Harnessing and Guiding Social Capital for Rural Development

By

Shahrukh Rafi Khan,
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First published in 2007 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN™
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010 and
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire, England RG21 6XS
Companies and representatives throughout the world.

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ISBN-13: 978–1–4039–8196–7
ISBN-10: 1–4039–8196–5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Khan, Shahrukh Rafi.
Harnessing and guiding social capital for rural development / by Shahrukh Rafi Khan, Zeb Rifaqat, and Sajid Kazmi.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 1–4039–8196–5 (alk. paper)
1. Social capital (Sociology) 2. Rural development. 3. Social capital (Sociology)—Pakistan. 4. Rural development—Pakistan. I. Khan, Sharukh Rafi. II. Rifaqat, Zeb. III. Kazmi, Sajid. IV. Title.

HM708.K52 2007
307.1'412095491—dc22 2007007588

First edition: December 2007

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America.

Harnessing and Guiding Social Capital for Rural Development

This book is dedicated to
Khalid Iqbal and Faiqa Sheikh,
Farzana Kazmi, Seema, and Rifaqat Zaman Khan
for all their support

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Preface

The Human Development Foundation North America (HDFNA) founded the Human Development Foundation (HDF) as a Pakistani development NGO to execute its Pakistan Project in rural Pakistan in 1998 and contracted the authors as research members of a Pakistani think tank based in Islamabad, Pakistan, to document the process of program implementation. The exciting part of this research was the complete freedom to design it and also to study the work of a rural development NGO from the very inception of the project.

Collective action via participatory development was the logical conceptual framework for the research. However, we felt that this really did not go to the heart of why collective action takes place and what rural development NGOs contribute to this process? The rapidly growing literature on social capital provided a possible answer to this question. Rural development NGOs claim to create social capital in the form of village organizations (VOs) or community organizations (COs) that subsequently catalyze the collective action. Based on our understanding of the literature, we hypothesized that social capital in this context is a feature of the community in terms of their norms, mutual trust, reciprocal obligations, and networks so that, if successful, development organizations (DOs) can harness the social capital and embody it in VOs or COs and guide these organizations to participate and engage in collective action for poverty alleviation and community welfare. Of course, other factors could also result in successful collective action, and although collective action could be induced, it could also occur independent of the DOs. We explore this issue using an in-depth case study. We think the documentation we engaged in is valuable, particularly because of the varied research method we employed, including placing an anthropologist in the field for a year, utilizing control villages for comparison, and adding two field-based updates. We also discovered and documented the importance of

understanding history and culture for the process of harnessing social capital. We turn again to the inception of this book and return to research issues later in the preface.

The HDFNA was registered in 1997 in the United States as a charitable foundation to launch, as the project document states, "an apolitical movement for positive social change and community empowerment through mass literacy, enhanced quality of education, primary health care and grassroots economic development." The initial financial contributions came from the Noor Foundation, the Society for International Health, Education and Literacy Programs (HELP), and the Association of Pakistani Physicians of North America (APPNA). Subsequent contributions came from founding members who contributed $10,000 each. HDFNA has a 21-member board, drawn from all over North America.

Thus the HDFNA Pakistan project was an initiative of a community of North American Pakistanis who desired to do something for the cause of human development and empowerment among the poor in their country of origin. In this regard, the HDFNA Pakistan project is extending the work earlier begun by its supporting organizations. APPNA had been running preventive health interventions in rural Pakistan since 1989. The Society for International HELP had been supporting education interventions via the Tameer-i-Milliat Foundation (TMF) since 1992. Noor Foundation had its own charitable initiatives.

While the health interventions managed to reduce the infant mortality rate, there was little impact of such interventions on the maternal mortality rates. HDFNA analyzed the cause of this lag to be poverty, and a preventive health initiative, on its own, was therefore not enough to improve the overall human development indicators.[1] To address this issue, HDFNA commissioned a country strategy report for its future human development interventions via HDFNA Pakistan Project.[2] The report made several suggestions, three of which stood out.

First, it recommended a multisector intervention that would ensure an overall increase in the human development indicators. Recommending this approach now has solid foundations in Pakistan, one of which is the work of the Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP) that initiated the work of other Rural Support Programs and other development support organizations.[3]

Second, to build on the sector work already initiated by the supporting organizations of HDFNA, it suggested a multipartner initiative. In addition to APPNA[4] and Tameer-i-Millat (TMF), it suggested others including the National Rural Support Program

(NRSP) and Aurat (Women) Foundation as implementing NGOs. NRSP would be responsible for the social mobilization to harness and formalize the community social capital in the form of COs needed to pull together and further the sector interventions. In addition, the income generation and microcredit projects run by NRSP would provide the glue for the COs and enhance the standard of living of the poor. The Aurat Foundation was viewed as a potential partner for women's empowerment. Finally, it recommended two research organizations, the Human Development Centre (HDC) and the Sustainable Development Policy Institute (SDPI) as partners to do the research.[5]

Third, the report recommended that research partners develop a research method that relied on building the capacity of the local DOs and communities to do self-analysis of their needs.[6] The SDPI was entrusted with the task of evolving a research method and a communications strategy that would engage both the local communities and the partner organizations.[7] The HDC was to work with the communities to develop village-level human development indicators (HDI) in order to help them track their own human development. This would be the first attempt at estimating the HDI at such a high level of disaggregation.

Just as APPNA, Society for International HELP, and Noor Foundation collaborated as constituent parts of HDFNA in North America, the APPNA and TMF initiatives were to collaborate via the HDF in Pakistan when working in the same localities. In addition to the health and education initiatives, HDF also included training, microcredit, enterprise development, and establishing linkages with government and civil society organizations as part of its mandate. Ghani Marwat was selected as the first country representative to oversee the opening of a field office in Mardan of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) of Pakistan in 1998. His past experience with Aga Khan Rural Support Program no doubt helped in his selection. Prominent board members of HDFNA who got this initiative off the ground included Dr. Naseem Ashraf, Dr. Musaddiq Malik, and Dr. Khalid Riaz.

After negotiations with NRSP, it was mutually agreed that they would provide training for the social mobilization to HDF staff rather than be part of the partnership. Aurat Foundation and HDC also did not join the partnership. SDPI initiated the field research in the summer of 1999 and placed an anthropologist in the field for one year and the research team made several field visits. The fieldwork came to a close in the summer of 2000. The completion of this manuscript was

delayed for various reasons but we have taken advantage of that by making two additional field-visits, in the fall of 2001 and the summer of 2006. These are included as chapter 9 and 10 of this book.

In a nutshell, this book is about the harnessing and formalization of social capital in the form of VOs or COs to guide and facilitate collective action for poverty alleviation in particular and for community welfare in general. It mainly investigates the success of the HDF in these two endeavors in the early years of its existence. In this regard, it should be viewed as a benchmark, as DOs require more time to get established. However, in terms of problems and obstacles confronted in its attempt to harness social capital, the timing is perfect because, as far as policy is concerned, most can be learnt from the initial years. Also, starting the research with the inception of the project was important for documenting the process of social mobilization for harnessing social capital and embodying it in COs.

This book has three parts. In the first chapter of Part I, we review the conceptual literature and locate our own conceptualization within it. In chapter 2, we review the empirical literature with a particular focus on poverty alleviation and rural development. In chapter 3, we review the attempts at harnessing social capital in Pakistan by rural support programs of the kind HDF is modeled on.

Part II contains seven chapters that together present a detailed case study of the HDF. In chapter 4, we locate HDF in the context of the local Pukhtun history and culture.[8] In chapter 5, we evaluate the nature and success of the multisectoral interventions HDF instituted in saving, microcredit, training, and linkages. Social mobilization is the method adopted by development NGOs to harness social capital into grassroots organizations for collective action and participatory development and hence is the most critical part of their work. In chapter 6, we document the process of social mobilization at project inception and indicate how local Pukhtun history and culture impacted this process.

In chapter 7, we evaluate the success of APPNA's health intervention and in chapter 8 that of TMF's education intervention. A dedicated chapter on these cases was deemed necessary to provide more details about the project partners but mainly because it was possible to assess the impact of these two interventions by comparing project with control villages. In chapters 9 and 10, we present the project field evaluation updates based on field trips one and six years (respectively) after the initial data collection. We demonstrate the dynamics of iterative project learning by a development NGO. Chapter 11 concludes

Part II by drawing on the evaluation of interventions, project updates, and project expansion to make an overall project assessment.

By the time the fieldwork was completed, we realized that while our in-depth case study method was valuable for documenting and describing a process, it was not ideally suited for rigorously testing two related hypotheses thrown up by our fieldwork: first, the impact of the prior presence of social capital on the success in constructing COs and on the survival of these organizations; second, the impact of these constructed COs in inducing collective action for rural development.

Funding was secured for follow-up research to test these related hypotheses, and the largest development NGO (not HDF) in Pakistan agreed to the research because it was hoped that, apart from the academic value of the research, considerable project learning could also result for it. Eventually, the research was terminate literally a day before it was scheduled to start. The research design was approved, the instruments developed after a series of preliminary and formal pretests, the field team trained, and the field strategy finalized. The sticking point was the development NGO's insistence that their social organizers (SOs) should accompany the research team during the fieldwork and that the principle investigator should be present in the field for the duration of the field research. The latter demand could be considered reasonable, but no academic would accept the former.[9]

This might have been a blessing because, once the alternative research design was fully fleshed out and the numerous nuances and complexities followed up on, the output was likely to be of book length report. In Part III, we have carefully documented our planned study in the form of a manual for the field researcher, alongside we give relevant instruments and associated documents. We hope other researchers can execute this research study if we do not.

Acknowledgments

We would particularly like to thank Dr. Naseem Ashraf, Dr. Khalid Riaz, Dr. Shahnaz Khan, and Dr. Musaddiq Malik for being supportive and for their patience in our documenting field-research findings in a form that can be more widely disseminated. We would like to thank Ghani Marwat for being completely open and very generous with his time. Similarly, the new Mardan regional project manager Dr. Manzoor Ahmed (regional program manager), after Ghani Marwat established the head office in Rawalpindi (Islamabad's twin city) in June 1999, was equally welcoming and forthcoming during our first follow-up visit. Acknowledgments are due to Dr. Moazzam Khalil, country director, APPNA SEHAT, Dr. Shakirullah, regional director, APPNA SEHAT, Mardan region, Mr. Khalid Khan, regional supervisor, APPNA SEHAT, Dr. Zaheer Ahmed, chairman (Tameer-i-Milliat Foundation), Mr. Nadir Shah, program coordinator (education, Tameer-i-Milliat Foundation, Mardan region), Mr. Sultan Khan, program manager (operations), Mr. Nasim Ejaz, the third regional project manager in Mardan, Muhammad Ishaq, social organizer (SO), Mr. Waseem Moazzam (SO), Ms. Fehmeeda (SO), Ms. Fakhra, credit officer, Ms. Ravida, program manager (monitoring and evaluation). Thanks are also due to Mr. M. Iqbal, Mr. M. Jameel, Mr. M. Shahnawaz, Mr. S. Ataul Haq, Ms. Jasarat and Mr. S. Murtaza Bacha, teachers in Tameer-i-Milliat Foundation and government schools.

For our 2006 project update, we would like to thank Muhammad Ishaq who had been promoted to the position of regional program manager at the Mardan office and Azhar Saleem, the chief executive officer. Both were highly cooperative and generous with their time. We would also like to thank Mount Holyoke College and Dean Don O'Shea in particular for assisting us with the modest support needed for the follow-up fieldwork.

We owe thanks to Dr. Ismat Aziz, who was the research project consultant in public health, for her report, part of which was incorporated

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into chapter 7. We would like to thank Mahjabeen Hussain and Irshad Tabassum for their efficient and patient word processing assistance for the first draft. Finally, many thanks are due to our Palgrave Macmillan editor, Anthony Wahl, for his responsiveness and for helpfully and wisely setting the parameters of the manuscript revisions based on reviewer feedback. We acknowledge the many valuable comments of two anonymous reviewers that contributed to the improvement of the manuscript, and we claim responsibility for remaining errors. Palgrave Macmillan has developed an ingenious conveyor-belt mechanism that works smoothly and efficiently with very helpful persons at each stage. In this regard, we would like to thank Kate Ankofski, the editorial assistant, Katie Fahie, the production assistant, and the NewGen text-editing team.

List of Abbreviations

AKRSP	Aga Khan Rural Support Program
APPNA	Association of Pakistani Physicians of North America
CBO	community-based organization
CCB	citizen's community board
CHC	community health center
CO	community organization
DO	development organization
FGD	focus group discussions
FSO	female social organizer
HA	health assistant
HC	health committees
HDF	Human Development Foundation
HDFNA	Human Development Foundation North America
LHV	lady health visitor
MSO	male social organizer
NRSP	National Rural Support Program
NWFP	North West Frontier Province
PPAF	Pakistan Poverty Alleviation Fund
PTA	Parent teacher association
RPM	regional program manager
RSP	Rural Support Program
RSPN	Rural Support Program Network
SDPI	Sustainable Development Policy Institute
SHA	senior health assistant
SO	social organizer
TBA	traditional birth attendant
TMF	Tameer-i-Milliat Foundation
VDO	village development organization
VO	village organization

Glossary

Hujra	space for male congregation
Jirga	council of elders
Kissani	peasant movement for land acquisition in Mardan
Mashar	village elders
Mullahs	clerics
Nang	honor
Pukhtunwali	Pukhtun code of honor
Purdah	female seclusion including veiling
Qalang	tax or rents
Tanzeem	organization (local word for DO)

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