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SOCIAL CAPITAL AND DEVELOPMENT: ROLE OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND NETWORKS

Background and Issues involved

Social capital presents a multidisciplinary framework for the study of development related issues. The definition of this notion has been a subject of strong controversy since it was used for the first time in 1916. The various definitions of social capital emphasised on norms, reciprocity and confidence which makes the society effective.

Despite the fact that social capital is widely used in literature, no adequate definition has been given to cover all the various aspects of this notion.

However, considerable efforts have been made especially by the World Bank and other actors to find the link between social capital and growth, social capital and education through its relationship with human capital, social capital and democracy through the commitment level of the citizen and social capital and level of investment.

These works will ensure that the inadequacies of development theories are highlighted and provide an opportunity to take the specific constraints of West Africa into account in the review of its development efforts.

MAJOR QUESTIONS

Apart from the quest for a uniform definition of social capital, it is necessary to use this notion to understand the role of culture in development. In this regard,

social capital would not have just a positive image as was attempted by previous actors. What then is the role of culture in development? The answer to this question should take the positive and negative aspects of culture in our region into consideration.

Another interesting avenue to consider is to understand the reasons for civic commitment and enhancement of democracy in view of understanding the accompanying vote-catching and constitutes a snag to its efficiency.

Also, the perspectives presented through the development of the third option, that is, civil society through its resource mobilisation capacity, job creation should also be a centre of interest.

This is the reason for the debate raging on the importance of the civil society in the development of our region. It appears that the current report on this third option places too much attention on its weaknesses and does not often present the measures taken on improved efficiency of the civil society.

Now the civil society is at centre of the formulation of public opinion which according to Ghandi is the temperature of the society. The issue of external funding is a crucial problem of development strategies orientation. In the light of this development, it is important to ask oneself the following question: what is the relevance of the civil society in development process? And what is the best strategy to meet its financing needs?

Furthermore, the debate on the networks as well as their influence in decision making, especially policy decision is also another area to be considered. The networks could have positive external image especially through the knowledge society. But, similarly, crimes from independent and autonomous networks use social capital to improve its efficiency.

In addition, one of the areas of study is religion and its connection with politics and economy. West Africa is a good example of where religion plays an important role in social effectiveness through the reduction of costs of transactions and development of an enabling environment. However, one question still remains: how can religion be a danger to development?

Finally, the informal sector is the final option for political failures. It is a kind of safety net to tackle the vulnerability of a good majority of the West African people. Two major questions arise from the informal sector: what policy can be introduced to include this sector more in development? What type of supporting framework can be introduced?

WORK TO BE DONE BY THE CONTRIBUTOR

Given the foregoing analysis and prospects for West Africa, the contributor is expected to attempt to define social capital in a multidisciplinary framework in order to take into consideration some development preoccupations that are not adequately presented in the current development study especially the role of networks, association and culture.

In addition, the contributor should be critical of this concept which today is, a « refuge concept » that would enable social sciences specialists to harmonise previous divergent views.

Finally, the contributor should tackle key development issues from a social capital perspective especially the role of the civil society, restructuring of the informal sector to ensure its greater participation in development. He should also prepare model answers to the questions raised in the section on major questions.

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