

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE THIRD

SECTOR: ANALYSING LINKS

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Abstract

A major portion of social capital literature is devoted to identifying the sources and factors that contribute to social capital development. In developing countries, social entrepreneurs have the capacity to motivate and organise villagers as a group to participate in their development activities. But there are limited studies that highlight their influence on social capital production. This paper analyses the links between social capital and social entrepreneurship by assessing the activities of social entrepreneurs in community organisations. Three voluntary organisations from rural India have been used as case studies for the analysis. The study found that in the poor socio-economic context of India, social entrepreneurs can reproduce social capital and sustain an organisation if they follow the 'enabling leadership' style. However, another leadership style, the benevolent dictator generate dependency among the poor and create risks to the sustainability of an organisation.

Key words: Social entrepreneur; Social capital; Community organisation; Enabling leader; Self-reliance; Taking responsibility; Social agency; Benevolent dictator.

1. Introduction

In recent years, the term social capital has received much attention and interest from researchers and policy makers. Other studies found in its application to community life and its ability to reduce community problems, restore peace and economic development (Krishna, 2000), enhance production (Monireh, 2011) and entrepreneurial characteristic (Damirchi, Shafai & Paknazar 2011; Doh1 & Edmund 2011) and contribute to making governments more effective (Putnam, 1993; Woolcock & Narayan 2000; Portes, 1998). Social capital is commonly conceptualised as a societal resource that links citizens to each other and enables them to pursue their common objectives more effectively (Stolle, 2003).

The problem of poverty is still prevalent in developing countries such as India where the benefits of development often fails to raise the standard of living for the poor (Jazairy, Alamgir, & Panuccio, 1992; Rajasekhar & Satpathy 2007). In India the number of people below the poverty line is approximately 300 million (Uphoff, Esman, & Krishna, 1998), though the economy grew over the last few years at more than 6% (GOI 2011-12) on average. Social capital is paramount for the development of the poor where they can be united together to solve their problems with limited resources, and so identifying sources and factors associated with generations of social capital is one of the major issues in the social capital literature. Voluntary organisations, government organisations, religious faith, societal cleavages, government policy and family structure can all influence social capital formation (Stolle, 2003).

Krishna (2002) argued that factors associated with social capital generation mostly depend on the context where association takes place. This study showed social entrepreneurs can activate social capital for poor villagers, acting here as a mediator between the villagers and development agents such as government, banking and insurance company officials and activating group activities for their development.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the links between social capital and social entrepreneurship by assessing the activities of social entrepreneurs in community organisations; this paper investigates whether social entrepreneurial activities can play any role in producing social capital.

The next section of the paper presents a brief literature review, which acts as the background scenario of a subsequent analysis. Section 3 explains the methodology, and Section 4 analyses case studies and the findings. The last section summarises the conclusions.

2. Background – Brief literature review

2.1 Social capital

Woolcock and Narayan (2000, p. 226) expressed the basic idea of social capital by saying, “... *a person’s family, friends and associates constitutes an important asset, one that can be called on in crisis, enjoyed for its own sake, and leveraged for material gain*”. Putnam argued for the first time that it is a resource possessed or not possessed by communities only (DeFilippis, 2001).

Theorists have identified three types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital is characterised by shared norms and values (Newton, 1997), and thick trust and dense networks (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988), commonly found in families and close-knit groups. Bridging relationships indicate weak trust and thin networks that cut across different groups (Granovetter, 1973; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Lin, 2005; Massey, 1998; Portes, 1998). Linking social capital reflects the relationship of a community or group with groups of higher social order (Woolcock, 2001; Aldridge, Halpern, & Fitzpatrick, 2002).

Most accounts of social capital rely predominantly on the importance of social interaction and voluntary association (Stolle, 2003). Here, high levels of civic engagement of people in a variety of civil organisations play a crucial role for the betterment of governance and economic development. However, Porte (1998, p. 8) argued, “...*social capital stands for the ability of actors to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks or other social structures*”. Onyx and Bullen (2000, p. 195) argued along the same line: “*The development of social capital requires the active and willing engagement of citizens working together within a participative community.*” This is social agency. Narayan (1995) referred to this as the organisational ability of the poor. This paper considers that the

main themes of social capital amount to social agency or the organisational ability of a civil group along with their trust, norms, reciprocity and network-based relationships, which help their collective actions for their collective benefits.

2.2 *Sources and factors of social capital*

Putnam (2000) considers networks of voluntary or non-profit organisations as one of the most important sources of social capital. He argues that associations function as “*learning schools for democracy*” (Putnam, 2000, p. 394). Other authors emphasise factors such as characteristics of the members, characteristics of the development activities, and size and age of the organisations as helping to build social capital (Passey & Lyons, 2006).

LiPuma and Koelble (2009) claim that social capital reproduction is context specific. Krishna (2002) argues in the same line and stated that in different contexts such as developing countries like India, young educated village leaders can activate social capital through their mediating activities. These mediators help villagers to benefit from government anti-poverty development programmes and aid, and they are social entrepreneurs, as they brought about changes in the economic and social lives of the poor villagers.

2.3 *Social entrepreneurship*

Social entrepreneurship is an innovative approach for dealing with complex social problems (Johnson, 2000), where social entrepreneurs play the central role; they are the key to successful social entrepreneurship (Bornstein, 2007). In this context, Muhammad Yunus of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh, Ella Bhat of the Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India, Bill Drayton of the Ashoka Foundation in the United States and Ms Maathai of Green Belt in Kenya are some recent examples (Bornstein, 2007; Maathai, 1985; Yunus, 1998). These social entrepreneurs, through their innovative ideas, energy and steadfastness, created social value, solved social problems and brought many positive changes to the lives of the world’s poor.

Some authors argue that social entrepreneurs not only create social value, they sustain value and bring positive social change (Nicholls & Cho, 2006). Their work brings about sustained change in the social, economic and political practices of disadvantaged groups, and they shift public attitudes toward weaker sections of society.

Alvord, Brown, & Christine (2004) used the term ‘social transformation’ instead of social change, and argued that social entrepreneurship is a catalyst for social transformation well beyond a targeted solution, and a mobiliser of social actors toward common goals. Social transformation consists of three types of change which social entrepreneurship is associated with: cultural, economic, and political.

In terms of cultural change, social entrepreneurship enhances villagers’ capacity through training, altering the existing social norms, roles and the expectation of the village to improve the cultural context. In Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) conducts training courses focusing on increasing villagers’ capacity and belief in their own potential.

By developing a micro-finance system, the Grameen Bank provides tools and resources to enhance productivity and transform economic circumstances. Micro-finance has changed the economic activities of women and enhanced their ability to earn an income.

Political change also helps to change the existing norms of villagers by building and encouraging local movements to challenge power and give a voice to marginalised communities. The Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) in India assisted poor women working as small-scale sellers, home-based producers and laborers, to protest against oppression and exploitation by local police.

This paper focuses on the form of social entrepreneurship that creates innovative solutions to immediate social problems and mobilises the ideas, capacities, resources and social arrangements required for sustainable social change/transformation.

2.4 *Characteristics of social entrepreneurs*

Social entrepreneurs are often viewed as business entrepreneurs with a social mission. Peter Drucker stated, “*the social entrepreneur changes the performance capacity of society*” (cited in Gendron 1996, p. 37). Twentieth-century growth economist, Schumpeter (1980) characterised the entrepreneur as the source of ‘creative destruction’ necessary for major economic advances. Changing activities for the betterment of society remains at the heart of their mission. They also use their social mission to satisfy unmet problems (Nicholls & Cho, 2006; Dees, 1998).

The concept of leadership characteristics of social entrepreneurs is still an important area of debate. Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal (Northouse, 2007, p. 3). Some studies observed leader as a part of the group who controls the group structure and processes (Bass, 1981), others observed they are not a part of the group that is being influenced or worked with. They acted as an outsider such as Mohammad Yunus of Grameen Bank (Yunus, 1998), Ella Bhatt of SEWA (Alvord et al., 2004), Bill Drayton of Ashoka foundation (Bornstein, 2007), Richard Mawson (Mawson, 2007) and other social entrepreneurs of Asian context (Hassan, 2005). This study considered all social entrepreneurs as leaders. Prabhu (1999) also observed similarities between the leadership of social entrepreneurs and business entrepreneurs.

Uphoff et al. (1998) described the leadership style of social entrepreneurs in developing countries as ‘facilitative’, with participatory development enabling villagers to take responsibility in decision-making. They work hard (Krishna et al., 1997), made sacrifices by leaving their employment, and some took a vow of celibacy, pledging to devote their entire life to the service of the rural poor (Krishna et al., 1997). These facilitative leaders were concerned with the work and family life of their staff, their values, and culture, their growth as individuals and professionals. The villagers respected them as their ‘guru’ or master and also loved them as senior family members.

There are limited studies that highlight social entrepreneurs’ influence on social capital production. This paper intends to contribute toward bridging this gap.

3. Methodology and data

The study uses qualitative methods of analysing case studies, looking at ‘real life’ situations. The data collection process from the case study organisations includes interviews, participant observations in their usual and unusual activities, and local history and stories to gather information. It satisfies the triangulation aspect covering at least three sources of data to make the data valid (Feagin, Orum, & Shoberg, 1991).

The researcher used the ‘emic’ version, as an insider, of accounting and representing data (Headland, 1990), referring to the data and used the villagers’ own words to interpret aspects meaningful to them. It moved to a more objective, ‘etic’ position in analysing those data. At this point the researcher superimposed her views (as an outsider and non-villager) on the insiders’ (villagers’) views. Academic language has been used at this stage to improve understanding.

Three rural voluntary organisations from India have been used as case studies in the process of analysis, ‘Gramonnayan Milan Samity’ (GMS); ‘Bhubonpur Adibashi Sangho’ (BAS); and ‘Mohila O Sishu Sangho’ (SMS)—from the districts of South 24 Parganas and Birbhum in the state of West Bengal. The organisation selection criteria included success of organization, changing the lives of the poor for the better, presence of a strong leader, existence of the organisation for more than 15 years, level of their cooperation and willingness to support this research, and accessibility to their location. The researcher’s familiarity with the location, culture and language also played a role.

The population where BAS is located consists mainly of a tribal community (*santal*) (GOI, 2001). SMS is much larger when compared with the other two organisations—serving a population of more than 31,000 in 20 small villages (SMS, 2006-07). BAS and GMS are serving villages with only 800 people (BAS, 2006; GMS, 2006). All three organisations are well known for their development activities.

4. Analysis and findings

4.1 *Socio-economic context of the case studies*

Salient features of the villages were:

- Agriculture and its allied activities as 80 per cent of total economic activities;
- Rain-fed single-cropped agriculture—mainly paddy belt with low yielding varieties and traditional farm techniques resulted in poor income for the farmers;
- Lower literacy rates of the villages than the district averages, about 40 per cent. The rates for women were particularly low. The education quality of government schools was poor;
- Low health and hygiene status—practically no provision of health services in the villages;
- High migration among the landless, especially during lean periods;
- Frequent climate related catastrophes including floods, cyclones and saline water from the sea inundating paddy fields as a result of collapsing river embankments, which exacerbates their sufferings and poverty. (SMS, 2001-02)

4.2 *The leaders*

The leader of BAS (David) is a German academic who came to India to teach German and lived in Kolkata (capital city of the state of West Bengal) before moving in 1979 as a research fellow with the Viswabharati University. While living at the university accommodation in Bolpur-Santiniketan in 1984, he came across some *Santal* villagers of Bhuvonpur. This motivated him to start development activities in villages. In 1987 he focused on development and started BAS jointly with a *Santal* youth from the village. His mission was to make the villagers self-reliant in their development activities.

He lived with the Santal villagers in every weekend, helped them and listened to their problems. He motivated them to be organised, disciplined and take responsibility of making decisions as a group to solve their problems, to take formal and informal education, and get practical training of managing community organisation from a centre of his

acquaintance. He raised funds using his network and offered the villagers access to his networks. David acted as enabler of the villagers to take responsibility in health, education and vocational training.

The study identified the founder of GMS, Arjun, as a leader. He played a very important role in establishing and managing the organisation. He founded GMS as a local resident in 1968 on a small scale to make the villagers educated.. He left the village for higher education in 1971, and the organisation could not survive until Arjun returned after a long absence and re-started development activities. He designed and controlled single handedly various development programmes in areas of education, income and health. He is a high salaried government job holder and lives in a town near Kolkata.

Sita is a local woman with a leadership role in SMS. She has been deeply involved in managing and strengthening the organisation since the beginning of SMS. After completing a Bachelor of Arts degree, she worked as a teacher at a local primary school. She was inspired to do social work by her primary school teachers, who were active participants in the Independence Movement of India during the 1930s. She is a believer of values and philosophies preached by Sri Ramakrishna (famous philosopher and saint from India), where the basic principles are “to serve the needy” and equality of human being irrespective of gender and wealth. She has a vision of the world where women are self-reliant and contribute equally to developmental activities in society. She has led a life of *Brahmachary*²³ for this cause. She left the job and started teaching higher education and imparted vocational training the local girls in her own house. She motivated the local girls to establish their own organisation to solve their problems and be self-reliant.

4.3 *Reproduction of social capital and leadership style*

The study found that the social entrepreneurs earned the trust of the villagers by their various qualities and hard work in village development. This trustworthiness made them leaders of their respective organisations and established a bonded relationship between them and their ‘followers’ (the villagers). The villagers accepted them as their leaders and accepted the values of the leaders as their norms or unwritten rules.

One of the staff of BAS said,

“David'da believed in certain values such as dignity of work, and equality of a human being and his practice of these values in his own life changed my life extensively. He worked with us everywhere from tree planting to carrying patients to hospital and lived with us, shared our joys and sorrows by being one of us. Again he maintained his relationship with the visitors of higher social positions from Europe, government agencies and other places. These practices prove his belief in equality. It is overwhelming. David'da is not just a person to me. He is an institution to me and I follow his values in my own life. He is an inspiration to us.”

Sita (of SMS) did the same thing for the village women. She said to them, *“...without your organisation you will not be powerful and cannot speak out against the cultural discrimination against you”*. She worked hard to motivate them to build their own organisation, *“...if men can build their organisation, you also can do so”*.

The different types of leadership characteristics vary in their impact on the relationships between the leaders and the villagers, and among the villagers. Social entrepreneurs like David and Sita took the responsibility building style, where they facilitated the self-rule of the villagers in managing their organisations, *‘the villagers should take control over their own tasks to solve their problems’*. The villagers learned to manage their own organisation for solving their problems ‘by doing’ and by formal education. These leaders remained facilitators.

As one BAS staff mentioned,

“We organise meetings, write our resolutions, and decide our future activities and the way of collecting funds. We don't now depend on our leader. We already know from him how to do it.”

In other words, the responsibility building leadership style facilitated the development of a social agency, which promotes active and willing participation in collective actions (Onyx & Bullen, 2000). This is clear from the statements of the villagers:

“We save and pool money together and offer the whole money as a loan to the neediest among us. We know her condition and trust she will pay it back timely.” (SMS)

“My friend broke my computer while he was doing work for BAS—it is expensive and hard to get it again. But it was not intentional and could happen with me also.” (BAS)

At BAS and SMS, the villagers in the weekly meetings and the team leaders in team meetings made decisions and solved problems (Putnam, 1993; Coleman, 1988).

The responsibility building leaders used their personal contacts to gather resources for the organisation and provided the villagers with access to their networks. The study found that David's friends from his networks with higher social positions overseas visited the organisation regularly and developed friendly working relationships with the villagers. This helped the villagers with resources and funds for collective action. As one of the BAS staff put it,

“David'da introduced us to his friends with national and international backgrounds. They visited BAS several times. David'da initially escorted them and explained everything related to BAS and school, and we used to accompany them. Now we represent our organisation and explain to them what they would like to know about BAS and us. I have relationships with hundreds of organisations and persons through the school and it surprises me as well”.

The women workers of SMS built up also their own networks with Sita's contacts. The women learned to use computers and set their networks to exchange ideas and resources. The villagers established relationships with their leaders' contacts; and provided evidence that David and Sita helped the villagers to establish networks, which helped to reproduce Bridging (Granovetter, 1973; Woolcock & Narayan, 2000; Lin, 2005; Massey, 1998; Portes,

1998) and Linking social capital(Woolcock, 2001;Aldridge et al., 2002). The women members developed their networks from Sita's contacts as well as their own and learned to collect funds.

Arjun (of GMS) followed a different leadership style and did not facilitate self-rule among the villagers. He encouraged the villagers to participate and cooperate under his control and he made all the final decisions. The villagers became dependent on Arjun to make decisions, the villagers never made any decisions as a group in collective action.

At the same time, Arjun encouraged the villagers to participate and cooperate in the collective actions under his control. Arjun innovated various successful development programmes and operated them with the help of the villagers. The villagers followed their leader, generally without question, and developed the norms of hard work and discipline in collective actions. These leaders build a norm of dependence on them. *"We wait for him until he comes and don't take any decision without him"*, one of the GMS staff stated clearly about Arjun.

Arjun collected funds and resources for their organisations. The villagers did not establish any relationships with the leaders' networks to collect funds under this controlling leadership style. The villagers are not strong in communicating knowledgeably and fluently in English with foreign visitors and donors. *"We don't know how to speak English and how to explain our organisational goals to the visitors,"* said a staff member of GMS. *"He (the leader) is a banyan tree and we work under its shade. He manages all the storms that affected us,"* another staff member clarified.

4.4 Leadership style: enabler and benevolent dictator

In analysing the leadership style of the social entrepreneurs the study found two distinct types: David and Sita followed the 'responsibility building leadership' style whereas Arjun held the 'controlling' style.

This responsibility building leadership style has some similarities and differences with the facilitator's leadership style of previous studies (Uphoff et al., 1998; Smillie & Hailey, 2001). The styles are similar in the philosophy of their social missions. Both types of leaders wanted to 'assist' the villagers in their development process to make them self-reliant. The responsibility building leaders introduced widespread participation and leadership at different levels and ensured self-rule or participatory management (Uphoff et al., 1998).

Facilitators paid personal costs by working hard, maintaining discipline, promoting learning, and encouraging self-rule. Some of them took a vow of celibacy and dedicated their lives to village development (Smillie & Hayley, 2001). In the present research, David and Sita took a vow of celibacy and dedicated their lives to village development.

However, the styles differ in regard to the way they achieved their goals. To pursue their goals, the facilitators of previous studies provided various services to the villagers (e.g. micro credit in case of Grameen Bank; formal training in the case of BRAC; or advocacy in the case of SEWA). However, the responsibility building leaders informally taught the villagers essential values and qualities to be self-reliant village workers. This is also a type of advocacy service, but dissimilar to the one provided by the leaders of SEWA who assisted the self-employed poor women to be organised in building political movement to protect themselves from the local police or other forms of exploitation. Another striking difference between the two leadership styles is the relationship between the leaders and the poor villagers in the previous studies was considered as of master or 'guru', but in the present studies the relationship was of friendship and interdependence.

With many similar characteristics to the facilitator leaders it can be said that the responsibility building leadership is a kind of facilitator leadership with a slightly different aspect. The responsibility building leaders tried to enhance the villagers' inner strength. Inner strength is one of the aspects of self-reliance (Rahman, 1990). They taught the villagers to be self-reliant or to be able to take responsibility in collective action. Thus the study called them 'enabler' leaders who helped to infuse a sense of responsibility among the village workers.

Arjun took on the mission of encouraging the building of 'confident' men to achieve the goal of village development. To him, a confident man is a hardworking and cooperative village worker. He encouraged the villagers to work hard, to be disciplined and to participate in collective action. These qualities made him the leader of the villagers. Arjun's concern for the wellbeing of the villagers resembles the qualities of the facilitators, but his controlling attitude differed. Arjun always made the final decision. He listened to the villagers and his fellow workers, but eventually made the decision that he considered best. This was one of the contradictions in his behaviour. He could not share his power with the villagers. He set up the organisation for the villagers but could not leave them its ownership. He networked but did not expand the villagers' networks. This appeared to be one of his major weaknesses and made him different from social entrepreneurs who believe in the sharing of power (Bornstein, 2007). He resembles more a business entrepreneur (Prabhu, 1999) who likes to keep control of his environment, than a social entrepreneur. Due to the lack of participation in the decision making process, the villagers did not learn responsibility 'by doing'. He did not make the villagers responsible for their collective actions; on the other hand, he made them dependent on him.

Arjun helped to set up a quality primary school and organised annual quality entertainment activities for the villagers. He provided jobs to the local graduates in his organisation and this helped reduced city migration. These evidences demonstrate that controller social entrepreneurs can be benevolent and can help to bring development in villagers' lives and wellbeing and productivity through collective actions. So Arjun followed a benevolent leadership style.

4.5 *Enabler leaders are social entrepreneurs*

The characteristics of the enabler leaders are not poor villagers but outsiders with higher education level and working for the development of the poor. This is one of the characteristics of social entrepreneur. Alvord et al. (2004) argued social entrepreneurship brings social changes in existing practices, attitudes and values in regard to the cultural, economic and political lives of villagers. The enabler leaders have changed the organisational abilities and economic practices of the villagers. Schumpeter (1980) characterised the entrepreneur as the source of 'creative destruction' necessary for major economic advances. These leaders carried out this 'creative destruction' and

brought cultural and economic changes in the villages; by virtue of this quality, the study recognises them as social entrepreneurs.

5. Conclusions

As per the findings of the three case studies in the poor socio-economic context of India, the social entrepreneur leaders in community organisations played a role of ‘enabler’ leader. They educated and facilitated the villagers to be self-reliant workers so that they could take responsibility for resolving their own problems without depending on government programmes. In the process they helped the villagers to generate their organisational ability or social agency; they needed a leader whose mission was to assist the poor to be self-reliant. The paper also identified other type of leader, the benevolent dictator, who does not serve this purpose—they generate dependency among the poor instead of developing their social agency or empowerment and placed the sustainability of the organisation at risk.

The implications of this study for the organisational sustainability are clear. Social entrepreneurs can reproduce social capital and sustain the organisation if they follow the ‘enabling leadership’ style. The enable leaders developed the villagers’ social agency or organisational capacity or social capital so that they can sustain their organisation in the long run when these leaders withdraw. The villagers developed self-reliance under the enabling leadership. Associating with outside leaders in the villagers’ development activities is common in the Asian context and naturally the sustainability of these organisations poses a major concern to the development world. So this paper argue that the intervention of social entrepreneur could ensure organisational sustainability if they took enabling leadership style to assist the villagers.

The findings can be generalised to a limited extent as they are based on a limited number of case studies from one region in India. It can be reasonably expected that there are a large number of such ‘enabling’ social entrepreneur leaders in the rural voluntary sectors in India. The activities of these enabling leaders in large numbers can make a major difference to social and economic development outcomes in India in the future.

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Notes:

¹*Brahmacharies* are unmarried devoted (to some particular values) people who limit all types of material consumption to the bare minimum.