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SOCIAL CAPITAL AND RESILIENCE: LESSONS FROM NEPAL

Background

Sabal is a five-year development food security activity implemented by Save the Children (SC) and its partners in the rural Central and Eastern Midhills regions of Nepal, both of which were severely affected by the 2015 earthquake. By designing and utilizing an inclusive group approach to activity implementation, Sabal aimed to strengthen social capital and resilience among chronically vulnerable populations with limited livelihood options, inadequate access to services, and barriers to cooperation among distinct castes. While the baseline study, routine program monitoring and annual beneficiary-based surveys each provided data on changes in resilience capacities, until 2019, Sabal had insufficient insight into whether and how activities had influenced social capital and strengthened resilience among participating communities. To address this critical knowledge gap, Sabal integrated additional quantitative and qualitative components focusing on social capital into its 2019 Annual Monitoring Study (AMS). The summary of results presented in this brief highlight both the successes and challenges Sabal experienced in strengthening social capital in Nepal and provide valuable lessons for resilience programming in other contexts.

SABAL QUICK FACTS

Activity Name

Sabal – Sustainable Actions for Resilience and Food Security

Stated Goal

To improve resilience and food security of targeted population in 11 districts of central and eastern mid-hills of Nepal.

Implementation Period

2014 - 2020

Reach

The activity has reached a total of 167,691 households (271,021 individuals).

Funding Sources

Sabal is a development food security activity (DFSA) funded by USAID's Office of Food for Peace

Implementing Organizations

Save the Children (lead), Helen Keller International, CARE, Action for Enterprise, Nepal Technical Assistance Group, Nepal Water for Health, Development Project Service Center, Local Initiatives for Biodiversity, Research and Development, TANGO International, Action Against Hunger, and 17 district-level local partner organizations.



Methodology

In conjunction with SC's resilience monitoring partner – TANGO International – Sabal adopted a mixed-methods approach (quantitative and qualitative) to AMS data collection. For the quantitative component, Sabal added resilience and social capital modules to the existing AMS household survey questionnaire. The team used a participant-based two-stage cluster sampling design and interviewed more than 500 program participant households across eight districts. For the qualitative component, Sabal conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) across three districts. TANGO staff trained qualitative interviewers on the concepts of bonding, bridging and linking social capital and subsequent changes in resilience capacities, and worked with them to develop and refine the FGD and KII tools to best fit the Nepali context. Interpretation of quantitative analysis was then triangulated with qualitative findings to clarify relevant relationships between shocks, stresses, the perceived effect on sources of informal assistance, and the contribution of social capital to resilience capacities and wellbeing outcomes (e.g. income, food security) among Sabal participants.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative findings suggest that Sabal's inclusive approach to group formation and activity implementation effectively integrated diverse community members **creating new associations and opportunities for individuals of different gender, castes and economic classes to work with each other in new ways**. Increases in this type of 'bonding social capital' have not only enhanced social cohesion, they've directly strengthened absorptive and adaptive capacities by fostering more inclusive and proactive practices related to community planning and disaster risk management. Additionally, by **deliberately linking activity-formed groups to local governments and civil society organizations** (e.g. through formal registration process), Sabal contributed to increased 'linking social capital'. According to participants, connections to these organizations has made a lasting difference in their ability to access a greater array of resources and support needed to effectively prevent and cope with shocks and stresses (i.e. earthquakes, prices increases, crop diseases, illness of household members, etc.). Qualitative analysis did find, however, that Sabal has not had a significant, positive impact on 'bridging social capital.' This conclusion is primarily based on evidence that activity-formed groups from different targeted communities were not intentionally connected to each other by the activity.¹ This is a useful learning for other activities, as it indicates a need to design activities that contribute to each type of social capital.

In terms of social inclusion and social mobility, FGD and KII participants described improvements due to Sabal's inclusion of community members from different genders, classes, and castes. Class and caste lines were also less important to the younger participants, reflecting promising generational and social trends in this part of rural Nepal.



¹ Resilience analysis frameworks generally consider three related, but distinct types of social capital at the household and community levels – bonding, bridging and linking (see Aldrich, D.P. 2012. Building Resilience: Social capital in post-disaster recovery).

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative findings of the AMS aligned with many of the findings in the qualitative research. The mean score for bonding social capital (ie. strength of relationships within communities) was 80.4 on a scale of 0-100. For context, participants in the 2016 baseline survey for Sabal had an average bonding social capital score of only 71.1.¹

For bridging social capital (ie. strength of relationships between different communities), the mean score during the AMS was 68.8 on a scale of 0-100. During the baseline survey for Sabal, bridging capital scores within the target communities averaged to 56.7. Linking social capital (ie. strength of relationships between communities and institutions) was the lowest scoring element of the social capital index with a mean score of 42.2 on a scale of 0-100. However, in comparison to a linking social capital score at baseline of 18.9, the AMS results hint at potential improvements in linking social capital that may be greater than for bonding or bridging.

In terms of caste dynamics, the quantitative analysis showed that Dalits (a disadvantaged caste in Nepal) had slightly lower scores on bonding and bridging social capital. However, surprisingly Dalits had the second highest scores for linking social capital – second only to Brahmins. For context, Dalits had the lowest linking social capital score at baseline. The AMS qualitative research suggests that Sabal contributed towards improvements in linking social capital for Dalits through its formation of inclusive and diverse community groups and purposeful connection of these groups to government services. Despite the apparent improvements for Dalits in linking with government and NGO institutions, the data shows that more work must be done to ensure Dalits and other disadvantaged castes have equal access to resources and services within and between communities. These quantitative findings align with the qualitative component in that the bonding scores were higher than the bridging scores. The quantitative and qualitative results also both point towards improvements in linking social capital. The one element of discord between the quantitative and qualitative components, however, is the qualitative finding that Sabal did not positively impact bridging social capital as much as it improved bonding and linking social capital. The quantitative component showed higher scores for bonding and bridging than it did for linking – but importantly, the quantitative component did not actually look at improvements over time or attribution to Sabal’s activities. This was a key difference between the quantitative and qualitative research. Sabal’s population-based final evaluation is planned for February 2020, and will provide better insights into the quantitative changes in social capital from the start to end of the activity.

TYPES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Bonding:

Connections, relationships, and level of trust within communities/groups

Bridging:

Connections, and trust between members of one community/group to other communities/groups

Linking:

Connections and trust between communities/groups and formal institutions, including government, the private sector, and NGOs

2016 Baseline Study (population-based household survey)	
	Mean Score on a scale of 0-100
BONDING CAPITAL	71.1
BRIDGING	56.7
LINKING	18.9

2019 Annual Monitoring Study (participant-based household survey)	
	Mean Score on a scale of 0-100
BONDING CAPITAL	80.4
BRIDGING	68.8
LINKING	42.2

¹ The Sabal baseline survey used population-based sampling methods of targeted Sabal communities, while the 2019 AMS used program participant-based sampling within those same communities. They also used different sample sizes. Therefore, the two surveys are not directly comparable and cannot be used for a test of differences calculation. Mentions of the baseline survey are included here for context. The Sabal Final Evaluation will evaluate the quantitative differences between each element of social capital at baseline and endline.

Lessons Learned

- By intentionally integrating individuals who would otherwise not necessarily have positive direct interactions, if any interactions at all, Sabal facilitated increased bonding social capital and expanded social networks between members of different class and castes.
- Bonding social capital among technically-oriented groups (e.g. farmers groups, household gardening groups, disaster management committees) was adversely affected by the fact that they tended to have less influence on meeting topics than groups specifically designed to provide social support (e.g. savings groups).
- Improvements in bonding and linking capital strengthened absorptive, adaptive, and transformative resilience capacities.

Recommendations for Programming

Programs should consider caste and gender dynamics when deciding whether to work with existing community groups or create new groups. In Sabal's program areas, many of the existing community groups were not inclusive of women and disadvantaged castes. Sabal's social capital research suggests that by creating new, diverse groups, Sabal was able to enhance bonding and linking social capital. For programs that choose to work within existing groups, make sure to assess the diversity of those groups and explore ways to improve meaningful participation of disadvantaged genders, castes, and ethnicities.

Programs should develop explicit strategies for strengthening each type of social capital – bonding, bridging, and linking. While Sabal's program activities contributed to bonding and linking social capital, there was not a strong strategy for building bridging social capital. Sabal could have been more intentional about linking groups from different communities to each other and building those cross-community relationships.

Programs should intentionally connect community groups with local government to build linking social capital, improve sustainability, and increase transformative resilience capacities. In Sabal's case, the program registered high-performing community groups with the local government. This was cited as an important contributor to linking social capital throughout the FGDs and KIs, and the quantitative data also hints at potential improvements in linking social capital scores.



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