

THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF AFGHANISTAN (IN THE LAST TWO DECADES)

Sharifullah Nikoui

Sociology department, Social science faculty, Parwan university.

nikoui.sharif1212@gmail.com

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Abstract. *This article examines the relationship between social capital and sustainable development in Afghanistan. Social capital is a tangible asset through which individuals and groups can leverage social relationships, including values, social networks, and trust, to gain economic and social benefits. Social capital, alongside other types of capital such as financial and cultural capital, plays a significant role in society's transformation and balanced development. Development requires balanced progress across various dimensions, and sustainable development eradicates inequality and poverty by strengthening justice and equality. Therefore, the development process in society is as dependent on cultural and social capital as it is on economic capital. This research employs a qualitative approach and document review, aiming to analyze the relationship between social capital and sustainable development in Afghanistan. The findings indicate that higher levels of social capital are deeply connected to development. This research clarifies the contradictory perceptions in the literature regarding the impacts of social capital on sustainable development, demonstrating that social capital has a profound connection to sustainable development.*

Keywords: Capital, Social Capital, Development, Sustainable Development, Afghanistan

РОЛЬ СОЦИАЛЬНОГО КАПИТАЛА В УСТОЙЧИВОМ РАЗВИТИИ АФГАНИСТАНА (ЗА ПОСЛЕДНИЕ ДВА ДЕСЯТИЛЕТИЯ)

Аннотация. *В этой статье рассматривается взаимосвязь между социальным капиталом и устойчивым развитием в Афганистане. Социальный капитал — это осязаемый актив, с помощью которого отдельные лица и группы могут использовать социальные отношения, включая ценности, социальные сети и доверие, для получения экономических и социальных выгод. Социальный капитал, наряду с другими типами капитала, такими как финансовый и культурный капитал, играет значительную роль в трансформации общества и сбалансированном развитии. Развитие требует сбалансированного прогресса в различных измерениях, а устойчивое развитие искореняет неравенство и бедность путем укрепления справедливости и равенства. Таким образом,*

процесс развития в обществе зависит от культурного и социального капитала так же, как и от экономического капитала. В этом исследовании используется качественный подход и обзор документов, направленный на анализ взаимосвязи между социальным капиталом и устойчивым развитием в Афганистане. Результаты показывают, что более высокие уровни социального капитала тесно связаны с развитием. Это исследование проясняет противоречивые представления в литературе относительно влияния социального капитала на устойчивое развитие, демонстрируя, что социальный капитал имеет глубокую связь с устойчивым развитием.

Ключевые слова: Капитал, Социальный капитал, Развитие, Устойчивое развитие, Афганистан.

INTRODUCTION

Social capital is a relatively new concept in the field of social studies. It refers to a network of relationships and connections that lead to better and greater access for individuals to opportunities, information, material resources, and social status. In sociological theories, concepts such as trust, solidarity, cohesion, and social values and norms are considered manifestations of social capital. Lida Hanfian (1916) defines social capital as a collection of tangible assets in the daily lives of individuals, such as equality, friendship, goodwill, empathy, and social interactions among a group of individuals or families that form a social unit. Social capital facilitates civil participation by creating equal opportunities and increases the likelihood of cooperation among citizens. Cooperation between groups and social organizations raises the level of trust and leads to greater participation. Pentam examined the relationship between development and social capital, considering social capital as a fundamental condition for development. The importance of the relationship between social capital and sustainable development is particularly significant in countries facing economic and social challenges. Therefore, the issue of this research is to analyze and examine the relationship between social capital and social sustainable development in Afghan society.

The research data were collected through qualitative methods and a review of books and scientific articles.

A noteworthy point regarding the composition of social capital in Afghanistan is its social fabric, which consists of 55 ethnic groups, among which four ethnic groups Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks constitute the largest populations (Glatzer, 1998: 226).

Societies with ethnic diversity use social capital as a tool to address social and economic challenges, and based on this reasoning, Afghanistan has the best opportunities for sustainable development through the strengthening of social capital. According to Ali-Abadi (1994: 13), Afghanistan is a museum of various races and ethnicities. This diversity can be a positive aspect of the cultural richness of society. However, obstacles such as inflexibility, lack of access to equal opportunities, ethnic nationalism, illiteracy, economic underdevelopment, and so on weaken social capital. Alongside the aforementioned factors, the closed system of governance and competition among ethnic groups are considered obstacles to sustainable development. Given that Afghanistan has endured several decades of crisis, its development process shows a deep reliance on social capital. According to research data from national and international organizations, Afghanistan ranks at the top of the list of underdeveloped countries in terms of development and progress.

Although in recent years, significant steps have been taken with the cooperation of the international community to create conditions for development and rebuild infrastructure, these efforts have contributed to a relative improvement in the status of social capital within society.

Many analysts describe the achievements of the past two decades as unprecedented in Afghanistan's history, with the growth of human resources and the accumulation of social capital in various forms, including civil society, media, and active human rights groups, being among them. Therefore, this study examines the relationship between social capital and sustainable development in Afghanistan over the past two decades, with the main issue being how social capital influences the process of sustainable development in Afghan society. The central question is how social capital in Afghan society has faced a deadlock and why the existing capacities for sustainable development have not been utilized. This study employs qualitative methods and document analysis to gather information from credible sources, analyzing the relationship between social capital and sustainable development in Afghanistan over the past two decades through a descriptive-analytical approach. The results confirm the relationship between social capital and development, describing the formation of a network of social relationships and connections as an unavoidable necessity for development.

Social Capital Theories

In the contemporary era, due to the influence of economic power, many other aspects of authority remain unknown to governments. For this reason, policymakers believe that by providing public services and welfare, they can address all challenges; however, today, social stability and cohesion have become central topics of discussion among experts as goals of social capital in

contrast to economic capital. The root of this issue stems from concerns about the excessive threat of industrialization and technology, which have diminished the role of institutions, values, and social norms on a global scale. Among all, sociologists emphasize the importance of social capital over economic capital in society. In general, social capital refers to the resources that individuals acquire through their connections with one another. The quality and quantity of these connections are shaped by social relationships, and according to Portes (1998), social capital is found within the structure of society (Shara'pour, 2005: 11). In other words, social capital is a type of investment through which individuals produce and obtain expected benefits during social interactions.

Pierre Bourdieu, a French sociologist, is among the first researchers to refer to social capital in an article titled "Forms of Capital" (1986). According to him, social capital is: a set of potential and actual resources that are connected to a durable and institutionalized ownership network with mutual recognition and awareness (Bourdieu, 1997: 50). Social capital is the product of social relationships and membership in a group that earns credibility for each of its members. Social capital emerges in the process of exchange and reproduction of relationships, and its benefit reaches the individual through "purposeful participation or sociability." James Coleman considers social capital as part of the social structure (Coleman, 1998: 462) that allows the actor to achieve their interests. Coleman focused more on the function of social capital, while Bourdieu was interested in how social capital provides access to economic capital.

After Coleman and Bourdieu, Putnam argues that social capital influences economic development. According to Putnam, networks of civic engagement are the foundation of social capital. He considers civic culture or social capital to be a prerequisite for political stability and economic growth (Coleman, 1998: 12). Fukuyama views social capital as a collective asset and defines it as a specific set of shared values and norms among groups that have mutual trust, commitment, and communication (Fukuyama, 2000: 69-71). Fukuyama believes that social capital fosters collaboration among groups based on moral commitment.

He emphasizes the connection between ethics and social capital, describing distrust as a significant factor in diminishing the effectiveness of social capital in society. In his view, certain phenomena such as cultural intolerance, racism, ethnic nationalism, and other types of social networks that have informal moral relationships should be distinguished from the true forms of social capital.

Overall, social capital focuses on the principle that family, friends, and colleagues are assets that individuals can benefit from in times of crisis.

The discussion of social capital is more significant for society than for private circles.

According to Putnam and Goss (2002: 9), a society that possesses various social organizations can leverage them when facing critical situations.

In addition to the above theories, it has been a common discussion among sociologists that individual participation in society yields positive results; however, contrary to sociological assumptions, social capital has two distinguishing features from other related concepts: "One is that social capital is the result of individuals interacting with one another, and the other is that social capital is a source of authority" (Tosuli and Mousavi, 2005: 6).

Furthermore, in political and economic policymaking, social capital is utilized as a low-cost solution to social issues; yet, we ultimately arrive at the question of how social capital contributes to sustainable development in society. If we compile all the theories related to social capital, we will conclude that when the relationship between social and economic structures is based on "trust and cooperation," economic performance and market efficiency increase, leading to investment in entrepreneurship and positive competition, while in the social dimension, norms, and social values enhance the level of cooperation (Shari'pour, 2005, 14-15). As a result, social capital aids in the flourishing of society in all areas and ensures sustainable development; because any form of investment in society requires a high level of social trust, and communities with low levels of social capital have the least likelihood of development. An example of such a community is Afghanistan, which, despite the efforts of the international community and significant economic expenditures, has not yet achieved development, primarily due to the imbalance between human, social, economic, and cultural capital. Despite the efforts of the international community and the Afghan government towards economic self-sufficiency and infrastructure development, the lack of social capital and trust and cooperation between the government and society has rendered all these efforts fruitless.

The Relationship Between Sustainable Development and Social Capital

In essence, development refers to the improvement of social, political, cultural, and economic conditions in a balanced manner. Just as social development emphasizes the enhancement of living conditions and the empowerment of marginalized groups, strengthening social institutions, and social welfare indicators, sustainable social development is associated with social justice, reducing inequality, and the active participation of citizens in public decision-making. In other words, sustainable development cannot occur without the realization of justice and equality.

The report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987) defines sustainable development as development that meets the current needs of society without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Avijit, 1998: 98).

The process of sustainable development requires structural changes that lead to the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty. Sustainable development creates the conditions for economic growth and contributes to ensuring justice and equality in access to public welfare such as health, education, and security. Except for economic growth, other dimensions of sustainable development have a direct relationship with social capital; equality and the right to access public welfare are not possible without considering social capital, as social capital fosters collective participation for the efficiency of structures that, as Bourdieu puts it, can be utilized in specific situations (Smith, 1387: 220). As Bourdieu has explained, social, cultural, and economic capital are directly related to each other. The relationship between different types of capital and sustainable development can be explained in such a way that social capital prevents the commodification of cultural capital and the excessive concentration of economic capital, thereby creating equitable access to resources and services for all.

Afghanistan and the Escape of Elites (Brain Drain)

Before addressing the main discussion, it is essential to highlight the issue of elite migration as a primary challenge to social capital in Afghanistan. The flight or migration of elites stems from the closed conditions and structures of countries. Some have referred to elite migration as a form of neo-colonialism, used as a tool to access cheap labor. Overall, this term reflects the exit and loss of specialized human resources, which are considered the social capital of a country (Tayefi, 2006: 9 - 12). Although there are no precise statistics on the number of Afghan migrants in various countries, existing estimates suggest that the total number of migrants from Afghanistan since 1978 has reached 6 million, constituting 20 percent of Afghanistan's total population (Ramyar, 2020: 154). According to the International Organization for Migration, between 2000 and 2002, the share of Afghan migration ranked second after Iraq, with 11,000 people migrating to industrial countries (UNHCR, 2003: 11). While the years 2001 to 2010 are considered relatively better years for the people of Afghanistan due to relative stability, the statistics on elite migration during these years indicate an alarming level. Despite the creation of job opportunities and the need for human resources, elites have shown little inclination to remain in Afghanistan, and this flight of elites constitutes the greatest weakness of social capital.

Considering the financial resources required for migration, most migrants come from the upper classes of society; as existing evidence suggests, securing the necessary costs and skills for migration to countries like Turkey, which serves as a gateway to Europe, is not feasible for most Afghans. For this reason, migration from higher-income and highly educated classes is 80 percent more than from lower-income and less educated classes.

Based on this premise, it can be confirmed that the migration of human resources, as a primary indicator of social capital, has had a significant impact on sustainable development in Afghan society, and Afghanistan's underdevelopment is directly related to the migration of elites and the flight of human resources.

Another issue related to the brain drain from Afghan society in the past two decades is the program for transferring Afghan personnel who worked with NATO and the United States. In 2009, over 48,000 Afghan employees and translators, along with their families, were relocated to the United States, and this trend continues. Additionally, the "Special Immigration Visa" program from industrialized countries is another factor contributing to the brain drain from Afghanistan. Despite this, in the past two decades, a new and educated generation in Afghanistan has shown at least a belief in the discourse of sustainable development and has achieved a relative understanding of the need for change and reform of the current situation.

Social capital and sustainable social development in Afghanistan

After the events of September 11, the Afghan government entered global political discourses as a global issue. From the very beginning, Western political doctrine described the Afghan government as a "fragile state" and a security threat to the global order.

According to Newman (2009: 424), a fragile state cannot maintain public order within its territory and foster economic and social development. Typically, due to the inability to control territory, Western nations perceive fragile states as a threat to their security and consider intervention in these countries' affairs as their legitimate right. Although the aim of these interventions is stated to be the establishment of a stable government and assistance in economic and social development, it seems that foreign interventions do not align well with the objectives set in countries suffering from the disorder. For instance, after 2001, the international community, led by the United States, came to Afghanistan with the goal of "nation-building." Evidence suggests that the American state-building process in Afghanistan has failed, and alongside the withdrawal of American and NATO military forces, the order and government they claimed to have established collapsed.

Therefore, the internal situation in Afghanistan can be better explained by Brook's analysis of fragile states rather than Newman's theory. Brook writes about fragile states: "Such states are unable to meet their own needs; consequently, the trust and loyalty of the people are drawn towards ethnic communities" (Ramyar, 1399: 45). In these types of states, several self-centered elites hold power, to maintain their authority. In contrast, a stable state requires the rule of law, the guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms for the people, political participation, and the formation of civil society.

This article reviews some research conducted on the relationship between social capital and sustainable development in Afghanistan, aiming to clarify the role of social capital in development. The main argument is based on the principle that significant efforts have been made in Afghanistan over the past two decades for development, which have not been sustainable due to the lack of social and cultural infrastructure; therefore, mobilizing social capital is necessary as a long-term solution for creating development. Despite internal conflicts and the unstable social and economic conditions in Afghanistan after 2001, alongside NATO's military presence, international organizations have made considerable efforts in the field of economic and social development. The problem is that integrating various forms of capital within society is essential for creating sustainable development, and this issue has not been taken into account in Afghanistan.

According to the Asia Foundation report (2015: 73), the results of international efforts can be summarized in the reduction of poverty, mortality, life expectancy, and education. While the efforts of foreign organizations may have impacted the development of the country, it seems that the lack of attention to the growth of social capital has rendered the global community's efforts ineffective. For instance, the Western neoliberal policy in Afghanistan has led to the destruction of the middle class and dependency on state resources, undermined the culture of innovation, and increased anti-social capital patterns such as corruption and distrust towards the government (Ramyar, 1399: 51). Therefore, due to the lack of specialized personnel, oversight mechanisms, public participation, and the absence of trust and cooperation among civil society organizations, the economic and social conditions have not improved sufficiently.

To overcome this situation, social capital, or networks based on cooperation and trust, is very important. According to Hamidi's argument (1395), there is a very strong intra-group social capital in Afghan society, which can be seen among ethnic groups; however, social capital in its modern sense is still underdeveloped in Afghanistan.

Although in the past two decades, the initial roots of modern social capital have expanded in the form of active legal parties and movements, the continuation and strengthening of these could replace traditional intra-group capital. Additionally, over the past two decades, social capital in Afghan cities has transitioned from traditional forms to urban councils that address public issues.

In analyzing social capital in Afghan society, the theoretical model of Robert Putnam and Fukuyama can be most effectively utilized. Just as Putnam's empirical research in Italy showed that in places with high levels of trust and cooperation, the level of development was greater compared to those with low levels of capital. Based on Putnam's theory, it can be argued that among ethnic groups and in the realm of ethnic interests in Afghanistan, there is a high level of cooperation and trust; however, in analyzing the concept of cross-ethnic or modern social capital, the same deadlock is observed that Putnam identified in underdeveloped regions.

Despite the government's inclination and the increased concentration of resources and policies in predominantly Pashtun areas, the level of participation in government organizations, public welfare, and social trust in democratic institutions has been at its lowest over the past two decades, with the inefficacy of institutions and organizations being more evident. This is because, in predominantly Pashtun areas, social capital is traditionally based on ethnic values and, most importantly, religious beliefs, where the norms of Pashtunwali hold greater significance than the trust of conscious cooperation. According to Hamidi (2016), people in these areas still turn to tribal elders, community councils, and religious leaders to resolve their disputes and problems.

Consequently, it can be said that reliable civil networks have not yet formed in these regions, and if they do exist, they are not trusted by the people. For this reason, relationships are limited to the upper levels of society, and lower classes are less informed about the flow of information. In contrast to the Pashtun community, among other ethnic groups, especially the Tajiks and Hazaras, there has been a horizontal development of social networks and civil ties over the past two decades, characterized by intra-generational gaps, urbanization, a desire for education, and unlimited participation in national processes such as elections and civil society. Just as Putnam believes in the success of horizontal networks, the findings of this study also indicate that government institutions have performed better among the Tajik and Hazara communities, with higher levels of public engagement and cooperation. It is expected that strengthening these horizontal networks in the future will contribute to sustainable development in these areas.

In any case, cooperation, empathy, goodwill, and traditional participation are general characteristics of Afghan society that form the foundation of national solidarity and cohesion.

These values and norms are the greatest source of social capital, provided that they are more flexibly related to the macro changes in society and are utilized at the national level.

On the other hand, as Pentam believes in the role of strong networks in development, despite the ethnic and intra-group structures at the national level, especially in the past two decades, cooperation and trust in institutions and organizations have been in a better position, with all their shortcomings, and the effectiveness of bureaucratic organizations, given their limited history in Afghanistan, is predicted to be positive. For instance, the activities of civil movements over the past two decades in establishing stability and equitable access to services indicate that social capital among the educated and literate segments of society has been growing. The level of participation in elections and human rights activities, as well as education and public awareness, suggests that social capital in Afghanistan has experienced unprecedented growth in the last two decades.

The reality is that despite the growth of social capital, its impact on economic and cultural development has not been tangible, and the sustainability of these types of networks and relationships, which Bourdieu emphasizes in his theory, has receded just as quickly as it has grown.

Despite possessing cultural capital, social capital has not been particularly successful in mobilizing capabilities and talents to address the major challenges and problems of society.

Despite all the shortcomings in human resources, development, and social capital in Afghanistan over the past two decades, hopes for improvement have been ignited, opening a new horizon for society. Afghanistan emerged from a crisis, and in less than two decades, the achievements in social development have been significant, and strengthening them could lead to sustainable development.

Table 1: Growth of Social Development Indicators in the Last Two Decades in Afghanistan

INDICATOR	DETAILS
CIVIL SOCIETY	According to reports, approximately 2,100 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were officially active in Afghanistan in the fields of health, education, and social development over the past two decades. Of these, 268 were foreign institutions, and the rest were domestic (Ramyar, 2020: 156). Additionally, political parties and organizations form another part of civil society, with 68 political parties being active in Afghanistan during these two decades (Ministry of Justice: 2017).

MEDIA AND INFORMATION FLOW	Article 34 of the Constitution of Afghanistan affirms freedom of expression. Subsequently, 65 visual media outlets, around 200 audio media outlets, 25 newspapers, and hundreds of other publications were active (Ramyar, 2020: 159).
HEALTH	In terms of health indicators, 67% of the Afghan population (as of 2016) had relative access to healthcare services (Central Statistics Organization, 2017: 16).
EDUCATION	In the field of education, the number of students increased from 1 million to 9 million by 2016. Additionally, 60% of the country's population was literate (Literacy Department: 2016: 16). Cultural development in the past two decades has been a significant milestone, showcasing the existing capacity for sustainable development in Afghanistan.
HUMAN CAPITAL GROWTH INDEX	According to reports from the Central Statistics Organization and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), approximately 60% of Afghanistan's population consists of young people. During the first decade, life expectancy was estimated at 63 years, and per capita income was estimated at \$561 (UNDP, 2016).

The table above shows that social and cultural development has experienced continuous growth over the past two decades. Focusing on utilizing these potential resources could significantly contribute to sustainable growth in Afghan society.

Conclusion

This paper examines the relationship between social capital and sustainable development in Afghan society. Various development strategies have been tested in Afghanistan over different periods, particularly in the last two decades, with the support of the international community and foreign aid. The goal of these efforts has been focused on creating development in various dimensions, which has also led to some early results.

However, as argued above, development is an internal process and requires the comprehensive support of the people. In contrast to this argument, little attention has been paid to internal forces, trust, and cooperation among the people in the development process in

Afghanistan. Development priorities were designed based on a capitalist model, which mainly engaged the middle class and skilled workforce in bureaucratic, engineered activities.

The result was superficial and premature progress in various social, cultural, and economic areas. As discussed in the section on social capital theory, human resources and financial assets alone are insufficient for sustainable development. In addition to these, a society requires cultural and economic capital, as well as trust and cooperation within civil networks. This issue is taken seriously in the policy-making processes of developed countries, where social capital is considered a fundamental principle for societal progress.

Therefore, Afghanistan, as a country in need of sustainable development, possesses sufficient economic, cultural, and social resources, which, if mobilized effectively, can lead to progress. Despite the previous neglect of social capital, significant growth has been seen in Afghan society over the past two decades, with various social networks having undergone horizontal development. Thus, any future development-oriented policy will not achieve satisfactory results without considering social capital. The aim is to make it easier for Afghanistan to accumulate social capital, create a space for increasing trust, and ultimately strengthen the broader culture. To this end, society requires extensive planning, one of which involves reflecting and rethinking social capital. What gives the development process in our society more flexibility and resilience is the possession of social capital.

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