The Strength of Local Engagement

Securing livelihoods and sustaining the environment through empowerment in community-based resource management

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a rise in the role of communities in achieving the global goals of poverty alleviation alongside environmental protection. Simultaneously, it is increasingly recognised that communities are subject to power asymmetries resulting in differential abilities among community members to benefit from the sustainable management of natural resources. Striving to explore community-based resource management from a new angle, this thesis draws on ideas from different fields of study to build a framework highlighting social networks as central to capabilities for sustainable livelihoods. Following a qualitative single-case study design, documentary data describing the strategies of an organisation employing such community-based approaches are analysed through the developed framework in order to illuminate how these reflect the ideas in the literature. It is found that organisations can empower communities through the facilitation of ties necessary for an enabling social environment while further acting as a network tie themselves through which community members can expand their asset bases. In both scenarios, the support of the outside organisation emerges as key so as to circumvent the hurdles rooted in limited capabilities.

Keywords: community-based resource management, social networks, capabilities, empowerment, sustainable livelihoods

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1 Introduction

Although it has in the past couple of decades grown to encompass a wide range of ambitions, a key tenet of sustainable development is that of ensuring poverty alleviation alongside environmental conservation. Simultaneously, experiences from developing countries seem to suggest that balancing the two is not as straightforward as otherwise predicted, and that addressing poverty–environment interactions requires careful consideration of the local barriers and opportunities. Indeed, scholars are increasingly finding that the poor adopt livelihood strategies not out of choice, but through necessity (Barbier 2010; Leach et al. 1999; Nunan 2015). Achieving sustainable development on the ground thus largely depends on the enhancement of options available to the poor to secure their welfare in an environmentally sound manner. As a consequence, we are seeing a rise in the role of communities in achieving the global goals of poverty alleviation alongside environmental conservation, wherein scholars and policymakers stress the value of including local natural resource users through participatory approaches.

Chief among these is that which is commonly known as community-based resource management, whose holistic, integrative nature allows for the goals and objectives to be defined by those directly facing the consequences of poverty and degradation (Berkes 2004). Whereas earlier writings portrayed local communities as obstacles to efficient and rational organisation of resource use, resulting in the exclusion of these local resource users in top-down initiatives, the failing of such approaches reinvigorated the understanding of communities as central to sustainable results (Agrawal & Gibson 1999, p. 631). Hence, community-based resource management has emerged as the key to meeting the needs and priorities of those whose livelihood strategies are central to achieving the two main goals.

Particular emphasis is placed on the social capital embedded in such participatory groups and, more specifically, the social interactions and networks which enable access to the support, information and resources fundamental to the capability of individuals to transform the social environment shaping the livelihood options available to them (Bebbington 1999, p. 2022; Nunan 2015, p. 107). Still, such an idealistic vision of social capital as a panacea for poverty alleviation alongside environmental protection can easily fall short of expectations, especially when it is built on the idea of 'community' as a harmonious group of similarly endowed members (Agrawal & Gibson 1999, p. 636; Ballet et al. 2007, p. 363). Indeed, an increasing number of scholars are finding that a wide variety of social differences transcend community boundaries, resulting in differential abilities among community members in accessing those spheres of information, support and resources (Bebbington 1999, p. 2023; Leach et al. 1999, p. 230).

Thus, although the connection between poverty–environment interactions and the social capital embedded in participatory initiatives is widely recognised in the development literature, our understandings of the dynamics and mechanisms at play remain rather limited. More specifically, we have yet to explore the ways in which such participatory approaches can contribute to the achievement of the two goals by strengthening the capabilities of participants and fostering an enabling social environment. To put it differently, it raises the question of how community-based resource management may be able to act in favour of those with fewer endowments.

1.1   Purpose and research question

Following the previous section, the purpose of this research is to explore how community-based approaches are employed to secure livelihoods and sustain the environment, and how the strategies involved may reflect the connections made in development literature surrounding social capital and capabilities. This differs from the common approaches adopted in studies investigating matters of social capital in participatory approaches, in which collective management is the main focus. While those approaches do provide important insights into the ways in which social capital can facilitate co-operation and the emergence of norms favouring sustainable resource use, they have not been able to fully account for the differential endowments held by community members and how community-based resource management may be able to achieve poverty alleviation and environmental conservation in the face of these differences.

To this end, the thesis has three underlying objectives. First, a theoretical framework is developed and outlined which explains how network social capital functions in relation to issues of access, capabilities and livelihoods. Second, qualitative data from an organisation employing participatory strategies to secure livelihoods and forest conservation is collected and analysed through the developed framework. Finally, the findings illustrate how community-based resource management initiatives relate to propositions found in the development literature, and how these insights may further our understanding of the social networks of access embedded in such approaches. In so doing, the study may also illuminate potential strengths and shortcomings of community-based management in the strive to balance secure livelihoods and conservation of the environment.

For the purpose of the study, a research question has been drawn up which will direct and maintain focus throughout the research process, while also serving as the base on which the study can reach a conclusion. It reads as follows:

How are social networks of access reflected in initiatives employing community-based resource management to balance secure livelihoods and conservation?

2 Theoretical framework

Central to this thesis is the theoretical literature on the relationship between livelihoods, capabilities and social networks in poverty–environment interactions. The propositions constituting the theoretical framework draw on different fields of study, however with clear linkages and similarities. This chapter is devoted to presenting these as well as their underlying presumptions, with particular emphasis on the ideas central to the analysis.

2.1 Poverty, livelihoods and capabilities

In many parts of the world, the rural poor are concentrated in marginalised areas, making them largely dependent on the environment for their livelihoods (Barbier 2010, p. 635). As a consequence, the poverty–environment relationship is commonly portrayed as a 'vicious downward spiral', in which a deteriorating environment resulting from overuse by the marginalised poor leads to their further impoverishment, making the livelihoods of the poor gradually more difficult and uncertain (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, p. 27). Simultaneously, scholars are finding that such a portrayal fails to account for the many assets, structures and processes which influence the behaviour of the poor in relation to the environment. Literature pertaining to the sustainable livelihoods framework suggests that the livelihoods of the poor should not only be understood in terms of the economic opportunities and natural resources available to people, but as comprising of "the capabilities, assets (including material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living" (Scoones 1998, p. 5). In this sense, Scoones (1998, p. 5) goes on to define a livelihood as sustainable when "it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets, while not undermining the natural resource base."

Within this framework, the 'assets' on which different livelihood strategies depend are often conceptualised as the different forms of capital presented in economic theory, which are in turn combined to create livelihoods. Here, Scoones (1998, pp. 7–8) identifies four main capital endowments: natural capital, economic capital, human capital, and social capital. Building on this argument and adding cultural capital to the list of capital assets, Bebbington (1999, p. 2021) finds that rural livelihoods further needs to be understood in terms of the ways in which people are able to expand their asset bases through engaging with other actors. More specifically, Bebbington (1999, p. 2023) regards access and social capital as central elements to the framework, in the sense that relationships with

other actors "become almost *sine qua non* mechanisms through which resources are distributed and claimed."

Similarly, Ribot and Peluso (2003, p. 153) stress the importance of understanding access as "the *ability* to derive benefits from things," as opposed to the *right* to benefit commonly adhered to in literature on property rights and poverty, drawing attention to the wider range of social relationships that constrain or enable access. Whereas the sustainable livelihoods framework is built on considerations of capabilities and endowments, Ribot and Peluso's (2003) theory of access explores the 'bundles of powers' which people can draw on to benefit from different kinds of resources. More specifically, these bundles are embodied in and exercised through various mechanisms and social relations that affect the ability of people to benefit from resources, indicating that individuals are positioned differently in relation to resources at different times and in different places (Ribot and Peluso 2003, p. 154). Here, Ribot and Peluso (2003) identify seven mechanisms of access, including technology, capital, markets, knowledge, authority, social identities and social relations. While all of these influence the extent to which individuals are able to benefit from a particular resource, it is once again found that social identities and social relations are central to all other elements of access (Ribot and Peluso 2003, p. 172). Indeed, the theory of access suggests that in order to ensure access, subordinate actors may transfer benefits to those which, in the broad sense of the word, control access (Ribot and Peluso 2003, p. 159). In drawing parallels to the sustainable livelihoods framework, the 'bundles of powers' can be considered peoples' capabilities made up of the initial endowments of capital assets. However, where the sustainable livelihoods framework recognises social relations as one of the capital assets in the creation of livelihoods, the theory of access understands social relations as a mechanism of access, and that endowments, or *bundles*, are embodied in and exercised through these. This suggests that capabilities are not only influenced by social relations, but largely determine the extent to which people can actually benefit from those relations. Considering this, the ability to benefit from the relationships central to their livelihood strategies varies greatly between individuals, and can lead to the exclusion of some from the broader benefits embedded in such social networks.

It is in this regard that the sustainable livelihoods framework and the theory of access are central to this thesis. More specifically, it points towards how social capital understood as networks and relations cannot be understated in the achievement of local sustainable development. It remains unclear, however, how the particular nature of such social networks may be able to influence social patterns of access, especially when one acknowledges the differences in people's initial endowments. This is the question to which this chapter now turns.

2.2   The networks view of social capital

While the concept of social capital can be traced in earlier literature, it mainly gained momentum towards the end of the 1990s, when scholars such as Bourdieu

(1986), Coleman (1988) and Putnam (1993) began writing about the value of social bonds in achieving desirable ends. Still, whereas there is a wide agreement on the metaphor of social capital, in which social structure is considered capital in the pursuit of benefits, scholars begin to diverge when the metaphor is made concrete with regards to the network mechanisms that define the degree of connectedness (Burt 2000, p. 348). Indeed, when scouting the vast literature on social capital, two distinct dimensions emerge: *structural* and *relational* social capital. The most commonly referenced is that of the relational dimension, deriving from the definition made popular by Putnam (1993), who, in drawing on Coleman (1988), regarded social capital as residing in the structure of relationships, determining their nature and quality. According to this definition, values, trust and norms of reciprocity are central to understanding collective and co-ordinated actions. On the other side of this division are those scholars following the tradition of structural social capital, in which the social structure—understood as network ties, roles, and procedures—facilitates conditions of accessibility in the strive to secure benefits (Burt 2000; Lin 2001, 2008).

For the purpose of this thesis, the latter definition will be adopted. Studies of social capital in community-based resource management often pertain to the former definition, as a means to suggest the value of trust and norms of reciprocity in the collective organisation for resource management. However, as the purpose here is to explore such initiatives from a new angle—that is, as facilitators of social networks for strengthened capabilities in sustainable livelihoods—the structural dimension of social capital is better able to account for the particular nature of associations between members involved in participatory approaches to natural resource management (Woolcock and Narayan 2000, p. 230). Furthermore, the networks view of social capital allows for the exploration of social capital as an individual resource, as opposed to a collective good available to each member within a network, calling attention to the ways in which some individuals may hold greater social capital than others (Comim 2008, p. 645; Van Deth 2008, p. 156). In this sense, it acknowledges that social capital and its benefits is contingent on the social position of an individual within networks, and can be largely differential between members in a group or community. From this understanding of social capital, two prominent examples of network structures can be identified, both of which have been assigned various different names. In essence, these are the horizontal and vertical associations, otherwise known as bonding and bridging, or strong versus weak network ties.

2.2.1 Bonding and bridging

Building on the propositions in the sustainable livelihoods framework and Ribot and Peluso's (2003) theory of access mentioned earlier in this section, the bonding and bridging nature of social networks influences the kinds of resources that can be captured by an individual (Lin 2008, p. 58). Here, Burt (2000, p. 353) emphasises the value of reaching across the so-called 'structural holes' separating groups and their embedded resources. According to this definition, the flow of

resources circulating in one group is likely to be different from that circulating in another, due to the lack of interaction between groups separated by these structural holes in the social structure. To put it differently, strong ties reflect the relationships between those cohesive contacts which are strongly connected to each other and, thus, are more likely to hold similar information and resources. Weak ties, on the other hand, reflect the interactions that span structural holes and facilitate access to resources which are more additive than overlapping, thus putting individuals with such ties at a competitive advantage in comparison to those without (Burt 2000, p. 353). Now, it is important to note here that social capital is not equivalent to social networks, but is rather contingent on those networks. More specifically, Lin (2001, p. 55) defines social capital as the resources embedded in networks, such as expertise, knowledge, skills, or material resources. These, in turn, become social capital when they are invested through social networks as a means to secure benefits or returns. This is where the initial endowments of individuals come into play, as the differential opportunity structures within networks determine which individuals can draw on better resources and, thus, strengthen their positions within these social networks. For instance, Woolcock and Narayan (2000, p. 227) find that while the poor may have intensive stocks of 'bonding' social capital which they can leverage to get by in their day-to-day lives, they lack the more diffuse 'bridging' social capital which would allow them to get ahead.

Similarly, Lin (2001, p. 47) differentiates between expressive actions and instrumental actions, arguing that the utility of the different interactions depends on the benefits one hopes to achieve. If the objective is to maintain or preserve existing resources, interactions with those sharing similar resources and which can provide the necessary support would be sufficient to meet the needs for such expressive action. In regards to instrumental action, however, interactions may be relatively complicated depending on the social position of an individual within the network. More specifically, instrumental action entails the seeking out and gaining of additional resources, and thus depends on the richness of resources embedded in the interactions available to individuals. For some, intimate relations may be rich in resources, and are thus sufficient means for achieving instrumental action. For those actors which are poor in comparison, the tendency towards 'homophilous' interactions (relations between actors with similar resources) most likely results in strong ties being confining rather than facilitating (Lin 2008, p. 61). Consequently, instrumental action would require 'heterophilous' interactions or, to use Burt's (2000) terminology, the bridging across structural holes. Still, when an individual possesses fewer endowments, such heterophilous interactions often remain unlikely, due to the inequality in differential command of resources and the need to assess each other's willingness to exchange (Lin 2001, p. 47). With regards to Ribot and Peluso's (2003) proposition that subordinate actors may transfer some sorts of benefits to others in order to ensure access to desired resources, the networks view of social capital thus suggests that such asymmetric interactions are not as straightforward. Here, the actor seeking more resources may have much to gain, whereas the payoff for the other partner in the interaction poses a serious problem (Lin 2001, p. 50).

In exploring the propositions in this view of social capital, it becomes clear that the praise attributed to social networks in achieving secure livelihoods alongside environmental conservation at a local level can easily fall short of expectations, and potentially even result in the greater marginalisation of community members as those with less endowments are unintentionally left out. Although the idea of social capital appears promising in the pursuit of community-based approaches and grassroots empowerment (Harris and De Renzio 1997, p. 920), such initiatives rely on the initial endowments of the poor and their capacity to channel the resources required to strengthen their capabilities with regards to adopting sustainable livelihood strategies. Recognising this, some scholars propose a third type of network structure which inheres in the relationships between different social powers, wherein the links are between individuals and those groups beyond the community which can provide access to resources (Woolcock 2001; Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Such 'linking social capital' is thus central to community-based resource management; not only does it provide access to the resources, ideas and information required for a means of living, such participatory processes may also facilitate greater social interaction and empower members to better be able to reap the benefits embedded in existing social networks.

2.3   Empowerment through participation

So far, the literature has suggested that the capabilities of individuals are central to the achievement of the two main objectives of the sustainable development paradigm, as these determine the options available for adopting sustainable livelihood strategies. These capabilities further determine the social position of individuals within network structures, and thus their ability to benefit from the resources embedded in these as a means to strengthen their capabilities and broaden livelihood options. Here, the participatory nature of community-based resource management emerges as a potential solution to the shortcomings of traditional approaches, which have either fully excluded the concerns of local resource users from resource management programmes, or simply failed to provide the necessary support for effective local management (Berkes 2004, p. 622). As the form and function of community-based resource management often differs greatly depending on the local needs and circumstances, it is somewhat difficult to define precisely. Still, it is often discussed in relation to inclusive decision-making, participatory planning, and conflict resolution. For the purpose of this thesis, however, another one of its features is of interest: the fostering of self-help environments and collective capabilities.

Essentially, Adams (2003, p. 19) defines self-help as "a process, group or organisation, comprising people coming together or sharing an experience or problem, with a view to individual and/or mutual benefit." In this sense, organisations may work together with the community so as to facilitate the growth of alternative practices and heightened awareness, while increasing collective capacities of community members to take control of their circumstances and

enhancing the power of those who lack it. Furthermore, community work involves empowering people "to analyse the sources of their problems for themselves, to explore their own needs and develop their own strategies" (Adams 2003, p. 130). In doing so, participatory conservation programmes are better able to encompass a broader view of the livelihood needs of local people while incorporating their knowledge and interests; something which traditional approaches have failed to do, resulting in weak local support (Berkes 2004, p. 628).

Exploring the role of self-help groups for strengthened capabilities, Ibrahim (2006, p. 398) develops the notion of 'collective capabilities', as opposed to the 'individual capabilities' often pertained to in development literature. Whereas individual capabilities are the functioning bundles an individual draws on to make a living, *collective* capabilities refer to those a person obtains by virtue of their 'engagement in a collectivity' (Ibrahim 2006, p. 398). As such, they allow for the achievement of actions that the individual would not have been able to achieve solely through their initial, individual capabilities. However, these collective functionings do not only enhance individual and communal well-being, but may also ultimately create a virtuous feedback mechanism in poor communities, as a result of "the accumulation of new endowments, the widening of individual capabilities and the nurturing of social capital" (Ibrahim 2006, p. 411). Indeed, self-help initiatives can allow poor communities and their members to create and seize new economic, political, and social opportunities more effectively. More specifically, they are instrumentally valuable in the promotion of income generation and resource sharing, all the while creating a sense of self-esteem among the poor and encouraging them to participate in local decision-making (Ibrahim 2006, p. 406). While Ibrahim (2006) does perceive self-help groups as those which are collectively initiated among members of poor communities, these could very well be fostered from the outside through participatory programmes (Adams 2003, p. 8). In some instances, such outside support can even be critical, due to the lack of assets and limited access of community members to the necessary social networks, financial resources and information conducive to the emergence of such initiatives (Ibrahim 2006, p. 408). In implementing such programmes, organisations can draw on their various partnerships as well as their experiences from past initiatives to distribute or link communities and their members to information and resources, while empowering them to find solutions to attract and accumulate such resources themselves. In other words, outside support from organisations employing participatory approaches thus involves the creation of an enabling environment helping the poor overcome the social, economic and political constraints on group formation, so that members later will be able to reap the many benefits of it.

3 Method and material

The purpose of the following chapter is to outline the research design, material and sampling, and the means of analysis. The research methods employed are described and motivated in terms of their relevance and suitability, including discussions regarding possible limitations and shortcomings.

3.1 Research design

Seeing as the purpose of this research is to explore how the connections in the development literature are reflected in community-based approaches employed in initiatives to balance secure livelihoods and conservation of the environment, this thesis is of an exploratory nature. While the role of social capital in community-based resource management is widely recognised in the literature, this has mainly been with regards to matters of civicness and solidarity. Inspired by a different lens than that which is often applied—namely, social networks of access—this study followed a qualitative single-case study design in order to gain insight into the field of social capital and community-based resource management from this alternative angle. While case studies cannot provide a sufficient basis for statistically valid generalisations and thus lack external validity compared to other designs, they achieve high internal validity through fuller explanations of the phenomena under study (De Vaus 2001, p. 236). Case studies can further be applied for both explanatory, descriptive and exploratory purposes, making it a suitable approach for this thesis (Yin 2003, p. 1).

There are a variety of options available in doing case studies, often related to the number of cases as well as the weight attributed to the case in the study. Recognising the limitations of the case study in terms of external validity, it is often argued that multiple, strategically selected cases are more powerful and convincing as they provide more insights and thus make for tougher tests of theories than single case designs (De Vaus 2001, p. 227). While this is a reasonable rationale, the aim of this study is not to test theory and, therefore, the limitations of a single-case study design were not considered as significant. Still, to ensure the feasibility of the research as well as the possibility for adequate material, the case was strategically selected in order to provide a sufficient base for analysis (see subsection below). Furthermore, the case study is *instrumental* in that its purpose is to provide insight into the specific research issue as opposed to the particular case in itself and how this relates to other cases, and thus does not have the objective to generalise (Punch 2005, p. 146; Stake 1995, p. 3).

3.1.1 The case

Adhering to the purpose and objectives of the study, the selected case is an organisation centred on community forestry in order to secure livelihoods, thriving forests and resilient landscapes. Located in the Asia-Pacific, the Center for People and Forests (RECOFTC) is an international non-profit organisation working locally, nationally, regionally and globally to "support people and forests through a diverse but interconnected programme of network building, capacity development, policy change, conflict transformation, research, field projects and strategic communications" (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 8). The Center was founded as the Regional Community Forestry Training Center for Asia and the Pacific in 1987 by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the Government of Switzerland (through the Asian Development Bank) and Kasetsart University in Thailand as a regional hub for training and research. In 2000, RECOFTC was formally recognised as an autonomous international organisation by the Governments of Thailand and Switzerland, along with governments of other countries in the Asia-Pacific subregion. The organisation has since then expanded its partnerships and programmes in Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand and Viet Nam; and grew into 'The Center for People and Forests' in 2009, reflecting the broader focus on strategies including capacity development, landscape management as well as livelihoods and conflict transformation (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 8).

This choice of case was primarily motivated by the aim to ensure that the material was sufficient not only in terms of providing adequate insights into the strategies involved with community-based resource management, but also in terms of their relevance to the study. A case which does not clearly centre around matters of networks, empowerment and livelihoods would not properly allow for the exploration of how these matters as discussed in the development literature relate to the initiatives and strategies involved in participatory approaches. While there are plenty of other organisations that cover such matters, the participation of communities is often regarded as one among many strategies employed to achieve greater goals, and is thus not a focus in and of itself. Considering that the purpose of this study is to gain more detailed insight into the specific nature community-based approaches, its strong focus on local people and vulnerable communities makes the particular case of RECOFTC highly suitable in that regard. Furthermore, the Center has a wide variety of programmes being implemented throughout the region, focusing on somewhat different priorities based on the needs of local communities. As such, it allows for insights into the many ways in which social networks of access play a role in participatory approaches depending on different social environments, and thus makes for a compelling single-case study.

3.2   Data collection

The empirical data collected consists of documentary data in the form of reports made public on the RECOFTC publications website. For the purpose of the study, the documents which have been consulted provide insights not only into the organisation's vision, theory of change, goals and objectives; but also the specific initiatives and strategies adopted to achieve these objectives. The method for sampling can thus be compared to that of purposive sampling, in which the material was selected with the purpose and focus of the study in mind (Punch 2005, p. 187). These documents include, more specifically, annual reports, strategic plans and so-called 'stories of change' (see overview in Table 3.1). To ensure the feasibility of the study and the relevance of the reports, the material was delimited to those published after the shift made to The Center for People and Forests in 2009 for a broader focus within the implemented strategies. Finally, the material was delimited to those reports published in English, so as to circumvent the risk of important information being lost or distorted in translation.

Although documentary materials are often used in coordination with other sources of data as a means of triangulation, they can be used in various ways in social research, with some studies depending entirely on documentary data (Punch 2005, p. 184). Still, such materials require careful consideration and assessment in any study employing them, and especially in those which use them as the sole sources of data. As described by Atkinson and Coffey (2004, p. 58), documents are not transparent representations of organisational routines and decision-making processes, and cannot be treated as firm evidence of what they report. Taking note of the four criteria suggested by Scott (1990 in Bryman 2012, p. 544), documents should be assessed in terms of their authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning. The publications sampled for this study are assessed as typical of development-oriented organisations and follow similar procedures and structures in presenting the information they contain, fulfilling the criteria of authenticity, meaning and representativeness. Last, but certainly not least, the credibility of the documents is perhaps the most relevant to the sampled documents and the purpose of the study. Documents and reports published within organisations are often created with particular objectives in mind, such as sharing the vision of the organisation and demonstrating the organisation's progress (Bryman 2012, p. 551). While the desire to maintain public confidence often motivates the correct portrayal of initiatives and their effects, it is very likely that more emphasis is placed on positive results as opposed to less successful ones so as to ensure a

Table 3.1 Overview of the documentary material consulted

Type	*Annual Reports*	*Strategic Plans*	*Case Stories*	*Background Report*
Material	RECOFTC 2015a; RECOFTC 2015b; RECOFTC 2017; RECOFTC 2018b	RECOFTC 2013b; RECOFTC 2018a	RECOFTC 2014; RECOFTC 2016	RECOFTC 2013a

strong public appearance. However, as the focus of this study is more on the approach underlying initiatives and strategies, and less on the effects of these, the documentary material is considered credible for these purposes.

3.3   Data analysis

In order to gain insight into how the propositions in the theoretical framework are reflected in the different approaches and initiatives implemented by RECOFTC, the study employed a qualitative content analysis. Among the most prevalent approaches to the qualitative analysis of documents, it entails the searching-out of themes in the materials being analysed (Bryman 2012, p. 557), and thus allowed for the identification of overarching themes that captured the phenomenon of social networks and empowerment in participatory approaches. Seeing as the theoretical framework is central to the analysis, the search for themes was primarily guided by ideas inspired by the propositions in the literature, and was thus not inductive in nature. More specifically, expected ideas deriving from the theoretical framework included themes reflecting bonding, bridging and linking social networks in addition themes related to endowments, empowerment as well as individual and collective capabilities. Due to limited operationalisation in the theoretical literature, these ideas mainly helped to identify relevant messages in the material, in which case the assigned themes were further elaborated through the identification of sub-themes and connections so as to illustrate the various dimensions of the phenomenon under study. While the aim of the study is to trace elements of the theoretical framework within the approaches adopted, measures were taken to minimise the risk of deliberate distortion so that the analysis presented is faithful to the data (Hardy and Bryman 2004, p. 8). This was done through an emphasis upon repetition of themes, in the sense that the analysis acknowledged when a theme which according to the theoretical framework would be judged as relevant was reconsidered in terms of its significance in the case that it had little frequency. Furthermore, themes which were originally considered irrelevant to the purpose of the study received further deliberation when occurring frequently throughout the materials. Still, this approach does not imply that 'anything goes' simply because it occurs more frequently; it rather allows for the identification of potential disconfirming data that may not coincide with the laid out theoretical framework, but nonetheless provides insight into the role of social networks of access in community-based resource management.

4 Empirical analysis

The following chapter features the empirical analysis of the strategies employed in the Center's initiatives to balance secure livelihoods and conservation of the environment. It is structured around the ideas which emerged from the analysis of the data, illustrating how the organisation is drawing on social networks of access to empower community members in two distinct ways: (1) *indirectly*, through the facilitation of ties and partnerships among communities and between communities and other stakeholders, and; (2) *directly*, as one of the ties within the network itself through which community members can access the information, training and support necessary to obtain greater benefits from the other ties as well as forest landscape resources as a means to enhance local livelihoods without undermining the natural resource base. In order to clearly illustrate the linkages between the ideas described in the theoretical literature and the approaches behind the Center's initiatives, the empirical data will be presented in an active conversation with the theoretical framework throughout the sections.

4.1 Enhancing and building partnerships

Of the two distinct themes which emerged from the analysis of the documentary material, the facilitation of ties and partnerships has been central to the Center's programmes implemented throughout the years. While the latter can be traced within the initiatives documented in the earlier publications, it has mainly been supplementary so as to safeguard the guiding principles behind the strategies before increasing in prominence with the more recent programmes. In regards to the theoretical framework outlined earlier, this section largely pertains to the different ties recognised in the networks view of social capital and how the Center works to enhance such relationships to indirectly empower communities and their members. Here, it is found that communities are indirectly empowered through the fostering of enabling social environments fundamental to access recognised in its various forms. This is either achieved through the linking of communities to key stakeholders controlling access or through the bridging across communities for mutual support and encouragement.

4.1.1 Linking communities to key stakeholders

Witnessing the massive impacts of growth and efforts to overcome poverty on the forest landscapes and local people of the Asia-Pacific region, the Center works to

increase the role of local people in managing forest resources through community forestry and, thus, minimising conflicts over community rights is chief among the organisation's objectives (RECOFTC 2013b). Here, the facilitation of ties to government agencies ensures the flow of information and dialogue in which those conflicting interests and policies undermining community rights can be identified so that compromises can be established (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 12). In linking communities to these actors, members will be empowered to claim forest tenure and other rights which subsequently allow them to derive greater benefits from their forest resources while also protecting these landscapes from outsiders' illegal or illicit activities (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 26). The ways in which the Center draws on such social networks of access to indirectly empower communities and their members becomes particularly clear in the organisation's emphasis upon the inclusion of the most marginalised in these partnerships and negotiations. Indeed, it is recognised throughout the publications that those community members which are the most dependent on forest resources for their livelihoods are also the least able to negotiate rights over these resources. In many instances, however, such exclusion of poor people is not intentional but simply stems from a lack of information hindering their understanding and, thus, their negotiation for fair shares of the community forests (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 15). Through partnerships between communities and key stakeholders in which the Center actively ensures that negotiations are based on mutual respect and that benefits are shared equitably, such ties not only provide community members with a platform to voice their needs and requests, but may as a result also lead to their heightened awareness with regards to their rights and stakes in the management of forest. The Center's involvement in a local community in Sel Pyar village in Myanmar makes for a clear example of one such project:

> The local community in Sel Pyar village in Myanmar once had no interest in investing their time and resources in CF. Even though the village owned 4 hectares of CF, the forest was severely degraded due to a long history of livestock grazing and unsustainably extracting forest products. The community had 25 community forestry (CF) members, but they were not active in forestry activities. […] As well as developing capacity for agroforestry management, RECOFTC facilitated local community members' understanding of forestry governance through their participation in negotiations with the Forest Department for formal CF Certification. […] [The villagers] gained trust in the concepts of community forestry, especially of community forestry rights and rights to management, withdrawal, access and inheritance of land tenure. […] With this significantly increased level of participation, the villagers were able to increase their CF area from 10 acres to 515 acres (4 ha to [208] ha), including 285 acres (115 ha) of forested land and 230 acres (93 ha) of barren land for restoration and CF (RECOFTC 2018b, pp. 8–9).

What is meant by *indirect* empowerment here is that the facilitation of these linking ties primarily increases community member's access to the different livelihood assets through the creation of an enabling social environment, as opposed to directly building and strengthening capabilities to adopt sustainable livelihood strategies. Indeed, while Ribot and Peluso's (2003) definition of access as the ability to benefit points towards broader mechanisms shaping access than

rights alone, there is no denying that legal control and management is on some level a prerequisite to other forms of access. To put it differently, linking communities to these platforms for negotiation and legal support may, in turn, realise the necessary conditions for the fostering of a setting in which capabilities can be strengthened and greater benefits can be obtained. Such benefits need not simply involve greater forest areas such as in the example above; they also include the various opportunities for livelihood improvements flowing from this increase in forest resources. Furthermore, in those instances in which the main challenge limiting options for livelihood strategies is the unsustainable extraction of resources by other actors, community members can turn to these platforms to establish forest tenure which would support them in protecting their landscapes and secure the condition of the forest resources on which their livelihoods depend.

While the Center has largely concentrated on the enhancement of partnerships for the establishment of community rights, the organisation further operates this linking function to tie vulnerable communities to key actors within the private sector in more recent programmes. This is often done through the organising of events and networks supporting entrepreneurs from marginalised populations, or simply the involvement of such actors as partners in their projects (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 32). Once again, these linkages primarily favour the fostering of an enabling environment; whereas relationships to government agencies allow for the transformation of rights-based conflicts, ties to private sector actors may work to increase the economic value of forest landscape resources for communities through investments, community-based enterprises and product certification schemes (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 7). Examples of such linking ties can be observed along the base of the Chure mountains in Nepal, where the Center supported locally initiated projects focused on beekeeping and agroforestry among women in the Sarlahi district by drawing on donors from across the globe to provide the communities with funds for beehives and tree saplings. By the time of publication, 37 beehives had been distributed to the most disadvantaged households in the district and, to ensure the extended success of the project and the women's ability to generate further incomes, women involved in the project were then linked to a beehive contractor for a year of continuous support (RECOFTC 2018b, pp. 6–7).

Through the linking of communities to key actors within these sectors, the organisation addresses the range of constraints which have limited the options available to local communities for sustainable livelihoods. While these ties may not be able to directly enhance the capabilities of community members, they do indeed contribute to such empowerment indirectly by facilitating opportunities for other forms of access. Nevertheless, the facilitation of these partnerships is not in itself what makes for the linking function of the network ties; it rests on the capacity to leverage the resources (in this case, rights to forest resources and their increased economic value) through these ties beyond the community (Lin 2001; Woolcock 2001). In the light of the differential opportunity structures existing within social networks, the Center's involvement is thus central to the linking function of these partnerships, as it ensures commitments to mutual respect and the fair share of benefits. Thereby, the various barriers to such asymmetric interactions proposed by Lin (2001, 2008) are mitigated, increasing the likelihood

that community members will indeed be able to reap the benefits embedded in these ties. Still, as is also reflected in the other strategies involved in the Center's programmes, these linking ties are not in themselves sufficient to safeguard secure livelihoods from the sustainable management of forest landscapes. Although the broader enabling environment may on some level be a prerequisite for the access of community members to different resources, it does not automatically ensure their ability to benefit from these resources. As will be seen in section 4.2, further efforts are required not only for community members to seize the many livelihood opportunities made accessible through the established community forests, but also to strengthen the capacities of local people to properly benefit from these linking ties in the first place.

4.1.2 Bridging across communities

Although the Center's programmes primarily focus on the linking of communities to other key stakeholders so as to facilitate access to those benefits not available through other ties, there are mentions reflecting the bridging function of social networks throughout the publications. Here, two outstanding features can be distinguished which set it apart from the linking ties discussed earlier. First, it encourages joint support which helps to maintain resources such as those made available through the linking ties. In 2012, for instance, the Center supported the creation of the Anlung Vil commune network in Pursat Province in Cambodia. More specifically, the network promotes active information sharing among 16 community forest groups struggling with illegal logging and land encroachment, providing members with a common voice that allows them to be more effective in addressing illegal forest activities as they occur (RECOFTC 2015a, p. 1). The second feature is the encouragement among members through mutual knowledge exchange and useful insights into the different livelihood opportunities made possible through the sustainable management of forests. As part of the project in Sel Pyar village in Myanmar mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Center encouraged networking with other communities and arranged local study tours to other sites so that Sel Pyar villagers could learn from their experiences and methods for managing forest landscapes. Subsequently, the community has itself offered trainings to other villages on basic concepts and principles of community forestry, participatory decision-making and nursery establishment skills, inspiring others to become active in community forestry (RECOFTC 2018b, pp. 8–9).

These two features of the bridging function as employed by the Center largely reflect the expressive and instrumental actions in Lin's (2001, 2008) theory of social networks. The case example from Cambodia suggests that tenure rights and forest certification established through linking ties are not always in themselves enough to ensure community member's abilities to prevent outsiders' degrading activities, but may require additional support. Whereas theory suggests that such expressive action very well can be satisfied through intra-community interactions with those sharing similar assets, it appears here that those assets flowing within community boundaries are sometimes not alone sufficient to meet the needs for

such action, and that bridging across communities can allow for greater combinations of assets. In this light, the networks created by the Center can be considered collectivities extending beyond communities, embodying those collective capabilities, as described by Ibrahim (2006), which are at times required for members to fully benefit from resources attained through linking ties. Similarly, the Myanmar example points to collective capabilities as the livelihood opportunities developed through the sharing of benefits and know-how across community boundaries. The case here further suggests that bridging ties very well can be conducive to instrumental actions too, especially where awareness and perceptions of the opportunities with community forestry are varied. Certainly, while these communities may be of similar powers, Burt's (2000) structural holes imply that such bridging across communities can facilitate access to resources and information dissimilar to those already flowing in the first community.

It is in this sense that the Center combines linking and bridging ties to create favourable settings for the indirect empowerment of community members. While both functions are central to the achievement of the organisations objectives, the resources embedded in the two ties are different. Where linking ties can foster the enabling environments for instrumental action, bridging across communities can help maintain these and disseminate resources for members to make better use of the enabling environments. To some extent, the bridging function could therefore achieve those very same ends pursued through the strategies in the next section. Still, the indirect nature of this attempt at empowerment signals that this largely depends on the richness of the resources embedded in those cross-community interactions. Alternatively, the bridging across communities may complement the direct empowerment explored in the section below, so as to stimulate and broaden its impact.

4.2   Helping to self-help

So far, this chapter has demonstrated how the Center can be considered to employ social networks of access to indirectly empower communities and their members through ties to enhance conditions for greater livelihood opportunities. Although the programmes have largely concentrated on creating such partnerships enabling access to forest resources, alternative strategies aiming at the empowerment of communities through training, information and support can be traced at varying levels in the Center's programmes throughout the years. It is recognised already among earlier publications that the key to significant improvements in livelihoods lies in the strengthening of the skills and abilities of local people (RECOFTC 2013b, p. 11). Here, the most recent five year strategic plan builds on the previous strategic phases by putting people at the centre of change through improved tools and knowledge in addition to established tenure rights and opportunities for dialogue (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 6). In contrast to those strategies which have been discussed thus far, the role of the Center here is more closely tied to the participating communities directly, in the sense that the organisation itself is a tie

within social networks of access through which members can access those resources central to strengthening capabilities. As was briefly mentioned in the previous section, such *direct* empowerment and collaboration with local people on the ground is very often vital to ensuring that community members not only properly benefit from the networks created, but that they further are able to seize the many livelihood opportunities accessible through community forestry. In other words, the strategies adopted by the Center here allow for the empowerment of community members directly through the allocation of those assets which are central to capabilities for sustainable livelihoods (Scoones 1998).

Where this can be observed in earlier programmes, it has most often been in relation to strengthened capacities to benefit from those ties with key stakeholders for the establishment of rights and tenure. More specifically, this involves people understanding their rights and responsibilities in addition to having the necessary skills for leadership, negotiation and engagement (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 23). This still remains strongly embedded in the organisations programmes, but has recently become further accompanied by projects targeting better opportunities for income generation and livelihood benefits. Such attempts include the creation of self-organised communities with improved business skills, so that members are better equipped to respond to various investment projects as well as developing more in-demand products for local businesses to generate additional profits (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 32). In a recent project in Cambodia, for instance, community members in the Kravanh district in Pursat Province were invited to participate in trainings on livelihoods and markets, where they could learn about developing community forestry enterprise plans and ways to draw on private sector ties to access markets. The case story highlights an initiative taken by a group of members who, after receiving the training, decided to move away from collecting wooden poles to sell to businesses and instead start producing wooden furniture and swings—a shift which marginally increased their profits and subsequently allowed them to expand their businesses and sales (RECOFTC 2018b, p. 4). However, the workshops do not stop there; in addition to training on markets and consumer trends, the Center further works with participants to improve techniques for specific activities, as well as providing additional support through the distribution of useful resources. Besides linking the women to key stakeholders, the Center's involvement in the Sarlahi district in Nepal extended into the training for the wife and husband of the corresponding households on health, bee identification and honey collection so as to ensure that they would have the knowledge and skills to generate the most income from the beehives. Furthermore, the project distributed the necessary tools for more efficient beekeeping and harvesting (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 7).

Seeing as one of the core objectives of the Center's programmes is ensuring that local communities derive fair benefits from forest resources and are able to secure their livelihoods, the direct empowerment pertained to here is indeed truly imperative. Certainly, power asymmetries do not only influence which households are better equipped to access key stakeholders, but further determine who may be able to derive greater benefits from forest resources. Even though all members of the community may have equal access to forest resources through established rights, better-off households are often more likely to derive greater benefits as

they use more advanced equipment and have more capital to invest (RECOFTC 2013a, p. 33). In other words, they are better able to draw on the various mechanisms of access identified in Ribot and Peluso's (2003) theory of access, and not just social relations. Here, the Center "empowers and strengthens local people to embolden them to seek fairer benefits," ensuring that they have the means to find solutions themselves to attract and accumulate better resources for strengthened livelihoods (RECOFTC 2018a, p. 14).

It is in this sense that the Center's involvement can be described as helping communities to 'self-help', or as Adams (2003) understands it, enhancing the power of those who lack it and increasing the abilities of people to take control of their circumstances. In many ways, the participation of members in these community-based projects can thus be understood as nourishing those collective capabilities which allow for achievement of actions that the members would not be able to realise through their initial, individual capabilities (Ibrahim 2006). Furthermore, ensuing from these collective capabilities is the increase in options available to people in choosing livelihood strategies and, as a result, the creation of a virtuous feedback mechanism for the improved well-being of communities and their members. To take the case example from Cambodia above, the trainings offered on markets and livelihoods provided members with the means to increase their profits through shifts in business strategies, leading to the accumulation of greater incomes which, in turn, allowed them to increase investments in their businesses and further expand their market ties. Through actively working with the communities on how to utilise the various resources distributed for the greatest benefits, the Center therefore sets out to ensure that members will be able to draw on these assets and continuously nourish them long after project completion.

5 Discussion

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore how community-based resource management is employed to secure livelihoods and sustain the environment, and how those strategies involved may reflect the ideas in the theoretical literature surrounding social networks of access. From the analysis of programmes carried out by the Center, it appears that social networks are reflected in such approaches in two distinct ways. First, they are reflected in those ties and partnerships created among communities as well as between communities and key stakeholders for the fostering of enabling social environments. Here, the linking of communities to key stakeholders more specifically ensures access in the sense of rights and tenure, or the enhanced economic value of environmental resources to local people. While such strategies may not necessarily strengthen the capabilities of community members directly—and thus do not fully make for the praise attributed to social networks in the literature—they do make possible the realisation of conditions fundamental to access recognised in its various forms. By contrast, the bridging across communities can to some extent strengthen collective capabilities through mutual support, encouragement and knowledge exchange; helping to maintain the conditions realised through linking ties in those instances where intra-community assets are not alone sufficient, and enlightening members on the many livelihood opportunities in the sustainable management of resources. Second, organisations can themselves be a tie in the social network through which community members can access those resources central to capabilities for sustainable livelihoods. More specifically, organisations here may distribute information and training in addition to useful tools and support, providing community members with the means to take control of their circumstances and find solutions to attract and accumulate better resources themselves.

Although the literature on sustainable livelihoods, access and capabilities have pointed to social capital in the form of networks and relations as key in poverty–environment interactions, studies of community-based approaches have by and large pertained to social capital for co-operation and norms favouring sustainable use in collective resource management. While there is little doubt that these are valuable functions of social capital, the results in this thesis demonstrate that community-based approaches drawing on social networks may further strengthen such local engagement through the enablement of access to those resources determining the options available to community members in choosing livelihood strategies. If the literature emphasising the enhancement of these options as central to on-the-ground sustainable development is right, this could very well even be among the key functions of community-based approaches. As such, I find it surprising that it has not received greater attention, especially when considering the praise attributed to communities in literature and policy. However, this is not

to say that all community-based approaches faultlessly act in favour of those members in the communities which hold fewer endowments. As was alluded to in the analysis, this often requires both the indirect and direct empowerment of communities to ensure that members not only properly benefit from their enhanced network ties, but that they are further able to seize the many livelihood opportunities made possible through these. Certainly, where there are no proper ties to key stakeholders, strengthened capabilities are less likely to foster secure livelihoods if there is no enabling social environment. Similarly, while such an enabling environment can very well increase the options available to the poor, it might not with full certainty bring about improvements in livelihoods where local capabilities to seize opportunities are insufficient.

With that, the results in this thesis further suggest that support by an outside organisation is central to ensuring that those social networks of access embedded in community-based approaches act in favour of the less endowed members. More specifically, in the linking of communities to key stakeholders, the presence of the implementing organisation actively worked to establish these partnerships on the basis of mutual respect and the fair share of benefits. Perhaps more importantly, the role of the organisation in those projects aiming to directly strengthen the capabilities of community members cannot be overlooked, as it facilitated certain achievements which would not have been possible without those principal resources accessed through participation. While this is in line with the suggestions in the literature that such outside support very often is critical to overcome the challenges posed by limited access to the resources conducive to such progress, it calls into question how social networks of access are reflected in locally initiated projects which do not receive such outside support. Instances such as these could potentially illuminate alternative functions of social networks of access in local resource management which were not explored in this thesis.

Finally, some notes remain to be made regarding whether or not the findings of this thesis are suggestive of broader trends in development practice employing community-based approaches. The results here proved notably fruitful in light of the subject matter having received little previous attention and, while the objective has not been to generalise, this does raise questions about whether the results demonstrate a single occurrence or if they can be observed beyond this single-case study. As has been mentioned earlier, the form and function of community-based resource management varies considerably, ranging from those concentrating on the greater inclusion of local people in decision-making processes to those actively working to embolden communities and their members. Located closer to the latter end of the spectrum, the strategies employed by the Center are thus more likely to be reflective of social networks of access than those less concerned with the strengthened capabilities of local people.

6 Conclusion

There is no denying that communities have a key role to play in the achievement of the two central goals of poverty alleviation and environmental conservation. At the same time, local people around the globe are constrained by limited options to secure their welfare in an environmentally sound manner. By analysing strategies of an organisation employing community-based resource management as a means to secure livelihoods and sustain the environment, this thesis has shown how organisations may draw on social networks to empower local communities in two distinct ways. First, the creation of ties among communities as well as between communities and key stakeholders may realise the necessary conditions for an enabling social environment. Second, organisations can themselves be ties within such social networks through which community members can access the support, information and training central to capabilities for sustainable livelihoods. The two of these are in many ways mutually reinforcing, and it is when combined that the community-based initiatives drawing on these can properly address the many constraints on the local sustainable use of resources.

This has been a first step in exploring community-based resource management from this alternative angle. I encourage others to carry out further research within this promising research area. As the results here proved contingent on the outside support provided by an organisation, potential avenues of future research is the exploration of social network functions in examples of locally initiated projects with no outside support. Alternatively, studies of the many forms of community-based resource management employed in programmes could potentially illuminate other features of social networks in this context. I have no doubts that there is more to this angle than that which has been covered in in this thesis, and that we still have plenty to learn from community-based resource management in the pursuit of sustainable development on the ground.

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