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The Role of Social Capital on Food Security: Empirical Evidence from Rural Tanzania

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Abstract

Over 80 percent of the population in rural Tanzania suffers from food insecurity. In this regard, social capital can be considered an important resource for the rural poor, who possess little or no other forms of capital, to attain food security. Against this background, this paper explores the role of household social capital – social network, trust, norms, and reciprocity; as well as knowledge sharing and collective action - on food security in rural Tanzania.

We employ unique data on 900 households in villages of Morogoro and Dodoma obtained under the “Trans-SEC” project. The social capital index is constructed with standardisation and exploratory factor analysis, and, is cross-validated by comparison with alternative indices. We capture household food security using various food security indicators such as Food Consumption Scores (FCS), Coping Strategy Index (CSI) and Months of Adequate Household Food Provisioning (MAHFP). These represent the four pillars of food security - availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Structural equation modelling is used to examine the effect of social capital and the mediation effect of knowledge sharing and collective action on food security.

The results show a strong positive correlation between social capital and almost all food security indicators. Both, knowledge sharing, and collective action demonstrate a positive correlation with caloric and protein intake as well as diet diversity. Additionally, collective action is negatively correlated with Coping Strategy Index and stability of food provision. However, knowledge sharing and collective action only partially explain the effect of social capital on food security. The significant direct effect of social capital on food security indicates that other effects of social capital such as direct transfer of food or money through social connections have strong impacts on food security. The paper highlights that increased household social capital is key to improved food security in rural contexts. It recommends strengthening social capital both horizontally and vertically. For instance, diffusion of knowledge can be enhanced by promotion of agricultural cooperatives and associations among farmers (horizontal ties) and encouraging extension services and cooperation with research institutions (vertical ties).

Keywords: Collective Action, Food Security, Knowledge Sharing, social Capital, Social Capital Index, Tanzania