

## **Bridging, Bonding, and Linking Social Capital for Community Action: A Case of Atisbo Development Union in Atisbo Local Government Area of Oyo State, Nigeria**

**Olajide, O. E**

*Department of Adult Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria*

*This paper examines the effect of social capital variables (bridging, bonding and linking) on the successful control/ management of armed bandit operations in Atisbo local government area of Oyo state when communities are given opportunities to manage their own affairs. Applying the social capital framework, it analyzes empirical data from the Atisbo Development Union (ADU) formation in Atisbo local government area of Oyo state. The study confirms previous findings, which emphasized the high level of cohesion and traditional norms among a homogeneous community of indigenous people (bonding social capital) as a success factor. This study further identifies that for effective management of collective action, mobilization of bridging and linking social capital are equally important as they do not only help mobilize external resources but, at times, also promote bonding social capital.*

**Keywords:** Bonding, Bridging, Linkage, Social capital, Armed bandit, Vigilante

### **Introduction**

Recently the role of social capital in the management of collective resources such as management/control of armed bandit operation has become a topic of widespread interest especially in development policy debates. It is increasingly agreed that customary institutions such as council of elders, youth forum, age grades and council of Obas have forms of social capital in the management/ control of collective resources as they provide structure, foster trust and norms of reciprocity for cooperation and coordinated actions. These institutions are the local equivalents of the rule of law as they are deeply tied to local notions of identity and social norms of cooperation. Local participation is an important element for the successful governance of collective action including the management/ control

of local issues (Uphoff, 2000; Olajide, 2012). Thus, studies often take community management of collective resources for granted as such management is assumed to be a form of enhanced local participation.

However, the success of managing collective action differs from community to community, as some are more successful than others (Pretty, 2003; World Bank, 2003). It is this prime aspect that plays a vital role in determining success or failure of management of collective actions. Despite this acknowledgement, most studies have applied a social capital framework that does not acknowledge the multi-faceted aspects of social capital. As a result, many such studies have overemphasized the local relations, or the bonding social capital, in the management of community resources. This emphasis in explaining the success or failure of

community collective action fails to recognize or tends to downplay the mutual interaction among bonding, bridging, and linking aspects of social capital. Based on a “mini ethnography” carried out in Oke Ogun region of Oyo state, this paper explores aspects of social capital of three distinct kinds (bonding, bridging, and linking) and their distinct as well as mutual roles in the management of collective problem(armed bandit operation) at the local level.

The Vigilante groups which is a form of local security outfit was formally recognized by the local government authority of Atisbo Local Government area (LGA) of Oyo state in the year 2002. Its membership was based on common interest of the LGA communities. The group is often presented as a successful outfit for the management/ control of armed bandit operations in Atisbo LGA. The success story is attributed to the homogeneous and cohesive nature of the community with an indigenous system of governing collective action (bonding social capital). This study analyzes the broader case, exploring the possible role of social capital generated by maintaining relations at various levels in the management/control of the security operation at local level. The findings from this study open grounds for further investigation in order to identify whether there is causal relation between the successful management/control of security outfit by community people and high bridging and linking social capital. The paper starts with presenting a brief conceptual and theoretical overview of social capital in relation to collective action, followed by the presentation of the methods applied. Then, it presents the case descriptions along with findings. Finally, it attempts to integrate findings with the theory of social capital and presents a conclusion.

### **Conceptual and Theoretical Overview of Social Capital**

Social capital describes the extent and nature of relationships people have with others, the relationships people have with their communities, and relationships between people and various services, institutions and systems. It is also a concept that can be used to understand the linkages between communities or

institutions. The concept of social capital has been directly linked to broader concepts such as social cohesion, democracy, economic wellbeing and sustainability. It is a concept that has attracted much policy and academic interest in recent years. Most recently, the concept has been adopted and developed in various capacity building and community development strategies, both nationally and internationally.

Social capital is a concept that can be understood as networks of social relations characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity. The essence of social capital is quality social relations. It is the quality of relationships, understood through the use of the concept “social capital”, which affects the capacity of people to come together to collectively resolve problems they face in common and achieve outcomes of mutual benefit. Thus, social capital can be understood as a process of resource for collective action, which may lead to a broad range of outcomes, of varying social scale.

Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.” Coleman (1988) defines social capital by its function that “It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within that structure.” Putnam (1993) defines social capital as features of social organizations, such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefits.

Despite their emphases at different levels and for different purposes, at the heart of all these definitions lie “relations” (Portes, 1998; Narayan and Cassady, 2001) and the benefits, such as mutual cooperation or various other resources that result from these relations. Studies of collective action, such as management of natural resources in general and forestry in particular, have widely used the social capital framework as defined by Putnam for three significant reasons. First, Putnam (1993) relates social capital to meso (collective)

level units, such as associations, communities, and regions.

Second, Putnam (1993) presents social capital as a solution to the dilemmas of collective action. Third, Putnam applies the social capital framework to the study of the performance of institutions, such as regional governments. In a broader, analytical sense, application of the social capital framework in the study of the management of collective issues is useful because it includes networks (both formal and informal), including users' groups, as the structural social capital facilitating collective action (Uphoff, 2000; Pretty, 2002); and various formal and informal norms and institutions (such as norms of reciprocity, trust) as the cognitive social capital which predisposes groups to cooperation and collective action (Uphoff, 2000). Furthermore, while facilitating or predisposing to cooperate, sanctions arise as an integral part of the social capital framework. Therefore, social capital is a multifaceted concept (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000).

Based on relationships of connections between actors located at different levels, social capital has been presented as bonding, bridging, and linking. According to Woolcock and Sweetser (2002), "bonding social capital refers to connections to people like you [family, relatives, kinship], bridging social capital refers to connections to people who are not like you in some demographic sense," while "linking social capital pertains to connections with people in power, whether they are in politically or financially influential positions." Linking social capital also includes vertical connections to formal institutions (Woolcock, 2001; Mayoux, 2001). Bonding social capital is the relationship within a homogeneous group and "bridging social capital tends to bring together people across diverse social divisions" (ONS, 2001; Field, 2003). Bonding and bridging social capital have resonance with Granovetter's (1983) ideas of "strong ties" and "weak ties" respectively.

Studies on indigenous organizations have often shown a link between social capital and sustainability of these organizations, though these studies are limited to the bonding level (Garforth and Munro, 1995). Since

social capital is predominantly related to indigenous people and traditional system of management of their collective resources, a brief review of studies on indigenous organizations is useful for the purpose of the present study.

Traditional organizations are rooted in culture and tradition, the sources of social norms. "Tradition is not and has never been static, but it survived because of the close fit to the needs, values and interest of people who uphold it." Esman and Uphoff (1984); Uphoff, (1996) highlight the social capital represented in the existing organizations as too important to be bypassed or discarded. Wolff and Wahab (1996) found that government attempts to supersede indigenous organizations in Nigeria failed. The indigenous organizations were found to be sustainable because membership forged strong social and economic links and members recognized and trusted their leaders who were appointed based on age and experience. In Cernea's (1987) opinion, the degree of group cohesion is critical for the persistence of indigenous organizations. Garforth and Munro (1995) observe that their viability comes "because of the stability of structure and members, a set of operational rules, sanctions, and economy of scale, which permits specialization."

The experience with traditional organizations suggests that social capital (recognized norms, roles and responsibility, based on trust, and resultant collective actions) contributes to the sustainability of the organizations. It also indicates that recognized and accountable leadership, loyal members and consensual processes, and informality have contributed to the mitigation of conflicts and creation of conducive environments for institutionalization of such organizations.

### **Methodology**

This study is based on qualitative research conducted in the Oke Ogun region of Oyo state. The researcher and his local research assistance, spent an extended period of time of four months (June – September, 2012) in the community. This period was sufficient to



immerse researcher into the local setting while observing day to day practices of social relations, particularly in relation to management/control of Vigilante groups. He also had the benefit of knowing the local language so he could directly communicate with the local people. The local research assistant was fluent in both English and the local language. In addition, the local residents were able to fluently communicate in English. We listened to and engaged in conversation, and developed an understanding about people's behaviour within the Atisbo Local Government Area (LGA). We observed how people behaved, interacted, and how decisions were made within the LGA participants and non-participants. Ten focus group discussion sessions were conducted with officials of the local government authority, vigilante group members, community leaders and the executive members of ADU to understand how individuals collectively interact and make sense of the initiatives taken by ADU and construct meanings around such initiatives. The extensive qualitative process formed a "mini ethnography" that explored local issues and contexts which generated a good deal of information. Qualitative data was further analyzed which helped to build themes out of narrative text collected from semi structured interviews

### **Discussions of Findings**

#### **Bonding Relations in Atisbo LGA**

As defined earlier, bonding social capital refers to connections to people with some shared demographic characteristics such as family, relatives, and kinship. It is cooperation resulting from the relationship within a homogeneous group (Woolcock and Sweetser, 2002). Given the high level of cooperation among people at the Atisbo local government area, the people of Atisbo LGA possess high bonding social capital which is mainly due to the indigenous and homogeneous character of the people living in the area. The people living in Atisbo LGA are called Oke Ogun people which comprise of six communities that formed Atisbo namely: A – Ago Are & Agunrege, T – Tede, I – Irawo, S – Sabe, B – Baasi and O – Ofiki & Owotoro.

More than 90 percent of the population living in Atisbo LGA belong to one traditional institution called Atisbo Development Union (ADU), The Atisbo LGA pioneered the successful management of security outfit named Vigilante group through local community participation. Apart from having the tribal characteristic of strong unity among the members of the Atisbo LGA, the threat they faced from armed bandits who were terrorizing them on daily basis during the 1990s, and at the dawn of the century and the armed robbery case of January 7 2002 led to the establishment of the security outfit which brought them even and made their tribal unity stronger. In this period, the community felt the fear of losing their ancestral domain and other customary rights that were not safeguarded by formal government policies. In order to institutionalize their struggle and prevent their common property from being encroached by outsiders, the community decided to form the Vigilante group. The group also, in an FGD concluded,

*The group was also supported by the "Atisbo elders in council" (a traditional informal institution composed of local elders, tribal leaders, and LGA officials). The ADU in council is stronger than the elected political office holders of Oke Ogun. The entire community respects the decision of the ADU in council and considers it to be a local court, with the right to make final decisions about any social conflicts or problems.(FGD, ADU executive members)*

The high level of bonding relations among the people of the same ethnic origin is backed up by the formal participatory organizational management process. It is based on a traditional system of collective decision making and involvement of tribal institutions. The ADU in council has long experience in organizational management, sustainable resource generation at local level, participatory decision-making, conflict resolution, and maintaining equity and fairness.

In addition, the members of the Vigilante group are treated equally in terms of sharing benefits and resources and penalizing the violators of norms. Good leadership, a participatory approach in planning, implementation, and transparency also contribute equally to the success story of vigilante groups in the area. For instance, typifying the respondents' view in an FGD:

*bonding helped us to discover our internal local potential of resource mobilization and effective use of such resources for the development of our communities* (FGD, Community leaders Tede)

Another respondent in an FGD surmised:

*the face to face interaction of community members serves as antidote for internal cohesions for socio-economic development of our communities.* (FGD, Community leaders, Ofiki)

### **Bridging Relations of Atisbo LGA**

According to Woolcock and Sweetser (2002), "Bridging social capital refers to connections to people who are not like you in some demographic sense;" and according to Field (2003), it "tends to bring together people across diverse social divisions". Because of the high level of homogeneity among the people living in Oke Ogun, bridging relationships among the people of different ethnic groups concerning the management of vigilante groups are not relevant in this case. However, focusing on the bridging level of relationships among various informal and formal institutions who participated in the study make bridging to have different functions. Institutionally, the Oke Ogun ADU in council is the main governing body through which people from different communities are involved in decision making. The Oke Ogun ADU in council is bringing together elected political units, local informal leaders and community elders, hence representing a very broad array of stakeholders. Since its inception,

the Oke Ogun ADU in council has been championing the cause of Oke Ogun people by launching various programmes for their collective benefit.

Furthermore, there is good level of cooperation between the local government authority and the Oke Ogun ADU in council. Interestingly, the Oke Ogun ADU in council has relationships with different communities based on trust and mutual cooperation. This good understanding among different organizations epitomizes that local government and community people can work in tandem for mutually beneficial collective action. How such a bridging relationship among different stakeholders has been possible is an interesting issue. As mentioned by respondents, even though the unity among local homogeneous people is a reason inspiring different stakeholders to work together, the idea for unity and that emergence of mutually beneficial mechanism that links them is not solely internally grown. The fact that there is a smooth relationship among different formal and informal local institutions, which are well governed, consequently, also motivates the local community to work cohesively for their personal as well as collective goal. The issue of external local relationship is further explored in the section of linking social capital. For examples, one of the participants agreed that

*as result of bridging social capital we have easy access to our elected representatives and there are social bond from one community to the other in terms community governance* (IDI, Elected officer)

Also another participant was of the view that:

*bridging has encroached our independence because more often than not we have to rely on their elective officers before decision concerning our community thus leading to slow pace of decision making* (IDI, ADU member).

### **Linking Relations of Oke Ogun People**

According to Woolcock and Sweetser, (2002), "linking social capital pertains to connections with people in power, whether they are in politically or financially influential positions." Linking social capital also includes

vertical connections to formal institutions like UNDP, UNESCO (Woolcock, 2001). Since the relationship between the Oke Ogun ADU in council and local governments has already been explored, this section presents the relationship between Oke Ogun people, the state and federal government as well as relationships with other stakeholders in and outside the local government. In an FGD, the respondents posited that

*the Oke Ogun people have a long history of relationships with government, particularly at the central level. Their relations with government started right from the beginning of their organized struggle to protect the rights of the people.*(FGD, ADU executive members)

As discussed above, the people of Oke Ogun started their struggle to safeguard their right as they felt unsafe due to external encroachment on their properties and resources. This struggle led to a high level of unity among the people living within the region which in turn encouraged them to institutionalize their struggle through the establishment of the Vigilante groups. The fight for security was successful in 2002 when the Vigilante groups became the official security outfit in their domain. For the first time in history, Oke Ogun region successfully pressured the government to legislate with local people to have a security outfit and a local edict was enacted to that effect” (FGD ADU executive members).

Existence of such strong networks has built strong social capital at different levels and facilitated the successful implementation of security outfit practice. It is important here to note that behind all the success of the vigilante group has been the continual support from the local government and well meaning Oke Ogun sons and daughters home and abroad. Their support to the communities started in two ways: first capitalizing the external threats through raising awareness for local unity and fights against common threats, and, second, working with (and pressuring) government policy makers to create an enabling policy environment for collective action at local level.

## Discussions and Conclusion

The People of Oke Ogun is a case with social capital of all three kinds of relationships: bonding, bridging, and linking. This case presents us with some information so that we can question the ability and limitations of indigenous organizations to expand relationships; and potential implications of this relationship at various levels for the successful management of collective affairs by local communities. This study of the Vigilante groups confirms the literature showing how indigenous communities generate strong connectedness among themselves and carry out collective activities successfully (Cernea, 1987; Garforth and Munro, 1996; Wolff and Wahab, 1996). This study shows that successful collective resource management in Oke Ogun can be partly attributed to the practice of governance through traditional systems of decision making, the networks of tribal communities belonging to one ethnic group and availability of some livelihood options based on agricultural products. However a crucial question is whether they would have been able to establish and manage the Vigilante group as successfully as they have done had they not had a dedicated outside leader who had direct networks as far as the president of the country? Would they have been able to manage their resources without having enabling policy support and good external linkages in place?

The studies with indigenous organizations and social capital give us basis to raise those questions regarding Oke Ogun people. Studies have shown that indigenous homogenous communities too have various problems and suffer internally from the “downsides” of their high bonding social capital (Adhikari and Goldey, 2006) because traditional organizations, like traditional norms, are in many cases used in favour of elites. Those in leadership position, who are normally drawn from elite strata, are likely to be dominant and exploitative (Esman and Uphoff, 1984). Thus, the indigenous groups may be closer to members, but might be easily dominated by traditional elites (Uphoff, 1996).

Though such groups may be internally strong, a lack of external connections may limit their

effectiveness. Communities with strong ties, based on the close circle of family, clan, kinship, caste and ethnicity, etc. create cleavages, which sometimes create interlocking difficulties in their upward movement (Field, 2003). According to Narayan and Cassidy (2001), a good infrastructure does not result in production opportunities in homogeneous or poor groups unless they have a relationship with influential outsider groups. Similarly, a cross cutting connection of micro and macro levels is necessary for high social capital (Krishna, 2002). In the case of Oke Ogun, Oke Ogun sons and daughters had a catalytic role by mobilizing high bonding relations, which led to fairer internal management as well as promotion of the organization and thus securing unprecedented rights. External threats, as well as access to external resources have all helped to consolidate internal strength as well as get rid of the problems that many indigenous organizations internally suffer.

On the other hand, the homogeneous character and common interest among the local people made them more responsive to externally led calls for unity in a common struggle. The argument here is not whether promotion of linking social capital automatically results in high bonding social capital. It is, rather, that internal cohesive indigenous groups also require external support and linkages, and an enabling environment to successfully manage local resources. The Vigilante group is an example of the synergetic outcome of the symbiotic relationship between external linkages and internal performance. Presence and mutual interplay among different types of social capital have made the case of Oke Ogun exceptional. This experience with Oke Ogun people shows that management of collective resources can be successful when communities manage not only to embolden their bonding relations, but expand their linkages so that they can draw benefits from these expanded networks. It is an example where the community needed an external driver to get united and put pressure on and influence the policy makers to devolve a certain authority to the local communities. This indicates that the communities can have their say in state policy if they are united and

have a good network to facilitate them in accessing resources and information.

The case of Oke Ogun communities also signifies how supportive government policies, especially full devolution of management rights to communities, can help generate a conducive environment. In turn, the Oke Ogun case provided the government with lessons that communities with devolved rights can protect and manage their resources (Rice, 2000). The foregoing discussions suggest that assigning local communities with the responsibility of managing resources does not necessarily result in success if the community lacks certain kinds of social capital. The stock of different types of social capital and their mutual interaction is something needed for the effective management of collective resources as in the case of Oke Ogun people. Combining multiple types of social capital, rather than attempting to increase one type alone, can be useful in resolving public problems and enhancing wellbeing (Pretty, 2002).

## References

- Adhikari, K. P., and P. Goldey. 2006. Social Capital and Its "Downside": Impact on Sustainability of Induced Community Based Organizations in Nepal. A Paper Presented in a Conference on Institution and Development, September 15-16, Centre for Institutional Performance, The University of Reading.
- Bourdieu, P. 1986. Forms of Capital. In: *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, J. C. Richards, ed. New York: Greenwood Press.
- Cernea, M. M. 1987. Farmer Organizations and Institution Building for Sustainable Development. *Regional Development Dialogue* 8 (2):1-19.
- Dasgupta, P and Serageldin, I 2000. Social capital: a multifaceted perspective. World Bank review -Business & Economics 424 pages
- Esman, M. and N. Uphoff. 1984. *Local Organizations: Intermediaries in Rural Development*. London: Cornell University Press.
- Field, J. 2003. *Social Capital*. London: Routledge.
- Garforth, C. and M. Munro. 1995. *Rural People's Organisations and Agriculture Development in the Upper North Thailand*. AERDD, The University of Reading.
- Granovetter, M. (1983). The Strength of Weak Ties: A Network Theory Revisited. *Sociological Theory* 1 : 201-233.
- Grootaert, C. (1998). Social Capital: The Missing Link? *Working Paper 3*. Washington, D. C.: The World Bank.



- Hobley, M. 1996. Participatory forestry: The process of change in India and Nepal. London: Overseas Development Institute.
- Krishna, A. 2000. Creating and Harnessing Social Capital. In: *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspectives*, P. Gupta and I. Serageldin, eds. Washington D.C.: World Bank.
- Krishna, A. 2002. *Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press
- Krishna, A. and N. Uphoff. 1999. Mapping and Measuring Social Capital: A Conceptual and Empirical Study of Collective Action for Conserving and Developing Watersheds in Rajasthan, India.
- Mayoux, L. 2001. Talking the Downside: Social Capital, Women's Empowerment and Micro-finance in Cameroon. *Development and Change* 32: 435-464.
- Narayan, D. and M. Cassidy. 2001. A Dimensional Approach to Measuring Social Capital: Development and Validation of a Social Capital Inventory. *Current Sociology* 49 (2): 59-102.
- ONS. 2001. Social Capital: A Review of Literature. Office of the National Statistics, UK. <<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/downloads/soccaplitreview.pdf#11>> (accessed September 2003).
- Olajide, O. E. 2012. Community Development Associations (CDAs) participation in Local Governments (LGs) Development Projects' implementation in Oyo State, Nigeria. Ibadan Journal of Educational Studies (IJES) Vol. 9 Nos 1& 2
- ONS 2001. Quality report for England and Wales, Office of National Statistic. Macmillan, Palgrave
- Portes, A. 1998. Social Capital: Its Origins and Applications in Modern Sociology. *Annual Review of Modern Sociology* 24: 1-24.
- Portes, A. and P. Landolt. 1996. Unsolved Mysteries—The Tocqueville Files II: The Downside of Social Capital. *The American Prospect* 7(26):18-21.
- Pretty, J. 2002. Social and Human Capital for Sustainable Agriculture. In: *Agro ecological Innovations: Increasing Food Production with Participatory Development*, N. Uphoff, ed. London: Earthscan.
- Pretty, J. 2003. *Social Capital and Connectedness: Issues and Implications for Agriculture, Rural Development and Natural Resource Management in ACP Countries*. CTA Working Document Number 8032.
- Putnam, R. D. 1998. Foreword to Social Capital: Its Importance to Housing and Community Development. *Housing Policy Debate* 9 (1): v-viii.
- Putnam, R. D., R. Leonardi, and R. Nanetti. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. New Jersey: Princeton.
- Rice, D. 2000. *Forest Management by a Forest Community: The Experience of the Ikalahan*. A Study Report of the Project-Planning for Sustainability of Forests through Adaptive Co management. Manila: Asian Development Bank.
- Uphoff, N. 1996. Foreword. In: *Indigenous Organisations and Development*, P. Blut, and D. Warren, eds. London: Intermediate Technology.
- Uphoff, N. 2000. Understanding Social Capital: Learning from the Analysis and Experience of Participation. In: *Social Capital: A Multifaceted Perspectives*, G. Parthadas and S. Serageldin, eds. Washington D. C.: World Bank.
- Uphoff, N., M. Esman, and A. Krishna. 1998. *Reasons for Success: Learning from Instructive Experiences in Rural Development*. West Hartford, Conn: Kumarian Press.
- Wolff, N. H. and B. W. Wahab. 1996. The Importance of Indigenous Organisation to the Sustainability of Contemporary Yoruba Strip-weaving Industries in Iseyin, Nigeria. In: *Indigenous Organisations and Development*, Blut, P. and D. Warren, eds. London: Intermediate Technology.
- Woolcock, M. 1998. Social Capital and Economic Development: Toward A Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework. *Theory and Society* 27: 51-208.
- Woolcock, M. 2001. The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes. *ISUMA Canadian Journal of Policy Research* 2 (1):11-17.
- Woolcock, M. and A. T. Sweetser. 2002. Bright Ideas: Social Capital—The Bonds That Connect. *ADB Review* 34 (2).
- World Bank. 2003. Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Project, Morocco 2003, *ICR Report No.* 25917

### Biographical Note:

**Olajide, O. E** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Adult Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan. He has published extensively in peer-reviewed International Journals

E-mail :[ephraim0307@gmail.com](mailto:ephraim0307@gmail.com)