

Looking at NGO interventions through a social capital lens in post-conflict Burundi

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Period: 2004-2010
Funded by Ghent University

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Since the nineties, social capital has been labelled the 'missing link' to sustainable development (Grootaert 1998). The underlying common sense idea is very simple: "It's not what you know, it's *who* you know." (Narayan & Woolcock 2000) Social capital is generally defined as "the features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives". (Putnam 1995) The poor can rely on these social networks, and the norms and values inherent in these networks, to develop and empower themselves.

As a consequence, building social capital became a highly relevant task for all development actors: donors, states, NGOs. External development interventions are requested to "create social capital that increases the voice and economic opportunities of the poor" (World Bank 2000: 129-130).

In particular, social capital becomes more significant in conflict and post-conflict situations. Conflict damages a nation's social capital and recovery from conflict demands the reconstruction not only of a nation's infrastructure, but also of its social fabric (Colletta & Cullen 2000). Again, external interventions are requested to build social capital during their peace building, rehabilitation and reconstruction activities.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to look at NGO interventions through a social capital lens in post-conflict Burundi. What exactly is the impact of concrete NGO interventions on social capital in rural Burundian communities? Altogether 10 months of field work was conducted in Burundi, in which we analysed three different NGO interventions. The research focuses on four specific topics: (i) the capacity for mutual assistance, (ii) the capacity for collective action through associational life, (iii) the capacity for local governance and (iv) the capacity for conflict-sensitive development. Through this research we hope to produce some basic insights on how social capital 'works' in rural Burundian communities and how development interventions could and should interact with this social capital. This in order to present a critical analysis of both social capital theory and NGO-interventions in the context of post-conflict reconstruction.

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