



APO *news*

Harnessing social capital for community development

Rural communities in Asia tend to have strong community organizations based on trust among villagers, the so-called community force. The ICD Program of the APO has focused on mobilizing that community force for productivity enhancement and rural life improvement. However, the characteristics of Asian communities have been changing along with rapid economic growth in the region. Rural transformation can be seen in the form of outmigration to urban areas, diversification of agriculture and the introduction of nonagriculture activities in rural areas, and feminization and aging of the farming population, for example.



Deliberations on survey results in progress

To assess the impact of rural transformation and identify its implications for the future of the ICD Program, the Survey on Redesigning Integrated Community Development was carried out in 2004. The survey attempted to analyze the relationship between the strength of the community force such as unity, close human relationships, trust among villagers, etc. and the development performance of community people. Statistical analysis of social capital was performed.

The survey was conducted by national experts in the Republic of China, India, Indonesia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Japan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam. The 10 national experts, all of whom are researchers or community development specialists, selected study sites and conducted interviews with villagers based on the survey questionnaires. The questionnaires were modified from the standard format used for social capital research by the World Bank. The basic premise of this survey was that social capital affects welfare by facilitating collective actions.

The coverage of the survey differed among countries, from 60 households in six villages (Vietnam) to 540 households in 32 villages (Sri Lanka) based on the conditions and support in individual countries. In Thailand, the questionnaire survey was conducted in 1,504 villages, since the APO survey was incorporated as part of the National Rural Development Survey. Reflecting the diverse situations and policy emphasis in participating countries, selected issues and objectives varied greatly. However, some commonalities can be identified. First, all the countries were in the midst of transformations. Second, globalization and trade liberalization had,

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"Imagination is more important than knowledge. The important thing is to not stop questioning."

Albert Einstein

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directly or indirectly, had significant impacts on rural socioeconomies. Third, these changes presented both opportunities and threats for local people. Fourth, all the country studies therefore focused on the dual goals of growth and equity. Finally, how to exploit the emerging opportunities but not decrease social equity or degrade the natural environment was the main question.

Survey findings were presented and debated in a symposium held at National Chung Hsing University in Tai Chung, ROC, 25–29 April. Fifteen participants from 15 member countries attended. The results of the survey showed that the degree of the community force such as unity and mutual trust in a community and its development performance had positive correlations to some extent. Other interesting findings were that:

1) Participating in functional organizations positively affects agricultural production and innovative farming activities. Participating in bureaucratic organizations negatively affects agricultural productivity. Participation in communal organizations negatively affects health status, but positively affects income, while involvement in NGOs negatively affects income. This may indicate that

the poorer and/or weaker sections of a community tend to depend more on communal organizations and NGOs or that NGOs focus on the poor.

- 2) Sharing public goods positively affects income. Trust in bureaucratic organizations positively affects health status and household expenditure. Trust in government officials positively affects project participation. Trust in one's neighbors has positive effects on reducing conflict.
- 3) Aggregate social capital positively affects income among the lower-income population but negatively affects it among the upper-income population. Participation in functional organizations has a clear-cut positive impact on productive activities in general. However, the impact of social or cultural gatherings was unclear from the survey results.
- 4) Bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital were confirmed to have a positive effect on welfare enhancement. It appears that traditional forms of social capital do not have a positive impact (or have a negative impact) on the upper-income population in a market-oriented economy, suggesting a need to create new forms of social capital responding to changes in development levels. 