

PIARC Technical Committee C20 on Appropriate Development

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Abstract

The World Bank defines social capital as the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. Social capital is a multifaceted concept that implies emotional attachments to relatives and friends as well as the structural products of interactions between people. Although the term 'social capital' has come to mean 'horizontal' and 'vertical' social networks, reciprocal trust, and management of risk, and there is no doubt that a more precise definition is needed for clarity, its importance is undisputed. The relevance of social capital in bringing about economic growth is increasingly becoming recognised (Grootaert, 1998) in as far as the bonds within, and bridges between, social groups and networks open up economic opportunities, and provide safeguards against vulnerability and adversity associated with shocks and stresses (Narayan, 1999).

Frankenberger and Garrett (1998) agree that social capital is one of the most important resources to be accounted for in poverty reduction programmes. They link social capital to notions of vulnerability, describing its 'reactive' and 'proactive' uses as a means of managing risk. Access to these networks requires mobility, and transport is the agency by which social capital networks are supported. Mobility is essential to the sustainability of social networks yet, to date, existing literature disregards the means by which people *physically* access social capital, whether in the guise of associations and community groups or simply maintaining rural-urban linkages with extended family members.

Existing studies of transport and its impact on the rural poor focus largely on its role in the process of economic growth, by increasing the productive capacity and market accessibility of small-scale farmers. Few researchers have investigated the role that transport plays in providing access to and maintenance of valuable social networks.

This paper draws on empirical evidence from Kenya to review the relationship between transport mobility and social capital and its relevance for rural development. It examines the significance of transport in accounting for the extent of social interaction and the way that transport interventions enable the poor to access, and be included in, social capital networks.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Rural Transport Services Project for Kenya (RTS) was initiated by the Kenya Network for Draught Animal Technology (KENDAT) in 2001. The objective of the study is to 'systematically assemble data, information and experience that can provide key policy options for improved delivery of rural transport services which improve livelihood systems of poor men and women at the national and local levels'.

The Sustainable Livelihoods Approach is an important underpin to the project. Livelihood analysis is being employed at the field level (micro-level) to capture the inter-relationship between transport and the development of livelihood assets, and at the macro level, to identify how the existing policy environment and institutional system influences mobility and access issues.

Access to social networks and political processes are important in creating opportunities for learning, exchange of information on new opportunities as well as influencing development priorities. A transport system should help in addressing the dimensions of poverty that is related to social exclusion (KENDAT, 2001). Mobility is essential to the sustainability of social networks, both in enabling access to cognitive and structural social capital, and in creating opportunities for networking in the very act of making a journey. The means by which people *physically* access social capital, whether in the guise of associations and community groups or simply maintaining rural-urban linkages with extended family members, are generally disregarded.

The RTS project has provided an opportunity to investigate the role that transport plays in providing access to and maintenance of valuable social networks. The empirical research undertaken in Kenya demonstrates how accessibility constraints can be a precursor to vulnerability, and the way in which social capital can help people deflect shocks and stresses associated with vulnerability.

The interaction between transport mobility and maintenance of social capital networks was investigated in three rural areas of Kenya, namely Lari Division in Limuru District (Southern Central Kenya), Mwea Division in Kirinyaga District (Central Kenya) and Kalama Division in Machakos District (Eastern Kenya).

2 SOCIAL CAPITAL: KENYAN DEFINITIONS

In referring to social capital in this paper, I acknowledge its definition as the social resources upon which people draw in pursuit of livelihoods, divided into two 'types'. 'Cognitive' social capital includes relationships of trust and confidence, along with perceptions of family and rural home. 'Structural' social capital includes networks, membership of groups, access to wider institutions of society, rural-urban linkages and extended family contacts.

Social capital is a multifaceted term that infers emotional attachments to friends and family, as well as tangible or structural products of interaction. The interface between these social networks are extremely powerful. For example, they provide a safeguard against adversity by facilitating the transfer of assets. Access to these resilient networks requires mobility that is sustained by the available transport system. Transport is not simply a means of travel. It is the agency by which social capital networks can be supported.

Social capital is a well publicised subject by donor and lending agencies (eg. DFID's series of papers published under *Social Development Systems for Co-ordinated Poverty Eradication* and the World Bank's *Social Capital Initiative*), and by academics (in particular the seminal works of Putnam (1993), comparing society and governance in Italy). Social capital is considered to be one of the most important resources to be accounted for in poverty reduction programmes (Frankenberger and Garrett, 1998). Yet, there remains a paucity of empirical data that demonstrates how social capital can be produced, and further, information regarding social mobility and accessibility to social capital networks.

Of the literature available on the subject, Gugerty and Kremer (1999) provide one of the few papers reviewing social capital formation in Kenya. The paper addresses whether and how development funding affects social capital by examining the impact of development projects on social capital formation among rural women's groups and primary schools in Western Kenya. In brief, the paper finds that outside funding has relatively weak effects on the type of indicators usually thought of as social capital. It reports that, in women's groups, funding strengthens the group's ties to the community, but has ambiguous effects on the internal solidarity of the groups. Groups that receive funding also report a much larger number of visits from outside groups and have more contact with community members. In primary schools, funding appears to strengthen internal solidarity and motivation but has a negligible impact on external linkages to government, NGO's or the education administration.

In his insight into the PRSP process, Sisule (2001) explicitly alludes to the need to develop social capital amongst communities, in order to influence resource allocation in Kenya. In establishing an institutional framework and building the capacity of institutions and organisations to participate in the implementation and monitoring of poverty reduction strategies, Sisule asserts that deliberate efforts should be made to organise and empower people to have a say in decisions on resources allocation and use. This should be achieved at the micro level (community), meso level (district) and macro level (national).

3 SOCIAL CAPITAL AND MOBILITY

In exploring access to social capital networks in this study, both 'cognitive' and 'structural' types of social capital were identified, with a particular emphasis on the latter. Structural types of social capital in Kenya take the form of revolving funds, commonly known as a 'merry-go-round', harambee's (a social group that raises funds for particular events such as school fares, weddings and to support families during illness), and jua-kali. A jua-kali describes an informal association or business that promotes appropriate technology, ranging from training in cake baking and weaving, to repair garages for intermediate means of transport.

Social capital networks feature prominently in the survey sites, and are characteristic of rural areas in which the majority of people partake in agricultural (pastoral and arable) production to some degree. The cognitive networks identified during the field surveys are those that do not stem from any financial incentive or mechanism that will result in capital gains. On the contrary, they are the product of social relations that people invest in with time and money, often with no returns, and are sometimes referred to as coping mechanisms. The maintenance of links between friends, relatives and neighbours is undertaken as a form of risk management. Whilst there may be no immediate, or even long-term gains, the formation of cognitive networks

ensures the availability of a sustainable 'safety net' that can be deployed during periods of adversity (illustrated in Box 1).

Box 1: Jephitha Gichoya

Jephitha Gichoya, a teacher living in Ngurubani, Mwea owns a bicycle, wheelbarrow and ox-cart, but currently has no oxen due to lack of funds. Jephitha can borrow oxen from friends to use when transporting manure and water, and has an arrangement with a neighbouring farmer who owns oxen but no cart. Whilst Jephitha no longer belongs to any farmers groups, this reciprocal arrangement has strengthened his relations with neighbouring farmers who inform each other of the current market price for vegetables, and lend each other produce when capital is need quickly. Jephitha recently lent a farmer 10kg of French beans with which he could sell to pay for his children's school fees. Whilst the farmers group has disbanded, the farmers remain on good terms, which further strengthens the support network.

Structural networks, in which members invest time and money for capital gains by contributing to a revolving fund can range in size and influence, from farmers groups aiming to increase their productivity through acquisition of a plough, to entrepreneurial self help groups that generate an income through contributing a community service. In his explanation of social capital in the creation of human capital, Coleman (1997) discusses the value of trustworthiness that is implicit in these rotating credit associations, and without which the institutions could not exist. "For a person who receives a payout early in the sequence of meetings could abscond and leave the others with a loss." He indicates that revolving funds are more likely to operate successfully in rural areas, that typically constitute a more homogeneous society, than amongst their urban counterparts, who are characterised by a high degree of social disorganisation.

In most instances, the social groups organise events such as weddings, and increasingly, funerals, but few are organised to promote accessibility, either through provision of means of transport, or through voluntary labour to improve community access routes. There are however, some exceptions, notably in Mwea and Kalama.

The Nguka Taxis are one such group that operates boda boda bicycle taxis in Ngurubani, Mwea Division (see Box 2).

Box 2: Nguka Taxis Self Help Group

There are 24 members in the Nguka boda boda taxi self help group. There is a charge of 2,500kshs¹ to join the association as a licensed boda boda operator, and the group contributes 500kshs to the council a year. Members contribute money each week to a kitty, and then hold a ballot where one member receives the kitty, with which to purchase a bicycle (at a cost of 2,800kshs). The self help group will continue until every member has paid for a bicycle out of the group's kitty. The self help group acts as a boda boda station where they have constructed a shelter and they operate a queuing system whereby each boda boda operator gets a fare and then goes to the end of the queue to ensure there is equitable distribution of fares.

The boda boda generally only service areas where cars cannot access and hence have captured a niche in the market. There are 28 bicycles in the self help group, with some members owning two bicycles. Most members own their own bicycle, but

¹ Current exchange rate is 73.6 Kenya Shillings to 1 US Dollar.

some rent them from the owner to which they must pay 60kshs per day, whether they have generated 60kshs in fares or not. Often whole days can be spent without receiving a fare, particularly when the bicycle is under repair. Average earnings of Nguka taxi operators are 500-1000kshs per week, and there are seven other boda boda groups in Ngurubani that service different routes.

The Machakos District of Kalama, which is characterised by steep terrain and terraced farms (instigated by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1972 to prevent soil erosion), once adopted community maintenance of the large network of feeder roads under the administration of the local Chief. Since 1992, with the introduction of a multi-party state, this practice was aborted, since the Chief no longer had the authority to mobilise the community in this way. According to a focus group respondent, the roads are only mended every ten years, and the effects of erosion and gulying, exacerbated by tree cutting for firewood, leading to surface run-off, and the use of ox-sledges that cause rutting in the road, have caused tremendous degradation of access routes. There are now only small village groups that make repairs to stretches of road that lead to their own property, under their own volition (See Box 3).

Box 3: Ruth Masyula

Ruth works as a nurse at Kyangala dispensary. She lives with her husband and two children on a very steep hill 3km distance from Kyangala.

Ruth belongs to a women's church group that meet once a month, 3km up the hill on which she lives, along with a primary health group and three other women's merry-go-round groups. She spends 2000 kshs a month visiting friends and relatives in Nairobi and elsewhere.

In Kalama there is a District Officer who used to mobilise labour on the road by providing food-for-work. Since the DO left, this system no longer exists, but people in the community want it to be revived "people need to be mobilised to repair the road if there is food or not". The earth road on which Ruth lives was constructed in the 1970s by a community committee, who provided labour or money to mobilise road repairs. Unfortunately, the programme was unsustainable, and currently repairs are only made to the road if there is a death in the community and the body has to pass along the road. Similarly, if Ruth has a specific function that requires access, such as a wedding, she will mobilise friends to make repairs to the road, rather than the whole community who do not have a vested interest in the road.

Bourdieu (1997) explains that the volume of the social capital possessed by an 'agent' depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilise, and is hence related directly to the proximity in physical and geographical space of such a network. In contributing to this debate, it is my opinion that in fact the missing link to the continuing discourse on social capital, is the prerequisite of accessibility, and therefore mobility, required for both the generation and maintenance of social capital and the networks with which it is intrinsically linked.

Mobility is essential to the sustainability of social networks, both in enabling access to cognitive and structural social capital, and in creating opportunities for networking in the very act of making a journey. Hence, transport is more than a physical network. One might argue it is a social network itself. However, the literature disregards the means by which people *physically* access social capital, whether in the guise of

associations and community groups or simply maintaining rural-urban linkages with extended family members.

4 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper demonstrates that weak social capital and dissolution of bonds of trust between individual and social groups and a weak civil society are detrimental to economic growth. Prosperity for a majority of people can only be attained if investment in social capital is made (World Bank, 2000). Indeed, it is not possible for central government to effectively plan for poverty alleviation while excluding the people from the process (Tegemeo Institute, 2000). This study of different sites in Kenya asserts that involving the poor people themselves results in improved setting of priorities, and that poverty reduction strategies should empower people to take part in planning and implementation strategies.

Clearly, there is a plethora of existing data on types of social capital and its significance for rural development but there remains a scarcity of information regarding social mobility and accessibility to social capital networks. Evidently, the social capital debate is incomplete. This on-going empirical research undertaken in Kenya will contribute to the continuing discourse from the perspective of the transport sector, and will provide further evidence for establishing firm linkages between social mobility and transport sector policy in ways that would be likely to influence investment decisions.

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