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Farmers' Organizations: Building Social Capital for the Conservation of Natural Resources in Uganda

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Table 1
Positive and negative examples of social capital in SILC groups.

| Relations of trust | Reciprocity and exchanges | Common rules, norms and sanctions | Connectedness in networks and groups |
|---|--|---|--|
| Transparency builds trust | 95% repayment rate on loans | Groups collectively develop terms of loans Sanctions against those who break the rules | Members enjoy "the spirit of teamwork" Groups donate to community Groups create horizontal connections |
| Distrust is a barrier to participation. Some women must sneak out of house to attend meetings or leave the group if they become "too empowered." | Men receive more loans and more plant material than women. | Sanctions applied inconsistently | Discrimination against new members Groups create few vertical connections |

Justification for the Study

Social capital, defined as trust in others, social networks and norms of reciprocity, is essential to foster the collective action necessary to conserve natural resources¹. Farmers' organizations can build social capital within groups (bonding) or among groups (bridging).

Four features are important to consider regarding building social capital within organizations: relations of trust; reciprocity and exchanges; common rules, norms and sanctions; and connectedness in networks and groups².

Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs) in the Nnindye parish of Uganda consist of a microlending component and Collectively managed banana plot. We looked for evidence that NGO-supported SILC schemes are building the important features of social capital which could then facilitate the sustainable management of community natural resources.

Can Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs) build social capital which can then be used to collectively manage natural resources?

Results and Discussion

There is a high density of farmers' organizations in the Nnindye parish with several organizations in each village. Seventy percent of the members are women. All organizations observed were either self-initiated and externally supported or externally initiated and externally supported. Organizations without external support quickly dissolve.

Distrust within the community (low social capital) prohibits farmers from participating in organizations. It is also a threat to the sustainable management of common resources, as corruption causes exploitation of resources. SILC groups are influencing social capital within the group (See Table 1) and bringing members together to collectively manage a banana plot. Bridging social capital (outgroup relations) is still lacking, causing strong personal boundaries and inhibiting new members (See Figure 1).

The paradox of high densities of collective organizations with low levels of trust seems to contradict Putnam's proxy of using membership in voluntary organizations as measure of social capital³. However we maintain that the density of voluntary farmers' organizations is artificially high due to external support and not an accurate proxy for the social capital in this area. Despite the challenge of extreme individualism and distrust, many of these farmers' organizations manage to build social capital among the participants and provide incentives for farmers to collectively manage their banana plot (See Figure 2). Farmers receive training in management, transparency and accountability which reduces instances of individuals exploiting the groups' natural resources.



Figure 2
Members of the Kayunga Savings and Internal Lending Community, supported by the NGO UPFORD, tend a community banana plot.

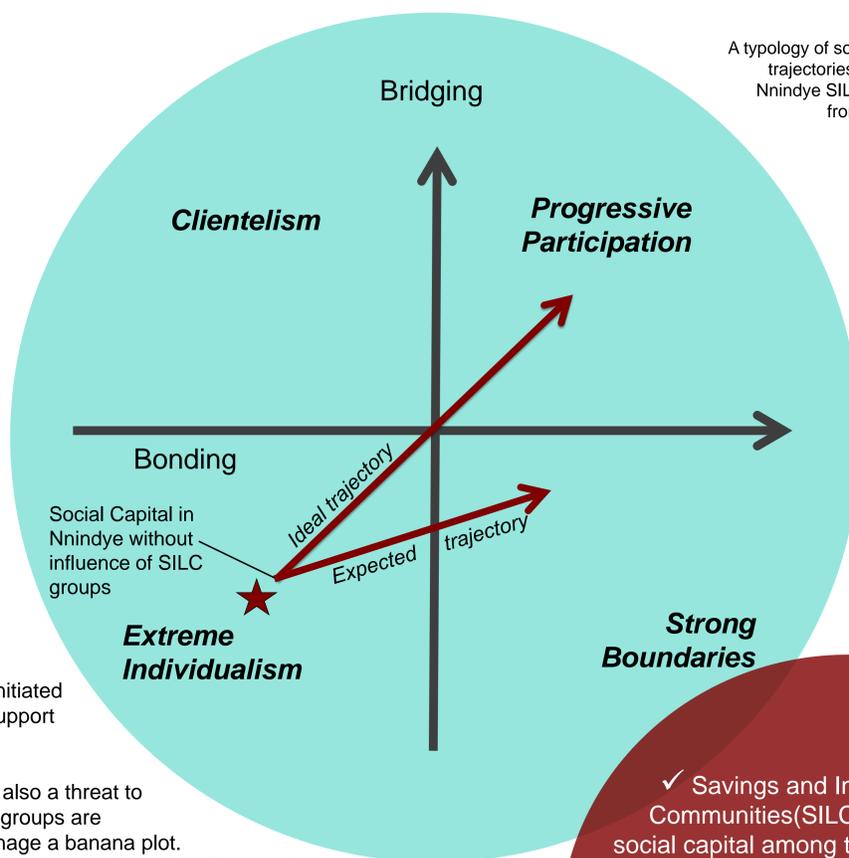
Method

This research was undertaken as part of the AgTrain/ARI field methods training course, a joint course between the University of Copenhagen and Makerere University in Kampala, Uganda. Field work consisted of nine semistructured interviews and four focus groups with members and non-members of organizations, key informants and NGOs. Interviews were translated from Luganda to English by a local guide.

Bibliography

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- ³Putnam, R. D., Leonardi, R., & Nanetti, R. Y. (1994). *Making democracy work: Civic traditions in modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.
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Figure 1
A typology of social capital and the trajectories of social capital in Nnindye SILC groups. Adapted from Flora and Flora⁴.



Conclusions

- ✓ Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILCs) are building social capital among the participants by creating trust, social networks, rules and norms and a culture of reciprocity.
- ✓ Social capital within the community is too low for collective action without the support of an external agent such as an NGO.
- ✓ Social capital built in SILC groups helps in the conservation of natural resources.