

Rural Development through Social Capital?

An inquest into the linkages between social capital and development in war-torn villages in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

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This doctoral thesis concerns the potential causal relationship between social capital and rural development in war-torn villages in the north of Sri Lanka. The social capital thesis centers on the notion that social relationships matter to development-related outcomes and reconstruction of war-torn societies. This theoretical understanding and the conditions in the north of Sri Lanka motivated the author to apply the concept of social capital to study development in war-torn villages.

Observations made in the area of study highlighted that development in this area depends not only on social capital but also on many other explanatory factors. Thus, the study builds a research model that can also take account of these other explanatory factors. Ethnographic information gathered in the study area leads the study to form two hypotheses: bonding social capital causes development; and bridging social capital causes development. The study attempts to determine whether there is a casual relationship, and if such a relationship exists, the nature of it. This study finds that development is a complex phenomenon: social capital cannot entirely account for development, while other explanatory factors, such as natural assets and infrastructure issues, also strongly influence the prospects of development.

The study was conducted in six rural war-torn villages in the north of Sri Lanka in 2005. This study involved two phases spanning a time period of almost one year. The study commenced with initial observations, collection of official records and brief interviews with key figures in the area. It then conducted close observations, case studies and interviews in the study villages. In the second phase, the study administered a survey to all (416) households in the study villages. The data was analyzed using two computer based data analysis programs: SPSS and LISREL.

Key Words: Bonding social capital, bridging social capital, natural assets, rural development, and conflict.