Social Capital and Natural Disasters:

A Study in Western China

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Social Capital: the missing link?

- Recovery from disasters: Focus of *social science* studies on natural disasters

- Core questions:
  - Why did some affected communities/households recover quicker and better than others?

- Based on empirical data, this paper intends to show that ...
  - Social capital plays an important role in people’s recovery from disasters
  - Different levels and aspects of social capital influence the recovery in different ways
  - Thus; we need further studies on the relationship between social capital and recovery from natural disasters
What is Social Capital?

- Social Capital: A social structural resource
  - Micro-level social capital
    - Resources embedded in personal networks, which enables actors to acquire more external social resources
    - Helps people to obtain information, knowledge and social support, thus is helpful for people to achieve higher social-economic status
  - Macro-level social capital
    - Features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit
    - Plays a crucial role in promoting economic performance, making democracy work, alleviating poverty and ensuring sustainable development

- Research questions
  - What is the role of social capital in recovery from disasters? How does it work?
  - A comprehensive analytical framework consists of both micro and macro level social capital
  - The “institutional vacuum” in China during the period of social transition
Data

- Monitoring the Social and Economic Development of Western China
- Conducted by NRCSTD and Fafo
- The survey covers:
  - 11 provinces in western China
  - 2,772 communities
  - 44,000 households
  - 167,000 person
- Multi- modules
  - Demography
  - Education
  - Labor force and migration
  - Health
  - Housing and Infrastructure
  - Agriculture
  - Household economy
  - Social network and social capital
  - Information about the community

This paper uses a sub-set of the data: including only people who lived in sample communities that experiences natural disaster during last year.
Research variables

- **Dependent variables**
  - Formal and informal support (from government, NGO, etc, or from relatives, friends)
  - Psychological health
  - Self-estimation of the household’s economic status
  - Changes in the economic situation over the last year

- **Independent variables**
  - Micro-level social capital
    - *Network size*
    - *Network density*
    - *Embedded resources in network*
  - Macro-level social capital
    - *Trust*
      - in institution
      - in strangers
      - in familiar people
  - Public participation
    - general
    - political

- **Control variables**
  - Economic situation of household, education, rural-urban, location ……
Profiles

- 47.3% of the sampled households live in communities affected by natural disasters last year
- 5% of the affected households received formal support, 17% received informal support
- 25% of the sampled individuals met mental problems
- 77% of the affected households seem to recover well from the disasters, while one third currently define themselves as “poor”
- The mean network size is approximately 26 persons, the mean network density (proportion of relatives) is 0.69
- High degree of trust in familiar people, and low degree of public participation
Results

- Impact on social support
  - *Micro social capital is very important, especially for informal support*
  - *Network density is negatively correlated to formal support, and positively correlated to informal support*

- Impact on psychological health
  - *Higher network density leads to better psychological health*
  - *Institutional trust and social participation is positively related to psychological health, while the trust in strangers and familiar people has negative impact*

- Impact on economic recovery
  - *Micro social capital, especially the network size, has an important impact*
  - *Higher network density seems to lead to worse economic recovery*
  - *Affected households in high-trust communities recover easier, whereas high levels of social participation seems to have a negative impact on recovery*
Conclusion and Discussion

- The important role of micro-level social capital in recovery from natural disasters supports the “social resource” theory

- Network structure, social capital and type of action
  - Networks with bigger size and less density improves the circulation of information and resources, thus they have a positive impact on instrumental actions
  - On the contrary, networks with smaller size and higher density (so-called “core networks”) could provide more informal support, and are better for expressive actions

- Trust, participation and recovery
  - Trust and participation do not necessarily lead to more resources. Rather, their main function is helping people to cooperate, hence make better use of existing resources
  - Higher trust in institution and strangers brought better economic recovery, which shows the importance of trust and cooperation for recovery from disasters
  - People in communities with higher level of public participation had worse economic recovery
  - Macro-level social capital has significant positive effects on psychological health
    - High trust and participation ➔ higher level social integration ➔ better psychological health
Disaster recovery is not only about building houses but the reconstruction of the whole community as a safer place.

To mobilize each member of the community in this collective action, social capital is a crucial need.

Thanks

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