

A Theoretical Framework for Understanding MCC's Emphasis on Relationships

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*B*ut relationships are the most important part of our work. . . . As a former MCC worker who has intermittently worked with MCC over the past 20 years, I routinely have encountered statements stressing the importance of building relationships. Orientation sessions in Akron would discuss their significance. Country directors would affirm their centrality to new MCC service workers. Storytelling excursions by returned MCC workers would highlight the key role played by relationships in their work. Books on MCC celebrated MCC's diverse relationships.

However, despite the general acknowledgement that building relationships is an important organizational value, there has always been some difficulty within MCC in defining exactly *why* relationships are important. For the most part, development-focused efforts at justifying relationships within MCC have been pragmatic allusions to enhancing program efficiency, taking the form of claims such as, "If we build relationships, we will be better able truly to ascertain community needs," or "If we build relationships then people will be

more willing to participate in our programs or adopt our innovations." However, this pragmatic emphasis does not reflect, at least not fully, the importance that building relationships occupies within MCC lore. Enhanced program efficiency would not explain why a country director might tell a new service worker that "it doesn't matter what you actually do in the community, so long as you build relationships while doing it."

An MCC Board member once commented to me, "You know, what MCC needs is a theoretical framework for relationship building." A good theoretical framework should be able to articulate a rationale for the intrinsic value MCC lore places on relationships and provide a means for analyzing MCC's non-program impact in community development. An articulated framework could also provide a mechanism for incorporating relationship building into program planning and program design.

This chapter should be considered an initial foray into developing such a framework. The essay is largely based on my doctoral research in MCC Bolivia in summer 2000. However, I will also draw on anecdotal experiences as a former MCC worker in Nicaragua, Lesotho, Bolivia, and Somalia and more recently as an MCC consultant to Colombia, Haiti, Uganda, and Bolivia for insight regarding the role of relationships in MCC and trends in MCC programming.

Two major constructs are presented as part of the analysis: social density and social capital. Emile Durkheim's model of *social density* emerged in the nineteenth century and has not normally been applied to community development work, but some elements in this model provide insights into the connection between relationships and development. The second construct, *social capital*, is a relatively recent phenomenon that only became widely applied to community development about fifteen years ago. Although social capital is the more contemporary construct, this narrative will first briefly cover Durkheim's concept of social density because it serves as the intellectual progenitor to the subsequent social capital literature.

DURKHEIM, SOCIAL DENSITY, AND DEVELOPMENT

Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist of the late nineteenth century and one of the greatest sociological theorists ever, developed models of society that have influenced generations of researchers within disparate fields, including international development, where his models served as the foundation for modernization theory, one of

the principle paradigms of development.¹ Durkheim developed the concept of *social density* as a model to explain variations in societies.² He posited that certain societal characteristics could be deduced from the shape of social networks. Durkheim considered a society's social density to be a measure of the frequency and diversity of the social interactions within a given space. In Durkheim's framework, a social interaction was a moment of focused, ritualized interaction between two individuals or among a group of individuals. These interactions could range from relatively informal and simple greeting rituals ("Hi, how are you?") to more elaborate occasional ceremonies such as weddings or funerals, as well as simple everyday activities such as cooking together or farming together. The key element in all was a moment of shared interaction. These moments of shared interactions create a relationship bond ranging from slight and tenuous to deeper and longer lasting. A collection of social interactions within a group over time will build a sense of solidarity and cohesion between and among individuals.

Table 1: Societal Characteristics in High and Low Social Density

| Low Social Density | High Social Density |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generalist • Concrete forms of thought • Use of context-specific language • A religion based on a personal relationship to a deity • Intolerant • Slow rates of change • Strong sense of individual identity • Strong emphasis on community | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specialist • Abstract forms of thought • Use of context-neutral language • A religion based on an abstract concept of deity (the divine life force, "that of God in all of us", etc.) • Tolerant • Rapid rates of change • Weak sense of individual identity • Strong emphasis on individual freedom |

However, these social interactions do more than create a relationship bond; they also embed ideas. Durkheim posited that any ritualized interaction, no matter how informal or brief, contained implicit ideas or values planted within the participating individuals. The

more an individual engages in a particular social interaction, the stronger the implicit values become embedded in the individual.

Durkheim contended that individuals in a low social density context would share similar characteristics including being generalists, using a concrete, simplified language, and having a strong sense of identity. In contrast, individuals in a context of high social density would be more specialized, use a more abstract language, and have a weaker sense of identity.³ Subsequent theorists throughout the late 1800s and early 1900s applied Durkheim's ideas of social density to a range of phenomena from religion to economics to social change. The graph above depicts some of the societal characteristics ascribed to low and high social density contexts.⁴

Community development is a field devoted to intentional social change, facilitating the acceptance of new ideas in a context, and encouraging individuals to think creatively about solutions to community-based issues. In addition, initiatives such as micro-enterprise and alternative agriculture are based on encouraging individuals to find economic "niches" that they can occupy to increase household income.⁵ Drawing on the social density model, one could say that the community development worker is trying to create a higher social density context—one that would see a more rapid rate of change, greater tolerance of diversity, an ability to think abstractly, and an emphasis on economic specialization. It follows then that changes in a community that create a higher social density—changes that increase the frequency and diversity of social interactions—should have consequences for development beyond specific programs.

Consider then the hypothetical scenario of a North American development worker sent to a country like Bolivia and placed in a relatively isolated rural community. The presence of this worker represents an automatic increase in the diversity found in the community. As they engage in the life of the community, such workers must perforce engage in social interactions with the community members around them—i.e., relationship building. If one steps back from the scene and measures the social density of the community, one could argue that the presence of a foreign worker will slightly increase the social density of the community through a slight increase in the frequency and a slight increase in the diversity of social interactions within the context. According to Durkheim, this slight increase in social density should also be accompanied by a slight increase in tolerance, a higher rate of change, and more creativity—regardless of what the worker actually does in the community.

There are some caveats to this conclusion. The presence of diversity in a community does not automatically imply an increase in community social density. Actual social interactions have to take place across this diversity. Durkheim's models allowed for pockets of relatively higher and lower social density in a region. Individuals who engage in more frequent and more diverse social interactions will occupy a higher level of social density than individuals who do not.

One can use this social density framework to interpret the impact of a community development worker's relationship building. If workers choose to disengage from the community and simply focus on their project work ("I only drill wells"), they will limit the frequency of their social interactions in the community and thus have less influence on community social density. If a worker only interacts with one segment of the community, then the benefit of social interaction diversity will only accrue to that segment of the community, meaning that one part of the community may experience a slight increase in social density but that the rest of the community will maintain its old level. Finally, if a worker is traveling throughout a wide region and has only infrequent social interactions, then the impact of these interactions is diminished, as Durkheim's models require repetitive social interactions to build higher social density.

SOCIAL DENSITY AND MCC RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In my research of MCC community development efforts in Bolivia, I focused on the positive and negative *unintended* consequences of an MCC worker presence. One of the common patterns that emerged confirmed the correlation of positive unintended consequences with higher social density. When MCC workers focused their time on a single community, intentionally engaged in a broad range of village life, and worked to build relationships with all sectors of a community, social density and positive unintended consequences emerged. In contrast, negative unintended consequences were most often correlated with MCC workers choosing to focus on their work to the exclusion of community life, trying to cover a broad zone or region, and focusing on a single sector of a community.⁶

The social density model can be brought to bear on the debated question of whether MCC should focus on placing international workers or on hiring local national workers to undertake community development work. From a transfer of technology perspective, hiring local national workers would make sense. They should already be fa-

miliar with the context, should have had training relevant to the needs of the community, and should already be able to speak the language. Everett Roger's work on the diffusion of innovations contended that change agent *homophily*—meaning how similar they were to the target population—was an important factor for whether a new innovation became widely adopted.⁷ From this perspective, hiring a local national worker should create greater program effectiveness.

However, a foreign worker should have a greater impact on social density since one of the measures of increasing social density is the diversity of social interactions found in a context. A foreign worker will represent greater social diversity than a local national and their social interactions should lead to higher social density than an equivalent national worker. Hiring local national workers might increase program effectiveness, but placing international MCC workers should have greater unintended consequences because of their greater influence on community social density.

This local national versus international worker debate became particularly acrimonious in MCC Africa several years ago but has surfaced periodically in all regions. Applying the social density model to the debate suggests that the debate is between enhancing program effectiveness, on the one hand, and maximizing positive unintended consequences, on the other. Since these two models address very different dimensions of development work, this debate not surprisingly can become heated and has probably been exacerbated precisely because MCC lacks a relationship model for unintended consequences to incorporate alongside its program effectiveness models.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Social capital is a relatively recent model located within the Durkheimian intellectual tradition.⁸ Although theorists and researchers had been studying the effects of social networks for decades, social capital literally roared onto the community development scene in the early 1990s, popularized by a series of articles by Robert Putnam culminating in his essay, "Bowling Alone: The Decline of Social Capital in America."⁹ Community development researchers turning their energies to the task of understanding the role of social capital within community development generated literally thousands of articles during the latter half of the 1990s.¹⁰ Social capital is now considered to be an integral component of community de-

velopment and has provided a useful framework for understanding the unintended positive and negative consequences of NGOs working in community development.¹¹

Social capital has generally been defined as "the features of social organization, such as social networks, norms, and values which help coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit."¹² Social capital is the facilitating agent that allows for rapid citizen mobilization and has a multiplier effect on other forms of community capital development.¹³

Putnam described four types of capital inherent in all communities: natural resource, infrastructural, human, and social capital.¹⁴ He contended that a sustainable community would have all four of these capitals in balance. Putnam's framework gave community development workers a model for identifying what types of community development would be most appropriate in any given context. Where natural resource capital was degraded, environmental conservation efforts could be implemented, whereas if human capital was missing, skills training programs could be developed.

This community capital framework was later expanded and modified.¹⁵ However, the role of social capital has most captured the imagination of researchers. It was an "invisible" capital—difficult to see by an outsider but nevertheless crucial for the well-being and sustainability of the community and necessary for the success of other development programs.

Numerous writers have stressed the contribution that dense and overlapping social networks make to a community's social capital. These networks can consist either of the formal associational networks found in civic groups or the informal social networks present in any community or region.¹⁶ Both types of networks are important for social capital. These networks allow for the flow of information throughout a community, permit exchanges to occur, and provide a matrix within which to carry out community analysis, discussion, and consensus building.

Still, the mere existence of social networks does not imply a high level of social capital. Initial models contended that the patterns of organization in the social networks would yield different forms of social capital, not all healthy.¹⁷ Butler Flora classified a community's social capital as horizontal, hierarchical, or non-existent based on the type of social networks present in the community.¹⁸ Social networks that are dense, overlapping, and promote egalitarian exchanges give rise to *horizontal social capital*—a positive force for development. In contrast, *hierarchical social capital* contained strong vertical networks

with weak or non-existent horizontal networks. Patron-client relationships or communities that depend upon a single industry typically exemplify hierarchical social capital.¹⁹ This hierarchical type of social structure was prevalent in areas of persistent poverty and was an impediment to sustainable community development.²⁰ *Non-existent social capital* resulted from extreme isolation and the absence of any social networks. Communities with non-existent social networks are characterized by high rates of transition, high levels of crime and delinquency, and low trust.²¹

Flora and Flora later refined the definition of social capital to include *bonding* and *bridging* components (see Table 2).²² Bonding social capital referred to the degree of internal cohesion and solidarity within a group. Bridging social capital referred to the number of external connections outside of the group. Healthy communities would contain both strong bonding capital and strong bridging capital. Unhealthy communities would be weak in one or both of these dimensions.

Table 2: Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

Social capital does not consist solely of the network structures in a community but also encompasses the set of norms embedded

| | Low | Bridging Social Capital | High |
|------------------------|------|---|--|
| Bonding Social Capital | Low | <i>Individualism</i> Few connections between individuals. The wealthy tend to substitute economic capital for social capital (security, etc.) while the poor have few options. | <i>Regionalism</i> Strong group identities, but little connection between groups. Region very resistant to change. |
| | High | <i>Clientelism</i> Low sense of community identity, regional change promoted by connections to external interests | <i>Progressive Participation</i> Regional change driven by community needs and interests. Vital and healthy dynamics. |

within these social relationships. According to the social density model, a specific social interaction in the networks will embed specific ideas. While these interactions may create a relationship bond, some types of social interaction can create negative complications. One such factor is the presence of power differentials.²³ Significant power differentials embedded in a social interaction can inhibit trust formation, limit the potential for reciprocal exchanges, and create one-way relationships leading to hierarchical social capital.²⁴ Theorists identified a set of norms important for strong social capital in a community—including trust, reciprocity, accountability, inclusiveness, and symbolic diversity—and proceeded to examine how interaction rituals may foster (or inhibit) the creation of these norms in a community.²⁵

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The NGO Worker and Social Capital

Since social capital is the product of the social interactions and networks in a community, factors that impinge on these social networks will have an effect on social capital—intentional or not.²⁶ Most development organizations tend to emphasize technical, economic, or political development efforts rather than social capital. Nevertheless, these initiatives will affect social capital through the distortion or creation of social networks, the changing of values or norms, or the construction of new forms of interaction and leadership structures. In addition, the presence of NGO workers in a community or region will influence the social networks, norms, and values in the community as a byproduct of their presence and relationships.²⁷ In this analysis, four dimensions are important: trust, power, bonding/bridging capital, and informal networks.

Norms of Trust

NGO program plans are implemented through the actions and interactions of specific individuals (e.g., development officials, extension officers, or government representatives). The levels of trust embedded in these specific social relationships will influence not only the degree of community receptivity but also the social capital and norms present in the community. The more that NGO workers establish trust or engage in rituals that emphasize trust, the more they will increase social capital reserves in a community.

Power Differentials

As mentioned earlier, extreme power differentials are problematic for social capital. Power differentials embedded in the relationships between development personnel and community target populations can inhibit trust formation as well as creating hierarchical social networks. Although he does not use social capital vocabulary, Chambers' critique of the professional, mainstream development programs emphasizes the problems inherent in low social network integration and high power differentials.²⁸ Vergara argues that many NGOs create power differentials and hierarchical networks when they enter a community. When NGOs focus on a community's weaknesses, participants relate to NGOs as *beneficiaries*. Community members form relationships with the NGO personnel from a position of weakness and create patron-client networks.²⁹

Bridging and Bonding Capital

Development workers in a community with weak bridging capital may find that they can be most effective in strengthening social capital by connecting community groups with each other (or to outside of the community). At the same time, development workers in a community with weak bonding capital may be able to create internal cohesion and solidarity through shared, collective activities. The relationships the NGO worker forms through shared activities will be an important factor influencing the quality of social capital in the community.³⁰

Formal and Informal Interactions

While the social interactions generated by an NGO worker's formal development workshops and meetings are often documented, the informal interactions of the NGO worker are less systematized. Research findings consistently cite the importance of informal interpersonal interactions in promoting community development.³¹ Most professional development programs attempt to create learning through formal interactions (e.g., workshops, seminars, or trainings) and in the process minimize the role of informal interactions. While there is a role for formal structures in community development, this bias underestimates the influence that informal interactions and long-term interactions can play in social learning and in creating this important bridging and bonding capital.³²

The value of the social network integration of change agents, informal interactions, and trust-building are not necessarily new concepts within the field of development. However, interpreting these

principles through the lens of social capital suggests that these elements have implications that reach beyond enhancing program effectiveness. An NGO program that negatively affects the social capital in a community can depress the potential of the community in other endeavors.

NGO programs may thus need to be evaluated not only in terms of whether they have accomplished their goals related to technology transfer or economic development but also in terms of whether they have positively or negatively affected social capital. Ironically, NGO projects labeled successes may actually reduce social capital and thereby depress community potential. Conversely, NGO projects labeled failures may actually enhance community development if they created greater levels of healthy social capital.

MCC AND SOCIAL CAPITAL: A BOLIVIA RESEARCH PROJECT

During the late 1990s my doctoral research on MCC examined how MCC workers affected community social capital. The project focused on a single region of Bolivia—the Yapacani Regional Development Program. The Yapacani colonization zone is located about 120 kilometers northwest of the city of Santa Cruz, where from 1990 to 1999 MCC operated an integrated development program.

The program contained two distinct components. First, an extension and rural development program based in the northern section of the Yapacani zone operated with personnel placed in local communities and carried out community development activities in these communities around agriculture, health, and education. Second, MCC personnel based in the region's central town promoted institutional strengthening among the Yapacani institutions and all the communities in the region. The research findings identified programmatic factors that enhanced and hurt community social capital.

MCC program elements that enhanced community social capital included low resource availability, worker placement in specific local communities, the practice of personal and program values that emphasized power devolution (e.g., servanthood values from a faith-based perspective or a simple living ethic), shared collaborative activities, and activities such as farmer-to-farmer visits that convened disparate groups together.

Low budget and minimal program resources

Economic wealth and status are one source of power. MCC generally operated with extremely low budgets. Programs usually allocated enough for the maintenance of program personnel, but with few, if any, additional resources for program infrastructure or funding projects. Having small budgets made community-based MCC personnel doing extension work more dependent on neighbors for carrying out program activities. This dynamic in turn encouraged reciprocal exchanges and reduced power differentials between the volunteers and the community. The minimal resources also encouraged more creative approaches to problem solving that drew on social capital reserves for successful implementation.

Placing personnel in communities

Assigning MCC workers to live in communities opened opportunities for forming relationships and for deep integration into rural social networks. Volunteer integration into community social networks helped network expansion and allowed for the volunteer perspectives and insights to be integrated into the community decision-making matrix (increasing social density). Placing volunteers in communities also reduced power differentials between the community members and the MCC staff, equalizing status and thus allowing horizontal relationships to form.

Values

MCC workers often possessed personal values or attitudes that motivated efforts to reduce power differentials between themselves and community members. For example, MCC recruits place a high priority on service and servanthood. Hence MCC personnel in Bolivia often intentionally sought to place themselves in positions of relatively low power in community dynamics; rather than arriving with an attitude of "We are here to teach you" they came with an attitude of "We are here to serve you." This value stance had the effect of helping to promote horizontal relationships and because of the specific social interactions involved, also embedded these servanthood values.

Egalitarian involvements

A former MCC country director once commented that "Relationships are built through shared activities." In this spirit volunteers thus worked alongside farmers harvesting their crops, clearing the land, or helping out with community-level projects. By working side-by-side with community members in shared activities rather than as

supervisors or trainers, volunteers reduced power differentials between themselves and community members and promoted the creation of horizontal networks with the community members with greater trust embedded in the networks.

Ecumenical approaches

MCC volunteers tended to participate in the communities' religious life, an important social networking context.³³ The volunteers' willingness to participate in community spiritual life gave them greater credibility with community members and increased their acceptance among the people. Furthermore, in the interest of relating to all the community members and not appearing to take sides, MCC personnel living in communities usually adopted an ecumenical approach and supported any church denominations present. They also carried out community-wide activities (both secular and religious) that incorporated both church bodies. These ecumenical practices encouraged the creation of overlapping networks that crossed religious boundaries, fostered increased tolerance between members of different churches, and strengthened the norm of inclusiveness.

Farmer-to-farmer exchange programs

An evaluation of the Yapacani program found that farmer-to-farmer exchanges were frequently mentioned program highlights even though MCC viewed these as minor components to the program. When asked to elaborate, community interviews detailed that it was relatively rare for farmers to have a chance to visit non-family members in different communities. Farmer-to-farmer exchanges gave people opportunities to make connections and build relationships with others that they would not normally have met, promoting bridging social capital between groups.

Informal and long-term interactions versus the legitimization of presence

Placing volunteers in communities and emphasizing the importance of personal relationships helped volunteers integrate into the informal and long-term community networks where much collective learning occurs. This integration helped enhance community reflection and analysis on issues.

FACTORS REDUCING SOCIAL CAPITAL

Other aspects of the MCC program reduced social capital levels, reinforcing power differentials and inhibiting volunteer integration into community social networks. These included the following:

High resource availability

Persistent corruption in Bolivia has created an environment of suspicion and distrust surrounding any type of financial or material allocation.³⁴ Such suspicion has made it difficult for communities and NGOs to work together when large amounts of financial or material resources are at stake.

The MCC personnel in the Yapacani program reasoned that communities needed to take charge of their own development rather than rely on these NGOs of whom they were suspicious. This led them to develop a program where communities would write and submit their own projects for donor funding. Unfortunately, this move had negative unintended consequences; in spite of MCC's intentions, communities were still dependent on an NGO in the process, namely, MCC. The fact that the program required MCC to act as a "gatekeeper" for access to international donor funds unintentionally created hierarchical networks between community members and MCC workers. Suspicions around possible embezzlement also eroded the levels of trust that MCC personnel had been able to establish with rural community members.

Zone-wide coverage

The region-wide component of the Yapacani program placed personnel in the central town to help operation across the zone. As a consequence, the volunteers living in town were not able to integrate very well into any social network. Communities did not get to know the volunteers and consequently did not trust them as much. Plus, the intermittent social interactions meant that the volunteers had relatively little influence on social density in any one place.

Overemphasis on formal workshops

In many communities, MCC involvement was limited to infrequent, high-intensity workshops with little or no outside interaction. Although the workshops did have a positive impact in some communities, the stand-alone, high-intensity format meant that the workshops did not necessarily contribute to increasing social density (the ideas and norms did not "embed" strongly) and the local social networks were not affected either.

Interchangeability of personnel

In some areas of the program a series of short-term personnel were used interchangeably to continue a process or program. The frequent transitions in MCC personnel inhibited relationship formation, trust building, and social network integration. Regular personnel turnover further resulted in minimizing the potential of MCC workers to strengthen social capital or to increase social density.

QUINCE AND CHALLAVITO: A TALE OF TWO COMMUNITIES

The contrasting experiences of MCC in two rural Yapacani communities highlight different connections among social capital, social density, and development. Quince and Challavito are neighboring communities in the northern section of the Yapacani zone. They have been settled for roughly the same length of time and have similar natural resource and economic capital. MCC worked in both communities for at least six years. However, the two communities demonstrated radically different responses to MCC programs. In Challavito MCC programs yielded encouraging results. The community took the initiative to design, develop, and implement several community-based projects. In contrast, Quince proved to be an extremely problematic experience for MCC workers. Tensions and frustration between MCC workers and community members eventually reached the point that MCC discontinued its work there.

This decision was particularly noteworthy because the Quince leaders were among the first community elder to lobby MCC to set up a rural development program in the Yapacani colonization zone, and early reports contained many positive references to Quince. In contrast, Challavito was an afterthought with little positive comments. The surprising divergence in the two communities can be attributed to two dimensions: first, existing internal social capital, and second, subtle differences in MCC's programming presence.

Community characteristics

The two communities possessed very different types of social capital. In Quince, a strong, authoritarian leader dominated the community, creating hierarchical social capital. The community also consisted of several relatively autonomous groups that had few connections with each other. Based on the social capital analysis presented earlier, these characteristics would indicate a fairly low level of community social capital dominated by a hierarchical form of social capi-

tal and located in the *clientelism* quadrant of the bridging/bonding table profiled earlier.

In contrast, Challavito was a smaller community that had overlapping horizontal networks with fewer distinct groups creating network gaps. The community had significant internal cohesion and was located in the *regionalism* quadrant of the bridging/bonding table profiled earlier. In addition, there was a tradition within the community of diverse leadership and strong norms related to rotating leadership roles. These factors contributed to a more horizontal form of social capital. The presence of this horizontal form of social capital was reflected in MCC worker reports noting that Challavito community members demonstrated both greater creative analysis during community workshops and were more likely to take advantage of available MCC technical resources.

Differences in MCC programming

The differences in social capital in the two communities may have been present at the beginning of the MCC presence in the region, but subtle differences in MCC programming also influenced the communities' social capital, enhancing the community social capital in Challavito and hurting it in Quince. One of these differences in programming was the relative continuity of the MCC personnel in each community and their integration into the social networks in the communities. MCC placed workers in both Quince and Challavito for the first six years of the Ypacani program. However, the volunteer presence in each community differed significantly.

In Quince, a succession of short-term volunteers lived in the community for periods of several months to one year. Eight different MCC workers worked successively in the community over a six-year period. The quantity of volunteers and the relatively short periods involved meant that it was difficult for trust to build between the community and the specific MCC workers, preventing service workers from integrating into the social networks of the community and reducing the frequency of social interactions (lowering social density). In addition, the two volunteers who did live in the community for relatively longer periods primarily engaged in zone-wide work, spending most of their time visiting other communities. Their continued absences made it difficult to sustain adequate follow-up in Quince and to spend time informally interacting with the community members.

In contrast, Challavito had more stable MCC personnel. Two MCC workers lived in succession in the community for three years

each. The longer time frames allowed for greater trust and social integration to build. In addition, both three-year volunteers made a conscious decision to focus their work on Challavito and the immediate environs. Consequently, the volunteers in Challavito functioned in a manner most consistent with strengthening community social capital and building higher social density. They integrated into the social networks of the community, they interacted informally with the community members outside of the planned program activities, and they built greater levels of trust and cooperation between themselves and community members, enhancing social capital and increasing social density.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND SOCIAL DENSITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MCC AND RELATIONSHIPS

By now, the astute reader will have noted with some discomfort that many of the trends within MCC over the last decade are precisely those elements that might hurt social capital or reduce social density. MCC has shifted from the community-based development worker profiled in this research to a development model that emphasizes donor funding, seconding MCC workers to local organizations (where they usually live in a central town covering an entire zone), using more short-term personnel, and developing a central database for reporting that emphasizes formal programs and program effectiveness rather than unintended consequences and relationship building. While the surge in these directions has its genesis in a variety of complicated internal MCC politics, I would contend that this trend has been somewhat accelerated because of the lack of a good theoretical framework for understanding the unintended consequences of relationship building.

Although the shape of MCC program has changed, a theoretical framework for relationship building using the social capital and social density models still has relevance for MCC into the future. The principles of maximizing social capital and social density can still be applied to the "new" MCC because these principles are transferrable to other forms of social organization. Instead of communities, MCC's work is now with "the community" of local partner organizations. A recent program evaluation I led in MCC Uganda highlights how these principles can be applied to a contemporary MCC.

Partner and peer interviews commended MCC Uganda as being very successful in generating positive unintended consequences because although MCC functioned as a donor, it invested relatively

small amounts of funding (following the "minimize external resources" principle from social capital). The country directors also worked tirelessly to establish close relationships with individuals in local partner organizations (slight increase in local partner social density and social networks) and worked to convene partners together to discuss mutual issues (creating bridging social capital). MCC Uganda was also cited for its country director continuity. Only three country directors had served with MCC Uganda over the last twenty-one years (following the "long term personnel" principle from social capital). MCC Uganda representatives also engaged in informal social interactions and followed a "simple living" ethos (minimizing power differences and creating horizontal relationships), seconded foreign workers to local organizations (following the "maximize diversity" principle in social density), and took care to ensure that placements were not concentrated in any one place (dispersing the impact on social density).

One of the challenges for the country directors was that while their relationship-building efforts were important, these efforts were not readily "seen" in the MCC programming document templates. These templates only "saw" a relationship when a seconded worker or a financial grant was involved. Fraternal organizational relationships (what might be considered the "informal relationships" for the donor-set) did not appear in program documentation, even though these occupied a significant percentage of country director time and energy and were crucial for building good social capital.

Creating bridging social capital between local partner organizations can be an important relationship role for MCC in the future. Instead of focusing on a set of single MCC-partner relationships (with subsequent vulnerabilities to creating a patron-client relationship), MCC might function to create a space where multiple partners can come together to discuss issues of mutual interest and make connections with each other (the equivalent of farmer-to-farmer exchanges for local partners).

This convening role has been described by David Korten and others as a "fourth-generation" development model for international NGOs.³⁵ The international NGO functions as a connector rather than as a provider of funds or training. Convening local partner organizations should enhance the bridging social capital among the community of local organizations. In addition, higher social density should occur because of greater network diversity which should then lead to more abstract thinking (and thus more creativity).

Table 3: Models and "Best Practices" for Relationship Building³⁶

| Social Density | Social Capital |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize diversity in context • Engage in numerous social interactions • Engage in social interactions with numerous groups in context • Engage in repeated social interactions with groups of people • Engage in interaction rituals that highlight specific norms including horizontal relationships, trust, humility, creativity, and servanthood | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimize external resources • Facilitate connections between groups (such as farmer-to-farmer exchanges) • Engage in social interactions within groups that build cohesion and solidarity • Minimize power differentials • Engage in social interaction rituals that highlight specific norms such as trust and generalized reciprocity. • Be present in a context for an extended period of time. • Engage in multiple informal interactions in addition to formal NGO programming. • Avoid patron-client types of relationships • Practice ecumenical relationship building |

While the unit of analysis and social organization may have shifted from a community focus to a local organization focus, the principles highlighted in this essay are still relevant for creating a theoretical framework of relationship building that can allow MCC to identify the positive and negative unintended consequences of its programs and informal actions. Table 3 summarizes the principles profiled in this essay for maximizing social density and social capital through relationships. Awareness of how social density and social

capital are built, I contend, will be crucial for MCC as it reflects on its strategic reasons for working in a personnel-intensive manner and as it considers what relative weight it should place on relationship-building in its future programming.

NOTES

1. For an introduction to Durkheim's work, see John Macionis, *Society: The Basics* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall Press, 2006). On modernization theory, see David Ashley and David Orenstein, *Sociological Theory: Classical Statements*, 5th. ed. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon Press, 2001) and Andrew Webster, *An Introduction to the Sociology of Development*, 2nd. ed. (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press International, 1984).
2. Randall Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions* (New York: Oxford Press, 1994).
3. Macionis, *Society*.
4. Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*.
5. See Terrence and Vernon Jantzi, "Strengthening Civil Society for Rural Development: An Analysis of Social Capital Formation by a Christian NGO in Bolivia," in *Local Ownership, Global Change: Will Civil Society Save the World?* ed. Roland Hoksbergen and Lowell Ewert (Seattle: World Vision Publications, 2002).
6. Terrence Jantzi, "Local Program Theories and Social Capital: A Case Study of a Non-Governmental Organization in Eastern Bolivia," Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 2000.
7. See, for example, Everett M. Rogers, *The Diffusion of Innovations*, 5th. ed. (New York: The Free Press, 2003).
8. For a discussion of social capital, see Collins, *Four Sociological Traditions*.
9. Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6/1 (1995): 65-78.
10. E. Glaeser, L. Laibson, D. Scheinkman, J. Alexandre and C. Soutter, *What is Social Capital? The Determinants of Trust and Trustworthiness* (Cambridge, Mass.: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1999).
11. Jantzi and Jantzi, "Strengthening Civil Society for Rural Development."
12. Cornelia Butler Flora, "Social Capital and Sustainability: Agriculture and Communities in the Great Plains and the Corn Belt," *Research in Rural Sociology and Development: A Research Annual* 6 (1995): 3.
13. Jantzi, "Local Program Theories and Social Capital."
14. Robert D. Putnam, "The Prosperous Community: Social Capital and Public Life," *American Prospect* 13 (2005): 35-42.
15. Mary Emergy and Cornelia Flora, "Spiraling Up: Mapping Community Transformation with Community Capitals Framework," *Journal of the Community Development Society* 37/1 (2006): 19-36.
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nomic Development and Cultural Change 47/4 (1999): 871-897; Jan Flora, "Social Capital and Communities of Place," *Rural Sociology* 63/4 (1998): 481-506; Anthony Bebbington, "Sustaining the Andes: Social Capital and Policies for Rural Regeneration in Bolivia," *Mountain Research and Development* 18/2 (1998): 173-181; Ian Falk and Larry Harrison, "Community Learning and Social Capital: 'Just Having a Little Chat,'" *Journal of Vocational Education and Training* 50/4 (1998): 609-627; S. Green, "Community Practice: Opportunities for Community Building," *Social Work (Maatskaplike Werk)* 34/4 (1998): 362-369; and David J. O'Brien, Andrew Raedeke, and Edward W. Hassinger, "The Social Networks of Leaders in More or Less Viable Communities Six Years Later: A Research Note," *Rural Sociology* 63/1 (1998): 109-127.

17. In addition to Jan Flora, "Social Capital and Communities of Place," and Cornelia Butler Flora, "Social Capital and Sustainability," see Cynthia Duncan, "Understanding Persistent Poverty: Social Class Context in Rural Communities," *Journal of the Community Development Society* 37/1 (1996): 103-124.

18. See Butler Flora, "Social Capital and Sustainability."

19. See Duncan, "Understanding Persistent Poverty," and Alejandro Portes and Julia Sensenbrenner, "Embeddedness and Immigration: Notes on the Social Determinants of Economic Action," *American Journal of Sociology* 98/6 (1993): 1320-1350.

20. So contend Flora, "Social Capital and Communities of Place," and Duncan, "Understanding Persistent Poverty."

21. Edward S. Shihadeh and Nicole Flynn, "Segregation and Crime: The Effect of Black Social Isolation on the Rates of Black Urban Violence," *Social Forces* 74/4 (1996): 1325-1352; and Cornelia Butler Flora, Jan Flora, Jacqueline D. Spears, and Louis E. Swanson, *Rural Communities: Legacy and Change* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1992).

22. Cornelia Flora and Jan Flora, *Rural Communities: Legacies and Change*, 2nd. ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 2008).

23. See A. L. Wilson, "Creating Identities of Dependency: Adult Education as a Knowledge-Power Regime," *International Journal of Lifelong Education* 18/2 (1999): 85-93; and John McKnight, *The Careless Society: Community and Its Counterparts* (New York: Basic Books, 1995).

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25. For social capital and trust, see Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and The Creation of Prosperity* (New York: The Free Press, 1995); for reciprocity, see Putnam, "The Prosperous Community"; on accountability, see R. Vergara, "NGOs: Help or Hindrance for Community Development in Latin America?" *Community Development Journal* 29/4 (1995): 322-328; for inclusiveness, see Flora, "Social Capital and Communities of Place"; and on symbolic diversity, see Cornelia Butler Flora, "Building Social Capital: The Importance of Entrepreneurial Social Development," *Rural Development News*

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28. Robert Chambers, *Challenging the Professions: Frontiers for Rural Development* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1993).

29. Veraga, "NGOs: Help or Hindrance."

30. See Flora and Flora, *Rural Communities*.

31. Falk and Harrison, "Community Learning and Social Capital" and S. Green, "Community Practice."

32. In addition to Falk and Harrison, see C. Frankfort-Nachmias and J. P. Palen. "Neighborhood Revitalization and the Community Question," *Journal of the Community Development Society* 24/1 (1993): 1-14.

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34. D. Hertzler, "Settlers' Communities in the Bolivian Lowlands: Local Organizations, National Networks, and U.S. Intervention." Master's Thesis. University of Iowa, 1995.

35. See the discussion in Jantzi, "Local Program Theories and Social Capital."

36. Information taken from Jan Flora, "Social Capital and Communities of Place."