

Does Social Capital empower Fisherfolks Economically?

Vidya Naik V¹, C.M. Bhaskar Reddy²

¹ Research Scholar, CMR University Bangalore, Karnataka, India,

² Professor, Director CMR Group of Institutions Bangalore, Karnataka, India

ABSTRACT

The marine fishing has grown as a key contributor to the economy of India in the post-Independence era. However, the relative benefits are not yet reached significantly to the small scale marine fisher folks and as a result this community still remains as economically backward. The relational social capital is one of the recently developed concepts that describe the role of social bonding in empowering the society. The present paper investigates the impact of relational social capital on the economic empowerment of marine fisherfolk. The study gathered the required data from a randomly selected 377 fisherfolk from the Uttara Kannada district. The analysis of the data using multiple statistical tools revealed the significant role of relational social capital on economically empowering the fisherfolk in Uttara Kannada.

Keywords:

Relational social capital, Economic empowerment, Fisherfolk, Uttara Kannada.

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Introduction

The fishing industry plays a potential role in India's economy and its socio-economic growth in the post-independence period. Liberalization policies in the 1990's amplified the productivity of the sector and currently India enjoys third position in the global ranking of fisheries. According to FAO (2016) the production of fisheries and its output will be doubled within the span of next 30 years. Unfortunately, all this prosperity is not transferred to the lives of small scale fishermen. The distribution of earnings in this industry heavily leans in favor of the organized sector and the per-capita area available per fisherman has gradually declined over the years. Thus, the small scale fishermen continue to be in an economically backward state.

The Government of India introduced a number of schemes to uplift these small scale fisherfolk, however, the socio-economic condition of the small scale fishermen in India has not flourished as the monetary benefits are stagnated at the organized sector of mechanized-fishing and have not reached the small scale fishing community (Sathiadhas&Prathap,2009). Thus, the fishing community remains as economically backward and is bereft of several basic amenities, such as food, potable water, shelter, fishing equipment, etc. The economic backwardness pose severe threat to their existence as they even lack the access to essential facilities like healthcare and

sanitation and their earnings are seldom enough to meet their expenses. This scenario forced this community to borrow money from various sources to sustain their lives.

In order to get financial help from formal financial organizations, they need to provide collateral securities, which is difficult for them. So, they rely on microfinancing institutions which provide loans for the economically backward population with relatively simpler norms and procedures (Odebiyi & Olaoye,2012). These institutions provide loans to small self-help groups who offer repayment assurance (Thilepan&Thiruchelvam,2011). In this context social capital of the groups becomes inevitable as the strength of social bonding among the groups helps in the issuance of loans.

Social capital is initially defined by Hanifan (1916) as the "mutual consideration, understanding and social exchange among members of society". Later, Bourdieu (1985) defined it as "one of the four types of essential capital that regulates social life of humans which was an amalgamation of resources that form a complex web of mutually beneficial relationships". Further, Coleman (1988) as well as Lin (1999) modified this definition by including the element of trust between the members of the group. Due to the increased presence of social capital in the community life of human beings, several researchers explored the role of social capital in empowering the economically down

ward classes in the society. Swain, Sanh and Tuan (2008) highlighted the role of social capital in improving the employability skills of socially and economically backward communities in Vietnam and thereby helping in alleviating their poverty. Further, the impact of social capital on the repayment capacity of the economically backward communities was studied by Aigbokhan and Asemota (2011). The authors pointed out that the social capital among groups ensured effective utilization of loans, which in turn led to the reduction of poverty among poor households. The study by Dufhues, Buchenrieder, Quoc and Munkung (2011) also indicated the significant role of social capital in increasing the repayment capacity of the borrowers in Thailand, which in turn reflects their economic empowerment. Krenz, Gilbert and Mandayam (2013) argued that the formation of collectives among women borrowing groups helped to empower them economically as the collectiveness increased their bargaining power with microfinance institutions. Moreover, according to Vipinkumar and Asokan (2014), good rapport and effective co-operation among members of women in self-help groups helped their economic empowerment through the successful functioning of value-adding micro-enterprises. The economic empowerment of women through social bonding in self-help groups was further substantiated by Mallick (2015). However, a clear dearth was evident in the exploration of the role of various dimensions of social capital in the economic empowerment of fisherfolk, a community still at the lower ladder of the economic strata and need to be empowered. Among the social capital dimensions, relational social capital plays a vital role in economic development of the people who were at the bottom of the social strata. Relational capital measures the nature and quality of personal relationships of one individual with another individual and with society as well. This dimension of social capital encourages normative behavior among the individuals on the basis of obligations, trust, reciprocity and expectations (Lee & Johns, 2008). It reflects the individuals' willingness to consider the collective goals above their individual goals, thereby indicating their affinity towards the social collectiveness (Lazarova et al, 2009). Hence, the present paper aims to examine the impact of relational social

capital on the economic empowerment of fisherfolks in Uttara Kannada.

Materials and Methods

Research design and methods

The present study adopted a descriptive study design because of the research objectives that focus on mapping the impact of relational social capital on the fishermen's economic empowerment. The descriptive study design also helps to assess the magnitude of the impact of determinants of the independent variable (relational social capital) on the dependent variables (economic empowerment). Further, the explanatory design adopted by the study explains the relationship of relational social capital towards the economic empowerment of fishermen. Again, owing to its explanatory nature, a quantitative study was carried out to assess the associations between the variables. The structured questionnaire with simpler questions was prepared to gather the required data as it is less complex and easy to answer for a common person. Unlike the usual survey where a questionnaire is distributed among the selected sample population, the present study carried out a structured interview with the target population selected through random sampling. The questions aimed to understand the level of relational social capital among the respondents, as it affected their livelihood and economic empowerment. The researcher asked questions to each of the participants and noted their responses. The responses were rated using a five point Likert scale.

Sampling

The present study covers marine fishermen in Uttara Kannada region as its target population. The study selected UttaraKannada because a majority of the fishermen families in this region are below the poverty line. The sample area includes Ankola, Karwar, Kumta, Honnavar and Bhatkal taluks of Uttara Kannada district. A sample of 400 fishermen were selected using random sampling and a survey was carried out on them. As many as 377 responses were obtained and the data was subjected to analyses using various statistical tools, which are explained in the subsequent subsections.

Data analysis

Frequency analysis was used to analyze the demographic details of the respondents. The perceptions of participants regarding the various

dimensions of social capital were measured by using descriptive analysis. The internal consistency and reliability of scales used in the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (α) and the factors used in the questionnaire was validated using Exploratory factor analysis (EFA). Further, the study adopted "*Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy*" and "*Bartlett's Test of Sphericity*" to test the suitability of data for carrying out factor analysis. Finally, regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis to analyze the impact of relational social capital among fisherfolk on economic empowerment.

Results and Discussions

The demographic details of the respondents including information regarding the respondents' gender, marital status, family type and personal as well as family income are presented in Table 1. It can be observed that both males and females were almost equally engaged in fisheries related activities. Around 52% of males and 48% of females are engaged in fisheries related activities. This indicates that the gender disparities with respect to the livelihood are less among the target population. The findings supports the report of Ramachandra et al. (2016) who also demonstrated near equal participation of male and female individuals in fisheries related activities in Uttara Kannada districts with majority of the males engaged in capturing and females largely engaged in fish culturing and marketing. Further, the majority are married (72.4%) and living their life as a nuclear family (68.2%), indicating that the respondents have two or three dependent members in their family. This in turn indicates that the respondents should have a sufficiently high earning to provide livelihood for their dependent members. Lipton and Ravallion (1994) argued that there is a strong negative correlation between family type and income of the respondents. Going with this argument, the present study demonstrates that a vast majority of the respondents have their personal income (92%) and family income (64.5%) less than 5k, indicating the fact that the families belong to low income groups and the respondents are the potential earners of the respective families. Further, the result also supports Rao et al., (2016) who highlighted that around 80% of marine fishermen in Karnataka belong to BPL category. This finding hints that these respondents may need help from the

financial institutions to increase their fisheries activities and hence the income.

Table 1. Demographic summary

Demographic Details	Particulars	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	196	52
	Female	181	48
	Unmarried	40	10.6
Marital status	Married	272	72.1
	Widow	30	8.2
	Divorcee	34	9.0
Family type	Joint	120	31.8
	Nuclear	257	68.2
Personal income	< 500	19	5
	500-2K	115	30.5
	2K-5K	232	61.5
	5K-10K	10	2.7
	10K-20K	1	0.3
	< 500	7	1.9
	500-2K	67	17.8
Family income	2K-5K	176	46.7
	5K-10K	126	33.4
	10K-20K	1	0.3

Table 2 depicts that in all cases the Cronbach's alpha values are greater than 0.6, indicating the high internal consistency of the items used by the study. The Cronbach's Alpha values of these items were found as 0.623 (4 items), 0.798 (10 items), 0.787 (5 items) and 0.795 (5 items) respectively, for bonding, linking, bridging and social cohesion, thereby implying its consistency.

Table 2. Reliability statistics of relational social capital

Sub factors	Cronbach's Alpha	No. of items
Bonding	0.623	4
Linking	0.798	10
Bridging	0.787	5
Social cohesion	0.795	5

KMO value of relational social capital was found to be 0.780 and the Bartlett's test of Sphericity value was 5433.953 ($p < 0.05$), confirming the adequacy of sample used for the application of factor analysis to measure the validity of the questionnaire. After eliminating irrelevant variables, a total of 24 questions, which include the questions related to the sub constructs bonding

(4 items), linking (10 items), bridging (5 items) and social cohesion (5 items) were taken for factor loadings. Further, EFA depicted in Table 3 indicates that all the four factors of relational capital (bonding, bridging, linking and social cohesion) together explained around 56.629% of variation in the data, thereby demonstrating the validity of these factors in explaining the relational capital among the fisherfolks in the study region. Among these, 'bonding' is considered as most important factor as it explained 23.867% of variation in the relational capital among the fisherfolks. This indicates that

the items selected under 'Bonding' are highly relevant in explaining the relational social capital among respondents. This is followed by 'linking', which explains 12.647% and bridging that explains 12.180% of variation in relational social capital. Social cohesion is found to explain 8.936 % of variation in the data. Further, the findings also demonstrated that the factor loadings of all the factors under each item had values more than 0.5 which in turn confirms that all the items considered by the study under relational social capital factors are valid and hence retained in the study.

Table 3. Factors of relational social capital

Factors	Bonding	Linking	Bridging	Social cohesion
I bond with my family members/ relatives	0.776			
I bond with my community members	0.578			
I bond with my neighbours	0.611			
I bond with my friends	0.756			
I bond with my co-workers/ fellow employees	0.594			
I trust my family members		0.812		
I trust my community members		0.707		
I trust my neighbours		0.711		
I trust my friends		0.736		
I trust my co-workers/ fellow employees		0.733		
I will get help from my family members		0.821		
I will get help from my community members		0.735		
I will definitely get help from my neighbours		0.699		
I will definitely get help from my friends		0.71		
I will definitely get help from my co-workers.		0.757		
I am interested in cultural and recreational groups.			0.788	
These groups will help me upon my requests			0.85	
I have social connections with these groups.			0.807	
I feel very close towards my community				0.747
My community has difference in status.				0.76
These differences cause a lot of problems				0.764
The majority of the people get along with each other				0.68
I feel that I am really a part of this community				0.636
% of Variance	23.867	12.647	12.18	8.936
Cumulative %	23.867	36.514	48.694	57.629

Table 4 depicts the presence of the relational capital among the respondents. The findings revealed a strong bonding of respondents with their friends ($M= 4.310 \pm 0.839$), community members (3.952 ± 0.577) and coworkers ($M=3.737 \pm 0.724$). However, only a moderate

bonding is demonstrated with their neighbors ($M=3.151 \pm 0.867$), indicating that respondents maintain a strong bonding with the individuals with whom they associate and also with the society in which they live and become a part of. The findings strengthened the argument of Bodin and Crona (2009) who stated that bonding create a

trust and reciprocity within communities and help to build consensus among the community members, thereby leading to effective conflict resolution.

Respondents also exhibit strong willingness to help their friends ($M=4.281\pm0.885$), community members ($M=3.910\pm0.608$), coworkers ($M=3.836\pm0.623$) and family members ($M=3.703\pm1.186$) because of their strong linking with the community they live-in. Similar observation was made by Ramirez-Sanchez and Pinkerton (2009) by indicating higher level of friendship linking and co-operation among the fisherfolks in Mexico. However, the findings of the present study differs with Mcpherson et al. (2001) who pointed out that the strength of linking can be affected by the ethnic diversity among the resources, to a greater extent.

Further, respondents cited not so favorable attitude by the cultural organizations, which are supposed to bridge the gap between community members, in upholding their interests ($M=3.220\pm193$) and helping them in any of their difficulties ($M=3.361\pm1.138$). Moreover, the respondents were also skeptical about the wide social connections of these organizations. Hence, their participation in these organizations were less ($M=3.361\pm1.061$). This result contradicts the argument of Woollock (2001) that the bridging capital promote trust among the community members, which in turn can provide collaborative procedures. In addition, the respondents also pointed out that there exists strong disparity within their society in terms of wealth, income, social status and ethnic background ($M=4.191\pm0.902$) and these disparities cause a lot of problems ($M=4.202\pm0.894$). However, despite these divisions most of the people in their community are ready to help each other ($M=4.244\pm0.884$) and hence they strongly feel as a part of that society ($M=4.411\pm0.804$). In brief, the respondents made it clear that they are strongly affiliated to their community, despite certain issues.

The study also revealed that the respondents are empowered to make proper investments ($M=4.836\pm0.583$) and capable of having proper savings ($M=4.886\pm0.444$). However, the low to moderate agreement in the capability of availing the loan ($M=2.963\pm0.710$) and spending the loan amount effectively ($M=3.233\pm0.945$) indicate that the respondents are not economically empowered

to handle the financial matters properly. The findings are in-line with the study of Sathiadhas and Prathap, (2009) who also pointed out the economic distress of marine fisherfolks in India.

Table 4. Presence of relational social capital and economic empowerment

Relational Social Capital	Mean
Bonding	3.7376 \pm 0.816
Linking	3.7687 \pm 0.829
Bridging	3.335 \pm 1.122
Social cohesion	4.218 \pm 0.865
Economic empowerment	4.083 \pm 0.732

Table 5 presented findings of linear regression analysis performed to examine the impact of relational social capital on economic empowerment of fisherfolks. The findings demonstrate that relational social capital significantly and positively affects the economic empowerment of fisherfolks ($F(4,372)=10.742$, $p<0.05$). Further, it is found that relational social capital produced a 10.4% of variation in the economic empowerment of the fisherfolks, thereby specifying the significant role of relational social capital in empowering these groups economically. Hence, the proposed hypothesis *H1: Relational Social capital empowers fisher folks economically* is accepted.

It can be further inferred that the overall β value of relational capital is 2.812, specifying a significant empowerment of 2.812 times in economic status of the fisherfolks as a result of a unit small change in their relational capital. In addition, β value of linking (0.077; $p < 0.05$) bridging (0.064; $p < 0.05$) and social cohesion (0.140; $p<0.05$) specify that any unit small change in linking among fisherfolks significantly enhances their economic empowerment by 0.077 times, bridging empowering them by 0.064 times and social cohesion results in an economic empowerment of 0.140 times. In other words, the above-mentioned relational capital factors significantly empower the fisherfolks economically. These findings support Martin et al. (2012) who stated the role of bridging and linking in developing the diversified strategies for gaining the livelihood to a greater extent and partially differ with Sekhar (2007) who hinted the role of

bridging but rejected the impact of linking in the empowerment of fisherfolks.

Table 5. Coefficients for the impact of relational social capital on economic empowerment

	Unstandardized Coefficients	t
B		
Bonding	0.039	1.248
Linking	0.077	2.349
Bridging	0.064	2.965**
Social cohesion	0.14	3.601**
$R^2 = 0.104$		
$F=10.742***$		

significant at $p < 0.01$, *significant at $p = 0.000$

Conclusion

The study provided the evidence of the impact of relational social capital on the economic empowerment of marine fisheries in Uttara Kannada. The study analyzed the role of relational social capital dimensions in enhancing the economic status of the fisher folks. The findings revealed that all the dimensions of relational social capital (linking, bridging and social cohesion) except, bonding significantly improve the economic status of the fisherfolks in Uttara Kannada. In the wake of the findings, the study suggests to create more awareness among the fisherfolks regarding the importance of relational social capital factors in their lives so that they may be more socially inclined, which in turn can make them more economically empowered.

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