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“Bridging the gap between increasing knowledge and decreasing resources”

Farmers’ Organisations in Nnindye, Uganda: Building Social Capital for the Conservation of Natural Resources

ANNA SNIDER¹, VINCENT CANWAT², NASHON MOGONCHI³, NAWA MALUMO⁴, ANDREAS DE NEERGAARD², NICOLE SIBELET⁵

¹*Montpellier - SupAgro, France*

²*University of Copenhagen, Dept. of Plant and Environmental Sciences, Denmark*

³*Edgerton University, Kenya*

⁴*Makerere University, Uganda*

⁵*CIRAD, Innovation, France*

Abstract

Farmers’ organisations can influence members to effectively manage natural resources. Social capital built in these collective organisations has been identified as an important component of development. The aim of this research was to explore the link between social capital, density of collective organisations and effectiveness of these organisations on the effective management of community natural resources. In this study we analysed farmers’ organisations in Nnindye, Uganda, which consist of Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs) in conjunction with an agricultural development component. Members of these organisations tend a common banana plantation and sell the produce to partially finance a micro-credit scheme.

We found a high density of farmers’ organisations in the area including a SILC/agricultural development scheme in every village. These farmers’ organisations were formed and supported by international NGOs in the area with the goals of developing agriculture, alleviating poverty and empowering women. We found lack of trust to be an inhibiting factor to participation in farmers’ groups as well as a threat to the sustainable management of common resources. Several non-group members cited corruption among group leaders as a reason for not joining farmers’ organisations and some farmers had left corrupt groups because of exploitation of common biological resources by group leaders. This paradox of high densities of collective organisations with low levels of trust seems to contradict Putnam’s Instrument which uses density of voluntary organisations as a proxy for social capital in a society. However we maintain that the density of voluntary farmers’ organisations in the area was artificially high due to external support and not an accurate proxy for the social capital in this area. These farmers’ organisations showed some potential for creating social capital among the group members, but we found some evidence that bonding rather than bridging social capital was being created in these groups with discrimination against out-group members. Despite these challenges, many of these farmers’ organisations manage to provide incentives for farmers to conserve common resources and increase agricultural production through access to improved varieties and training in good agricultural practices.

Keywords: Farmers’ organisations, resource conservation, social capital