

Our seminars



SUMMARY

26/06/2023 – **Social capital and targeted beneficiaries of a development project: A lab in the field experiment in rural Zimbabwe**

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Community-based development (CBD) projects have played a significant role in development assistance for several decades, emphasizing a bottom-up approach that prioritizes beneficiary involvement in project design and management. For CBD initiatives to succeed, communities must harness their social capital, organizing themselves and actively engaging in development processes. While proponents highlight the promotion of social capital through community-based projects, critics argue that their effectiveness relies on pre-existing levels of trust, trustworthiness, and community interactions. This paper examines the pre-existing social capital of individuals targeted by an NGO in Zimbabwe. We investigate the differences in networks between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, exploring whether these networks translate into increased trust, altruistic behaviors, and willingness to participate in collective action. Our study, conducted in the rural district of Murehwa, Zimbabwe, employed a survey and lab-in-the-field experiments involving 341 individuals in 2022. Our study finds that beneficiaries indeed exhibit higher network levels compared to non-beneficiaries. However, we did not observe behavioral differences between the two groups before project implementation. Beneficiaries did not exhibit higher levels of trust, altruism, or participation in public goods provision. These findings shed light on the selection process of development projects and the inherent bias it introduces. It is crucial to take into account individuals' social capital levels, especially since they are linked to poverty status.