features of social capital. It has been argued also that high levels of social capital can be transformed into financial capital.*

*Research in 20 agriculture-based groups in Búzi district, central Mozambique reveals gender is the key characteristic to human and social capital formation in this area. Despite the fact that men and women are equally exposed to groups, in terms of membership, as well as, participation in group activities, the benefits of the groups and the outcomes of social capital are significantly unequally distributed. Women find it harder to transform and benefit from the increased number of social relations or the trust created from group access to information, access to markets, or help in case of need.*

*The contribution of women to food security has been widely acknowledged and gender sensitive approaches have been discussed for years in the development debate. Despite attempts to mainstream gender in development activities, there is still a lack of understanding in how to do so in planning, implementing and evaluating rural development projects. More systematic research is needed to fully understand the complexity of group dynamics in relation to culture and gender roles to address the different needs of gender groups and overcome existing cultural barriers.*

**Keywords**: associations, gender, Mozambique, rural development, social capital

# 1. Introduction

Farmer groups, associations and cooperatives are not an indigenous concept in rural Mozambique, where people traditionally rely on their "strong ties" (Granovetter 1973) and "social capital" has traditionally been associated with the networks over and within the extended family. Kinship ties are based on mutual help and offer social protection in the absence of governmental structures to guarantee social security (Ministerio do Plano e Financas 1998) in case of sickness and old age. Restricting social capital to strong kinship ties has reasons: it is partly due to scattered settlement patterns - in central Mozambique for example, farmers often live miles apart from each other - but also because the traditional social organization is based on the *regulo*-system (for the traditional system see Roque and Tengler 2001). Diversification of social relations and creating "weak ties" (Granovetter 1973) does generate social capital of people and - against increasingly limited capacities of the extended family (HIV/AIDS rates, migration,…) – decrease peoples' vulnerability.

In Mozambique working in or as groups was introduced after independence (1975) when the socialist FRELIMO government forced people to work in agricultural cooperatives and live in communal villages. With the transition to a market economy, the cooperatives were privatized, and transformed into associations, often without explaining the implications of these changes to farmers[i]. After the civil war (1992) international donors preferably allocated emergency relief to people who were organized as groups and hence created an expectation of people to receive free goods other than looking at the group as a framework to overcome problems out of their own capacities.

The advantages of working as a group have been demonstrated in different studies. Pretty and Ward (2001) have reported higher yields of farmers that are organized in groups compared to individual farmers in Nepal, Philippines, Kenya…, and Bebbington (1996) has argued that membership in groups can allow farmers to access markets and technical assistance. Andersson et al. (2002) have found that group meetings strengthen social capital and reduce the costs of collaboration and collective action. While the ability of groups to generate social capital, people who engage in collective action and hence provide public goods is well documented in the literature (Molinas 1998, Feldman and Assaf 1999, Lochner et al. 1999, Collier 1998), relatively little is known on how these benefits are actually translated to the individual level and distributed within the group. We will demonstrate different types of goods that can be generated by the group; while public and collective goods are equally accessible to all members, private goods are significantly unequally distributed between men and women.

In the literature, networks and horizontal associations, such as those created through group membership, are perceived as (structural) social capital (Putnam 2001, Haug 1997, World Bank 1998, Bebbington and Carroll 2000, Krishna and Uphoff 1998,…). Taking into consideration "the multiple dimensions of social capital" (Putnam 2001) we use Putnams (2001) definition here which states that social capital is "networks and the associated norms of reciprocity".

The paper draws on field work carried out in Mozambique between February and June 2005. A survey on social capital (n=160 farmers, 20 agriculture based groups in Búzi district) was conducted. The study was complemented with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews (government, extension, NGOs, group presidents, farmers…), group discussions, participant observations during field visits and secondary data collected from NGOs, government and local universities.

# 2. Social Capital Outcomes: What is there for Farmers?

Considering broad concept and different dimensions of social capital, we distinguish three types of social capital outcomes: public goods, collective goods and private goods[ii] and classify the outcomes of social capital accordingly:

(1) public goods such as the provision of a bridge by the group to access fields on the other side of the river, introduction of new technologies by service providers that other farmers can also apply easily or market linkages with traders. Conservation agriculture is a knowledge-based technology that requires local inputs only. Therefore this good is of non-rival and non-exclusive character to the group and broader community as it is not consumed when used. Similarly, market linkages are yet of public good character as traders usually buy up what group members and the broader community produces,

(2) collective goods such as the creation of group funds, feeling of belonging, and social status by being recognized as a group member by fellow members and the outside community. Collective goods are similar in character to public goods but accessible to members only, qua their membership status. To enter groups requires the payment of membership fees and being accepted by the group members, and

(3) private goods that are available for individuals such as the probability to borrow money in case of need, number of information sources and access to services.

We will now discuss further the distribution of these goods amongst members.

## 3. Distribution of Social Capital amongst Farmers

In the survey on social capital reciprocal relations, the probability to access help or credit from others, sources of information and access to services have been used as proxy variables to assess the structural social capital of the respondents.

The results of Table 1 show significant differences for gender, position and education in access to and use of social resources. Age and household size do not have an impact.

Men are more likely to access credit or help when they need than women, but also have higher access to information and services. Not surprisingly, education (index combining years of school, literacy, and ability to speak Portuguese) is a key factor in accessing information from a variety of channels or being visited by others.

Being visited in the rural setting means that somebody needs something from the respondent, and educated people are likely to be knowledgeable and can give advice. Being visited by others and helping them in one or the other way creates obligations for the future for the visitor and hence creates social capital for the respondent who can request "repayment" in return when needed. This explains the high correlations of likelihood of educated people to receive credit or help in case of need.

Table 1 also demonstrates correlations for position and social capital, though these are not as strong as for gender or education. Leaders are more likely than simple members to access credit or help when needed or receive information.

Similar to social capital, gender, position and age have a significant impact on the production value and the farm size, i.e. men, and older people have larger fields, while men and leaders achieve larger production value.

**Table 1 Correlations of Social Capital Indicators with selected socio-economic variables**

| *Nr. of…* | *Gender (1=female, 2=male)* | *Age (in years)* | *Position (1=member) (2=leader)* | *Household size* | *Education (literacy and school years)* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| people who would give credit | 0,321 *** # | -0,070 | 0,142 * | 0,001 | 0,183 ** |
| people who would help in need | 0,278 *** | -0,080 | 0,148 * | 0,072 | 0,280 *** |
| of institutions accessible | 0,160 * | 0,007 | 0,174 ** | 0,076 | 0,114 |
| of information sources | 0,173 ** | -0,059 | 0,026 | 0,124 | 0,208 *** |
| times being visited last month | 0,127 | -0,106 | 0,111 | 0,076 | 0,224 *** |
| size of farm | 0,379 *** | 0,145 * | 0,051 | 0,130 | 0,111 |
| production value | 0,138 * | -0,006 | 0,156 ** | -0,047 | 0,062 |

(Source: Gotschi et al. 2006)
Significance levels: *** < 0,01 %, ** < 0,05 %, * < 0,1 %
# Values represent Pearson's R.

Because men are more likely to be able to read (t-test -6,94 ***, p-value 9,49) and men are more likely to be in leadership positions (t-test -3,99 ***, p-value 16,65). It is concluded that gender relations are perpetuated and manifested in the group. An equal number of men and women in the group does not mean that men and women have equal chances of creating reciprocal ties and benefiting from the group.

Leadership positions in groups are highly gendered as presidents and vice-presidents of groups "need" to be male and only in 'female-only groups' women can become leaders. In contrast, the position of the group treasurer is a typical female task, as women are said to be looking well after the money, be

trustworthy and do not “eat” the money. About 80 % of the positions of treasurers are occupied by women. The position of the secretary is balanced between the two gender groups.

In Table 2 women in leadership positions (n=23) are compared with men in non-leadership position (n=32) with regard to their ability to benefit from social capital.

**Table 2 t-test comparing women in leadership positions with men in non-leadership positions for social capital indicators**

| *Nr. of…* | *Gender (1=female leaders, 2=male non-leaders)* |
|---|---|
| people who would give credit | -2,64 *** |
| people who would help in need | -1,649 |
| of institutions accessible | -1,519 |
| of information sources | 0,282 |
| times being visited last month | 0,281 |
| size of field | -1,764 * |
| production value | 0,143 |

(Source: Field work 2005)
Significance levels: *** < 0,01 %, ** < 0,05 %, * < 0,1 %

It is evident that women in leadership position can improve their social capital as compared to women in non-leadership positions. While it is still more likely for male members, than female leaders, to obtain credit, there are no significant differences between these two groups in terms of accessing help in need, information or services. Results in farm size and production values suggest that women in leadership positions can improve their socio-economic status as compared to women in non-leadership positions and can (partly) overcome gendered disadvantages. However, compared to men in non-leadership positions female leaders still have significantly smaller farms, though the level of significance in Table 2 is reduced compared to Table 1.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

The contribution of women to food security has been widely acknowledged (for example WFP 2002) and gender mainstreaming has been discussed for years in the development debate. Research in rural Mozambique reveals that gender sensitive approaches do not meet their targets by simply having equal numbers of men and women in the project, on the contrary, they do manifest gender roles and perpetuate inequalities between men and women. There is a need to understand gender related roles and related cultural traditions from both, the female and the male perspective. More systematic research is needed to fully understand the complexity of group dynamics in relation to culture and gender roles to address the different needs of gender groups and overcome existing cultural barriers.

Women in Búzi district form more than 50 % of group members, they attend group meetings, invest money and time in group activities[iii]. And while women are meeting the same people as men, and investing the same resources, they are less able to create social relations upon which they can draw in case of need, nor do they access information or services to the same extent as their male colleagues do. One main factor is the culturally rooted hierarchy between men and women. In the presence of men women feel inferior, they traditionally are not supposed to talk to men, and (still) are often perceived as not supposed to take responsibilities in the groups. Therefore they often feel unable to take a position that would require them to violate traditions. For example attending seminars or meetings with others (which the position of the president implies) requires to leave the compound, travel to the district capital and stay away from home for the whole day or even over night. Social norms and the husbands lack of trust and suspicion on the whereabouts of his wife combined with loss of control over her suppress such behavior and even desire of women to stand for elections. A second factor is the specific gender tasks that include subsistence/reproduction needs of the household that women have to pursue on a daily basis (fetching water and firewood, cooking food, washing cloths etc.), while men are more free to do other things outside the house.

NGOs who support farmer groups need to understand and consider gender roles, and to strengthen group development processes; they need to pay attention to group dynamics. For example, institutional

development needs to focus on giving more farmers (men and women) opportunities to participate in leadership positions within the group by ensuring rotation of leadership positions. Another way would be to allocate different committees to different tasks within the group and broaden the scope of the group to include other activities as group objectives. This would give women more opportunities to take on leadership positions and expose themselves to acquire new skills and experiences. Supporting women in leadership position starts by integrating social norms into the planning of project activities. For example the organization of (leadership) meetings outside the community needs to consider the need to return of women at the end of the day. Finally, functional education and adult literacy as this has been shown are one way to increase benefits to members from the group.

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[i] Research in rural Mozambique revealed that farmers hardly differentiate between cooperatives and associations.

[ii] Fafchamps and Minten (1998) have distinguished for example public goods and private goods of social capital, Pretty and Ward (2001) distinguish between public, club (collective) and private goods.

[iii] We have demonstrated elsewhere that men and women invest equally into the group and group activities; i.e. results from the same survey as used here did not show significant differences between men and women (Gotschi et al. 2006).