

**Coversheet**

**The inequality of social capital: agency, association and the reproduction of chronic poverty.**

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## **The inequality of social capital: agency, association and the reproduction of chronic poverty.**

*This paper draws on research in Tanzania to question ideas that building social capital through getting institutions right in development can overcome poverty . It uses cases studies of the poorest families in the study area to dispute the concept of social capital as an asset that can be readily created, used or substituted for other missing 'capitals' (human, natural, financial and physical)*

*The paper details the clusters of interlocking disadvantage of the chronically poor which make it highly unlikely that they can draw on social capital to ameliorate their poverty, or that the creation of social capital at community level has any significant effect on their wellbeing. Factors highlighted include small family size and weak family networks, lack of assets (including labour power) which constrains their ability to engage in reciprocal collective activities, poor health, inability to articulate in public fora and the derogatory perceptions of other community members towards them.*

*The paper illustrates how some social relationships, collective action and local institutions may reproduce the exclusion of the poorest. The paper concludes by suggesting that processes of institutional formation do not necessarily result in inclusive forms of social, that the poorest people are severely limited in their scope for exercising agency and that we should be cautious about claims that it is possible to get institutions wholly right for poverty alleviation and social inclusion.*

### **1. Social capital, institutions and agency.**

Social capital has become a popular concept partly because it specifies a resource which can be tapped for development. Social capital then is seen as productive , and as an asset which can be strategically mobilised by individuals for particular ends ( Lin 2001) . The concept allows the expectation of positive outcomes of collective action (building generalised trust and norms of cooperation ) , beyond the purely functional tasks achieved (managing water supplies, constructing schools, group savings and so on). Considerable attention has therefore been paid to the public and visible manifestations of collective action; to the institutions of associational life, as the mechanisms for the generation of social capital (Narayan 1997). Development policy is concerned with building social capital through ' getting institutions right' ( WDR 200/1), as these can create generalisable resources of trust, shape norms in socially and economically productive ways, render communities legible (Scott 1998) and create institutional space for inclusion of the marginalized.

Several authors however, reject the conceptualisation of social capital as the purposive investment in social relations in pursuit of tangible and material returns. Instead they reconceive social capital as embedded social resources ( Beall 2001 ) or as social networks (Long 2001), which are dynamic and negotiated, offer both enablement and constraint to individual actions and which may reproduce structural inequalities ( of class and caste, gender and generation). Long suggests that it is difficult to deduce general principle about the utility of particular institutions in creating social capital as ‘social networks are infused with a multiplicity of partial connections, exchange contents, normative repertoires and multiple markers of morality...They are tangled and ambivalent...social capital cannot, strictly speaking be stockpiled accumulated or invested. Instead it must be considered as an integral part of the self organising processes of network formation and reconfiguration.’ (Long 2001:155)

Such critiques are welcome and here I intend to build on them in two ways.

Firstly there is a need to understand more clearly how the social interactions of everyday life link to the functioning of institutions; how daily and routinised relations between people produce social and cultural norms which shape patterns of institutional inclusion and exclusion ( Cleaver 2000, Mosse 1997 ). In previous work I have suggested that the concept of *institutional bricolage* helps us to understand the dynamic formation of institutions through a combination of path dependency (the re-use of arrangements and mechanisms from the past) and conscious improvisation on the part of agents or *bricoleurs* ( Cleaver, 2002). The resulting institutions are often intermittently active, multi-purpose and hybrid of ‘tradition’ and ‘modern’ values, of formal rules and unwritten norms. Such institutions are made and re-made in the practices of everyday life, and are shaped both by social structure and prevailing norms and by the extent to which people are able to discursively question and refashion these.

A second and related area is the need to question the ubiquitous model of human agency and purposive investment in social capital. Alternative views query the extent to which people consciously invest in social structures, their capacity to exercise agency and their ability to strategise beyond the short-term in livelihood planning. Modifying strategic views of agency and investment in social capital requires us to investigate the multiple (and often non-economic ) channels through which people consciously *and unconsciously* access resources, conduct relationships and secure their livelihoods ( Berry 1989, Odgaard 2002). Additionally it requires us to understand motivations beyond the economic; the significance of symbols and culture, of the ethics of care and the importance of identity.

Such a nuanced view of agency, institutions and the construction of social capital is particularly relevant to an understanding of chronic poverty as it allows us to critically examine how far social relationships enable or constrain the livelihoods of the poor, and what ‘room for manoeuvre’ poor people have within existing social structures. It also facilitates an understanding of processes of institutional inclusion and exclusion, the reasons for ‘partial enrolment’ (Long 1992) of the poorest with institutions and the limits to the emancipatory possibilities of development interventions. In this paper I examine three factors which severely constrain the ability of the poorest people to exercise agency, to act as bricoleurs in shaping institutions and thus to build social

capital. The dependence of very poor people on their own able-bodiedness and their inability to sustain this is the first constraining factor. Secondly they experience little room for manoeuvre in their family and wider social relationships, due to derogatory perceptions of the poor and associations with witchcraft, small families and often fragile family ties and unstable marital arrangements. Finally the poorest people are constrained by their inability to articulate successfully in public for a – sometimes literally because they do not speak the right language, more often because they feel they ‘don’t have the words’ to challenge discriminatory norms, or to present their own interests clearly.

This paper examines the social networks, lifecourses and institutional engagement of poor people in one part of Tanzania. In drawing on case studies I illustrate how collective action in risky for the poorest people, how social relationships constrain as often as they enable and how the very embeddedness of institutions in social life and cultural norms can reproduce relations of inequality and marginalisation. The paper concludes that we should exercise caution about the prospects of building the social capital of the poorest through ‘getting institutions right’ in development, although providing spaces and shaping norms which facilitate the engagement of the marginalized may be beneficial.

## **2. Researching livelihoods in Usangu**

The research was designed to investigate rural livelihoods and their relation to natural resource management in the Usangu basin as part of a wider development project designed to build institutional capacity to manage contested natural resources; the Sustainable Management of the Usangu Wetland and its Catchment Project. In particular three themes were addressed: the role of natural resources on household economies and the impact of changes particularly on the poor, the place of social relations, collective action and public participation in livelihood strategising, the role of social relations, traditional beliefs and ‘culture’ in understandings about resources and their use (for SMUWC Project Reports see <http://www.usangu.org>).

The research was undertaken in four villages in diverse areas of the catchment; two villages where livelihoods were largely based on irrigated and rainfed agriculture with good connections to roads, markets and services and two villages recently settled in the north of the catchment, where people pursued mixed agro-pastoralist livelihoods far from markets and services.

A variety of techniques were used to distinguish between households of different levels of wealth and to understand processes of impoverishment and accumulation including life histories, labour and activity charts, in depth interviews, development of wealth indicators and hamlet level wealth ranking exercises. Key issues which arose from this exercise relating to poverty indicators were: the need to recognise different values and preferences for expenditure between ethnic groups, people’s preference for identifying social capabilities rather than physical assets as significant in determining wealth and poverty, the importance of tracking changes to household status over lifecourses, and the difficulty of reconciling household wealth with intra-household allocation of resources.

### 3. Profiling chronically poor households

In this study we identified the 'very poor' households who were deemed to be vulnerable to destitution and who had no apparent prospects of reversing the downward trend in their livelihood. These were distinguished from the 'poor- but-coping' households, who mostly were able to sustain their livelihoods (often because they were able bodied) but who nonetheless may be intermittently vulnerable to a downward slide of livelihood. A number of features distinguished the chronically poor and vulnerable from others:

*Lifecourse and dependency:* Small households, those with very small children and those dominated by older people were the most likely to be poor and vulnerable. The quality of extended family relationships were highly significant in determining whether households coped with disasters.

*Health:* Disease and ill health placed a disproportionate burden of care on poor families, compounded their lack of labour and constrained their participation in collective action. Costs of treatment related to problematic pregnancies and childbirth were frequently mentioned as burdens which threw a family into a downward spiral of debt. Poor families were most likely to use herbs and traditional healers rather than modern medical facilities, repeated ill health and suspicions of witchcraft lead to more visits to witch doctors and herbalists.

*Poverty and the Limits of Social Capital:* Poor and vulnerable households were characterised by very limited social networks and a high degree of social isolation. They had difficulty accessing help from relatives, were unable to pay entry fees of contributions to clubs and associations, and infrequently attended village government meetings at which they rarely spoke.

*Natural resource use and poverty:* Poor people were unable to use land effectively and due to their lack of labour flexibility, scarcity of inputs (such as irrigation water) disproportionately affected them. A strategy of expanding land under cultivation to cope with changes in climate and productivity was usually only available to those with substantial labour resources, or the very young and fit. Poor people were most adversely affected by the commoditisation of natural resources (such as water, firewood, thatching grass). They had to travel further to collect 'free' supplies or were forced to purchase small amounts as needed, often at relatively expensive rates.

*Coping strategies:* Poor people had the most ineffective coping strategies which eroded their asset base. The most prominent of these were distress sales of household goods and sale of labour, including the labour of children.

Thumbnail sketches of two chronically poor households, at different stages in their lifecourse, ( see below) illustrate how the lives of the poorest are characterised by the daily struggle for existence and a lack of medium to long term strategising, poor social networks and a lack of institutional engagement.

Household 'B', Mahongole ( MH/12/SAN, MH/12/SC)

The household consists of a couple, perhaps in their late fifties and their granddaughter, Shida, aged approximately 14 or 15. The couple had four children, a son who lives in the same village, Mahongole and two married daughters living elsewhere. Their other daughter, the mother of Shida, died and her father is unknown.

The family live in poorly maintained mud house consisting of two blocks. The thatching is inadequate and leaks and there is no furniture. They cannot afford to pay anyone to thatch the house for them.

Mr B is has one partly disabled arm, possibly the result of a stroke, and Mrs B allegedly suffers mental health problems which means that she finds noisy crowded public occasions distressing. Neither of them speak Swahili well.

The family farm a plot of less than an acre from which they harvest one bag of maize. This lasts them as food during the months of July and August and then it runs out. After that they buy food with the proceeds of sale of bananas and mangoes which grow around the house, and with money Shida earns selling her labour on rice fields after school, and collecting and selling bundles of firewood.

The family farm using hand hoes and have no livestock. In the past they had some cattle but these were stolen and this was the beginning of a process which led to their current impoverished status. At our first visit they had a pig on loan from a neighbour. They were to keep the offspring of the pig, but during our research it died.

Mr B attends burials in the village and goes to hamlet and village meetings to listen, but he never contributes. He has one friend to talk to and who once lent him 200sh for household needs. Mrs B doesn't go out much. They used to belong to the Moravian church but no longer attend due to ill health. They thought of switching to the Roman Catholic church to get more assistance but took no action. Their immediate neighbours are both widows and occasionally help with salt and relish but feel that they cannot help much with the ongoing daily problems of this household, being poor themselves.

Shida attends the Moravian Sunday School but she never goes to any church celebrations or activities because she is unable to contribute to the collection. She is in Primary Six and pays her own school fees by selling her labour and selling firewood. She wrote to an uncle asking for help with school fees but he refused. She does most of the manual work around the house including the collecting of water and firewood and much of the agricultural work.

#### Household 'N' , Sololwambo ( SL/7/SAN)

This household consists of a young couple and their two children who are not yet old enough to go to school. Their mud house consists of two blocks, one of which is completely unthatched.

They grow maize and sorghum in a small homestead plot and some rice on a different plot. They rent out most of their 3 acre rice field in return for three bags of rice as they have insufficient labour to cultivate it themselves. In order to get food they sell their labour, alternating cultivation of their own fields with paid work for other farmers. As a result, they often cultivate their fields late and late and have to curtail their activities early, resulting in small yields. At the time when they need to keep the birds from the newly sown crops they move with the whole family to the fields.

The couple have to undertake additional activities to secure food or cash for their daily needs. For example, Mr N hires himself out for brick making during the dry season and Mrs N brews komoni for sale. She makes this kind of brew because it uses only maize or millet, not honey which she can't afford. She also keeps chickens for sale but many of them are in poor health and die.

The family participate in village collective work (mostly brick making) but they don't participate in local traditional ceremonies, because they are Christians.

They have no plans for the future because they cannot see how their current life is going to improve.

#### **4. Threadbare social networks**

The role of close relationships within families and with close friends and neighbours is the subject of much interest in theorising social capital. For Coleman 1988 such close relationships are the site of the generation of norms and habits of trust and cooperation which, when be applied in wider forms of association can generate social capital (Dikito-Wachtmeister 2000) . Whilst literature emphasises the importance of weaker links, reaching beyond the family in the generation of social capital ( Granovetter 1973), close ties are nonetheless considered important social glue, producing 'bonding' social capital. Narayan (1997) suggests that the transaction costs of cooperation and collective enterprise are reduced by high levels of trust in families. In terms of poverty alleviation, it is commonly asserted that poor people, whilst lacking material assets can generally call on close relations with family, neighbours and friends as a form of social security . ' Poor people typically have plenty of bonding social capital' ( Woolcock 2000:2-3)

However, a number of detailed studies dispute this normative view of 'the social family' and illustrate the very patchy, negotiated and often constraining nature of close social relationships. Beall (2001) citing urban case studies form Africa and Latin America asserts the centrality of kinship in livelihood strategies but also emphasises the vulnerability that reliance on close family ties can produce. In adverse circumstances it is difficult for poor families to sustain self –help and mutual assistance – poor families may be unable to help those of their kin even worse off than themselves, and deprivation can lead to conflicts at family events, for example over inheritance at funerals. For Latin America she reports social support networks only really strong amongst the middle income groups.

Long's detailed case study of the changing social relationships of one Peruvian businessmen and the impact on his family enterprise, emphasises the constraining as well as the enabling nature of close social ties and in particular the conflictful nature of close family relationships ( Long 2001). In previous research I have illustrated this for Zimbabwean families and additionally suggested how relations with kin and close neighbours are particularly likely to be fraught with concerns about witchcraft (Cleaver 2000). Significantly, close social relationships are not totally 'taken for granted' but constantly negotiated, trust and mutual assistance are not automatic products of living together but are also formed and eroded over time, by circumstances and actions. The occurrence of both conflict and cooperation in families may well provide the basis of contradictory norms shaping wider forms of association; the oft cited phrase 'our community works together like a family' should not necessarily be read as a description of wholly harmonious relations.

#### **Family: the intermittence of care and dependency**

Here I draw on case studies to illustrate that whilst family relationships can be significant in supporting poor households both materially and psychologically, such ties can also be fragile, contested and constraining.

Most of the poorest families interviewed had close relations with only very few family members. This was either because the family was small, or had reduced in size often as a result of AIDS, or for larger polygamous families where relationships between the offspring of different mothers had not been maintained.

Such family relationships were characterised by intermittence – the chronically poor had not the money for transport to visit working relatives in town, and written communications often secured little response (see Shida's case above). Men detailed cases of falling out with their brothers over inheritance after the death of their father and this often resulted in long-term alienation of relationships. The life histories of the poor men interviewed were also characterised by considerable marital instability. Significantly the poorest men were often unable to pay brideprice in full and therefore usually paid a small instalment to the bride's family to secure marital rights over the woman. The lack of full payment, meant that several wives felt free to abandon their marriage and return to kin, when serious problems arose (although some were not welcomed back by their own families). Such splits were often not irrevocable, life histories show women intermittently living with their natal family and in the marital home with children in either place or sometimes sent to live with another relative.

The inability of the poorest people to maintain wider family relations beyond their immediate household severely constrained their livelihoods. Less poor families depended heavily on family members to help with trade – for example relatives living in another town or village could provide access to other markets for beer brewed or crops produced. Additionally relatives in nearby towns could provide lodging when visiting sick family members in hospital and help with accessing government services when necessary. Non-poor people were able to secure small amounts of capital from relatives; to purchase maize for brewing beer, to buy or rent a bicycle and so on. However, these social networks and resources were generally not available to the very poor.

In the poverty indicators developed through this research, people repeatedly emphasised the value of wealth in enabling a person to provide for his or her dependents ( to secure good marriages for sons and daughters, to educate children, to ensure the wellbeing of elderly parents, to pay medical fees of sick siblings ). The ethics of care therefore shaped people's views of the value of material assets. However, the poorest people could not automatically count on caring relationships with relatives to secure their needs in times of crisis. For poor people relationships with families were often based on some sort of explicit or implicit exchange. Relations through marriage were particularly problematic with accusations of witchcraft between in-laws abounding and help sought and given often of the basis of an explicit exchange. For example Mr M of Sololwambo asked his wives brother to help with medical treatment for a sick son. The brother in law offered Tsh 20,000 cash as 'rent' for Mr M 's bicycle for an indefinite period. The brother in law intended to hire out the bicycle for cash. In interviews poor people make a particular point of emphasising when relatives have given something free of charge. Where help



was given it was often of a very limited and stop gap nature. One woman specified how, when her family had no food, her brother would help her with food for two days, after which she was expected to find alternative sources of assistance.

The following case illustrates the enablement and constraint of family relationships and the extreme vulnerability of those who depend almost solely on their own able-bodiedness to generate livelihoods and to care for others. This man was poor-but-coping but facing problems caused by high dependency levels in his family and a complete reliance on his own labour both to generate and income and to sustain his social relationships.

Mr D M , Sololwambo (Sol/5/VB)

This farmer came from a large family - he had three elder brothers, 2 younger brothers and a young sister. As a boy he was brought up by his brother in law because his parents were divorced. He used to cut sugar cane in the morning and after school and sell it to pay for his school uniform and books. When he left school at the end of Primary 4 his father sent him to live with his grandmother and to herd cattle. But he earned extra money by selling his labour for grass cutting and building mud houses. He used the proceeds to cultivate a one acre field of his own. Once he built up some capital he was able to quit herding for his father and get bigger fields. With the crop proceeds he bought a bicycle and started trading in smoked fish. He used the proceeds of maize and rice harvests to pay his own brideprice, although he hasn't completed this.

When his mother in law died he took several of the wives brothers and sisters into his care. Later he suffered ill health as his jealous relatives bewitched him because he was successful through his own hard work. But one of his brothers and one of his sisters came to help him with labour in his farm at that time. They also hired themselves out as labourers to get cash to pay his medical expenses. When there is enough rain for a good harvest and plenty of surplus, he uses *mgowe* (collective labour) to cultivate his fields. He serves *pombe*, porridge and *ugali* with chicken and beans to those doing the *mgowe*. If his health improves he will revert to trading on his bicycle to try to build up his investment in his farms at Sololwambo.

### **Friends and neighbours; supplication and unequal exchange**

For the poorest people friends were few and far between. Those who did specify particular friendships ( mostly men) identified the benefits of these being primarily for psychological or moral support, occasionally for borrowing small amounts of cash. Poor women informants (often married away from their own family home) characterised relationships with neighbours primarily in terms of daily petty lending and borrowing; of salt, soap and relish, less frequently for pots and plates for funerals, and tools for cultivation.

The perceived benefits of relations with neighbours and friends were strongly balanced by the patent limitations and constraints of such relationships. When probed, many relationships with neighbours appeared inequitable and closer to clientage arrangements than to friendships. This particularly applied to shared labour arrangements. For example several poor agriculturalists cited neighbourly relations with richer pastoralists; relations based on the exchange of the poor persons labour for

food and credit. One poor person who still retained a few cattle grazed his animals with the much larger herd of his pastoralist neighbour. The poor man provided herding inputs on a loose rota with the rich man's sons. Another poor man received fresh milk and a small amount of cash for allowing his wealthy pastoralist neighbours to graze their cattle on his post harvest stover.

The unequal nature of the poor persons relationships with neighbours is demonstrated by the need to explicitly negotiate most social exchanges. Poor people resorted to such strategies as sending a sick child to ask for help with medication from the neighbours. Several women specified where they would turn if their first requests for help from immediate neighbours did not result in sufficient assistance. Like family relationships, those with neighbours were constantly negotiated, and constantly at risk of suspicions of witchcraft. To many, even the most basic of neighbourly activities; attending funerals or giving funerals were seen as a burden they could barely meet. One of the poorest families we met did not attend funerals because of the expectation that mourners should donate some food to the funeral feast. The sad case summarised below illustrates both the supportive and burdensome aspects of close relationships and social norms.

Mr and Mrs MG of Sololwambo chronicled the spiral of misfortune associated with the death of their daughter who was recently engaged to be married. The young woman died accidentally from a snake bite. The family were then faced with the costs of repaying the TSh 10,000 which the prospective grooms family had paid as an instalment on brideprice. They also faced the problem of providing food for all the mourners at the funeral when they barely had enough to eat themselves. The loss of the daughter caused a serious deficit in the families labour power, but Mrs Gonja's brother gave them a bicycle so that they could still get their maize to the grinding mill ( the daughter had previously headloaded this). The terrible misfortune of their daughters death led them to suspect witchcraft so they paid to consult a witch doctor to diagnose the source.

Poor peoples relationships to those nearest to them in blood, marriage and residence were therefore characterised by continuous supplication and unequal exchange. To suggest that the poorest received something similar to a traditional African form of social security through such relationships is optimistic – help secured was mostly minimal, intermittent and obtained through constant and costly reinvestments in unequal exchanges.

## **5. The limits of collective action**

Development literature stresses the positive role of collective action in supplying public goods that neither the state nor the market can effectively provide. Collective action is thought to build trust through association, repeated association and the generalised reciprocity involved builds further developmental capacity. This optimistic view of the constant building of social capital through collective action is partly challenged by studies which illustrate the ad hoc and intermittent nature of cooperative endeavour, and the exclusionary and well as inclusive processes involved. The faith placed in collective action is enticing, but misplaced for the poorest in our study area. Uphoff characterises collective action as underpinned by a principle of involuntarism, based on bargaining, discussion, accommodation and persuasion

which reflects face to face relationships and multi-stranded connections ( Uphoff 1993:609). The poorest people however are disadvantaged both by generalised norms and the personalised interactions implicit in collective action and are unable to negotiate such arrangements to their advantage.

In this section I examine two types of collective action; joint labour arrangements and membership of groups and societies to show how the poorest people are marginalized by such arrangements, and how the poorest are effectively excluded from them.

### **Collective labour; a resource for the non-poor**

Lack of labour was starkly the biggest constraint on livelihoods in Usangu, and a variety of arrangements existed for improving the supply of labour, particularly at agriculturally critical times ( at bird scaring ,weeding, transplanting and harvesting times). One strategy which households employed was to draw on a variety of ‘traditional ‘ collective labour arrangements. In the multi-ethnic Usangu basin, the provenance of such arrangements was mixed and the terms used to describe them varied. However, most revolved around a basic framework of loose reciprocity; a household could call neighbours and friends to work on their fields for a particular day (or for consecutive days) in return for which the host household provided the voluntary workers with food and beer. The numbers of households participating varied from ten to thirty; any number of people could participate from each household and the head of each household was entitled to come to eat even if he had not participated in the work. The frequency and quality of food offered to participants varied according to the capacity of the host household. The reciprocity involved was general rather than specific; the host household was not obliged to turn out to a neighbours collective labour event, even when the neighbour had participated in theirs. However, for the arrangements which we documented, participation remained relatively stable from year to year.

The benefits of such labour arrangements were the quick preparation of fields , or timely completion of weather dependent tasks, so reducing the climate related risks of agricultural production. Several people who used collective labour regularly had been able to expand the land under cultivation by this means.

None of the very poor households we interviewed and few of the poor-but-coping households were ever able to host collective labour days. Their inability to provide the necessary food and drink was the major constraint. Secondly, even were they able to scrape together enough extra victuals, they perceived such arrangements as essentially risky, as they could not guarantee how many people would come to offer labour and if the number of attendees was disappointing, the prepared food would be wasted. No poor person explicitly said that that it would be difficult to attract people to work on their fields, but the derogatory perceptions of the poorest, their inability to provide a good meal and the unlikelihood of them providing meaningful reciprocation. Additionally the small families of the poorest people further constrain their ability to conduct collective labour. Non-poor families were able to summon gangs of loosely related youths for additional collective labour days at peak agricultural times. Finally, poor people were not the most welcome attendees of other people’s collective labour days ( although never openly turned away) being perceived as potentially poor labourers and unreliable. This was partly because the times when

collective labour was required were those when the poorest households experienced most stress in terms of labour constraints, disease and demands for cash.

‘Traditional ‘ collective labour arrangements are drawn upon in development activities and perceived as visible manifestations of community participation. At village level there are various requirements to provide collective labour in support of village development plans and other initiatives. These include moulding and burning bricks, repairing roads, fetching sand and stones for the construction of school and clinic buildings, sometimes digging wells or pipelines. Collective labour is organised at the hamlet level, exemptions from individual household contributions are decided at hamlet level but the village is able to fine non-contributors. For the wealthy, the fine may willingly be paid in lieu of contributions. Such arrangements disadvantage the chronically poor; such labour takes them away from their daily struggle to secure the basic means of existence, and they are unable to pay an absentee fine. We documented few households totally exempted from such labour; even the elderly and disabled were usually expected to send a related youth to make their households contribution. People were exempted on particular occasions for reasons of bereavement.

The main coping strategy of the very poor was hiring out their labour, but this further constrained their ability to participate in collective action. There was a vibrant market of labour hiring in Usangu and young people, often working in gangs hired themselves out to secure money for school fees, for marriage or for renting land. Moreover, richer people were able to bypass collective arrangements entirely in favour of cash hiring. However, the poorest had to labour for whatever they could, usually food or credit, occasionally for small amounts of cash.

As with family and neighbourly relations, the participation of the poorest in collective action is unequal and intermittent. The less people are able to participate, the less they establish the expectation of cooperation, the less likely they are to secure social or material future benefits. Although cooperation and reciprocation is also negotiated for wealthier people, the expectation of cooperation and the arrangements established are more reliable, the social transaction costs lower, the outcomes less risky. The social effort to the chronically poor of maintaining family and social networks, participating in collective action and accessing institutions is enormous. The social and material support established through such collective efforts is not systematic, sustained or regular for the poor, but partial, intermittent, and related to specific events.

### **Groups, clubs and societies; entry fees and norms of exclusion**

Associational life in Usangu encompassed the range of formal and informal arrangements ranging from small savings groups or drinking circles of immediate neighbours and kin, to more formalised associations and clubs, often established in response to some development initiative (these included Irrigators Associations, Pastoralists Associations, Goat Rearing Clubs etc). Additionally ethnically based cultural groups existed for singing and dancing at public events and ceremonies and for facilitating particular livelihood activities such as livestock rearing.

The type of association predominating varied from village to village; the more marketised agricultural villages, displayed greater individualisation of social life, labour was hired rather than collective, membership of clubs and associations was largely for productive purposes such as livestock rearing or managing irrigation water. In the pioneer villages to the north of the district, where people settled in order to pursue mixed agricultural and pastoralist livelihoods; associational life revolved much more around 'traditional' forms such as collective labour arrangements, singing and dancing groups and public events like rainmaking. We cannot assume from this however that there was a polarisation between 'modern' and 'traditional' forms of association in the different types of villages. Tradition in the northern villages, if not entirely invented was certainly subjected to a great deal of negotiation and *bricolage*. 'Traditional' ceremonies of indigenous Sangu agriculturalists were cross cultural with immigrant Sukuma pastoralists participating by contributing the required goats, chickens or offerings of maize and beer

The entry fees for formal clubs and societies could be high (See case study of Household SM, Appendix) but cultural and 'traditional' forms of association were not necessarily more accessible to the poor. The traditional ceremonies mentioned above usually required contributions in kind, singing and dancing groups prided themselves on particular attire- often spotless white clothes for attending public ceremonies, a dress beyond the means of the poorest to buy or maintain. We have seen from Shida's case above that even church groups are potentially exclusive of the poorest, when the customs and rituals of regular meetings involve 'voluntary' contributions of cash to the collection. Such informal exclusion is significant as Odgaard shows how engagement with both the formalised institutions of the state and less bureaucratic social and cultural institutions contribute to the double safeguarding of rights and access to resources (Odgaard 2002). An inability to secure such access and rights undermines the sustainability of livelihoods. Many life history accounts of the impoverishment of poor people over time showed them dropping out of associational life bit by bit, and frequently even giving up church attendance because of the time it took away from productive activities.

## **6. Participation, Articulation and Access to institutions**

Social capital theory suggests that habits of trust and cooperation, and participation in public life make it more likely that people will be active citizens and engage in the institutions of government ( Putnam 1993, Narayan 1997 ) The processes of government are expected to be rendered effective transparent and accountable through such active engagement. Considerable attention is given in development to devolving decision making to the lowest level, to designing institutions with proper representation of the poor and marginalized, to refining participatory techniques aimed at transforming social dynamics by creating inclusive spaces for hearing the voices of all, if only for a day.

This research suggests that the chronically poor are largely excluded from effective access to institutions, even at the most local level, and that their institutional links are generally thin. Even those who participate actively ( such as Hamlet leaders) often find this an onerous and burdensome responsibility. Some hamlet leaders from poor households mentioned that they had taken on the position in the hope of gaining

exemption from taxes or levies, but instead found it merely detracted from their pursuit of livelihood

In this section I will explore one generally overlooked constraint on the active engagement of the poorest people in government and development institutions; the barrier of articulation. Due to the nature of the SMUWC project we investigated this primarily as it related to people's ability to access fora for resolving conflicts over natural resources (land and water), and for participating in village level planning and decision-making.

Most of the poor people we interviewed attended only hamlet meetings, a few also went to twice yearly village assemblies. All of the poor women and most of the poor men interviewed said that they attended just to listen, to be informed, not to speak.

Discriminatory norms of articulation ran as common threads through institutional encounters and family relationships encounters. In previous research in Tanzania we identified differing gendered norms of articulation which meant that men participated individually in village meetings, women only spoke as nominated representatives on behalf of other women ( Cleaver and Kaare ). In this research we found women doubly disadvantaged through their reliance on patriarchal systems of family, marriage and local government. The examples offered below are of women suffering exclusion in non –poor households; their position worsened by an inability to effectively express themselves, or to influence the discriminatory norms of the public fora accessible to them. These women, despite having relatively well-off husbands, suffered constraints and lived lives very similar to the chronically poor:

Mrs T , Sololwambo ( SL/29/VB)

This young woman, the second wife of a wealthy Sangu famrers and businessman , complained of being beaten and overworked by her husband. Despite their agricultural success and income from their kiosk in the village, she claimed to be living in poverty. She believed a miscarried pregnancy was caused by her husband working her too hard in the fields. She had reported the domestic violence to the Village Executive Officer in the hope that the village elders would intervene . The VEO told us that they had made the man buy a mosquito net for his wife and newborn baby but they feared further intervention might exacerbate the situation. He also partly blamed woman's own family for not playing a prominent role in the marriage and not ensuring the proper payment of brideprice. He suggested that young people learn to live together and Mrs T needed to be taught the etiquette of being a good wife –particularly cleanliness and perseverance. If the situation continued the Village Government could divide up the couple's property to ensure that the wife got her fair share on seperation.

Mrs T , Mahongole, (MH/19/VB)

This Nyakusa farmer claimed to be ill treated by both her wealthy husband his first wife. Doubts over the paternity of her child make her vulnerable in her marriage and she has no command over household resources. She sells her labour in order to get extra clothes and food for herself and her child and depends on neighbours to help her with salt and soap. She would like her father to return the brideprice of 25,000 sh so that she can separate from her husband but the father claims that he no longer has the

money. She feels she 'has no language' to report the situation to the Hamlet Chairman who could intervene, so she just has to stay and tolerate the situation.

People with grievances ( inheritance or marriage disputes , cattle theft, water diversion), against family or neighbours were faced with two options for resolution. One was to pursue their complaints through local 'traditional' fora – usually meetings of male elders. These often corresponded to and overlapped with Village Government. Adopting a preferred principle of reconciliatory conflict resolution such local authorities usually tried to achieve some sort of negotiated accommodation between the parties in dispute (Maganga 2002, Cleaver and Franks forthcoming ). Such resolutions were often reinforced by a community wide feast, or celebration, to which the conflicting parties contributed. Given the lack of reputation of the poorest, their chronic dependence on others for everyday assistance and their clientage relations, it was unlikely that these cases were resolved in favour of the poorest. An alternative was to pursue disputes through the court system ( Primary Courts, Ward Tribunals etc). Although theoretically free such systems were known to be costly; 'fees' often being required for speedy resolution of conflicts. Life history accounts of poor people specified how the costs of pursuing cases in court had crippled them , or how they had withdrawn their cases when fees threatened. Interestingly the primary courts heard a high proportion of divorce cases where the woman was suing for a share of land, livestock or custody of children. We can speculate that in these cases, non-poor women chose courts rather than family , local elders or village councils to pursue their cases because they were more confident of being heard in civil courts run ( at least nominally) according to principles of gender equality before the law. In these cases the adversarial norms of the court settlements were preferable to women to the reconciliatory norms of their local, socially embedded institutions.

## **7. The poverty of social capital – bricolage as a discriminatory process**

An understanding of the processes through which people access institutions and their exercise of agency in these and in social relationships, throws light on the formation of social capital. Institutions can both include and exclude, and social relationships can reinforce or bypass such impacts. Understanding the norms of institutions is critical, as even apparently benign and social desirable institutional principles ( such as negotiated reconciliations over competing interests) may operate to the disadvantage of those with little status, ability to articulate, or to contribute to a compromise solution.

The poorest people are both more dependent on their ability to exercise agency than others, and less able to do so effectively. They have fewer embedded expectations of co-operation and reciprocity, their social relations are often fragile and dependent on heavy investments of time and effort to secure very limited benefits. The agency of poor people is critically dependent on three interlinked factors: their able bodiedness, their room for manoeuvre within social relationships, and their ability to articulate their interests in fora accessible to them at low cost. In this paper I have outlined how all three factors are often absent in poor peoples lives. A disproportionate burden of disease constrains their coping and caring capacity, and often occurring at seasonally critical times limits their productivity. Their social relationships are often limited to a

small number of also- poor kin and fraught with unmet expectations (inability to pay brideprice, to send remittances, to pay for medical care for family members, even to bury relatives decently). The fragility of such links and the inability of the poorest to lubricate such relationships in culturally appropriate ways, means that they are an unreliable source of social support in conditions of long term stress. A lack of knowledge, a lack of confidence and the unintended impacts of institutional norms often constrain articulation. Whilst non-poor people are able to secure livelihoods through double safeguarding strategies, through accessing a variety of institutions, and can unconsciously draw on or consciously re-negotiate norms and practices, poor people are stuck with narrow and thin institutional linkages, which often reinforce their marginalisation.

## **Appendix**

Household V , Ukwaheri, ( UK/05/TN and UK/O5/SC)

(This shows how a poor-but-coping family has more dense social networks than those chronically poor cited in the text.)

The household consists of a Sangu man, his wife and six small children, as well as his mother. Although Mr V inherited 10 acres from his father he is only able to cultivate 3 of them. Due to shortage of rainfall they only harvest one bag of maize per acre. They have five cattle and ten goats and although poor appear to be coping .

His late father paid Mr K's brideprice of eleven cattle and 250,000sh. When Mrs K's father died the cattle were distributed to her younger brothers. Being a woman she didn't inherit anything. Mr K has also experienced problems within his family. One of his brothers disputed his inheritance and he suspects other relatives stole his cattle

Mr V is a member of the Defence and Security Committee of the Village which meets once a month He was chosen to be on this committee because he can read and write and the main benefit to him is that he has learnt about leadership from TMV training.

Mrs V attends the twice yearly Village Assembly where they discuss the income and expenditure of the village. She said that her husband might ask or answer questions at this meeting , but she has never spoken, even at the height of their water problems.



Mr V co-operates with a Sukuma neighbour, Mr M , in cattle grazing. As Mr K only has five cattle he keeps them with M's larger cattle. Each year they take it in turns to take the cattle for grazing at the Ihefu.

Mr V also has a friend in Mahongole from his own ethnic group, who lends him money in times of hardship.

Generally if the family have problems Mrs V seeks help from her brothers in Madundasi. Her brothers help provide her with capital for brewing and with seeds for planting. Sometimes she goes to stay with her brothers in Madundasi and sells pombe there at a higher price. She also goes there to get assistance from , and to help her mother, for example in times of sickness or in childbirth.

Mrs V has one neighbour whom she is particularly close to . They help each other with fetching water and making pombe. Other neighbours they just help each other with salt, and consoling the bereaved.

Both adults participate in mgowe group activities. They call people twice a year for ploughing and weeding and they offer enough food and pombe for ten people. This way they can cultivate a large area in a day.

Household K , Ukwaheri, (UK/17/TN and UK/17/SC)

(This study of a family in decline shows the different configuration of social links within a household, and the relative paucity of women's links compared to those of men.)

The poor Sangu/Kimba family consists of a man and his two wives. They previously had four children but two of them, a grown up son and daughter both died in 1998. They are left with one son now lives in Dodoma for work and one married daughter . Three grandchildren live with them due to the death of their father. Mr K's older brother and his wife also live with them and are totally dependent on K.

The family is poor and their livelihood declines steadily. They have lived in this hamlet since 1970 They grew rice in the past but gave up in 1994 due to lack of water and declining labour power. Now they grow only maize and sweet potatoes on three acres. They barely produce enough to eat, due to unreliable rainfall and worry how they will continue to feed their family in these drought years.

In the past when they suffered difficulties, for example when over 100 cattle died in 1980, their working son helped them. Another time, in 1994 they were fined 60,000sh

by Game Wardens for having wild animal meat in their home, so they sold rice and one of the wives borrowed money from her father to pay the fine.

Mr K attends open village meetings, but just to listen, not to speak. He hears about these meetings from the Hamlet Chairman. At fortnightly hamlet meetings they discuss water, management of ponds in the dry season and traditional matters of when to do rain sacrifices. At the hamlet meetings they also organise the hamlet's contribution to village works (currently making bricks for the dispensary ). Those who cannot contribute labour must pay in cash.

Mr K is a member of a pombe club (a drinking circle) For the past two years he has gathered to drink pombe with the same group of men of mixed ethnicity. The first reason for setting up this group was to enable individuals to drink throughout the year, using credit from neighbours. Now, he can even ask for credit for solving other problems from members of the pombe club.

Mr K is a traditional elder who is responsible for calling neighbours to the yearly rain sacrifice. People from different ethnic groups attend including Sukuma, Sangu and Kimba. His responsibility is to find the black chicken while the neighbours contribute maize for the brew. During the sacrifice day they pray for rain and good yields, good health and wellbeing for all.

Mr K's other social links include a friend who is also a traditional healer and very useful in times of sickness. He has links with a wealthy Sukuma neighbour who grazes his cattle on Mr K's post harvest stover in return for fresh milk , hires him for agricultural work and sometimes stands him credit in times of difficulty. He also has an old friend who lives nearby and they meet just for talking and sharing problems.

Both Mr K's wives appeared to have comparatively limited social networks and claimed that most of their activities were confined within the family. The main social linkages of the senior wife are with her neighbours who hire her for agricultural work, such as weeding maize. If she gets money she can buy food and clothes . At other times she gets one tin of maize for weeding one acre. From July to November she makes komoni, a maize based local brew for sale.

Mrs A , the second wife, goes to village and hamlet meetings just to listen because women are required to attend. They are allowed to ask questions about what is being discussed but few of them do so. However, she thinks it is a benefit to her to just hear what is being discussed. She also makes local brew and sometimes cooperates with other women brewers in collecting water. She often sells her brew to women traders from Madundas or Msangaji. Sometimes her young sister comes to help her in making brew and then takes some of the proceeds back to her home in Utengule.

Household SM , Mahongole.(MH/2/TN, MH/2/SC , MH/2/SAN)

(This case of a non- poor family is included to show how the ability to pay entry fees and regular contributions to clubs and societies can lead to much denser social networks.)

This Nyakusa family consists of a man, his second wife and eight children (some from the previous marriage) , three of whom are old enough to be at school. They cultivate small plots of rice , maize and beans in two different areas.

Mr SM is a member of the Mbange Milk Goats Group. This is a group of five set up under an IFAD and Minsitry of Agriculture project The first person to be offered the goat had to pay 5000sh to IFAD, then the first kid produced was given to another member and so on, until all had a goat. The group meets twice a month to talk about goat husbandry. They also make contributions of 1000sh each so that they can get credit from the Ward Bank for rice cultivation. Last year they borrowed 60,000sh. Mr SM says that being in the group is an advantage because you can also make personal lending and borrowing arrangements with group members.

Mr SM is also chair of the Motombaya Irrigation Scheme, established by FAO and consisting of about 214 members. Some of these own fields and some hire them to others. They meet weekly and in past years have contributed 5000sh as a one off 'entry fee' and 1000sh subscription. The scheme ensures that furrows are well kept, that claims to furrows are legitimate and that no-one steals water from others.

Mr SM is also a member of the Village Environmental Committee but so far they have never met. He is temporarily working as a SMUWC project representative making follow-ups of tree planting, counting livestock etc.

Both Mr and Mrs S M attend village and hamlet meetings, mostly for listening and even for asking questions when they dont understand.Their strongest participation socially is at hamlet level in burial ceremonies.

When they have problems they seek help from relatives in Tukuyu or Mbeya. Mr SM also has two friends of the same ethnic group who help him with cash, food and labour power and draught power, free of charge. One of them even helped him to send his sick child to hospital. Mr SM supports his aged parents at Tukuyu by sending them money.

Mrs SM said her daily contacts were with neighbours for borrowing salt, borrowing an axe, picking wild vegetables in their fields.

Mr SM observed that the strong cooperative links of the past were eroded by money circulation and people having lost the habit of believing in each other.

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