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Social Capital and Community Participation in Development

The Case of the Direct Community Financing Programme in Post-Conflict Sierra Leone

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Abstract

Community participation seemingly appeals to a number of development agencies and institutions. Participation is seen as a means through which project outcomes can be improved. Nonetheless, "participation" as a concept is perceived, understood and defined differently. Therefore, different objectives are identified for undertaking participation. Some believe that pursuit of economic objectives has come to dominate development practice, and others believe that development practice has neglected its human or social aspects. Despite the rhetoric, past community development practice has either made little improvement in people's lives, or resulted in excluding some members of target communities. With the new institutional focus, and community empowerment as the objective of participation, the problem for development intervention is how to enhance community participation.

Using a case study in post-conflict Sierra Leone, this research examines the Direct Community Financing programme, an externally funded development programme in ten communities in the Pujehun Port Loko districts. The study sought to investigate the extent to which social capital, as a community asset, facilitates community participation in development given the institutional environment and the objectives of the development intervention.

The study finds that community participation is directly related to community level social capital, with high social capital communities recording high participation in the programme. The study also finds that community control, ownership and decisions over project activities, as well as the extent to which the projects meet community needs, also affect participation. Similarly, the institutional rules and the (designated) roles of stakeholders are equally important for enhancing participation. In contrast, a community's historical experience, discrimination and exclusion, selective participation and communal conflicts, among other factors, can negatively affect community participation.

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Glossary

Kombi	rotating labour group (in Mende)
Kabotho	rotating labour group (in Temne)
Osusu	rotating savings scheme
Poro	secret society for men
Sande	secret society for women
Wunde	male dominated secret society in Southern Sierra Leone

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AfDB	African Development Bank
CBO	Community Development Organization
CDF	Civil Defence Force
CDO	Community Development Officer
CDP	Community-Driven Programme
DC	District Council
DCF	Direct Community Financing
DFID	Department for International Development
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country
IDA	International Development Assistance
IEC	Information, Education &Communication
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MUHEC	Massey University Human Ethics Committee
NaCSA	National Commission for Social Action
NPAC	National Project Approval Committee
NSAP	National Social Action Project
PMC	Project Management Committee
PO	Project Officer
PPA	Participatory Poverty Assessment
PRI	The Canadian Policy Research Initiative
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
RC	Regional Co-ordinator
RPAC	Regional Project Approval Committee
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SCAT	Social Capital Assessment Tools
SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone