Analysis and Assessment of "Social Capital in Small Development Networks" towards local sustainable Development (Case study: International RFLDL project- Sarayan Township, South Khorasan, Iran)

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Trust has a profound link with risk. It is a reliable solution for increasing resilience against various risks. Increased trust is what Emile Durkheim called "moral density" and contemporary writers discuss it under the heading of "social capital". The concept of trust has received much consideration and analysis across many disciplines. It has been associated with many positive benefits such as cooperative behavior, ''adaptive organizational forms,'' conflict reduction, decreased transaction costs, and the ability to organize. According to Barber (1983), trust is essential to every social relationship or social system, because trust reduces disorder and facilitates goal attainment. Communication facilitates trust and reduces symptoms related to mass ignorance that prevents spontaneous collective action. Bridging social capital is one of the most important components of the social capital for sustainable local and regional development. Given the importance of social capital in capacity building, strengthening the mobilization of the local communities, and for local sustainable development, in this study attention was paid to the relationship between trust and cooperation, which are important aspects of social capital. Bridging social capital in this study has been evaluated in the four villages of Dust Abad, Bostaq, Zangooii and Se-Qaleh city in the Iranian province of South Khorasan. The social capital of local stakeholder networks for sustainable development in the four areas targeted by the RFLDL project was investigated.

Methodology

Conducting a survey, using direct observation and interviews with target groups, identified first nodes of the network consisting of the head of small development committees (funds) (such as decision-makers in each sub-group) in each area. Afterward, based on the complete network method, a network analysis questionnaire was developed and questions about trust and partnership between residents were asked. During the full network method development all heads of small development

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committees including 63 people in four districts were studied. It should be noted that indicators examined in this article are related to large-scale network of relations between the heads of the four regions. Network macro-level indicators such as density, reciprocity, transitivity, geodesic distance and the average distance of intra-group and between group relations were calculated using the UCINET Software. Creation of an integrated network, is the appropriate way to achieve sustainable development. One of the goals of the International RFLDL Project was strengthening communication and interaction of subgroup-heads, as community leaders in the four regions, in order to strengthen social capital through social-system resilience, in the face of dangers and environmental stresses, like desertification and climate change, expanding upon them. In this paper, the relationship of trust and partnership as the most important dimensions of social capital for heads of the committees is examined. This reviews and assesses the effectiveness of the RFLDL project from a social viewpoint.

Results

The results indicate that trust, cooperation, solidarity and social capital, before the RFLDL project was implemented, were weak, while after the implementation of RFLDL these indexes increased and reached moderate levels. Also the indexes measuring the average geodesic distance, the speed of trust and cooperation exchange between the people increased after the program compared to the levels before its implementation, suggesting a greater unity in the study area. The EI-index diagnosed an increasing amount of intra-group bridges, which doubled after the implementation of the projects in the four regions. In other words, RFLDL's measures supported the formation of more sustainable and coherent networks among the leaders, mutual trust and mutual cooperation increased.

Conclusion

Results show that social capital and social empowerment increased to double levels, which will also support the reduction of social exclusion. After the implementation of the project, outer group social capital among the four regions has increased, which in turn asserts reduced social ignorance, increases social welfare and improved participation of residents. Based on the survey methodology and results it can be concluded, that network analysis can measure and evaluate useful indicators in relation to social factors affecting local sustainable development and empowerment. The formation and strengthening of community organizations achieved increasing social welfare and wider participation in decision-making. To achieve successful social empowerment, local sustainable development and fight social ignorance, social capital and social cohesion, with an emphasis on trust and cooperation, need to be further build. Certainly, with the accumulation of social capital the quality of life in the project area will also increase. Stronger trusting ties between the committees in the four regions, support sustainable rural development, and will be an important step in strengthening the spirit of cooperation between them, which is the opposite of social exclusion and an important contribution to socio-ecological resilience.

Keyword: bridging social capital, local sustainable development, social exclusion, social network analysis, RFLDL project.

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