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IS WANTOKISM A FORM OF SOCIAL CAPITAL?

Comparative study of two communities in Oro Province, PNG.

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Abstract

Social capital is an important prerequisite for development however the form it assumes is one which has to be understood well by development practitioners. A lot of interest in social capital has been generated recently particularly in the Pacific as social relations between people and various societal institutions in these islands are in many ways influenced by ethno linguistic affiliations. Only when these relationships between development agents and beneficiaries are understood in their local context can one truly appreciate it as a form of social capital. Hence, the term 'wantokism' which relates to social relations between people sharing similar ethno linguistic ties becomes an interesting topic of discussion in especially in the heterogeneous Melanesian countries of the Pacific. This subject is discussed in this thesis through comparing social relations between actors in two separate communities in Papua New Guinea.

The Buna community school project and Kokoda hospital project in the Oro Province of Papua New Guinea are examples of projects that involved a wide variety of people from all sectors of the community. The Kokoda project funded jointly by the Papua New Guinea and Australian government under the Australian War Graves office was successfully completed and is fully operational while the Buna project funded by the Japanese government under its Japanese International Cooperation Agency program was not completed. In a society where trust and cooperation among wantoks is expected to a higher degree this research explores this issue in both these projects and whether or not the lack of it or abundance in one may have contributed to its failure or success.

Through consultation with project board members, community members, provincial and district government personnel at both these locations this research raises the question of whether there is trust and cooperation between project boards and the wider community prior to and during the project work. More importantly it raises the question of whether there is trust and cooperation on the basis of wantokism. This thesis shows that the strong

bonding social capital inherent in wantokism is clearly exemplified in both communities. However, there was minimal trust among board members and the local community, and a lack of bridging social capital in particularly Buna which affected its ability to access resources from outside sources. In contrast, there was a higher level of bridging social capital, and better trust and cooperation between board members and the local community at Kokoda. Drawing together from firstly, a theoretical analysis of social capital, ethnicity and wantokism and secondly, from qualitative and quantitative research in these two communities, it reaches conclusions about the extent to which wantokism could be a form of social capital.

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List of Acronyms

AUSAID	Australian Agency for International Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
JICA	Japanese International Cooperation Agency
LLG	Local Level Government
MP	Member of Parliament
NZAID	New Zealand Aid
OIC	Officer in Charge
PMV	Public Motor Vehicle
PNG	Papua New Guinea
SC-IQ	Integrated Questionnaire for Measurement of Social Capital
SCPS	Social Capital and Poverty Survey
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WVS	World Values Survey

Glossary

Big men	Village Elders
Blood is thicker than water	Referring to loyalty to those related through kinship relations
Buai	Betelnut, a common palm nut chewed together with mustard and lime as a goodwill gesture during all types of social occasions in PNG
Ewage Dialect	Common dialect for people in the coastal region of Oro Province
Haus Krai	Place of mourning
Kina	Official PNG currency similar to the dollar
Kotopu	Respect
Maus man	Leaders or spokesperson
Motu	Language developed during colonial era and spoken commonly in the Southern or Papuan regions of PNG
Oro Kaiva Dialect	The common dialect for people in the Highland areas of Oro Province
Papa Graun	Landowners
Project Members	Board members of Project
Shouting “oro”	Traditional way of welcoming people in Oro Province
Toea	Official PNG currency like Cents
Tok Pisin or Pidgin English	Common trade language spoken by Melanesian countries of Pacific
Wanbel	Trust or Cooperation, Peace.
Wantok	English one talk’ - someone from the same area, speaking the same language, kin member
Wantokism	System of social relationship based on wantok

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