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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 organised way. Group organisation strengthens farmers' capacities to access information and markets and gives them a voice that is otherwise not heard. Being in a group allows people to increase their number of social relations, creates trust and other features of social capital. It has been argued that high levels of social capital can be transformed into financial capital.

Research in 20 agriculture-based groups in Búzi district in Mozambique revealed that gender is the key characteristic to human and social capital formation in rural areas. Although men and women equally participate in group activities, the benefits outcomes of social capital are significantly unequally distributed. Benefits of social capital were not equally distributed over members and varied significantly between gender, position and education. It was evident that men, group leaders and educated members are more likely to access help or credit, than women, members-only and people with little education. Women found it harder to benefit from the increased number of social relations or the trust created into benefits such as information, access to markets, or help in case of need. Whereas men are not restricted on a daily basis and are able to create and engage in more relations with group members or other people from the community and help others if they are asked to, thus increasing their social capital more quickly and strongly.

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