



Individual social capital – A structural approach

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I Introduction

Social capital has been recently held up as a conceptual framework to build a bridge between the diverse disciplines in rural development. Despite its potential and the impressively rapid take-up of the concept by the community of development professionals, it remains an elusive construct. No definition is yet generally accepted and many definitions are in use. Social networks have been recognized in various approaches as being an important element of social capital. Its measurement, however, has been accorded little attention to date. Many earlier empirical studies on social capital created a single index for its measurement. Yet, social capital is not a homogeneous entity, and utilizing a single index ignores this.

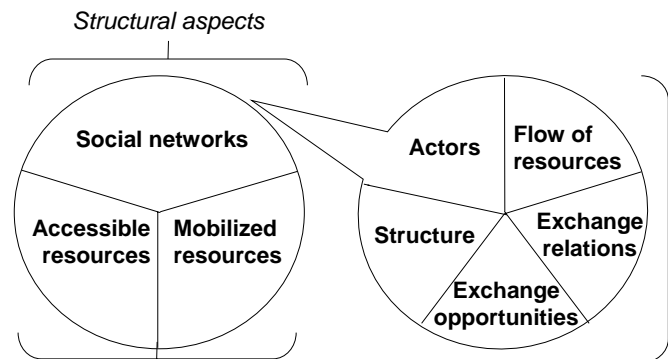
II Objectives and Methods

The objective of this contribution is to bring more structure into the conceptual framework of social capital and to broaden our understanding of individual social capital in rural household economies in developing countries. Methodologically, this work is based on an extensive literature review.

For the conceptual framework our definition of social capital is based on Lin (1999) and Foley and Edwards (1999): **Individual social capital = Networks plus resources**



III The Conceptual Framework



Social networks →

The Problem:

Social networks are often measured in an oversimplified way, e.g. counting group memberships. But simply grossing up the membership status indicates little about the strength of social capital. It must be at least accompanied by information on what people do as members.



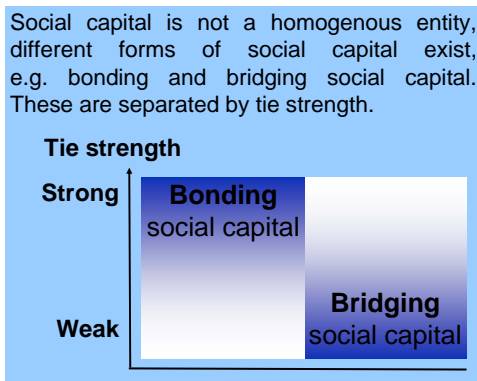
Suggested Solution:

Network generators from the field of sociology offer to measure networks in an appropriate way and can also distinguish different forms of social capital. These tools collect information about the individual networks of the interviewed person and about the availability of different resources attached to the network members and their relationships among each other.



Embedded network resources

Social capital

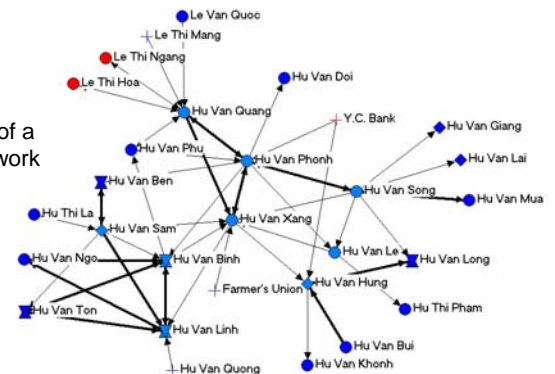


IV Conclusions

This work proposes a lean and clear definition of social capital: Social capital is best conceived as networks plus resources (e.g. credit, information). As social capital is rooted in social networks and relationships, it should be measured relatively to its roots. Oversimplified ways for measuring the social network part of social capital, such as counting group memberships of persons, are not appropriate. Conversely, network generators from the field of sociology offer a practical solution for measuring social capital.

As social capital is not a homogeneous entity, it is necessary to distinguish different forms of social capital. In the case of rural areas in developing countries, the separation into so-called bonding and bridging capital seems to be most appealing. Finally, we propose the operationalization of these two forms of social capital as function of an agent's so-called weak ties (e.g. acquaintances) plus resources and so-called strong ties (e.g. close relatives) plus resources. Thus, this research presents a feasible and consistent way for future empirical research to define and measure different forms of social capital in developing countries.

Example of a social network



V References

Michael W. Foley and Bob Edwards. Is it time to disinvest in social capital? *Journal of Public Policy* 19 (2):141-173, 1999.
 Nan Lin. Building a network theory of social capital. *Connections* 22 (1): 28-51, 1999.