



*It's who you know
that counts*



The Role of the Voluntary Sector in the
Development of Social Capital in Rural Areas

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1 Introduction

The concept of Social Capital sounds complicated, but it couldn't be simpler, do you trust people? How many clubs, societies or social groups are you a member of? If your child gets sick do you have support to call on? Basically how much social contact do you have in your life? These social ties, according to research will help you live longer and are probably worth money to the economy'.¹

Put simply, the idea behind social capital is that social networks, and the mutual trust they promote, have a value, both to the individual and to society at large. The concept of social capital is closely allied to the idea of civil society and discussions about both often focus on voluntary action and what is sometimes called the 'third sector' – the area of social activity that belongs neither to the state or to private business. Because voluntary action engages and connects people there is an implicit assumption that it contributes to the development of social capital. Certainly, the increasing use of the term in public policy circles provides a welcome opportunity for voluntary organisations to promote the role of the sector in building and strengthening communities. However, the exact nature of the relationship between voluntary organisations and the development of social capital is less than clear and discussions about the role and sources of social capital are often quite academic and abstract in their focus.

During the autumn and winter of 2002 NCVO undertook research with the aim of further clarifying the link between voluntary organisations in rural areas and social capital.² To do this we interviewed a cross section of the staff, volunteers, members and beneficiaries of four voluntary organisations based in rural areas of the South West.³ The four organisations involved in the study were:

A Disability Association: a volunteer run and lead self-help group providing mutual support, social activities, transport and training for people with disabilities and their carers. Founded within the last five years it is based in a market town.

A Healthy Living Centre Partnership: this healthy living centre is based in a large village and run by a voluntary sector led cross-sectoral partnership of organisations. Target groups include people with mental health problems, people with disabilities, the unemployed and those who are isolated due to their rurality as well as the wider community within a ten-mile radius of the centre.

An Advice Centre: situated in a major market town, this small, independent advice centre serves the whole district. The centre provides free advice and support on a range of issues through its network of volunteer advisors.

A Community Group: this relatively young organisation is based in a small village and is open to all residents of the village and the surrounding parishes. Its aims are to develop a regeneration strategy for the area and to establish a voluntary organisation to implement that strategy. The group is entirely volunteer run and led.

¹ Rural Community Network NI (2003) Rural Network News 34, 10.

² For more details of the research methodology please see Annex 1.

³ For more detailed case studies of the four organisations studied see Annex 2.

The main objective of this research was to explore how social capital is generated by, or related to, different kinds of voluntary sector activity within rural communities and to identify areas of practical learning for policy makers and voluntary organisations working in rural areas.⁴

There are strong reasons for undertaking a review of social capital within a rural context. 28% of the population of England currently live in rural areas and the rural population is growing three times faster than that in urban areas. The Countryside Agency's Rural Services Survey 2002⁵ suggests that a perception that rural residents benefit from higher than average stocks of social capital is a significant factor in driving the population shift away from our cities and towards rural areas, noting that: '*a common motivation for the move into rural areas... is the quest for community identity and a more socially fulfilling lifestyle*'. Yet the report also suggests that:

'some rural communities can suffer from a lack of "social capital"... due to a number of factors including closure of community facilities, decline in religious affiliation, physical isolation, loss of local services and an unbalanced rural population in terms of age and social background that can lead to a loss of community spirit and an increase in isolation for some groups.'

This report forms part of NCVO's programme of research and policy development, focusing specifically on the needs of voluntary organisations working in rural areas. We aim to increase awareness and understanding of the scope and impact of rural voluntary activity and develop and promote policy to support the work of the voluntary sector in rural areas. NCVO's rural work is funded by the Countryside Agency. The aim of this report is to:

- briefly outline the concept of social capital and explore its relevance to the voluntary sector and to the rural agenda,
- explore the relationship between voluntary activity and the development of social capital in rural areas; and
- explore the policy implications of the relationship between voluntary activity and social capital in rural areas.

This is a substantive report, exploring the findings from the case study research and the associated policy analysis in detail. Chapter eight contains a summary of conclusions and a full executive summary is also available.

⁴ For more details about NCVO's wider programme of research looking at the relationship between social capital and the voluntary sector please see: Jochum, V. (2003) Social Capital: beyond the theory, NCVO.

⁵ Available at <http://www.countryside.gov.uk/ruralservices/keyservices.htm>

2 Background

What is Social Capital?

It's not what you know...

It is interesting to note that what is thought to be the first recorded use of the term 'social capital' was in relation to rural communities. Lyda Hanifan, writing in 1916 on the importance of community participation in rural schools in West Virginia coined the term in reference to:

'those tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of people: namely good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse'.⁶

Although the concept has a long history it has been the subject of a significant explosion of interest in public policy circles in recent years. A recent study estimated that the number of journal articles referring to 'Social Capital' had increased approximately tenfold between 1991 and 1999.⁷ As a consequence of the high level of interest and debate generated by the subject there are a number of definitions of social capital. However, the author who has perhaps contributed the most to making the concept popular is Robert Putnam, who defined it as the:

'features of social organization, such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit'.⁸

Similarly, Michael Woolcock writing in 2001 identified an emerging consensus around the definition of social capital as *'the norms and networks that facilitate collective action'.⁹*

The basic premise is that relationships foster mutually accepted 'norms' of behaviour and in particular generate reciprocity and trust within groups. These are beneficial because they make the achievement of objectives easier and the resolution of problems more effective. The most common ways of measuring social capital tend to centre on issues around trust (trust of neighbours, peers, institutions, government etc.) and civic participation. Research will often focus on measuring levels of generalised trust and counting formal membership of organisations such as associations, charities or faith-related groups.

Causes and Effects of Social Capital

Discussions about social capital focus on both its causes and its effects. The phrase 'social capital' refers both to the collective value of all 'social networks' (the relationships between individuals and groups) and also to the outcomes of these relationships i.e. norms of behaviour, attitudes, trust. Significant (occasionally extravagant) claims are made for the effects of social capital – for example it is alleged that joining just one group cuts the odds of you dying within the next year in half! It is also suggested that those effects can

⁶ Hanifan, L. J. (1916) 'The Rural School Community Center', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 67, 130-138.

⁷ Harper, R. (2001) Social Capital: a literature review, ONS Social Reporting and Analysis

⁸ Putnam, R. D. (1993) 'The Prosperous Community: social capital and public life', *The American Prospect* 4:13.

⁹ Woolcock, M. (2001) 'The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes', *Isuma* 2:1.

be identified, assessed and in some cases even measured. Studies into social capital range dramatically in scope. Small-scale research at the household and community level has suggested that *'the well-connected are more likely to be housed, healthy, hired and happy'*.¹⁰ At the same time a growing body of evidence suggests that social capital can have a variety of positive impacts on a larger scale, ranging from economic growth and government effectiveness to improved labour market participation, election turnout, educational achievement, lower crime rates, better public health and a general improvement in perceived quality of life.

'Social capital turns out to have forceful, even quantifiable effects on many different aspects of our lives... [there is] hard evidence that our schools and neighbourhoods don't work so well when community bonds slacken, that our economy, our democracy, and even our health and happiness depend on adequate stocks of social capital'.¹¹

It has been recognised, however, that establishing a causal link between social capital and the outcomes attributed to it is not always simple. Many commentators have highlighted a problem in separating cause from effect. Social capital is thought to be *'productive'* i.e. a resource that can be used to facilitate collective action. By the same token, however, collective action is often perceived as a generator of social capital. So, whilst the assumption is that social capital may lead to specific outcomes, the very existence of those outcomes is often used to infer the existence of social capital.

As well as being productive, social capital is thought to be *'cumulative'* i.e. those having social capital are likely to accumulate more. However, it is argued that social capital, like other forms of capital, can also be depleted. Indeed a central theme of Putnam's *Bowling Alone*, the book which is widely credited with raising the profile of the concept, was the decline of social capital in American society over the second half of the twentieth century.

It is important to note that, as well as creating positive effects, social capital can also be associated with negative social impacts. Strong social networks and powerful relationships may be of benefit to those within the group but this does not always translate into benefit for the wider community. Perhaps the most commonly used example of social capital acting in a negative capacity is that of the Mafia and other groups engaged in organised crime, whose activities are often based on high levels of bonding social capital and ideals of reciprocity and trust. However, examples of the negative effects of social capital are not always this extreme and can be found much closer to home. Research by the Countryside Agency finds that:

'powerful communities can have disadvantages – lack of privacy, social claustrophobia, cliquiness and hostility to newcomers'.¹²

Any discussion about social capital and its role in empowering groups and individuals inevitably raises the question of power and who has it. A number of issues associated with strong social capital have been identified,¹³ including:

¹⁰ Woolcock (2001).

¹¹ Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Simon & Schuster, New York.

¹² Countryside Agency (1999) *Living in the Countryside: The needs and aspirations of rural populations*, 4.

¹³ Portes, A. and Landolt, P. (1996) 'Unsolved Mysteries: the Tocqueville files II', *The American Prospect* 7:26.

- **Restrictions on individual freedom**
Communities with strong social capital can exercise tight control over their members, which can result in increased levels of conformity and reduced privacy and autonomy.
- **Downward levelling through peer pressure**
It has been observed that a community that has experienced adversity may sometimes undermine or demoralise those amongst its members that wish to improve their situation.
- **Social exclusion**
Strong ties can lead members of a community to bar others from accessing it. Groups and communities (whether of interest or locality) may be defined by whom they exclude, as well as by their membership.

In many cases the positive or negative perceptions of the effects of social capital are simply open to interpretation. The Countryside Alliance's Rural Regeneration Unit notes that:

*'Country sports as it happens are a particularly rich vein of social capital within rural communities. Research... reveals that some 1,700 volunteer days are involved in hunt social activities. [It] also revealed the importance of social networking amongst hunt car followers who constantly cited the importance of hunting to their social lives.'*¹⁴

The view you take on this will almost certainly depend on your personal views about hunting. By its very nature much of the voluntary sector (and civil society more widely) is made up of special interest groups attempting to improve the quality of life of their membership – from local heritage associations to carers support groups. Some commentators have argued that social capital can reproduce rather than tackle inequalities as those with access to decision making processes and resources build on and strengthen their position to the exclusion of those who do not. One of the key questions we wanted to ask by undertaking this research was: *Who benefits from the social capital that is generated by voluntary and community activity?*

Different Kinds of 'Capital'

Social capital is about who rather than what you know. What you know, for example your education, skills and experience is, in the language of the current debate, often described as 'human capital'. You may also come across 'physical capital', which refers to the tools and other physical resources required in order to undertake an activity (for example: computer hardware, meeting spaces, a Minibus). Lastly, of course, there is 'financial capital'. It is argued that each of these forms of capital have a role to play in social and economic development.



¹⁴ Daly Walton, D. et al. Ed. (2003) 'Rural Regeneration and Real Livelihoods', Rural Regeneration Unit.



3

Bonding, Bridging & Linking

Different Kinds of Social Capital

Just as there are different kinds of social networks there are different kinds of social capital. In fact, there are said to be three different types of social capital: bonding, bridging and linking. Bonding social capital is associated with a sense of common identity and high levels of personalised reciprocity and trust (for example families, close friends and neighbours). Bridging social capital describes looser ties and is associated with more diverse relationships, sustaining generalised reciprocity and trust beyond those who are familiar or well known (for example work colleagues, acquaintances, other communities). Finally, linking social capital is associated with access to, and confidence in, governance structures and institutions and relates specifically to *'the capacity to leverage resources, ideas and information from formal institutions beyond the community'*.¹⁵ Research suggests that while bonding social capital helps people to 'get by' in life and enables them to manage risks better, broader ties in the form of bridging or linking social capital are essential for 'getting ahead' and adapting to change. All three forms of social capital are considered necessary to a strong community and finding the right balance between the three is seen as critical.

It has also been argued that a high stock of bonding social capital can undermine the development of cross-cutting ties (i.e. bridging and linking), which enable the wider 'public good' outcomes that benefit the community at large.¹⁶ Bonding ties provide communities with a sense of identity and common purpose, but without the necessary cross-cutting ties to transcend ethnic, religious, social, geographic or other divides they can also lead to the pursuit of narrow self-interest and to the rejection of outsiders.

It has been argued that bonding social capital often predominates in rural areas where there is a focus on strong family links and close ties between neighbours within small communities. Research looking at levels of social capital in rural Australia has suggested that whilst bonding ties are stronger in rural areas compared to urban areas, the opposite is true of bridging ties.¹⁷ A second Australian study highlighted a lack of diversity amongst rural groups and again argued that this could adversely affect the development of bridging ties.¹⁸ This study also found that rural communities were less likely to have linking ties with institutions such as government, educational and business organisations.

'What we see in these data is an indication that on average rural and remote Australian communities have high levels of bonding ties and a healthy capacity to trust and reciprocate at local level. What is less clear is the extent to which civic and community connections in regional Australia result in generalised trust (beyond the local area), or in connections with power institutions.'

Research undertaken by NCVO in 2001 looking at voluntary organisations working in rural areas also highlighted a potential deficit in bridging and

¹⁵ Woolcock (2001).

¹⁶ Stone, W. and Hughes, J. (2001) 'Sustaining Communities: an empirical investigation of social capital in regional Australia', Paper presented to SEGRA fifth national conference, 10-12 September 2001. Available at www.aifs.org.au/institute/pubs/papers/stone4.html

¹⁷ Onyx, J and Bullen, P (1997) 'Measuring Social Capital in Five Communities in NSW: an analysis', Working Paper 41, Sydney Centre for Australian Community Organisations and Management.

¹⁸ Stone, W. and Hughes, J. (2001).

linking social capital.¹⁹ This was reflected in evidence which suggested that rural voluntary organisations tend to have low levels of contact with other voluntary organisations, government and the private sector. In undertaking this current piece of research we wanted to explore the difference between different types of voluntary activity and the different types of social capital.

Bonding, Bridging and Linking in the Four Case Study Organisations

Bonding social capital involves closed networks and describes strong ties within homogeneous groups.

Bridging social capital involves overlapping networks where a member of one group accesses the resources of another group.

Linking social capital relates to the connections between individuals and groups in hierarchical or power-based relationships.

All three forms of social capital are considered necessary to a strong community and finding the right balance between them is seen as critical.

The findings from our research are interesting in that they demonstrate that each of our case study organisations simultaneously benefits from and contributes to all three kinds of social capital, even where their relationships are largely confined within a reasonably narrow 'local' area. What the findings also highlight is that the different kinds of social capital are present in a different balance in each organisation depending on the aims and objectives and the activities undertaken. The study also suggests that the boundaries between the different types of social capital have the potential to be less clear-cut in a rural environment where communities are smaller and more close-knit than might be the norm in an urban context.

This section looks at the four case study organisations in the context of the three different kinds of social capital and explores the role that the various types of voluntary activity play in the development of each form of social capital.

Bonding Social Capital

Bonding social capital in all four organisations studied is related to common identity, with group members sharing one or several factors in common. These could be aspirations, aims or values (including the organisation's own objectives), personal experience, interests or locality. At the individual level group identity is a vital form of support, helping to overcome personal difficulties, combat isolation and stimulate self-confidence. At the organisational level it facilitates involvement, teamwork and collective action, including establishing and maintaining the social ties which are potential sources of both bridging and linking social capital.

Bonding social capital is particularly strong in organisations where there is a focus on mutual support or self help. The case studies demonstrate the

importance of bonding activity to quality of life, particularly for those at risk of rural isolation or social exclusion. Volunteering activity is another good source of bonding social capital and opportunities to socialise are perceived as a positive incentive to volunteer. The findings also suggest that in generating bonding social capital communities of interest play an equally important role to those of locality. The analysis of bonding social capital across the four organisations highlights the important role that voluntary organisations can play in connecting people and focusing activity around specific areas of need.

Bonding Social Capital: The Disability Association

The Disability Association is an extremely good example of the sector's role in building bonding social capital. Although it is open to all people with disabilities and their carers across the district, the association's active membership is a fairly homogeneous group, made up of people over 50 with disabilities living in and around a rural market town. Entirely volunteer-run and led, the group acts as a mutual support network offering advice, help, training and regular social contact to the disabled.

“We give each other a shoulder to lean on, it's the only way that you can cope”.

The sense of common identity, the regular monthly meetings and the other activities on offer all contribute to reducing the social isolation, which disabled people living in rural areas frequently experience.

“It's lovely to get out of four walls. When I'm at home in my flat it's lovely and cosy. I can see people from the window but there's nothing like meeting and talking to people”.

The Association enables those that suffer from isolation to build new social ties, which in some cases lead to friendships and activities beyond the group.

“They might not have known each other before but because they're involved and they see each other at least once a month, and they see each other more often because they know such and such lives just down the road and round the corner, so I think it's quite important for them”.

Bonding Social Capital: The Healthy Living Centre Partnership

A number of the activities that take place under the aegis of the Healthy Living Centre contribute to the development of bonding social capital. The research shows that amongst the many activities which take place at the Centre, bonding is especially strong amongst those attending the various self-help groups. These groups act as peer support networks for people dealing with specific issues, for example postnatal depression, mental illness or worklessness.

“It's really got me out and I suffered badly from depression, anxiety, panic attacks and everything like that. I wouldn't say I'm 100% but it has brought a difference to my life. It's like another little family really”.

The groups create a supportive environment where people who may feel isolated within the wider community can develop a sense of belonging.

“We’ve all suffered some sort of upset in our lives and what’s nice here is the fact that everybody is so friendly and you feel welcome no matter what you do, you’re just accepted as you are.”

The success of both the Healthy Living Centre and the Disability Association in creating opportunities for mutual support and self-help illustrates the crucial role played by the voluntary sector in facilitating the development of bonding social capital. What these case studies also demonstrate is the importance of communities of interest (as opposed to place) in generating bonding social capital, particularly amongst certain groups at risk of exclusion. This may be particularly relevant in a rural context where communities are smaller and scattered over a wider area. In this context, individuals facing specific challenges such as disability or unemployment may need to travel across geographic and community boundaries to develop relationships with others in a similar situation. A crucial issue in relation to service delivery in rural areas is the difficulty (both logistic and financial) in meeting the specific needs of small numbers of service users (for example adults with learning difficulties) when they are spread out over a large rural area. Our research also demonstrates the important role that voluntary organisations can play in connecting people and focusing activity around a specific area of need. Voluntary organisations in rural areas are often much smaller than their urban counterparts which enables them to respond to the needs of smaller groups of people.

What these findings also highlight is the blurring that can occur in the distinction between bonding and bridging social capital, perhaps particularly in a rural context where geographical communities are smaller. In this case bonding links between those with a shared sense of identity focused on common interests might also be viewed as bridging links between members of different geographic communities or other social groups.

Bonding Social Capital: The Advice Centre

The work undertaken by the Advice Centre does not lend itself primarily to the development of bonding social capital because of the confidential, one-to-one nature of the relationships between the volunteer advisors and their clients. Where the Advice Centre clearly does contribute to the development of bonding social capital is in the engagement of volunteers. Many of the volunteers have a similar profile: retired or semi-retired professionals all of whom are recruited from the local area. They identify themselves as community-minded people and feel that they share a motivation for volunteering:

“I think it’s putting something back, they’ve had a good life, they’re living relatively comfortably and they can afford the time to put something back and help people”.

The atmosphere in the Advice Centre is informal and friendly, which contributes to effective teamwork and low turnover amongst volunteers. In addition to the desire to ‘put something back’, research has suggested that volunteering in rural areas is often viewed as an opportunity to develop social networks – possibly as a means of overcoming isolation. In a qualitative study of participation in formal volunteering in five rural areas in England, 94% of participants stated that their main reason for getting

involved was to enhance their opportunities to socialise. Joining voluntary groups enabled respondents to 'network', 'socialise', 'chit-chat', 'get out', 'mix socially' and 'have a chin wag'.²⁰

“One of the workers actually said to me it was the best club he’d ever joined and the camaraderie was such that he wouldn’t want to leave”.

Bonding Social Capital: The Community Group

Perhaps surprisingly, interviewees from the village community group place the least overt emphasis on the importance of bonding social capital in their activities. The 11 steering committee members certainly share a number of common characteristics. The majority are professionals or ex-professionals, who are over 50 and a number of them class themselves as 'incomers', having come to live in the village within the last 15 or 20 years. They tend to be drawn from amongst the ranks of people who are already active within the community and they perceive themselves as having shared motivations.

“Most people join these things because they want to put something into their communities. There is a huge amount of goodwill and people willing to give up their time for the general good”.

Whilst this apparent homogeneity might create the external impression of strong bonding links, and bonding clearly does take place amongst active members, the perspective from within the group highlights local differences rather than similarities.

“I think a very wide mix of different people [have taken part] including people living in council houses, and people living in big houses with well paid jobs. I think there is a lack of people who come from the southern and the northern end of the village”.

What this perspective demonstrates is the potential for significant variations between external and local perceptions of diversity. There can be a tendency amongst rural policy makers to assume that rural communities are homogenous and that community of place correlates to common identity. However, rural communities themselves may be more likely to focus on local differences. What constitutes difference, what 'local' means in any given context is open to debate. It is important therefore that we avoid making generalised assumptions about the homogeneity of rural communities. Our research shows that one of the key ways in which social capital can be a useful tool for voluntary organisations to evaluate their work and relationships is in the focus it places on exploring ideas of common identity and issues of diversity at the local level.

Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital is a result of the links that are forged across groups or communities of locality and/or of interest. These links enable staff, members, volunteers and beneficiaries to make diverse contacts, increasing the range of expertise, knowledge and resources they can call on. These ties are present in all four organisations but are developed to different degrees, depending of the kinds of activity undertaken. Working in

²⁰ Colin C. Williams (2002) 'Harnessing Voluntary Work: A Fourth Sector Approach', Policy Studies 23:3/4.

partnership with other groups and sectors is relatively rare but where this does take place it demonstrates an impressive potential to both exploit and generate bridging links.

The case studies demonstrate that bridging social capital is particularly important for accessing resources and strengthening the group. It is also very important in the context of encouraging inclusiveness and diversity. In this context bridging activity is not only about networking with external organisations it is also about maximising levels of participation and representation within the group. This is recognised as a major challenge by all four of the organisations studied.

Bridging Social Capital: The Disability Association

As with the Community Group, whilst at first sight they might appear to be relatively homogeneous, members perceive themselves as a diverse group. This is because of the wide range of disabilities that is represented.

“To me it’s a good thing to have people with various disabilities in a group instead of just one sort... if you get a group like this one where there are all disabilities you get a better picture, you get different views on your own disability and on other people’s, you learn more about what their problems are and it works very, very well”.

This diversity fulfils one of the key characteristics of bridging social capital (albeit on a small scale) enabling members of one group to access the resources of another group, in this case by offering members the opportunity to learn from others by exchanging ideas and information to which they might not otherwise have had access.

“They (The County Association for the Blind) come down and show you the various tools and it’s surprising how many people who aren’t blind can find a use for them. A classic example (...) is the game Scrabble. Now for the partially sighted they do huge big tiles, the normal size ones people with arthritis can’t handle them but with these big ones they’re OK”.

Members of the association are often also members of other organisations (for example the Women’s Institute, Polio Fellowship, Association for the Blind). Cross-membership brings further contacts to the group and enhances its networking capabilities to mobilise further resources for the group or its individual members.

“They belong to other groups and from belonging to other groups, they will bring information back to us.”

The group holds regular meetings to which a wide range of external speakers is invited. This demonstrates a desire within the group to be outward looking and inclusive, also reflected in the wide audience for the group’s newsletter. The group recognise, however, that contacts established through the speakers and newsletter remain relatively superficial. One of the gaps the group is keen to tackle is the limited level of contact with younger disabled people. Like all of the organisations surveyed, the average age of Disability Association members is well over 50. The group meets at a local authority community centre which targets services at young adults

with learning disabilities, but in spite of this bridging links with younger people remain limited. The growing emphasis on IT training as one of the Association's key areas of work is viewed as a potential way of reaching out towards a younger generation who are perceived as being more likely to focus on work-related issues than the leisure pursuits which have traditionally formed the group's core activities.

The development of the group's IT skills, especially those linked to the use of the Internet, is a way of encouraging bridging social capital, with members accessing more information sources, taking part in discussion groups and communicating via electronic mail. Interestingly, it is also a strong source of bonding social capital, with many members using their new skills to stay in contact with friends and family who live at a distance.

Bridging Social Capital: The Healthy Living Centre Partnership

The Healthy Living Centre demonstrates the sector's capacity to harness high levels of bridging social capital for the benefit of rural communities, in particular through partnership working and the co-location of services. Part of the Centre's mission is to provide a hub for local services:

“what we wanted to do is have a one stop shop of agencies, basically we're all feeding off each other. People might come in for the pre-school and they see we've got things like the mental health project, or we've got Social Services. One thing leads to another”.

At a local level the Centre networks with the local schools, an out of school club and a gardeners association amongst a range of others. At district level contacts include the Council for Voluntary Service (CVS), the district MIND Association and Further Education College. At county level they engage with the Probation Service, Eating Disorder Association, Business Links amongst others. Some of these organisations are based at the Centre whilst others regularly hire rooms to undertake outreach work. A total of 21 organisations work in partnership with the Centre, contributing in a variety of ways to the achievement of the organisation's objectives, and many more are viewed as informal or potential partners. The project development co-ordinator and individual project managers see exploring the potential for new relationships and establishing ties as a key element of their role.

While many of the Centre's activities are specifically targeted at those most at risk of ill-health and social exclusion, it also aims to be as inclusive as possible by providing a central base from which a variety of services is made accessible and offering a range of services direct to the wider community:

“it is about certain groups who are perceived as vulnerable, but it's also for everybody. We don't think you have to be sick or unwell to benefit. Everybody can get benefit”.

At the personal level, the range of people coming to the Centre from different localities and for different reasons is a potential source of bridging social capital. However, this varies significantly according to the way people use the Centre. Some come to the Centre solely to engage with a particular organisation or project at a given time whereas others make

frequent visits and benefit from several activities. All the core projects within the Centre have been designed to complement each other and aim to maximise the links within the organisation.

“So what has happened to people when they come, is that they may come in for one reason but they very quickly take advantage of other things which are happening here, they want to volunteer or they might want to work in the garden, or they want to use the fresh food co-op. It’s not unusual for somebody to come in and to benefit from all these projects.”

The volunteering project represents an additional source of bridging social capital by providing volunteers with placements in a wide range of organisations (for example a community garden, a prisoner befriending scheme, Riding for the Disabled, Community Education, Sue Ryder). The project gives volunteers and Centre users alike the opportunity to meet people from different backgrounds.

“We’re getting more people involved in community work, so more people are getting involved in the befriending of older people, getting involved in prisoner schemes so that people are changing the circles that they socialise in”.

Opportunities to form bridging ties are a particularly important aspect of the community garden project. Users include participants from the volunteering project, beneficiaries from various other organisations, including the Probation Service and the local School as well as members of the local community who simply enjoy gardening or sharing their gardening skills with others.

“People who are disadvantaged in the workplace, can’t find work come to the [garden], mix with other people who have got work and come here for whatever reasons. Similarly adults with learning difficulties from the local community come. Guys in their sixties teaching lads in their teens the way they used to do things, as well as me coming in with new aspects of biological control and stuff like that, fantastic!”

A key part of the Healthy Living Centre’s success in building bridging links is its status as a partnership based initiative. Close links with a range of partners allow the Centre to benefit by sharing resources, expertise and experience:

“it’s [the Partnership Forum meeting] an opportunity for everyone to find out what’s going on here, but also what tends to happen is people will say ‘I know the funding stream that you can tap into for this particular project’”.

Working in partnership is also perceived by the Centre’s management as an opportunity for maximising capacity:

“what we definitely don’t want to be doing is trying to reinvent the wheel all the time, if there’s somebody else doing it already then we’ll work alongside them and we’ll complement it”.

Bridging Social Capital: The Advice Centre

The Advice Centre is another positive example of the role of the sector in enabling the development of relationships between diverse groups, individuals and organisations. The Centre's mission statement focuses on diversity and inclusiveness. The Centre's aim is to deliver a free and impartial service to people across society including its most deprived members:

“we help anybody for anything. Somebody comes through the door, we'll help them”.

The diversity of the users is viewed as beneficial to volunteers and staff working in the Advice Centre because it broadens their experience and understanding of the wider communities in which they live.

“I didn't really know what was going on out in the real world, whereas coming here, you do get to see every aspect of the community, every problem but also you get to see the plus points as well, you get to see the bonuses and you get to see the mix of people that live here”.

In common with the other organisations studied, the volunteers are often personally well-connected and tend to be involved in other local organisations which is another source of bridging social capital:

“they're clearly all wearing many, many hats and we are one of the many, many things they do which is useful, because their contacts are wonderful.”

At an organisational level, bridging social capital is generated through the numerous contacts that the Advice Centre has with local and regional organisations. The Advice Centre is seen by many of its users as a one-stop shop but by itself it cannot meet all the advice needs of the area. Many problems faced by users require the help of other service providers. As with the Healthy Living Centre, communication, collaboration and coordinated action are perceived to be the key tools in identifying an effective solution. Both informal and formal networking (e.g. sharing of information sources with other organisations or inviting guest speakers to meetings to update the volunteers) and working in partnership with other organisations such as Social Services and the Welfare Rights Unit are vital to the Advice Centre and considered one of the organisation's priorities. The Centre views its role as being not only about delivering its services effectively but also contributing to local development and the strengthening of the voluntary sector in the area: bridging social capital is required to enable the centre to achieve these aims.



Bridging Social Capital: The Community Group

As with all the organisations studied, bridging links in the form of cross-membership bring additional contacts to the Community Group and enhance its networking capabilities, enabling the Group to mobilise further resources.

“[The steering committee] has drawn the usual suspects that you'll find in any community, so you can almost guarantee that your chair person, your treasurer, your secretary will also hold positions of similar authority in other groups, whether it's the WI or the local bridge club, the movers and the shakers if you like”.

Once again it is clear that these contacts benefit the Community Group but equally it is apparent that that engagement with the group also benefits the other organisations they belong to. For some, this might even represent their initial motivation for joining.

“The Short Mat Bowls Club are showing a very healthy interest in this group, because they want to make sure that when a community facility goes in... there’s a room big enough to accommodate what their wishes are, and it’s a thriving group so why not? They’ve come forward with pieces of their own agenda but they’ve mucked in”.

There are evident similarities amongst members of the group’s steering committee (50+ professionals and retired professionals from a single village) who currently do the lion’s share of any work involved. However, interviewees are very clear that the group aspires to be as inclusive as possible and aims to reflect the whole of the community including residents, local businesses and other voluntary organisations. This focus on inclusivity is partly altruistic in motivation.

“I don’t think it matters necessarily that the people who are the driving force are of a kind, which by and large they are, but the people who come to the meetings are a mixture, a real mixture, and those are the people of course whose views we need to establish, it’s no good giving [the Village] something that [the Village] doesn’t want, and people like us don’t make up the bulk of [the Village], we have to carry these people along with us”.

It is clear that external factors also play an important role in encouraging the development of inclusive policies and procedures, often because access to certain sources of funding is limited to projects that can demonstrate they are ‘community led’.

“The more we consult the better result it is that we get, and the funding bodies generally expect us to have consulted widely”.

“I think the decisions if they’re made by the community itself, all the community has had an opportunity to contribute to the process, it can only be a good thing. A lot of funding we’re looking at can only be got via the community.”

In order to give all members of the community the opportunity to contribute and to obtain the widest view possible on local needs and aspirations the group sent a written consultation to each household in the village and used the responses to develop a local ‘wish list’ of potential activity. This is prioritised and developed through regular open meetings. However, despite these attempts, the group realises that it has so far not succeeded in engaging with certain parts of the community, which remain hard to reach. There is widespread recognition within the Group that more needs to be done to engage with certain groups within the community.

“What we have so far failed to do I think is to find young people to take part, and we need that. We need the energy of the young, we need the different viewpoints, we don’t just want [Village] to be run by a lot of elderly fogies whose ideas and whose standards, whatever, are different from the young people of today”.

One of the aims of the Community Group is to encourage community spirit and build ties between people that live in the same place, but do not necessarily interact, communicate or do things together. Through the work it is doing with the Parish Council around consultation and the Parish plan, its aim is to strengthen the community of place and to bring together the different communities of interest present in the village. As noted in the section above, members of this group place surprisingly little overt emphasis on the importance of bonding social capital in their activities whilst the emphasis on bridging activity is much stronger. However there is evidence of strong bonding social capital within the community particularly amongst the village's numerous, vocal communities of interest, many of which are represented by voluntary groups. One of the Community Group's major goals is the construction of a community centre that will cater for the village's many different communities of interest. This is seen as a key way of building social cohesion and generating additional bonding social capital, highlighting the important relationships that exist between the different kinds of social capital.

Linking Social Capital

In exploring the relationship between voluntary action and linking social capital we wanted to look at the question of whether rural voluntary organisations succeed in building the cross-cutting ties which would allow them to engage in wider public debates. The study suggests that the arena for this kind of activity is often quite narrow, with few organisations exerting influence beyond the district in which they work. Even at a local level, linking is the least well-developed form of social capital amongst the four case study organisations. This is the case despite the fact that the four organisations taking part in the study all demonstrate impressive levels of organisational capacity and good networking skills relative to many of their peers locally.

Like bridging activity, linking social capital is often used to reinforce the group itself. Linking social capital is particularly important for obtaining funding and ensuring ongoing financial sustainability. It is also vital in influencing public policy and decision-making processes in the wider environment, but this kind of activity was much less well developed amongst the organisations surveyed. Much of the activity focused on developing cross cutting ties is driven by the immediate need to survive rather than wider strategic aims. Whilst all of the organisations studied show some level of success in forming alliances and relationships with other organisations and in influencing wider public debates they all stress the challenges and capacity issues posed by undertaking this kind of activity.

Linking Social Capital: The Disability Association

The Disability Association generates linking social capital primarily in order to access additional resources. These take the form both of funding and support given in kind, for example office space, a meeting facility, capacity building support. To do this the group has developed an excellent working relationship with the District Council, which has provided support and helped in capacity building.

“We’ve got [District Worker], he’s wonderful, he’s been absolutely marvellous because the forms you have to fill in are horrendous. Luckily [President] gets on very well with him so they do them between them.”

The Association has also established contacts with many other organisations in the public, voluntary and private sectors to obtain funding especially for transport and travel insurance.

To a lesser extent the Association has been involved in generating linking social capital to influence local decision-making. The most frequently quoted example is the group’s involvement in getting more dropped kerbs in the market town in which they are based to enable wheel chair users to move about more easily. The Association responded to a major need expressed by its members and acted upon it by bringing the issue to the awareness of the local authority.

“No doubt there will be other issues that come up and I’m sure they’ll fight every inch of the way, we’ll all try our best to help one another, to make things better and to make things easier with access to and from buildings, out and about within the town itself and generally getting a voice where we can be heard.”

The organisation represents the interests of a minority group and meeting the needs of minority groups is one of the greatest challenges for service deliverers in rural areas. As a consequence the role of the Association is recognised by a number of key service providers and institutions, which see it as an effective way of interacting with the local disabled community. Due to its high visibility in the locality and its wide network of contacts the association has been consulted on a number of issues including rural regeneration and transport:

“the group often get invited to certain meetings to be consulted upon certain issues relating to disability needs. So where do you actually get that voice if you don’t support your own local disabled association, because if you haven’t got them there’s not many other groups you can actually go to, and listen to and gather that information”.

Linking Social Capital: The Healthy Living Centre Partnership

As we have established, the Healthy Living Centre benefits from an excellent working relationship with a number of long-term key partners that have helped it to access resources in terms of funding and contributed to capacity building. Again an ongoing relationship with the District Council is seen as invaluable.

“They’ve been very supportive and they have deep interest in us existing and surviving. They give us a lot of support in kind. For example, on the personnel side, we’ve developed a whole lot of documents, procedures, standards and if we have a problem we can phone up [District Council worker] and say “we’ve got this problem, what can we do about it?”

The organisation is seen as being an important partner to local government and statutory agencies for a number of initiatives, particularly on issues around regeneration and community development. In addition to building bridging social capital, working in partnership contributes to linking

social capital. Amongst the Healthy Living Centre's many partners are organisations and bodies that impact directly on the organisation's prospects. A strong partnership can be perceived by funders as an asset in its own right and in this case has helped secure extra funding.

To date the Healthy Living Centre has not played an active role in influencing social or health policy within the locality, mainly because of a lack of resources and a strong focus on service delivery. However, it does provide the local authority with feedback on a range of issues relating to local health issues. Now that the core projects of are well established there is a growing awareness within the Partnership of the potential role the Centre could play in influencing the development of local policies, particularly through the relationship with the Health Authority.

Linking Social Capital: The Advice Centre

The Advice Centre generates linking social capital by acting as an intermediary or facilitator between clients and a range of institutions and statutory agencies. Members of the community are able to access additional support and resources through the Advice Centre. It disseminates information, signposts people to existing services and supports them negotiating their way through a range of organisational and governmental systems and processes that they may find challenging or exclusive. In this way the Advice Centre contributes to reducing the distance that can exist between institutions and members of the community.

In terms of using linking social capital to influence decision-making and policy, the Advice Centre provides local government with vital feedback on a number of social issues. The Advice Centre uses a computer-based system for recording case information that helps produce statistics on beneficiaries and their problems:

“It might be that the local authority is very concerned about the homelessness in the area and they would ask us to give them information about the people becoming homeless, the type of people, their age, where they'd come from”.

The office organiser plays a key role in promoting the Advice Centre as a partner to local and regional government and statutory agencies for a range of purposes, including regeneration and community development initiatives. This is done through responding to consultations, attending meetings, standing on committees and general networking. It involves linking directly with officials but also with other voluntary organisations in order to influence the local authority from the perspective of the local voluntary sector more widely as well as on behalf of the individual organisation. The Advice Centre has adopted this role somewhat by default, partly as a result of the knowledge, experience and drive of the office organiser (demonstrating the important relationship between human and social capital) but primarily in response to the low levels of infrastructure support that are available to the sector locally (demonstrating the importance of the wider institutional context). As a significant and successful local organisation with excellent contacts, both the local sector and the local authority tend to focus on the Centre to meet their own needs for consultation and voice. This demonstrates the benefits of the bridging and linking social capital

generated by voluntary organisations to government and to the sector at large as well as to the organisation itself and the communities it serves.

Linking Social Capital: The Community Group

Again, this organisation demonstrates an excellent working relationship with their District Council. This relationship has clearly benefited the Group by providing access to funds, expertise and capacity building.

“Without that assistance I think we couldn’t really have got going. Now we’ve got over the first hurdle, we have got some money and we have something to work with. But more importantly, we have the information about how to go about things and where to direct our appeal, and without [District officers] we wouldn’t have known that”.

This relationship is largely the legacy of the District Council’s role in developing the Group, which grew out of a public meeting arranged by the District council’s officers to raise awareness of the potential for local regeneration activity. In the early stages of the relationship, linking with the District Council tended to be a rather one-way process, in which the local authority provided advice, support and capacity building to the group. However, as the project progresses and the Community Group engage in greater levels of consultation with the local community about local needs and aspirations, members are slowly developing the knowledge, skills and confidence required to influence local policies and service delivery.

“[Local authority worker] is on the regeneration side of the District side, I think it was her remit to start the process and certainly pushed it forward for many months, before the group itself started to motivate itself a little bit more and she could back off a little bit... now they’re perhaps doing less of the pushing and we’re actually pulling information out of them so to speak, different relationships slowly developing”.

With the help of the District Council, the Community Group has also developed links with the Regional Development Agency and the Countryside Agency, essentially with a view to accessing funding:

“They’ve had quite a lot of dealings with the RDA for example, any one of them now is quite capable of picking up the phone, and having a conversation they wouldn’t have dreamt of having two years ago.”

The Group has also found that having several Parish and District councillors on the steering committee (as well as a number of ex-councillors) is a particularly useful for obtaining information, sharing experience and improving the group’s awareness of how local government operates. Importantly, the Community Group is working more and more with the Parish Council, which is seen as having a complementary role to that of the group. The Parish Plan joint sub-group has reinforced those links and shown that collaboration benefits both parties as well as the community:

“there’s a lot that can be done together; it’s got to be done together. I’m sure that neither organisation can push it forward as well as a joint show”.

An important part of the group's regeneration role is to increase levels of linking social capital throughout the community by increasing opportunities to influence local planning and service delivery, engage in public consultation, meet representatives of local government and obtain information to which they might not otherwise have access. They also provide an important service to the various tiers of local government by increasing their links with local communities and providing important information on local needs.

Whether for funding or influencing, linking social capital is far more resource intensive than either bonding or bridging activity and entails greater levels of expertise, time and support. However, linking social capital can also play a vital role in facilitating both bonding and bridging activity by providing access to resources, expertise and support from those in positions of power. Our research suggests that social capital can be a useful tool for voluntary organisations and groups of all sizes to use as a broad framework within which to examine their relationships with a range of stakeholders.





4 *Social Capital, Voluntary Action & the Rural Dimension*

This part of the report analyses the key policy issues specifically related to rural voluntary action and to the development of social capital, which emerged from the interviews with the four case study organisations. The aim is to explore the relevant policy themes and to connect this debate with the day-to-day experience of voluntary organisations operating in rural areas. Wherever possible the aim is to draw out examples of practical learning and associated recommendations for supporting voluntary organisations working in rural areas in promoting and sustaining social capital.

What is the Relevance to the Voluntary Sector?

Social capital is particularly relevant for the voluntary sector because of the role it attributes to civil participation and membership. Because voluntary action engages and connects people, the voluntary sector is at the heart of any discourse about social capital. Establishing social capital as a contributor to social and economic development alongside the other forms of capital (human, financial, and physical) underlines the importance of voluntary activity and collective action. As a consequence, the concept of social capital is often used to promote the role of the voluntary sector within society. Moreover, it has allowed the role of communities to be fully recognised and attributed a greater weight to their resources and assets.

In the context of voluntary action, social capital can play a number of roles. It can be a target of intervention. For example, a project or programme might be established with the specific intention of building or renewing social capital within a particular community or locality. Many community development and capacity building initiatives have this as one of their medium or longer-term aims. However, as well as being an aim in its own right, social capital is often viewed as a resource for enabling community based activity. This relates to the perception of social capital as 'productive' or part of a virtuous circle enabling action. In this context, social capital is identified as a resource to deliver wider outcomes and becomes one of the levers for getting activity off the ground. An example of this would be the current focus on engaging communities in rural regeneration initiatives and in the delivery of rural services. The assumption here is that the existing stocks of social capital within communities will facilitate the delivery of these activities. At the same time there is often a corresponding assumption that engaging in activity will help to build the stocks of social capital in those communities taking part. Lastly, and importantly in the context of this study, social capital can also be a tool used to comprehend the situations and communities where voluntary action is taking place. The theory here is that understanding social capital, its sources and outcomes can help voluntary and community organisations examine the focus of their current and future activities and allow them to work more effectively with the communities they aim to support. In all of these contexts social capital can be a useful tool for voluntary organisations to use as a broad framework within which to evaluate policies and programmes.

The Rural Context

Over a quarter of the population live in rural areas and this figure continues to expand at three times the rate of the urban population. As noted above, one factor in this decisive reversal in a trend dating from the industrial revolution (of populations moving out of rural areas and towards towns and cities) may be the stronger sense of community identity that rural areas are generally believed to possess. This common perception is supported by research undertaken by the Countryside Agency with a range of rural communities in 1999, which found that:

*'The perceived strength of the community is one of the most prized features of rural life, and an asset that is largely seen to have been lost in urban areas. People not only take pleasure in having friendly relations with others in the neighbourhood, but also tend to feel supported in various ways. The vigilance of neighbours is not only felt to help minimise crime, but also allows parents to feel they can allow their children more freedom than they might if they lived in a city.'*²¹

Similarly, according to the British Crime Survey, significantly more rural residents than non-rural residents report that they feel their neighbourhood is one in which people help each other (approximately half of all rural respondents compared to about a third in urban areas).²² Also supporting the idea that community ties are stronger in rural areas, research from NCVO reveals an active rural voluntary sector – with an unusually large number of organisations per capita – that is extremely successful at drawing in volunteer support. NCVO's survey findings show that rural residents are significantly more likely to donate time and effort to voluntary organisations than those living in urban areas.²³

However, whilst community spirit is evidently perceived to be a strength of rural areas this strength is sometimes seen as being subject to decline. Research undertaken on behalf of the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) looking at quality of life in both rural and urban areas has found that 51% of those who have always lived in a rural location believe that community spirit will be a thing of the past, a greater proportion than amongst urban dwellers (46%).²⁴ There is a range of potential reasons given for this, mostly related to long-term societal changes, including:

- increased levels of population mobility,
- growth in car ownership,
- loss of shared facilities like village shops schools and pubs,
- more people commuting instead of working in the community where they live,
- increasingly individualistic lifestyles and pursuits; and
- an increasingly unbalanced rural population in terms of age and social background.

In recent years a growing number of rural policy makers have highlighted the negative impact that popular assumptions about the strength and stability of rural community life can have on the development of policies to

²¹ Countryside Agency (1999) *Living in the Countryside: the needs and aspirations of rural populations*, 3.

²² Aust, R. and Simmons, J. (2002) Rural Crime 2001/2002 in England and Wales, Research Development and Statistics Directorate, Home Office. Available at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/hosbl02.pdf

²³ Yates, H. (2002) Supporting Rural Voluntary Action, NCVO.

²⁴ Unpublished Opinion Leader Research for the Countryside Agency (2002) *A Sustainable Countryside?* Countryside Agency consultation on the future.

meet the needs of rural communities. In particular they draw attention to the way that the widespread belief in a 'rural idyll' can mask the existence of deprivation and social exclusion in rural as well as urban areas. They point out that this issue is compounded by the 'hidden' nature of much rural deprivation, either because it exists in pockets too small to significantly influence local deprivation statistics, or at an individual household level side by side with affluence, rendering it all but invisible. Compounding these issues is the general sense that once strong rural communities are under threat due to wider social and economic factors including the long-term decline in public and private service provision, the rise in house prices and recent crises such as flooding and foot and mouth disease. In response to these factors a number of initiatives have been developed aimed at creating a 'rural revival' in terms of both community and economic development. Many of these also have an agenda aimed at capitalising on or building rural social capital, for example the Rural White Paper 2000 made a number of commitments aimed at engaging with rural communities:

'We will empower local communities, so that decisions are taken with their active participation and ownership. We will help communities map out how they would like their town or village to evolve and let them take on more responsibility for managing their own affairs'.²⁵

Social Capital, Rurality, Access & Isolation

The clearest distinction between life in rural and urban areas is the geographical context. Our research suggests that the greater distances, disbursed populations, smaller settlements, extended travel times and associated transport issues which characterise rural areas, can all have specific impacts on the development of social capital. Individually and collectively these issues can significantly exacerbate the experience of both physical and social isolation within rural communities, limit the development of social networks and hamper voluntary activity. Rural isolation limits both access to key services and the capacity to develop and maintain social links and networks. The role of voluntary action in a rural context is often focused on building social capital in order to address these challenges. This section explores a range of interrelated access issues and highlights the impacts that these can have on the development of social capital:

- Access to transport;
- Rural isolation; and
- Access to services.

Social Capital & Access to Transport

Rural isolation tends to be compounded by other issues such as low income, disability and, in particular, lack of access to transport. Where these issues exist in combination the effects can be particularly devastating. A significant amount of voluntary activity in rural areas is focused around combating transport poverty.

²⁵ DETR (2000) *Our Countryside: The Future, a fair deal for rural England*.

“A lot of people can’t go out on their own, they haven’t got transport. Like me, I can’t go to a bus stop, I’d love to go to [Town] but I can’t get from the house to the bus stop, I’d have to get a taxi out and a taxi back, so a lot of people like me by having this meeting, they have at least once a month they come out.”

The transport issue is a particularly hot topic for the Disability Association because its members often have limited mobility and many live on low incomes. It is also significant at an organisational level because of the additional costs associated with compliance with specific legal requirements for disabled passengers and the cost of insurance. Poor availability of public transport and what is perceived as the prohibitive cost (even of subsidised services) are highlighted by interviewees from the Disability Association as the most significant limitations on the group’s activities.

“If there was transport more people could come and we could travel further afield, we could get together with another Association, that would be rather nice I think, an activities thing together, but we can’t do it while we’re stuck in one place with lack of transport.”

The greater part of the Association’s fundraising activity is geared towards meeting the costs of transport and insurance which are essential to the majority of the group’s activities. For a small organisation, where most members are on low incomes this can be challenging. The challenge is amplified in a rural setting, in line with the greater distances to be covered.

Whilst transport is clearly a particular issue for the Disability Association, it is interesting to note that a recent consultation report on the needs and aspirations of the voluntary sector across the district in which they operate indicates that the majority of local voluntary organisations see poor transport infrastructure as one of the five key issues impacting on their work (the others were insufficient funding, a low skill base and increased bureaucracy and legislation).

Promoting access to public transport services was one of the early tasks identified by the Community Group and is currently the focus of one of their two working groups. In this instance the group identified a role in promoting and facilitating access to an existing public service that was under used and consequently under threat. This process demonstrates the key role that local public transport services can play in supporting social and community activities and demonstrates in a very practical way the importance of what is sometimes called the ‘institutional context’ (for example the policies and activities of local government or the private sector) to the development of social capital. In this case public transport is seen to have a key role in facilitating bridging social capital in the form of links with communities beyond the village and, crucially, in bringing people into the village from elsewhere.

“I put together a village bus timetable, collated all the bus information from various operators and leaflets and big books that covered the whole of [District], that weren’t really very usable, and collated all the bus timetables for the village into one little booklet that the District Council funded printing of, and we distributed it around the village. We’ve done the second edition and we’re working on the third at the moment... It went in the library, the post office, various groups around the village, but the next edition we are going to put through every letterbox in the parish.

Really that was a bit of an offshoot, it came about just as people were saying public transport, there isn’t any, in actual fact there is quite a lot. We’ve got an evening bus service that started two years ago, but even now not too many people know about it, a lot of the feedback things that came off of this initial survey were “no evening bus, we can’t get to the cinema in [X]”, but you can, “you can’t get to [X] for the community activities that go on there”, you can.

We use the evening bus, we’ve got two cars in the household but our involvement with CAMRA, we go out to different pubs and have a beer of an evening, obviously we’re not going to drive and we use the evening bus quite a lot, and we’ve been concerned that there’s not many people on it and selfish really, I was thinking it’s a way of promoting it and hopefully keeping it, because it’s only a two year pilot scheme subsidised by the council and obviously if people didn’t use it, it wasn’t going to stay... You do see people in the most unlikely places, we’ve seen people with copies of the bus timetable, you put them in local pubs and people use them to come to [the Village] as well as go out from it.”

Transport issues act as a focus for generating social capital by drawing members of the community into the wider regeneration process. Residents’ interests embrace concerns about local parking facilities, impact on local businesses and worries about the potential for proposed developments to increase local traffic levels, as well as the cost and availability of public transport. One of the next steps for the group is the development of a Parish Transport Plan as part of the wider Parish Planning process, which is seen as having specific relevance to the local economy and to addressing issues of isolation:

“the implications are great for those suffering from rural isolation, or for bringing people into the economy of the town to go shopping and things like that”.

This demonstrates the way in which the very challenges that affect rural communities are often also a source of the social capital that is used to tackle them. The voluntary sector often plays a key role in generating and capitalising on social capital within rural communities in order to address the challenges rural life can entail. One growth area, which has been particularly reliant on the support and leadership of voluntary



organisations in recent years, has been the development of community transport initiatives in rural areas. In 2001 the Countryside Agency's *Rural Services Survey*²⁶ reported the first reversal in a long-standing trend of decline in public transport in rural areas. This reversal is predominantly thanks to the widespread development of rural transport partnerships and projects designed to help communities to identify and meet their own transport needs. As our research highlights, transport is a cross-cutting issue in rural areas, affecting access to jobs, services and social activities. Grants are available for rural transport services and facilities. Projects that reduce the need to travel such as mobile services can also be supported.

“Another one we’re looking at is a walking bus for the primary school, all the kids, it’s like a virtual bus where it starts off one end of the village and all the kids and the parents walk down the village and they stop at houses as they come through, the other kids join them and they all walk like a crocodile, they walk to school in one group... the point is they don’t all get in the cars and drive to school individually and cause a traffic jam, the idea is it’s fun for the kids walking in together, they’re supervised but you don’t need as many adults, and again there’s grants available, it does actually happen in the county”.

This interviewee highlights the value of bridging links across communities and between voluntary groups in spreading good practice and inspiring new activity. These schemes also encourage community groups and voluntary organisations to develop local transport projects and promote linking activity in the form of partnerships involving local authorities and the private sector as well as voluntary organisations.

“We’re looking at various things at the moment, the main one is to try and get a community bus through the village, because there’s funding available through the Countryside Agency, through the Vital Villages Initiative there’s a transport grant, a parish transport grant which is quite substantial, and there’s another couple of small funding schemes for various things, but we’re just looking at the moment, we’re about to do consultation in hand with the Parish Council, with their Parish Plan and the transport is part of that, so we’re going to work on their timescale with them.”

The success of such schemes demonstrates the capacity of the voluntary sector in rural areas to identify gaps in service provision and meet needs through the generation of social capital that, in many cases, have not adequately been met by either the public or private sectors.

“They actually hire the taxi for one day a week and the taxi goes up and picks up the fares. A volunteer looks after the phone line a couple of hours each evening, takes bookings from people that want to go somewhere and then they’re charged less than it would cost a taxi, but it’s a sharing scheme, so... for instance, the old people meet once a week, they can’t get in from some of the outlying areas. There are some buses but they don’t fit the timings, so if a car could go out and pick three of them up and bring them back in and take them back, it’s just filling in various transport links that there’s gaps in, that wouldn’t warrant a regular bus, but hopefully building from that.”

Social Capital & Rural Isolation

If rural isolation is symptomatic of the way in which sparse populations can limit the development of social capital, our findings demonstrate the role played by the voluntary sector in rural areas in tackling this issue. Like the Disability Association, the Healthy Living Centre plays a key role in tackling isolation and exclusion, in part through the strategic provision of subsidised transport for beneficiaries. In this case transport is provided for the Centre's users wherever possible through a partnership with one of the Centre's many tenants – a community transport project. All of the promotional material advertising the Centre's varied services and self-help groups includes the query 'need a lift?' along with relevant contact details.

“That was a major, major factor in coming here was transport was provided and childcare was provided”.

However, whilst the Centre endeavours to provide transport for users, where it can, this is not always possible and workers are conscious that this limits their capacity to reach all of those who may be in need of the Centre's services.

“It is very difficult for the little old lady in the village to get here, if she doesn't go on public transport, that is a difficulty, and we have not the facilities, although we do make more than we used to, home visits, we can't do it for everyone, we just cannot”.

The vision set out by the Healthy Living Centre Partnership focuses on the wider determinants of health and in particular social exclusion, mental health, rural isolation and increasing access to services and opportunities. The work of the Centre specifically highlights the relationship between rural isolation and poor mental health with a high proportion of activities aimed at facilitating social contact for isolated people. In particular, work focuses on reducing the effects of depression and strengthening support systems for people by helping them to develop networks and increasing self-esteem and a sense of belonging.

“I don't drive and living in the village, I was going slowly crazy being in the house all the time”.

As well as providing appropriate support networks for people with a specific area of need, the Centre also works to engage the wider community with the aim of engendering a range of benefits relating to increased levels of social capital, trust and mutual support. They describe their aims as:

“greater social cohesion, less isolation, increased access to support within the community, greater knowledge and understanding of the factors that affect mental health, more willingness of people to ask for help and talk problems over and therefore prevention of mental health problems or intervention before crisis point”.

The work of the Centre also exemplifies the extent to which providing opportunities for volunteering can play a role in combating isolation and generating both bonding and bridging social capital. The Centre offers volunteering opportunities to both service users and to members of the wider community. As well as placements in a wide range of local voluntary organisations there are a number of volunteering opportunities within the Centre itself, ranging from reception and general administration to counselling and working in the community garden. Many of the volunteers are drawn from the ranks of past or current service users and involvement in volunteering is viewed as a way of increasing levels of social contact, reducing isolation and building self esteem. Many of the volunteers interviewed see the time they donate as an opportunity to give something back but also identify a direct benefit to themselves, often focused around increasing levels of social contact and tackling isolation.

“I’d seen there was computer courses... so I come for computers first... and then I was asked if I’d like to help out which I did, and it got me out and I got to meeting people, because before that I was stuck indoors all the time and I was getting really miserable and fed up. Now it’s turned my life around, which is great!”

Exploring voluntary activity through the lens of social capital highlights the complex nature of the relationships that exist within voluntary organisations between staff, volunteers, beneficiaries and the wider community. The concept of social capital draws attention to the way in which the boundaries between beneficiary and donor can become blurred where access to strong social networks is perceived as a source of benefit in its own right. In the case of the Healthy Living Centre, beneficiaries choose to donate their time because they want to give something back to the organisation which has supported them. However they also do it because they value the increased levels of social contact that their involvement provides. These boundaries become increasingly unclear when supporting people to move into paid employment constitutes an organisational aim. Volunteers who are neither current nor former beneficiaries equally perceive a benefit to themselves in getting involved and often specifically mention the increased diversity of their social contacts as a benefit to their quality of life. Even paid staff highlight the value of working with people as a positive influence in their lives.

“I think it’s fantastic that they give them that chance. It’s lovely because I’m such a nosy sod I always come round and have a quick chat to whoever’s here... if I had a problem it’s just a case of putting my head through the back hatch, ‘hello!’ ”.

The blurring of these boundaries is even more apparent in membership organisations such as the Disability Association where members are simultaneously volunteers and beneficiaries, or in community based organisations such as the Village Community Group where the organisation is run and managed by the community it aims to serve.

Social Capital & Access to Services

The third key policy issue relating to the geographic challenges that can be posed by rural areas is access to services. Rural communities often experience limited access to a range of mainstream services provided by

both the public and the private sectors. What all sectors have in common, in a rural context, is that their services are frequently more expensive (or less profitable) to deliver than in more densely populated areas where greater economies of scale may be achieved. Recent years have seen a range of policy initiatives aimed at stemming an overall trend of decline in basic key services in rural areas. Due to the low profit margins associated with service delivery in rural environments, policy makers are increasingly looking to the not-for profit sector as a means of delivery and to social capital as one of the tools for enabling that delivery.

As noted above in section 3, in an environment where many mainstream services are regarded as being under threat, it can be extremely challenging to access support for more specific needs or minority groups. Many service providers choose to deliver their services from larger conurbations in order to reach greater numbers of people. Recent policy initiatives such as the Countryside Agency's Market Towns Initiative recognise the potential value of this approach. There is a genuine dilemma for service providers, working with finite resources, who may find that they are able to deliver a service of significantly higher quality in a single, centralised location than would be possible across several smaller outlets or from a mobile facility. However, whilst these services often at least notionally 'cover' those living in outlying rural areas they are frequently not well advertised and rely on users having access to transport. Exclusion from services can and does include groups that might not otherwise be perceived as suffering from exclusion, but those most at risk from other forms of exclusion are often the hardest hit.

One of the key achievements of the Healthy Living Centre has been in creating a hub for the delivery of local services by drawing in a partnership of local providers and making facilities available for those who want to deliver services locally such as room hire, payroll services, photocopying, fax. The Centre very successfully generates bridging social capital across organisations and between communities as well as facilitating the development of linking social capital between members of those communities and the providers of services.

“We have been pretty picky at choosing who we have here because what we wanted to do is have a one-stop shop of agencies, which were all feeding off each other”.

Facilitating access to services is also a role undertaken by the Advice Centre. Poor access to services is one of the major characteristics of the district in which the Centre is based, where services are often located in the major market town (40 miles distant). This severely limits opportunities for face-to-face contact with service providers and makes accessing services all but impossible for those dependent on the weak public transport infrastructure. Recent cuts in the District Council's budget have resulted in reduced funding and closures within the local voluntary sector, further limiting the availability of advice and support to local communities. Due to this local context the Advice Centre has become the first port of call for a rising number of people, this highlights the important function often assumed by voluntary organisations in rural areas, both in delivering services themselves and in brokering relationships with other service providers.

It is widely recognised that scattered populations can increase costs for service providers resulting in declining services in some rural areas. However, it is also important to recognise that greater distances can also increase costs for service users. Those individuals who are least able to travel to access services are often those in the greatest need of them. In many cases the role adopted by the sector in rural areas is that of bridging the access gap for those members of the community who do not have a choice. In recent years there has also been an increasing policy focus on encouraging rural communities to act as social entrepreneurs and support a range of 'hard to deliver' services, normally provided by the public and private sectors. Voluntary agencies can also play a crucial role in influencing local and national policy agendas in order to improve the extent and quality of rural service provision. All of these roles demonstrate the importance of bonding, bridging and linking social capital in the effective delivery of rural services and highlight the capacity of the sector to generate social capital in order to tackle the access issues that impact upon rural communities.



5

The Wider Institutional Context, Capacity Building & Influencing

A focus on the work of the sector in the context of social capital draws attention to the wider role of the voluntary sector in society. In particular it highlights the importance of the relationships voluntary organisations can foster both across sectors, between organisations and between communities and power institutions. It also reveals the important impact that organisations and institutions can have on the development of social capital. Our case studies demonstrate the significance of these relationships in a rural context, even where the scope within which those contacts are developed is sometimes geographically quite narrow.

Capacity Building

One of the clear findings from this piece of research is that voluntary action both utilises and builds social capital. Equally clear is that some degree of capacity building support is required to facilitate activity and organisational development. The link between capacity building and social capital is an important one. As we have already noted, social capital is ideologically neutral and can have either positive or negative impacts (frequently both). The role of capacity building, or community development activity, is to promote, but also importantly to influence, the development of social capital in order to encourage 'positive' social outcomes. Each of the organisations in this study has received capacity building support from external organisations and each of the case study organisations is engaged in building the capacity of its volunteers, members and the wider community.

In these case studies capacity building has often been provided by district level local authority officers with responsibility for regeneration or community development. This support relates directly to the local authorities' role as funders of voluntary activity and focuses particularly on accessing financial resources, both from within the local authority and elsewhere. However it also relates to the local authorities' responsibilities for addressing issues such as social exclusion, rural regeneration, service delivery and community engagement, highlighting the importance of the voluntary sector in supporting the achievement of those aims. The vital role played by capacity building in getting activity off the ground is particularly apparent in the case of the Community Group as a relatively new organisation.

“Supportive, maintaining morale, that seemed necessary because we’ve not always done well with some of the things we’ve sought, and for help and advice, where to go for monies, how to present certain things, does a business case need to be 40 pages long or will two sides of an A4 do... that’s often the case, you look at it and think ‘I can’t possibly do that’ and when we ask them about it, they say ‘it’s not that difficult, this is all that you need to do’, and we’ve actually been able to do things that we would not perhaps have known easily where to start without their input.”

Capacity building support is available to voluntary and community organisations from a variety of sources. Local ‘umbrella’ or infrastructure bodies such as Councils for Voluntary Service (CVS) usually operate at a district level and are set up to promote and develop the effectiveness of voluntary action in their local area. Rural Community Councils (RCCs) are county-based charities with a development role. They work both directly with local communities and with voluntary and other organisations. There are also sub-sectoral infrastructure bodies that provide support to a particular part of the sector, for example the National Council for Voluntary Youth Services. Voluntary sector infrastructure operates at local, regional and national levels and supports voluntary organisations by providing a range of functions, including:

- *Voice* – providing a voice for their membership/constituency (or giving them a greater voice than they would have individually) to government, funders, business and others (for example, through policy, campaigning or advocacy work);
- *Development* – both by providing capacity building support to meet existing needs and by identifying unmet support needs. This can be achieved either by meeting those needs directly, or by working with others to ensure that they are met;
- *Best practice and advice* – promoting and supporting best practice and providing advice on key issues of concern;
- *Interface* – providing access to their membership/constituency for other agencies or individuals including government, partnerships and researchers (and vice versa);
- *Co-ordination and networking* – both horizontally and vertically between member/constituent organisations and with other organisations performing complementary roles;
- *Brokering* – pro-actively identifying opportunities for organisations to work together, either across the voluntary sector, or voluntary organisations working with government.

The focus of this list on the facilitation of networks and relationships within and between sectors and between communities and institutions demonstrates the important role played by voluntary sector infrastructure bodies in facilitating the development of social capital. In particular it highlights their role in enabling the bridging and linking activity, which is often thought to be more difficult to achieve in a rural context.

Recent work by NCVO²⁷ also found that networks of organisations frequently operate as an additional, often less formal, tier of voluntary sector infrastructure, providing opportunities for mutual support, capacity building and information sharing. They can be a key delivery mechanism for services to the sector and are frequently the most effective structure for information dissemination and the promotion of learning and development activities. The role of networks is particularly interesting in the context of social capital as it demonstrates both the importance and the impact of social interaction as a tool in personal, organisational and community development. Whether formal or informal, networks provide participants

with the opportunity to meet and learn from each other by exchanging ideas, information and resources. Whilst horizontal networking leads to the building of bridging ties, vertical networking involves liaising with institutions and generates linking ties.

Research undertaken by NCVO²⁸ in 2001 found that voluntary organisations in rural areas tend to have poor access to networks and suffer from low levels of communication and information sharing with peers. It also showed that access to infrastructure and capacity building support can be restricted in a rural environment where there tend to be higher numbers of small and poorly resourced organisations spread out over a large geographic area. Several interviewees pointed to low capacity within the local voluntary sector infrastructure itself as a challenge facing voluntary organisations locally. The four case study organisations focused upon in this report all demonstrated strong links with other organisations and good networking skills, which played an important part in their ongoing success, but still highlighted the need for support.

“The voluntary sector has to be supported, and the local authority, particularly in small rural areas, doesn’t always have the capacity or the funding to deliver that, so where does that group usually go to? I don’t know, where does it go to? It’s got to be supported and helped by somebody, whether it’s a strong CVS or strong local authority or whatever, it does need links.”

A number of interviewees also stressed the value of independent sources of support and advice to the sector.

“Half the time you don’t know if the advice you’re being given by a particular official is something that is biased to suit his own book, and how much is the straightforward story, you don’t know when there’s a hidden agenda behind what’s being said”.

One of the potential risks identified by the Disability Association was a perceived dependency on a single source of support, in this case a District Council worker. The Council do not provide the group with financial resources but they have supported them with significant levels of Officer time, meeting spaces and other support in kind. Whilst the input of the District Council Officer has been extremely valuable, the fact that it is practically the group’s only source of advice and support is a concern.

As an ex-charity worker the officer has a good understanding and experience of the voluntary sector. However the Association are conscious that if he were to move on the group would be left with a significant gap and the transition could prove difficult. His involvement with the group is professionally motivated but the extent of his commitment is also dependent on personal choices and the excellent relationships he has with committee members, who fear this might not easily be replicated by another worker. In order to safeguard future sustainability and ensure a capacity to respond positively to change, organisations may need to diversify their linking contacts.

²⁸ Wilding, K. et al (2001).

The Institutional Context

The development of social capital is widely regarded as part of the capacity building process, which may include improving skills through training, promoting new forms of organisation and encouraging new ways of networking. Our research shows that effective capacity building requires not only the active participation of the community, but also the wider support of decision-makers and power institutions. The support of government at national, regional and local levels is of key importance to the success of local development initiatives. This demonstrates the importance of what Michael Woolcock has called the ‘institutional context’ to social capital,²⁹ referring to the power of local and national institutions, governance structures and policies to enable or to inhibit the development of social capital.

“I suppose it’s political in its own way, the way that money is disseminated through communities these days, it’s a very New Labour way of thinking, this is Tony’s third way and this is the sustainable way forward, so you could be quite cynical and say this is an amazingly political means of regeneration. But I think beneath all of that you could still say the best regeneration comes from a community group that has taken ownership of its own destiny.”

One of the key principles driving current public policy is the promotion of social inclusion and community engagement, resulting in a range of policies and programmes designed to create a positive institutional context for the development of social capital at both national and local levels and in both rural and urban areas. Capacity building activity frequently seeks to stimulate bridging social capital as part of the wider social inclusion agenda. Examples of this can be seen in the case study looking at the Community Group. This illustrates the influence of the local development workers in promoting and channelling aspirations towards effective community consultation and engagement with a diverse cross-section of the community. The impact of this capacity building activity is clearly underscored by the emphasis placed upon inclusiveness and consultation by the Group’s potential funders. A recent report from the Government’s Strategy Unit describes the Government’s perspective on the development of social capital.

*‘There are general and specific reasons for government intervention to promote the accumulation of beneficial social capital. At a general level, social capital has a crucial role to play in supporting and nurturing virtuous norms and behaviours such as co-operation with others. The more specific reasons are a mix of economic efficiency, equity and civic or political rationales’.*³⁰

The same report highlights the importance to government of having accurate and objective means to measure social capital. In a rural context, the Countryside Agency have been working to meet this need by developing ‘Community Vibrancy Indicators’. These take the form of a range of indicators relating to opportunities to engage in social and community activities. These are reported in the annual State of the Countryside reports³¹ alongside other quality of life indicators such as access to facilities and services.³²

²⁹ Woolcock (2001).

³⁰ Performance and Innovation Unit (now Strategy Unit) (2002) *Social Capital: a Discussion Paper*, 51.

³¹ Countryside Agency (2003) *State of the Countryside Report 2003*.

³² For more information about approaches to measuring social capital see Jochum, V. (2003) *Social Capital Beyond the Theory*, NCVO.

Our research found that all forms of social capital are dependent on the wider institutional context but that this is particularly important for linking social capital. Filling out grant application forms, responding to consultations, taking part in local strategic partnerships all demand an awareness and understanding of externally established rules. Again this emphasises the need for capacity building to enable organisations to develop the required skills and knowledge.

Influencing

As well as highlighting the influence of the wider institutional context on voluntary activity and the development of social capital, our study also draws attention to the role that voluntary action can play in influencing the wider institutional context both through targeted attempts to effect change but also by demonstrating good practice.

“There was a lot of suspicion because the Parish Council felt that they were the elected representatives of that community, that they were the ones who were empowered to make things happen for [Village] and there was suspicion, rivalry, jealousy, call it what you will to start with, but I think as it dawned on the Parish Council that it was beyond their own means to achieve a lot of the things that the Community Group wanted... the Parish Councillors will say that having this other group that’s quite enthusiastic and on the ball, has made them think quite critically about what they’re doing themselves”.

Influencing activity is one of the primary uses of linking social capital (along with accessing funding). Our research found that linking social capital is by far the most resource intensive form of social capital, demanding more expertise, time and support than either bonding or bridging. Involvement in social policy provides a good example: it requires a real understanding of social policy issues and the policy-making process, which cannot be improvised and requires specific skills. This may provide some background to the findings of research undertaken by NCVO in 2001 which suggested that: ‘voluntary organisations based in rural areas are less likely to influence the development of public policy than some of their counterparts in towns and cities and may feel isolated and under-represented’.³³

All of the groups involved in the study are engaged in influencing local policy agendas and service delivery to some degree or another, for example the Disability Association’s success in lobbying for the provision of dropped curbs. However, each of the organisations feels this is something they would like to do more of but lack the time and resources. It is in the field of social policy that the dynamics between bonding, bridging and linking social capital are the most apparent. The more an organisation is able to form ties with similar organisations in the sector, cooperate and act as a group, the more they are likely to develop an influential role.

“Strategically I think some of the issues we raise with the district do make a difference, and actually have made them sit up, especially around homelessness and around mental health with MIND have had an impact. I think generally we are making a difference and I hope we’re improving”.

³³ Wilding, K, et al (2001). Yates, H. (2002a).

Broadly speaking, the longer an organisation has been established the more likely they are to be aware of the opportunities that are available to them to influence the development of local policy. They are also more likely to recognise the potential value of this information:

“it has become clear to me that what the PCT [Primary Care Trust] is quite short of is actually grassroots information and I think they would really value having our contribution, because we are very much listening to the community and in touch with the community”.

Whilst all of the organisations are keen to have their voices heard, in some cases they are also increasingly aware of a pressure on them as consultees and partners to provide information and local knowledge and the potential tensions this can create in terms of organisational capacity. This is particularly the case in those areas where the local voluntary sector infrastructure is perceived as being weak or over-stretched. This demonstrates the importance of both organisational and sectoral capacity in facilitating the development of linking social capital in particular.

6 Sustainability

Our research has demonstrated that each of the three different kinds of social capital is required by voluntary organisations at various stages in their existence: for getting started; to facilitate development; and for ensuring ongoing sustainability. The four organisations in our study are all keen to expand their activities to some degree or another, although this might not be the case for all voluntary organisations and groups. Whilst bonding social capital often represents the basis on which organisations are initially founded, our research highlights the fact that none of the organisations is self-sufficient. Bridging and linking social capital are decisive both in helping the organisations develop and in ensuring ongoing sustainability.

Three key factors impact on organisational sustainability:

- Financial capital, in the form of grants, contracts, donations and earned income;
- Social capital, in the form of volunteering and support from, or engagement with, the wider community and relationships across organisations and sectors; and
- Human capital, in the form of vital skills experience and contacts brought to the organisations by the individuals involved.

In this section we explore the dynamic inter-relationships between social, human and financial capital highlighted by our research.

Financial Sustainability

The primary source of financial capital for the four organisations studied are grants from a variety of funders, most frequently from local government at the district level but also from regional and national sources, lottery bodies and government agencies. For all of the organisations fundraising and ensuring ongoing financial viability are continual areas of concern. However, those organisations which demonstrate strong bridging social capital through partnership working and collaboration with other organisations and other sectors are also those most likely to express confidence regarding their financial future.

“Now we’ve got over the first hurdle, we have got some money and we have something to work with, but much more importantly we have the information about how to go about things and where to direct our appeal”.

All of the organisations surveyed had more than one source of income, although the extent of the diversity of income streams varied considerably from organisation to organisation. For example, the Advice Centre has developed an agreement with the local authority to deliver a Family Support Service. The Disability Association funds much of its core activity though charging a small membership fee but also focuses on attracting donations from the general public, holding raffles and coffee mornings. The

Healthy Living Centre Partnership engages in a range of social enterprise activities to raise funds. All of the organisations studied have successfully attracted donations from local businesses. This variety of links with funders and supporters highlights the importance of both bridging and linking social capital in ensuring financial sustainability.

Sustaining Support

In terms of involvement and participation each group relies heavily on a small number of like-minded enthusiasts that are often highly committed and over-stretched. Burnout of active members, especially those with specific responsibilities in the organisation, can be a threat and the reliance on a limited pool of individuals raises concerns around dependency, knowledge management and sustainability. Issues around sustainability and volunteer burnout are raised by the Disability Association, particularly in the context of the group's relative dependency on a small number of individuals. Leadership is important for an organisation but ensuring appropriate succession strategies is also crucial for long-term survival.

“We are stuck, we're limited, [the President] tried to retire a bit so we made her vice president, but she's still working flat out now, she has that way, she'll do it until she dies”.

The issues around volunteer burnout are most significant in volunteer-led organisations and are a particular issue where a majority of active members are retired or semi-retired.

“I have done a lot of committee work and worked quite hard in my younger days, but as I've got older, I'm nearly 65 now, I feel I'd like to take a back seat”.

Amongst the four organisations in our study, the significant majority of volunteers are 50+ and the greater number of them are past retirement age. Having volunteers that are retired or semi-retired offers a range of advantages in terms of availability. It also provides an effective way of accessing the social and human capital that organisations need to develop successfully. In most cases active members (who tend to be older) benefit from a high stock of human and social capital, which is enhanced by their involvement in a variety of organisations. These members often use their social contacts to recruit additional volunteers. However in most cases new recruits have a similar profile to those that are already involved, raising issues of inclusiveness but also of sustainability. National statistics suggest a slow trend of decline in the numbers of volunteers amongst younger age groups; a trend which may be emphasised in rural areas where populations are ageing at a more rapid rate than elsewhere.

All of the organisations in this study are keen to recruit new, and in particular younger, volunteers. However, a number of barriers are identified to increasing engagement amongst younger age groups. One barrier identified by each of the organisations is the determining role of different life stages in levels and kinds of engagement. Research into volunteering habits has identified a clear difference between the motivations for volunteering given by different age groups. In particular younger volunteers are considerably more likely to express an interest in developing new skills and valuable work experience whilst older volunteers more frequently lay

the emphasis on a desire to give something back to the community based on their existing skills and experience. This can necessitate a different approach for volunteers of different age groups.

“Also if younger people are coming here with the reason to get a reference, if that’s their reason for being here... well it’s a phenomenal commitment to train them knowing they’re going to move on, but with the small skills base or less skills base in [the District], it’s something we’ve got to look at. I would say at the minute we give people confidence to go and job seek... but predominantly it’s older people, predominantly ex-professionals”.

Making a commitment to regular availability and long-term involvement is evidently more problematic for those who are not retired. This is not perhaps surprising: those amongst younger age groups with family and work commitments clearly have more limited time available to engage in community activity.

“I wonder what the figure will be regarding getting more people involved, because at the moment the people who are involved are the people who’ve got time, which is so severely disabled that they can’t work, or they’re not necessarily so severely disabled but they’re old enough they don’t have to work, but there are other people between 20 and 60, there must be, who are in a position who might be able to offer something, but a lot of things do tend to be organised by the people who have time on their hands”.

Older volunteers are frequently identified as being more ‘reliable’ or ‘committed’ and several active members express a level of impatience with those who are not available on a regular basis or who drop in and out of activity. However in a society with increasingly hectic lifestyles, with more people in full time employment, more people working longer hours and more people likely to work beyond the current retirement age, voluntary organisations may need to explore the possibilities of developing different forms of engagement for those who have less time to give. This may be increasingly important to reduce the significant pressure on a limited number of dedicated individuals and so reduce the risks to the organisation. It may also become equally vital if organisations are interested in engaging with a wider cross section of the community and a range of age groups. A good example of this kind of approach can be seen in the Community Group which has developed time-limited, issue-specific subgroups looking at transport and planning precisely so as to create opportunities for more dynamic forms of engagement.

Human Capital

Amongst the clearest findings from this research is the importance of the relationship between human capital (i.e. the knowledge, skills and abilities obtained through education or life experience) and social capital. This is a two-way relationship. In the organisations studied, social capital clearly influences the development of human capital, enabling those involved to access new skills, develop experience and make better use of contacts. But equally human capital plays a central role in developing social capital within the organisations, as those involved bring with them their significant past experience, skills, knowledge and personal contacts which are, in many

cases, the result of engagement in other voluntary groups or a long history of voluntary activity. The human capital of the individuals involved in voluntary action is an essential ingredient in the development of social capital.

As explored above, this finding links to issues around organisational sustainability. Each of the four groups studied is heavily reliant on the drive, experience and personal contacts of a limited number of 'movers and shakers'. This raises concerns around capacity and knowledge management. Whilst it is a particular feature of volunteer led organisations, human capital also plays an important role in organisations with paid staff and highlights many of the same issues about over reliance on a small number of 'indispensable' individuals. This can be a particular issue in a rural context where smaller populations mean a smaller pool of available workers both paid and unpaid. One of the important issues emphasised by this finding is the importance of skills development within the rural voluntary sector, whether for volunteers or paid staff, as it appears that the development of skills and knowledge have the potential to create significant ongoing benefit both for the sector and for the development of social capital more widely.³⁴

Organisational capacity relates to the numbers involved in an activity, the resources available and, crucially, to the right skills base. Whether responding to a consultation, generating new income streams, defining the organisation's strategy or delivering a service, expertise and knowledge are a prerequisite. The people engaged in driving the activities of the organisations studied by NCVO tend to enjoy impressive stocks of both social and human capital. The social networks they have access to and the skills they possess are crucial in sustaining the organisations they support. As we have highlighted throughout this report, the successful development of voluntary action requires financial and human resources in combination with social capital. Our research findings underline the fact that no one form of 'capital' whether human, social or financial can be used as a substitute for the other two.

7 Whose Social Capital?

Inclusion and Exclusion: whose social capital is being developed?

One of the key questions this research aimed to address was: *Who benefits from the social capital that is generated by voluntary and community activity in rural areas?* Our research findings certainly appear to support the concept of a virtuous circle in which social capital facilitates voluntary activity, which in turn generates more social capital. However, it is precisely because social capital is viewed as being both ‘productive’ and ‘cumulative’ that some commentators argue that it can reproduce rather than tackle inequalities; as those with access to decision making processes and resources build on and strengthen their position to the exclusion of those who do not.³⁵ When social capital is assessed in the contexts of social exclusion and diversity it raises questions about power and who has access to it.³⁶

Social exclusion is unquestionably a rural issue: over three million people in rural areas live below the poverty threshold of half average income, representing around 20-25% of the rural population. The main difference between urban and rural areas in this context is that rural deprivation rarely exists in the kinds of concentrations that urban areas experience; and as a result rural deprivation can be harder to identify. Whilst employment is higher and claimant unemployment lower in rural areas, average earnings are lower, jobs more likely to be part-time, casual or seasonal and hidden unemployment is higher. Other potential sources of exclusion are age, ethnicity, gender and lack of access to services.

“[The Village] certainly has got quite high indices of deprivation, but they’re only apparent in some of the housing estates and... with the industrial sides. The centre of the village itself is a real picture postcard, rural England and if you were driving through it as a visitor you would think, “how on earth does a beautiful village like this qualify for any regeneration grant?””

Throughout this study we have explored in some detail the relationships between:

- the different activities of the case study organisations; and
- the different kinds of social capital they generate.

We found that all of the organisations studied generate and benefit from each type of social capital to a greater or lesser degree. All of the organisations are extremely successful in their own terms and the development of social capital is in some way part of their primary purpose. However, in all activities relating to the development of social capital there is a risk that the networks, values and attitudes engendered can become narrow, self-perpetuating and exclusive; and voluntary action is no exception to this rule.

³⁵ Narayan, D. (1999) ‘Bonds and Bridges: social capital and poverty’, Poverty Division, Poverty Reduction and Economic Management Network, World Bank.

³⁶ Whilst the approach to social capital popularised by Putnam deals with collective values, social integration and cohesion, Pierre Bourdieu, for example, focuses on the pursuit of self-interests and the struggle for power. For more details see – Siisainen, M. (2000) ‘Two concepts of social capital: Putnam vs. Bourdieu’, Paper presented at ISTR Fourth International Conference, July 5-8 2000, Dublin.



One of the findings from our research is that those involved in voluntary activity show a high level of awareness of local differences and are as likely to focus on these as on similarities, suggesting that some of the common assumptions about the homogeneity of rural communities may be flawed. However it is fair to say that the arena in which this activity takes place is often quite narrow in both social and geographical terms. Our research shows how each of the different types of social capital can operate at the micro-level in rural areas. For example, a group might demonstrate bonding (close friends, family members), bridging (people from the other end of the village, different age, social or interest groups); and linking (use of parish council resources, village hall etc.) social capital without ever reaching across a parish boundary. Far more common is the restriction of networks and relationships within the boundaries of the local district with a sharp drop in both contacts with, and trust of, individuals and institutions beyond those borders.³⁷

At the same time there is a range of common social characteristics relating to the people most likely to be actively involved in the organisations we studied. Whilst participants come from a variety of social backgrounds and the gender balance tends to shift according to the activities undertaken, there are a range of common characteristics relating to many of the participants: white; middle class; ex-professionals; over the age of retirement; with higher numbers of women than men. This picture represents an inevitable over-simplification but at the same time all of the organisations studied identified a similar set of shared characteristics amongst their most active members. The single clearest unifying factor is the age range, with very few active participants under the age of retirement; and amongst those who are, few are in full-time employment. In this section we want to explore the implications of these findings in the context of wider issues around diversity and inclusion.

The findings from NCVO's research suggest that different kinds of voluntary organisations, the different activities they undertake and the different types of social capital this generates, all encourage varying levels of emphasis on inclusivity. The findings also show that ensuring inclusivity (even where this is a priority) can present a major challenge for voluntary groups working in rural areas. Whilst the organisations which are engaged in the delivery of services to the wider community clearly engage with a wide cross section of their communities, those organisations that focus their activities within a specific community (whether of interest or locality) show a tendency to be more limited in the diversity of the groups they engage with.

Both the Advice Centre and the Healthy Living Centre identify tackling exclusion as a primary organisational objective. The Advice Centre's mission statement centres on diversity and inclusiveness: '*provide free, confidential, impartial advice to everybody regardless of age, gender, sexuality or disability*'. The Advice Centre's role in tackling social exclusion focuses primarily around the generation of linking social capital through signposting clients to sources of information and support with which they might not otherwise have had contact. They act as brokers in facilitating relationships between their clients and those in positions of power ensuring that:

'individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available to them or through an inability to express their needs effectively.'

The Healthy Living Centre Partnership is constituted with a specific aim to *'break down social isolation and provide opportunity'* both to specific groups which are perceived as vulnerable, but also to the community at large. Part of the Centre's role in tackling social exclusion focuses around the development of bridging social capital across different social and special needs groups and between and within communities. However, the Centre also tackles social exclusion through the development of bonding social capital, in particular by developing a range of self-help groups targeted at those most at risk of exclusion and isolation.

Like the Healthy Living Centre, the Disability Association tackles social exclusion through the development of bonding social capital in its mutual-support activities. Unlike the Healthy Living Centre, the Association engages with a relatively narrow group of individuals. Whilst in principle the Association's activities are open to all people with disabilities and their carers living within a district area, in practice their membership largely consists of disabled people over the age of 50 living in and around the market town in which they are based. This narrower member base reflects two key issues. The first is the twin impact of limited resources and large distances in rural areas. There have been many 'distance decay' studies undertaken looking at service provision, particularly in relation to primary health care. These monitor the rate at which the numbers of individuals accessing a service decline in relation to the distance to be travelled to a service outlet. Services delivered by the voluntary sector are no exception to this rule. All of the organisations we studied expressed a desire to do more out-reach work and make contact with a wider geographical cross-section of the population but, without exception, all of them struggled to do this.

The second issue relates to the important role of common identity in the development of bonding social capital. Our research shows that, particularly in the context of the self-help groups, people come together precisely because they gain benefit from the company of others they perceive as being like themselves. This means that some of the groups are necessarily exclusive; the post-natal depression group within the Healthy Living Centre, for example, has no male members. The desire for a sense of shared identity can also lead to a level of self-exclusion from certain activities. For example, when asked about the potential for including more young people in their activities members of the Disability Association suggest that younger people fail to join the group not because they are unwelcome or have not been invited, but because they prefer to socialise with members of their own generation. However the research undertaken by NCVO suggests that it is important for organisations to give serious thought to the potential negative impacts of these social instincts as well as their potential benefits.

It is important to note that whilst an organisation may not be particularly diverse in terms of its aims, membership or beneficiaries, it may nevertheless contribute to tackling social exclusion by focusing on the needs of a special interest group. Interviewees from the Healthy Living

Centre, for example, highlighted the potential for work targeted at a specific group to benefit the wider community:

“The families are happy about that, carers have got more time because their partners may be here doing voluntary work, it’s got such an impact on the family as well. As far as community in general, then yes that’s got an impact as well because they’re getting more volunteers out into the organisation, they’re getting more people involved in community work.”

What this highlights once again is the relationship between different types of voluntary sector activity and the different kinds of social capital. Whilst engaging with a limited cross-section of the community might be quite acceptable in the context of the work of a self-help group, it would be considered much less appropriate in an organisation with a different set of aims and objectives, such as an advice centre. Tensions can arise where there is a potential conflict between the kinds of social capital required to achieve an organisation’s aims and objectives and the activities undertaken. An example of this can be seen in the work of the Community Group, which has very specific, task-focused objectives:

- *‘Develop a community regeneration strategy and action plan for the [Village] area.*
- *Establish a development trust as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status (or similar as appropriate) to implement the strategy and action plan once it has been developed.’*

However, the Group also has broader responsibilities for building capacity and engaging with a wide cross-section of the population to ensure that the strategies developed are representative and meet the needs of the whole community. Whilst the two sets of objectives are not in conflict with one another, they may require the development of different kinds of social capital based on different kinds of activity. It also needs to be recognised that building the capacity of the wider community to engage in this kind of regeneration process may require a longer timescale than that which both internal and external pressures tend to apply to the development and implementation of plans and strategies.

“One of the difficulties is getting hold of the socially excluded groups, they’re very reluctant to come forward. It still remains a challenge as to how you get good representation and good inclusive representation on groups like this, and if we’re quite critical there are still areas of [Village] that we’ve not been into, some of the housing estates for example, social housing, where those people are not going to come out of their own free will... If we were really critical we’re still not a representative community organisation and may never get to that stage.”

Many commentators question whether community capacity building in the context of regeneration programmes such as this one is inclusive enough and compatible with building the capacities of socially excluded individuals and communities. It has been argued that community development initiatives can sometimes be short-term and output-orientated in practice (however good the intention) and may neglect the least advantaged whilst favouring: *‘those who are already powerful and articulate, and who already enjoy a greater*

*capacity to act and to engage with the initiative*³⁸. Similarly, our findings highlight a potential confusion between the uses of social capital as a target of intervention (i.e. something that benefits the community at large) and as a resource or tool for achieving a specific outcome (i.e. building a community centre). Capacity building activity is primarily targeted at members that are actively involved in the groups we studied, such as the steering committee members in the Community Group or the volunteers at the Advice Bureau who already demonstrate high levels of both human and social capital.

External capacity building activities tend to be focused on those who are already active and engaged, because this enables specific tasks to be completed and goals to be achieved. Where the main source of capacity building comes from the local authority these tasks and goals are often tied in to wider political or institutional aims. But the capacity building support available often fails to address the wider issues of community participation and the engagement of service beneficiaries. Whilst to a greater or lesser extent the ongoing work of the organisations studied contributes to these wider aims, those delivering capacity building support do not always appear to clearly distinguish between building capacity within a single organisation and the slower process of building community capacity. This failure to distinguish may lead to unrealistic expectations of the capacity of both voluntary organisations and communities. In this context, initiatives that aim to promote social capital, civic engagement and participation need to clearly define whose social capital is being developed, who is being empowered and, crucially, for what purpose this is being done. Initiatives would also benefit from identifying what type of social capital is being encouraged, because each carries different implications and relates to different types of activity.

Our research found that in answer to the question ‘whose social capital is being developed?’ there are evident deficits amongst the most excluded groups. Even where organisations are aware of these gaps, engaging with a wider cross section of the community is often a slow and challenging process. Funding programmes that are linked to a requirement to demonstrate broad engagement are successful in raising the profile of these issues, but capacity building support is required to enable organisations to rise to this challenge effectively.

Other striking gaps are highlighted amongst younger age groups. The predominance of people over the age of retirement in the organisations studied perhaps emphasises one of the clear findings from this research: that in the development of social capital time is a vital resource. Social capital takes time to develop; it also requires the available time of individuals and groups to invest in activity. It may be that as lifestyles everywhere grow increasingly hectic, lack of time to engage is one of the greatest threats to the development of social capital.



³⁸ Shucksmith, M. (2000) 'Endogenous development, social capital and social inclusion: perspectives from LEADER in the UK', *Sociologica Ruralis* 40:2, 208-218.



8

Conclusions

The findings from our research looking at the relationships between the activities of just four rural voluntary organisations and the development of social capital are extremely rich in detail and information. The aim of this final section is to summarise the key findings from the research and related policy analysis and to highlight the practical learning for both practitioners and policy makers alike in order to support voluntary organisations working in rural areas in promoting and sustaining social capital.

Overarching Findings

- Perhaps the key finding is that (whilst they are unlikely to use the terminology) the development of social capital forms part of the primary purpose of all the voluntary organisations studied. Whether they are involved in delivering health services, advice, mutual support or community regeneration, each of the four organisations provides benefit to the communities they serve through the development and promotion of strong social networks, mutual trust and shared values.
- The aim of this study was to explore the role of voluntary organisations in rural areas in the development of social capital and to investigate the relationships between the different kinds of social capital and rural voluntary action. We find that voluntary organisations both generate and capitalise on existing social capital in order to tackle the specific challenges that rural environments can create for the communities that live in them, and that these challenges can even represent an impetus for the development of social capital.
- Whilst Social Capital can be just as important in other environments, in rural areas it is linked inextricably to the main problems of rurality: isolation, transportation and access to services.
- The voluntary organisations studied clearly contribute to the development of social capital. However, it is equally clear that they also benefit from existing stocks of social capital. In this way the research findings support the concept of a virtuous circle in which social capital facilitates voluntary activity; which in turn generates more social capital.
- However, our research also highlights the potential for social capital to reproduce rather than tackle inequalities because those with access to decision making processes and resources build on and strengthen their position to the exclusion of those who do not. In all activities relating to the development of social capital there is a risk that the networks, values and attitudes engendered can become narrow, self-perpetuating and exclusive; and voluntary action is no exception to this rule.

- The successful development of voluntary action requires a combination of financial and human resources together with social capital. The three forms of 'capital' are interdependent and in combination create an impact which is significantly greater than the sum of their parts. The research findings underline the fact that, in rural areas as elsewhere, no single form of 'capital' whether human, social or financial can be used as a substitute for the other two.
- The study demonstrates the importance of what has been called the 'institutional context' to social capital - the power of local and national institutions, governance structures and policies to enable or to inhibit the development of social capital. In a rural context this ranges from the impact of national funding programmes to decisions about public transport policy and the development of local structures for supporting and engaging with the voluntary sector.
- Our findings also emphasise the important role played by voluntary organisations in facilitating networks and relationships within and between sectors, within communities and between communities and institutions. This demonstrates the role played by the voluntary sector in enabling the bridging and linking activity, which is often thought to be more difficult to achieve in a rural context.

Key themes & Associated Findings

Different Kinds of Social Capital

- In undertaking this research we wanted to explore how the different types of social capital are generated by or related to different kinds of voluntary sector activity. Each of the organisations studied contributes to some extent to the three types of social capital. However the relative strength of these different types of social capital varies in each group and depends significantly on the organisations' objectives and the activities they engage in.
- Although bonding social capital (based on common identity) often represented the basis on which the organisations were founded, none of the organisations is self-sufficient. Bridging (based on more diverse relationships) and linking (relationships with government, institutions and power structures) are both decisive in helping the organisations develop and achieve ongoing sustainability. All three forms of social capital support, and to some extent rely on, the existence of the other two. However bridging and linking social capital are more challenging and resource intensive, and require greater levels of capacity building support to sustain.
- *Our findings emphasise the potential benefits of developing an understanding of the three different kinds of social capital, the dynamics between them and the challenges and opportunities associated with them. This is true not only for voluntary organisations working on the ground with rural communities, enabling them to assess, evaluate and develop their working practices, but also for local and national policy makers who wish to better understand and promote the relationships between social capital and voluntary action.*

Communities of Place Versus Communities of Interest

- There can be a tendency amongst rural policy makers to assume that rural communities are homogenous and that community of place correlates to common identity. However, rural communities themselves may be more likely to focus on local differences. What constitutes difference and what 'local' means in any given context is open to debate. It is important therefore that we avoid making generalised assumptions about the homogeneity of rural communities.
- The research shows that one of the key ways in which social capital can be a useful tool for voluntary organisations to evaluate their work and relationships is in the focus it places on exploring ideas of common identity and issues of diversity at the local level.
- *In the four organisations surveyed community of interest is as crucial a determinant in the development of social capital as community of place, in many cases more so. In identifying sources of common identity most interviewees identify shared values rather than shared localities.*

Bridging, Linking and Influencing

- A focus on the work of the sector in the context of social capital draws attention to the wider role of the voluntary sector in society. It highlights the importance of the relationships voluntary organisations can foster across sectors, between organisations, within communities and between communities and power institutions. One of the early questions addressed by the research is whether voluntary organisations in rural areas are successful in building the cross-cutting ties that allow them to engage in wider public debates. We find that the more an organisation is able to form ties with similar organisations in the sector, co-operate and act as a group, the more they are likely to have an influential role on behalf of their communities.
- However, amongst the rural voluntary organisations surveyed, the arena for this activity is quite narrow, with few organisations exerting influence beyond the district in which they work. Much of the activity that focuses on developing cross cutting ties is driven by the immediate need to survive rather than by broader strategic aims.
- *All of the organisations studied demonstrate some success in forming alliances and relationships with other organisations, and influencing wider public debates, but at the same time they all stress the challenges and capacity issues posed by undertaking this kind of activity.*

Social Capital, Rurality, Access and Isolation

- Our research suggests that the greater distances, dispersed populations, smaller settlements, extended travel times and associated transport issues which characterise rural areas, can all have specific impacts on the development of social capital.

Individually and collectively these issues can significantly exacerbate the experience of both physical and social isolation within rural communities, limit the development of social networks and hamper voluntary activity. Rural isolation limits both access to key services and the capacity to develop and maintain social links and networks. At the same time these challenges can emphasise the importance of social networks and provide an impetus for the development of social capital. The voluntary sector often plays a key role in generating and capitalising on social capital within rural communities in order to address the challenges rural life can entail.

- In many cases the role adopted by the sector in rural areas is that of bridging the access gap for those members of the community who are unable to access mainstream services. In recent years there has also been an increasing policy focus on encouraging rural communities to act as social entrepreneurs and support a range of 'hard to deliver' services, which are often provided by the public and private sectors in urban communities. Voluntary agencies can also play a crucial role in influencing local and national policy agendas in order to improve the extent and quality of rural service provision.
- *All of these roles demonstrate the importance of bonding, bridging and linking social capital in the effective delivery of rural services and highlight the capacity of the sector to generate social capital in order to tackle the access issues that impact upon rural communities. However the report suggests that support is required to enable rural voluntary organisations to develop this capacity.*

Organisational Sustainability

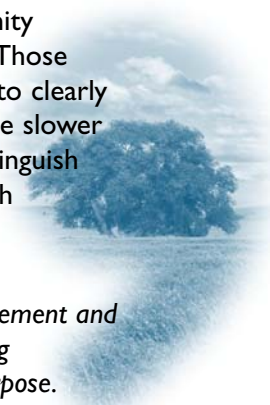
- Each of the groups studied relies heavily on a small number of like-minded enthusiasts who are often highly committed and over-stretched. Burnout of active members, especially those with specific responsibilities in the organisation, can be a threat and the reliance on a limited pool of individuals raises concerns around dependency, knowledge management and sustainability.
- *One of the important issues highlighted by this finding is the importance of skills development within the rural voluntary sector, whether for volunteers or paid staff, because it appears that the development of skills and knowledge have the potential to create significant ongoing benefit both for the sector and for the development of social capital more widely.*

Whose Social Capital?

- In answer to the question 'whose social capital is being developed?' our research found that there are evident deficits amongst the most excluded groups. Even where organisations are aware of these gaps, engaging with a wider cross section of the community is often a slow and challenging process. Funding programmes that are linked to a

requirement to demonstrate broad engagement are successful in raising the profile of these issues but capacity building support is required to enable organisations to rise to this challenge effectively.

- Whilst the organisations which are engaged in the delivery of services to the wider community clearly engage with a wide cross section of their communities, those organisations that focus their activities within a specific community (whether of interest or locality) show a tendency to be more limited in the diversity of the groups they engage with.
- Amongst all four organisations in our study, the majority of volunteers are past retirement age. National statistics suggest a slow trend of decline in the numbers of younger volunteers and this may be emphasised in rural areas where populations are ageing at a more rapid rate than elsewhere. All of the organisations in this study express a desire to recruit younger volunteers but few have been successful in doing so. In a society with increasingly hectic lifestyles, with more people in full time employment, more people working longer hours and more people likely to work beyond the current retirement age, voluntary organisations may need to explore different forms of engagement for those who have less time to give. This would reduce the significant pressure on existing supporters and is vital if organisations wish to engage with a more representative cross-section of the community.
- Existing capacity building activity is primarily targeted at members who are actively involved in the groups we studied, who already demonstrate high levels of both human and social capital. This support often fails to address the wider issues of community participation and the engagement of service beneficiaries. Those delivering capacity building support do not always appear to clearly distinguish between building organisational capacity and the slower process of building community capacity. This failure to distinguish may lead to unrealistic expectations of the capacity of both voluntary organisations and communities.
- *Initiatives that aim to promote social capital, community engagement and participation need clearly to define whose social capital is being developed, who is being empowered and, crucially, for what purpose.*







Appendix 1

Research Methodology

The research on which this report is based took place in the autumn of 2002. The overall objective of this study was to explore how social capital is generated by or related to different kinds of voluntary sector activity in rural areas. Because social capital is a complex and multi-dimensional concept a qualitative approach based on detailed case studies of four voluntary organisations was adopted.

The case studies explore the work of the four selected organisations not only in terms of their activities, resources and beneficiaries, but also in terms of the relationships and networks they have with community members, other organisations and institutions. They also aim to examine their strengths and weaknesses and to analyse how these impact on social capital, community capacity and development.

Following a review of a range of different indicators relating to rurality, population and deprivation (published by the Office for National Statistics) the decision was taken to focus the research within rural areas of the South West. A long-list of potential candidates for the case studies was developed with the help of a range of regional contacts and the use of the Internet. A short-list was then developed from this, which aimed to reflect the diversity of the sector both in terms of the size of the organisations approached and the activities they undertook. Access to the short-listed organisations was negotiated through the organisations' management (or steering) committees and trustee boards.

The case studies are each based on a number of interviews with the different stakeholders of the four selected organisations. These included: management; staff; volunteers; trustees; beneficiaries; and others as appropriate to the individual organisation. Identification of the key stakeholders and access to the individuals was established through the organisations themselves.

The interview guides mirrored the key research questions that emerged from a literature review on social capital in rural Britain conducted by NCVO in the summer 2002³⁹ and were based on the organisational module of the World Bank Social Capital Assessment Tool (the other modules being 'household' and 'community'). They focused essentially on social interaction networks within and beyond the organisations and covered the following themes: organisational structure and capacity; organisational and institutional relationships; and community involvement and participation.

The analysis of the interviews centred on the concepts of bonding, bridging and linking social capital, which highlighted the dynamics between the two major components of social capital: social interaction and shared norms. It

³⁹ Jochum, V. (2003) Social Capital: beyond the theory, NCVO.

also highlighted a number of issues relating to social capital such as inclusivity, access to services, community capacity building, funding, collaborative working and organisational sustainability. In addition to the interviews, as much documentation as possible was collected from the organisations including: annual reports; AGM statements; statistics; brochures and newsletters.

Key Research Questions

1. How are different types of social capital generated by or related to different kinds of voluntary sector activity?
2. Do rural voluntary organisations succeed in building the crosscutting ties (in the form of bridging and linking social capital), which would allow them to engage in wider public debates?
3. How do the strengths and weaknesses of the different types of voluntary organisation and voluntary activity impact on social capital, community capacity and development?
4. Whose capacity and social capital are being built? How inclusive are voluntary organisations?
5. What is the relationship between social capital, communities and locality? Is the prevailing factor locality or do other factors need to be taken into account?



Appendix 2

Profiles of Case Study Organisations

The Disability Association

This self-help group was founded within the last five years and is based in a medium sized market town. The aims and objectives of the group are to:

- *‘Provide support and advice to all people with disabilities and their carers living in [District];*
- *Meet regularly for information exchange and networking, arrange visits to disabled friendly establishments within and outside the area, organise social events for members and work in partnership with other agencies;*
- *Make aware and promote local disability issues and address local disability concerns and needs’.*

Membership of the group is open to all people with disabilities and their carers living within the district. The group is entirely run by its membership. This includes 6 committee members, about 25 regular attendants at monthly meetings and a mailing list of approximately 100 people who all receive a monthly newsletter. The group employs a freelance IT trainer on a part-time basis to support the provision of IT training which is one of the group’s main activities.

The group holds regular monthly meetings that are open to members and anyone with disability issues. A monthly newsletter is distributed to members, other interested parties and local statutory agencies. Group activities include:

- Regular IT training;
- Social events;
- Leisure activities (e.g. sailing);
- Outings (e.g. shopping trips, carol concerts).

The group received a one-off lottery grant in October 2001 for a computer station, free one-to-one training and Internet access. This was followed by an additional grant of the following year for further IT training.

The Healthy Living Centre Partnership

This organisation works with a range of cross-sectoral partners as an unincorporated association: The Healthy Living Centre Partnership Forum. Its aims are to:

- *‘Improve the quality of life of the people of [village] and the surrounding area;*

- *Break down social isolation and provide opportunity;*
- *Offer activities that impact directly on the health and well-being of community.'*

Specific target groups include people who are unemployed or have restricted opportunities for employment, people with mental health problems, people with disabilities, ex-offenders and those who are isolated due to their rurality. However, activities are also aimed at the wider community and the neighbouring villages in a radius of ten miles (a population of approximately 30,000).

The Partnership has six paid staff of whom four work part-time. The team includes a volunteer co-ordinator, a mental health worker, a project development co-ordinator, a project assistant, a general manager and a receptionist/administrator. The centre receives well over a thousand visits per week according to a survey conducted in 2002.

The centre has two core projects:

- A community mental health project offering support to anyone experiencing emotional difficulty or mental distress. The project worker offers individual counselling and has set-up two self-help groups: a group aimed at mothers suffering from post-natal depression, and a weekly drop-in for people with mental or emotional needs.
- A volunteering project that provides opportunities for people who want to volunteer. These may be people who are unemployed or unable to work or people from the mental health project, along with individuals from the wider community.

Other activities include:

- A community garden, located behind the centre, which works closely with the mental health and volunteering projects. Originally one of the organisation's core projects this has now become an independent registered charity.
- A pilot fresh food co-op (with links to the community garden).
- A number of partner organisations are housed within the centre including: Adult Social Services, the Youth Service, Health Visitors, Midwife and School Nurses, a Pre-school, an After-school club and the Community Accessible Transport Project.
- Adult education classes, run by Community Education, a local college, and a number of self-help groups (e.g. support group for stroke victims).
- The Centre also offers a range of paid-for services to tenant and external organisations including: room hire; payroll; photocopying; fax etc. and hopes to develop these further in future.

Over the last three years the Centre has raised approximately £1.5 million from a variety of national and local sources.

The Advice Centre

Situated in the major market town within a district, this small, independent Advice Centre serves the whole district. The aims and objectives of the centre are to:

- *‘Provide free, confidential, impartial advice to everybody regardless of age, gender, sexuality or disability;*
- *Ensure individuals do not suffer through lack of knowledge of their rights and responsibilities or of the services available to them or through an inability to express their needs effectively.’*

The Advice Centre is open to all members of the general public. Approximately 40% of all enquiries concern benefits. The centre employs six paid staff all of whom work part-time, including an office organiser, two deputy organisers, a guidance tutor/IT manager, an office manager and a family support worker. The centre relies on the services of 40 volunteers (the majority of whom work as client advisors). In the financial year 2001-2002 the advisors saw approximately 2,500 clients in a total of around 5,300 separate interviews.

The activities of the centre include:

- Debt and money advice;
- Benefit checking project;
- Family support services;
- Outreach service;
- Weekly surgeries in two local villages.

Currently the centre receives about £100,000 a year in funding from a combination of national, regional and local sources.

The Community Group

This community group is based in a small village. The group was developed following an open meeting arranged by the District Council’s Rural Regeneration Officer in December 2000 as part of a wider community regeneration agenda focusing on the district’s market towns and rural areas. Following this first meeting, which highlighted the opportunities available for taking forward a programme of community led regeneration, a steering group of interested individuals came together to explore the options. The group adopted a formal constitution in January 2002. Its aims and objectives are to:

- *‘Develop a community regeneration strategy and action plan for the [Village] area.*
- *Establish a development trust as a company limited by guarantee with charitable status (or similar as appropriate) to implement the strategy and action plan once it has been developed.’*

The group is open to the residents of the village and the surrounding parishes. The group is run by a steering committee of 11 members. Regular meetings to update the community on progress and gather input attract between 50 and 60 participants. Over all an estimated 300 people have attended at least one of the group's public meetings. The group has two sub-groups a Transport sub-group and a Parish plan working group, run in partnership with the Parish Council.

The group holds regular steering committee meetings (at least once a month) coupled with regular meetings open to the general public (every two months) activities include:

- A postal survey of all households in the village and surrounding parishes aimed at generating a local 'wish list' for the area.
- Publishing a timetable of all the buses passing through the village - aimed at increasing awareness and uptake of local public transport. This has been circulated to all households in the village and is available online.
- Exploring the potential for a new community centre.
- Raising local concerns about a planned housing development.
- A business directory and Parish Newsletter are in development.
- Work is underway in partnership with the Parish Council to develop a Parish Plan.
- Other proposals include hosting a Farmers Market and lobbying to increase the local police presence.

Further consultation to establish local needs and wishes and meet funding requirements is in the planning stages.

The group has received around £10,000 in funding over the past two years.





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Woolcock, M. (2001) 'The Place of Social Capital in Understanding Social and Economic Outcomes', *Isuma* 2:1. www.isuma.net/v02n01/woolcock/woolcock_e.pdf





Some Useful Websites

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

www.oecd.org/cer/obj1/docs.htm

Office for National Statistics (ONS)

www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/

World Bank

www.worldbank.org/poverty/scapital/

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**National Council for
Voluntary Organisations**

Regent's Wharf

8 All Saints Street

London N1 9RL

Tel: 020 7713 6161

Fax: 020 7713 6300

Textphone: 0800 01 88 111

Email: ncvo@ncvo-vol.org.uk

Websites: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Need to know? www.askNCVO.org.uk

HelpDesk: 0800 2 798 798

or helpdesk@askncvo.org.uk

Charity Registration: 225922

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