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Social Capital in Development: Bonds, Bridges, and Links in Osa and Golfito, Costa Rica

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Limited social capital poses a critical bottleneck for sustainable rural development. Despite vast investment, development interventions focused on preserving the biodiversity of the Osa and Golfito region of Costa Rica have done little to address poverty or improve the well-being of local residents. The authors of the current study draw upon field research and data gathered from semi-structured interviews with 310 community leaders and rural residents to investigate the bottlenecks to development and how they are related to forms of social capital in the Osa and Golfito cantons in Costa Rica. Specifically, we draw upon the distinction of bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital to characterize the nature of benefits from collective action in communities in Osa and Golfito. The data suggest that the lack of bridging and linking forms of social capital may explain the region's persistent development challenges and may thus indicate where development-related investments are most likely to bear fruit.

Key words: social capital, sustainable development, collective action, conservation, Costa Rica

Introduction

Limited social capital—the relative lack of benefit from relations of reciprocity and trust among local-level institutions, organizations, and social networks—has been identified as a critical bottleneck for sustainable rural development (Bebbington et al. 2006; Putnam 1995; Serra 2011; Titeca and Vervisch 2008). The Brunca region of Costa Rica, including the sub-departmental jurisdictional cantons (counties) of Osa and Golfito, which are home to approximately 80,000 residents, leads all others with a poverty rate of 35.3 percent and an extreme poverty rate of 15.8 percent, far exceeding national averages on the same statistics of 20.7 percent and 6.4 percent respectively (INEC 2013). Development interventions in Osa and Golfito have focused on biodiversity conservation and have generally ignored inequality in access to resources (Fletcher 2012; Horton 2007). Seen by locals as overly conservation-oriented and carried out "a espaldas de la comunidad" (with their back to the community) (Nuñez, Borge, and Herrera 2007:1), these interventions have done little to address the significant regional poverty that persists despite a combined national and international allotment of $20+ million for conservation efforts in Corcovado National Park, Piedras Blancas National Park, the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve, marine-coastal zones, indigenous reserves, and associated biological corridors between 1990-2009 (Menke 2012).

The current study draws upon field research and data gathered from semi-structured interviews with 310 residents to better understand the ways that bottlenecks to development in the Osa and Golfito cantons in Costa Rica may be related to an imbalance in the different forms of social capital that manifest there. We identify patterns in the perspectives of local residents that offer a good match to the predictions of scholarly work on the role of social capital in development. Specifically, we draw upon the ideas of bonding, bridging, and linking forms of social capital (Gittell and Vidal 1998; Woolcock and Narayan 2000) to characterize the nature of collective action in communities in Osa and Golfito. A key conclusion is that the lack of bridging and linking forms of social capital may explain the development challenges that persist in the region and

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may indicate where development-related investments in the future would be more likely to bear fruit.

Social Capital and Development: Bonds, Bridges, and Links

Despite its popularity among scholars, social capital remains difficult to define and even harder to operationalize. While empirical advances have followed since Coleman (1988) and others (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993) popularized the concept as the tangible benefits flowing from social relations, challenges remain in determining how social capital contributes to development needs and improved quality of life for rural residents. Nevertheless social capital remains central to development efforts and to the academic writing on the subject (for extensive reviews of social capital see Szreter and Woolcock 2004 and Serra 2011).

Early research on social capital has been characterized as taking a "cooperationist approach" (Serra 2011). Drawing mostly on the writings of Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti (1993:167), the cooperationist literature emphasizes "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." Focusing largely on increased social capital as the solution to problems of establishing collective action, the cooperationist approach to social capital is in essence a belief that "more [social capital] is better" (Serra 2011).

In the late 1990s, the pace of social capital research picked up as it came to be perceived as "the missing link" in development (Grootaert 1998). Its emergence was exemplified by the establishment of the World Bank's Social Capital Initiative (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002) and the Sustainable Livelihoods Initiative (Carney 2003). Commonplace were scholar and agency calls for "inducing" social capital as a means of overcoming development challenges (Adhikari and Goldey 2010) and avoiding poverty traps (Carter and Barrett 2006).

At this time, the perspective of Sen (1997) was very influential among development scholars. Sen addressed poverty reduction by laying out the indirect (but very real) economic impact of improved human capital and the ways social relations can bring additional benefits to human capability. Sen (1997:1960) put it this way:

> While economic prosperity helps people to lead freer and more fulfilling lives, so do more education, health care, medical attention, and other factors that causally influence the effective freedoms that people actually enjoy. These "social developments" must directly count as "developmental" since they help us to lead longer, freer, and more fruitful lives, in addition to the role they have in promoting productivity or economic growth or individual incomes.

Bebbington (1999) took this line of thinking further by identifying social capital as the critical asset that, when lacking, limits access to other key assets related to livelihoods (such as capital of other forms: human, natural, and cultural), a perspective embraced by the Sustainable Livelihoods Initiative (Carney 2003).

Eventually, scholars expanded on Putnam's (1995) conceptualization of social capital as comprised of strong horizontal relationships between individuals. Gittell and Vidal (1998) proposed two distinct forms of horizontal social capital: "bonding" and "bridging." Bonding social capital derives from exclusive interactions and solidarity among "people like us" that has the potential to lead to cooperation. Bridging social capital emerges from an inclusive solidarity among people of different backgrounds and can "traverse social gaps," therefore increasing contact with various other people, supporting tolerance, and preventing groups from becoming inwardly focused (Paxton 2002).

Eventually, a third form of "linking" social capital was proposed (Szreter 2002; Szreter and Woolcock 2004) to account for relations that span vertical arrangements in society. Linking social capital enables greater access to powerful actors, such as law enforcement officers, social workers, health care providers, NGO officials, politicians, and the public administration in general (Szreter and Woolcock 2004). The linking aspect of social capital is critical to development since persistent poverty is correlated with an inability to access people in power (Bebbington 1999).

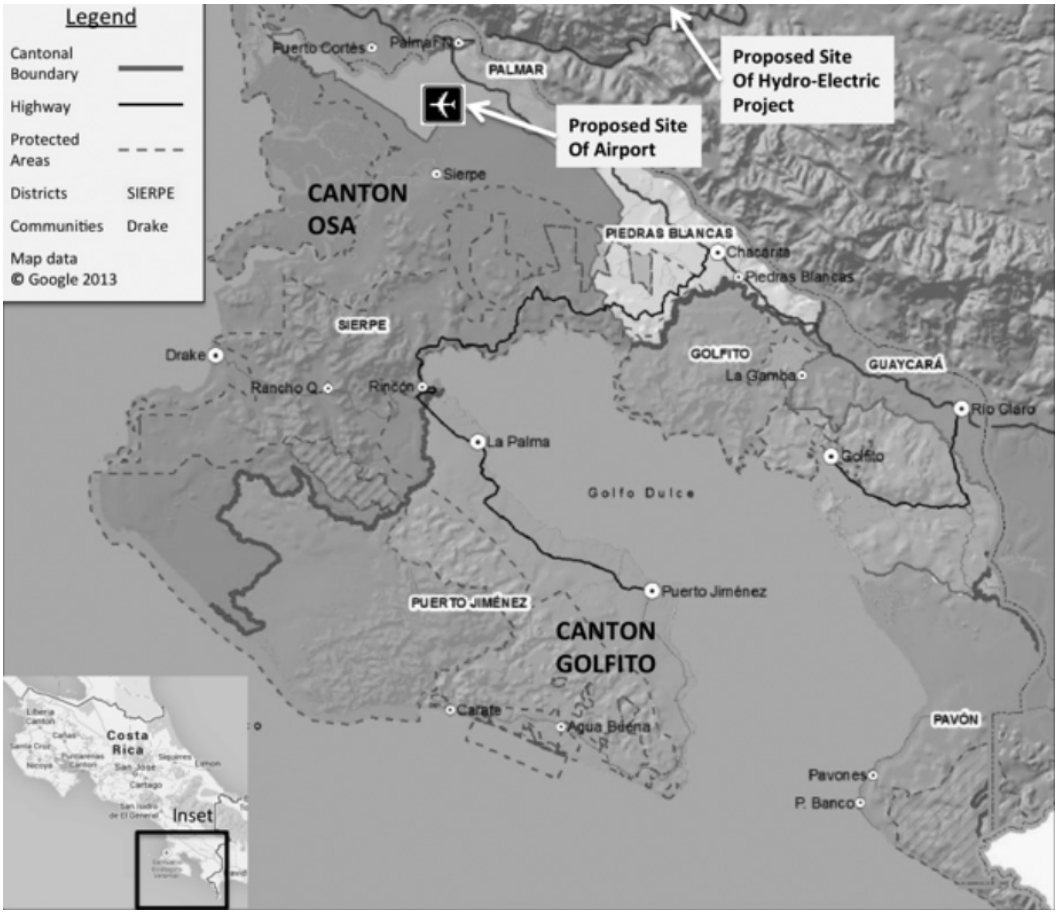
Development in Osa and Golfito

Long acclaimed for its biodiversity and the efforts to conserve it (Vandermeer and Perfecto 2005), Costa Rica has in recent decades also exhibited high wealth disparity, cyclical impoverishment, and high deforestation rates derived from export-based economic policies (Bozzoli 2000; Edelman 1995; Fletcher 2012; Horton 2007; Vandermeer and Perfecto 2005). Nowhere in Costa Rica is more representative of this juxtaposition of environmental quality and destruction than the cantonal jurisdictions of Osa and Golfito. Unique ecological conditions including the Golfo Dulce tropical fjord to the south and the Terraba-Sierpe wetlands[1] to the north have influenced the region's spectacular biodiversity. Yet, these conditions have also helped shape the region's development history as reviewed in the following sections. As we will show, most communities in the region do not have long and deep histories but were instead founded as isolated settlements in the last thirty to fifty years, with major consequences for social capital in the region.

Fruits, Forests, and Forced Relocations

The modern history of the region begins with the pervasive influence of the United Fruit Company (UFC) and its subsidiaries in the region (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998). Starting in 1938, the UFC was based in the town of Golfito (see Figure 1) with small settlements of plantation workers

Figure 1. Map of INOGO Project Area



dispersed across extensive banana fields. By 1955, nearly all of UFC's banana production in Costa Rica was shipped from Golfito. Yet in 1985, due to a combination of factors, including declining production and falling prices worldwide, the UFC abruptly withdrew from the region. Many former workers stayed in the scattered company towns, while others went looking for access to land for themselves in remote corners of the country. As a result of UFC's dominating and lengthy presence, a culture of top-down, heavy-handed management persists in the region (Fletcher 2012; Horton 2007) together with widely scattered small settlements.

In another effort to accelerate development in the region, the government granted a 47,000 ha concession to *Osa Productos Forestales* (Osa Forest Products or OPF) in the 1950s. The goal was to create "a tropical sustainable forestry industry centered on rotational harvests and waste-free processing of all the harvested wood into a variety of products for maximum economic returns" (Christen n.d.:74). Like UFC, OPF constructed roads, bridges, and other infrastructural works necessary to create functional farms and to encourage further agricultural development in the region. Yet, local populations who had long resided within the concession never had the opportunity to secure legal tenure. Thus, they challenged the OPF over its acquisition of their lands, sparking controversy and violent conflict (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998). Eventually in 1978, the government's Institute of Land and Colonization appropriated much of OPF lands, forcibly relocated local residents residing on those lands and incorporated this territory into the newly created Corcovado National Park and Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve. As a result of these forced relocations and the continuing lack of improvements in standard of living for the affected communities, conservation-related conflict persisted in the region throughout the next two decades (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998).

Also in 1978, Corcovado National Park was established as part of the expansion of Costa Rica's park system (Evans 1999), and artisanal gold mining soon came into direct conflict with its management strategy. Although mining along the Río Tigre is documented as far back as 1937, the withdrawal of UFC from the region in 1980 dramatically expanded the number of miners in Osa, including within the Park (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998; Horton 2007). A spike in global gold prices

further contributed to this extraction pressure on the park (Horton 2007). When national and international conservationists raised the alarm in the early 1980s, the Costa Rican government authorized additional relocations—some voluntary and some forced—of 800 gold mining families from Corcovado to surrounding areas, including lands inside the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998). This did not, however, eliminate the illegal gold mining activities within Corcovado National Park that continue to this day (Ankersen, Regan, and Mack 2006; Fletcher 2012; Horton 2007).

Beef, Beechwood, and Tenuous Tenure

In 1980, the *Instituto de Desarrollo Agrario* (Agrarian Development Institute or IDA) established a national agricultural program that supplied lands for productive use. IDA stipulated that those using the land had to pay for it over time, and they could only secure tenure after working the land productively for fifteen years (van den Hombergh 2004). The IDA's program in Osa was seen as a mechanism of resettling gold miners, yet due to the poor suitability of the region's tropical soils for agriculture and the small land parcels that IDA made available, the viability of agriculture for resettlement was dependent on expensive fertilizer inputs (van den Hombergh 2004). With little access to low-interest credit in the area, farmers often could not afford the fertilizer necessary to support viable yields (van den Hombergh 2004). This was compounded by other challenges to agricultural productivity including distance from markets, poor transportation, and lack of technical assistance. By the mid-1990s, many residents chose to sell their land rather than work the poor quality soil (Horton 2007; van den Hombergh 2004).

For medium and large landholders, rice was a historically important export commodity for the Osa region. The government's *Consejo Nacional de Producción* (National Production Council or CNP) provided subsidies to encourage the production of basic grains including rice and beans (van den Hombergh 2004). When structural adjustment policies in Costa Rica led to the dismantling of the CNP in 1986, rice commercialization diminished dramatically provoking many medium and large producers to abandon rice production (van den Hombergh 2004). Around the same time, due to international pressures and United States protectionist policies, livestock production across the country also fell sharply—so much so that by 1994, Costa Rica was forced to become a net importer of both rice and beef (Edelman 1995; van den Hombergh 2004). The failures of IDA programs and the discontinuation of CNP programs left little in the way of agriculture-based development opportunities for Osa residents but much in the way of government disillusionment (van den Hombergh 2004).

In the 1980s yet another government-sponsored comprehensive rural development program was initiated in Osa and Golfito. *Ston Forestal*, a Costa Rican subsidiary of Stone Container Corporation, was a paper and cardboard production company. The Costa Rican government granted Ston Forestal the benefits of a free trade agreement in 1992 as an incentive to attract them to this underdeveloped region. The agreement included rights to construct an industrial marine port in the Golfo Dulce Forest Reserve and international legal protections in the event of local conflicts (van den Hombergh 2004). These new contracts led to 24,000 hectares of *Gmelina arborea* (beechwood) being planted in the region. An estimated 600,000 tons of wood chips were slated to be produced and shipped from Punta Estrella, Golfo Dulce (van den Hombergh 2004). However, concern for social and environmental consequences led the *Asociación Ecologista Costarricense* (Costa Rican Ecologist Association or AECO) to collect reports of environmental damage and to mount a national campaign in opposition to Ston Forestal. It drew international attention from the likes of Rainforest Action Network and Greenpeace.

With the election of President Figueres in 1994, Ston Forestal was denied permission to construct the marine port and Central America's largest chipping facility (van den Hombergh 2004). Without the chipping facility, there was little demand for the wood already planted, and without an alternative way to earn money from plantations, residents found their subsistence jeopardized by having their land occupied by a now useless monocrop. The company ceased operations in the Osa region and was sold in 1999 (van den Hombergh 2004).

Local Impact of Global Demand for African Palm Oil

African oil palm (*Elais guineensis* var.) is a major global commodity whose production more than doubled between 2000 and 2010 (FAO 2011). Now the leading source of the world's vegetable oil, oil palm cultivation has also been identified as a principle driver of tropical deforestation (UCS 2011). The International Finance Corporation has identified Costa Rica as one of the twelve most important global producers of oil palm (IFC 2011). By 2012, the *Cámara Nacional de Productores de Palma* (National Chamber of Palm Producers or CANAPALMA) in Costa Rica reported being the world's ninth leading producer of oil and the first producer in terms of tons per hectare per year (CANAPALMA 2012).

Despite the Osa and Golfito region's largely unsuccessful history of agriculture-based development, African oil palm is emerging as a primary export crop for the Osa and Golfito region. Over 64 percent of Costa Rica's oil palm production occurs in the Brunca region, which contains the cantons of Osa, Golfito, and nearby Corredores (CANAPALMA 2012). Oil palm expansion in the south of Costa Rica has occurred largely via contract agriculture established by *Palma Tica*, a member corporation of the agro-industrial conglomerate Grupo Numar. According to CANAPALMA (2012), in Costa Rica's Southern Pacific, Central Pacific, and Atlantic zones, there were 60,000 hectares under cultivation in 2011. This makes palm oil today the second most important processed food export by value for Costa Rica, behind coffee.

Smallholders and large landowners alike are reaping the benefits of predictable, year-round harvests and consistent palm oil demand in Osa and Golfito (Beggs and Moore 2013; Roman Forestelli and Angulo Aguilar 2013). Unprecedented economic stability, coupled with a lack of competitive alternatives within or outside of agriculture, makes African oil palm cultivation extremely attractive to growers (Beggs and Moore 2013). Given the strong economic incentives to growers and modest gains even for landless workers, agricultural land in Osa and Golfito is being converted from food crops and pasture to palm plantations (Beggs and Moore 2013; Roman Forestelli and Angulo Aguilar 2013).

Tourism in Osa and Golfito: "A Forest Left Standing is More Valuable Than One Cut Down"

Tourism in the region dates back to the 1950s when foreign investors began purchasing coastal land areas; however, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that development of this sector boomed along with the broader emergence of ecotourism in the national agenda (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998; Honey 1999). Focusing on small-scale, nature-based ecotourism avoided many exploitative practices associated with tourism's role in development elsewhere (deKadt 1979). The ecotourism industry was noted for providing direct economic benefits, environmental conservation, and positive social outcomes (Budowski 1976; Honey 1999).

Despite previous development efforts in the region, the dominant economic motor in the region today remains small-scale, nature-based tourism (Fletcher 2012; Horton 2009; Hunt et al. 2015). But since the installation of the country's second international airport in Liberia in 2000, some analysts have suggested Costa Rica is in jeopardy of "cracking the golden egg" that has sustained it for years (Honey, Vargas, and Durham 2010) by moving away from small-scale, sustainable ecotourism toward large-scale resort, second home, and residential tourism development. While this shift is well documented along the northern Pacific Coast (Honey, Vargas, and Durham 2010; van Noorloos 2011), it has not been as prevalent in Osa and Golfito. The nature of tourism development could, however, shift dramatically if the government carries forward its plans to develop a third large international airport in the Osa region (see following section).

Analyses of tourism's impact in this region indicate a positive relationship between ecotourism projects and forest conservation, even regeneration (Almeyda Zambrano, Broadbent, and Durham 2010; Fletcher 2012; Hunt et al. 2015). They also indicate positive economic impacts in the form of household income and employment that exceed other livelihood options (Almeyda Zambrano, Broadbent, and Durham 2010; Hunt et al. 2015). But looking at the broader social and economic impacts of tourism, one finds outcomes that are more mixed, including concerns of seasonal job instability and inflation of local land prices (Horton 2009). Another suggestion is that ecotourism is another form of neoliberal conservation which does little to reduce, and may even enhance, inequalities of access to land and resources (Fletcher 2012). With an estimated 20 percent of the population in the region directly involved in tourism and an additional 60 percent involved indirectly via related services (Horton 2009), it is clear that development efforts must take into account the importance of tourism in the Osa-Golfito region.

Current Development Dilemmas

As part of its current development strategy for the Osa and Golfito region, the government of Costa Rica is espousing major infrastructure projects with direct relevance to the economic activities described in the previous sections. These projects include: (1) Costa Rica's third major international airport just outside of Sierpe-Palmar Norte (Araya Monge 2011); (2) Central American's largest hydroelectric dam upstream from the Terraba-Sierpe wetlands along the Terraba River (Grupo Independiente 2012; ICE 2013); (3) road improvements such as those to the Chacarita-Rincón highway, or those linking Sierpe to the Chacarita-Rincón highway; and (4) concurrent installation of electricity in formerly remote communities along said roadways.

The public discourse around these development plans emphasizes improved quality of life for the region's residents; however, a concern remains that, without additional policy intervention, these efforts will further consolidate the social and economic structures—the land tenure, materials processing and transportation facilities, and real estate markets—responsible for perpetuating the region's underdevelopment (Fletcher 2012). Opposition to the airport and the hydroelectric project revolves around the degree to which they come at the expense of the region's natural resources.

In sum, the history of the Osa and Golfito region has seen an array of attempts with limited success to develop the region economically while improving the quality of life for local residents. Major international firms promoting exports (e.g., UFC, Ston Forestal, Osa Forest Products) provided little to the communities in the way of social capital, other than that which emerged in protest of these companies' activities. State-led efforts to improve local resident livelihood capabilities (e.g., IDA's land redistribution initiatives and CNP's agricultural subsidy programs) likewise resulted in little opportunity for social capital enhancement. Internationally imposed structural adjustment policies promoting non-traditional agricultural exports failed to reduce the region's relative poverty or bond, bridge, or link actors in the region. There are indications in recent years that small-scale ecotourism ventures are providing more stable employment and greater earnings than other available employment opportunities. And African oil palm cultivation is also emerging as a principle economic activity.

Conditions have improved since the old "company days," such that there is more individual land and business ownership in the region. Yet, a key legacy of this history is that communities in the region are generally recent, small, and isolated. In many cases, they were founded either as company

settlements located according to the need for plantation labor or else by ex-plantation workers, miners, and pioneers who sought access to land in remote corners of the country. Infrastructure remains poor in many areas, and different development projects have done little to generate interactions beyond the local level. In the remainder of this article, we explore the implications of this history and of current livelihood activities for social capital formation in the region.

Study Methods

A field team was assembled of carefully chosen local residents, in-country experts, and university-based anthropologists with experience studying social and environmental impacts of tourism in communities on the Osa Peninsula. As described in detail below, this team carried out geographically extensive data gathering in the region related to historical development efforts, perceptions of current educational offerings, current health issues and access, principle livelihood viability, landscape preferences, and the social institutional analysis we focus on in this paper. The field team gathered this data between January and April 2012.

Fieldwork began earlier in 2011 with more than thirty meetings and key informant interviews—formal and informal—with local development associations, water service cooperatives (ASADAs), community credit organizations, NGOs, and local leaders and social groups during initial research scouting trips. Meetings and key informant interviews continued in early 2012 (five more of each) and helped inform a more representative sampling strategy for subsequent semi-structured interview efforts. Specifically, the input from key informant interviews identified over-studied, survey-weary areas, especially the peninsula towns of Puerto Jiménez and La Palma. For these locations, we were able to draw upon published sources and our own previous research (e.g., Almeyda Zambrano, Broadbent, and Durham 2010; Hunt et al. 2015) to corroborate data from our small sample of interviewees about local community strengths and weaknesses and about local organizations (funding, memberships, local, regional, and national ties, etc.). From the same key informants, it was also easy to identify those areas of Osa and Golfito that had been relatively neglected by prior research, including smaller communities such as Punta Banco, Pavones, Zancudo, La Gamba, Piedras Blancas, Sábalo, Rancho Quemado, and Carate. We sought sizeable samples in those areas, aiming for between 1:200 and 1:100 individuals, to ensure that the data would provide a fair overall representation of the region. As a result, our analysis includes development challenges and barriers to social capital in both well-studied hubs and in areas collectively perceived as understudied within the region (Table 1).

In the tradition of involving local residents in the research process as para-taxonomists (Janzen 2004) or para-biologists (Fitzgerald and Stronza 2009), we recruited and trained a number of local research assistants to serve as para-anthropologists. Together with the present authors, these individuals—who live and work in local communities—conducted semi-structured interviews in our target communities. Interviewees were initially identified through their involvement in local, national, and regional organizations, including local development associations, land management agencies, action groups, businesses, and indigenous communities. In these least-studied localities, additional door-to-door convenience sampling was employed to generate a local sample in the range we wanted. The combined efforts resulted in 310 completed interviews that were geographically distributed as shown in Table 1.

The interviews included a number of free listing exercises. Interviewers asked respondents to identify and describe the three principle assets or strengths in their community. This question was repeated until three assets were identified or until respondents could no longer provide an answer. The same approach was taken to assess the three primary challenges to their communities. Interviews also involved free listing to identify forms of collective action in the community, as suggested by Bernard (2011). This question, too, was repeated until interviewees could no longer identify additional forms of collective action in their community. The result was a list of formal and informal organizations operating in the community. Interviewers then requested additional information about each organization's leadership, the focus of its activities in and outside of the community, the number of members in the organization, and the sources of funding supporting the organization's activities. All interview responses—including additional qualitative information provided in accompaniment to the semi-structured questions—were recorded in handwritten notes by the field team and later transferred to Microsoft Excel files for data management.

The authors later analyzed the resulting data to determine the nature of existing collective action, community strengths, and community weaknesses in the Osa and Golfito regions. Within Excel, we created a relational database to characterize each of the identified organizations according to criteria relevant to our social capital analysis: (1) their focus of activity (e.g., development, sports, religion, etc.); (2) the geographic scope of their activity (local, regional, national, international); (3) the number of organizational members; (4) the organization's leadership; and (5) the source of the organization's funding (local activities, regional, national, and international sources). This characterization of resident perspectives and of organizations working in the study region sheds much light on the nature of social capital in the region.

Community Assets, Liabilities, and Social Organization

Resident Perception of Community Strengths and Weaknesses

We first review survey results regarding the three primary strengths of local communities (Table 2). Across our sample, respondents most frequently cited nature and natural resources as one of the strengths of their community (mentioned as one of three primary strengths by 56.1% of those surveyed). The survey makes

Table 1. Number of Semi-Structured Interviews Conducted in Each Community

Canton	District	2011 Population	Sampling Ratio*	Community
Golfito (*n*=187)	Pavon (*n*=55)	6,159	8.9	Pavones (*n*=18) Punta Banco (*n*=24) Zancudo (*n*=13)
	Golfito (*n*=77)	11,284	6.8	Golfito (*n*=77)
	Guaycara (*n*=47)	12,918	3.6	Rio Claro (*n*=23) La Gamba (*n*=9) KM 20 (*n*=8) Villa Briseno KM 37 (*n*=7)
	Jiménez ** (*n*=8)	8,789	0.9	Puerto Jiménez (*n*=3) La Palma (*n*=5)
Osa (*n*=123)	Sierpe (*n*=61)	4,205	14.5	Rincón (*n*=6) Rancho Quemado (*n*=2) Sábalo (*n*=12) Alto Laguna (*n*=6) Bahía Drake (*n*=21) Sierpe (*n*=14)
	Palmar ** (*n*=7)	9,815	0.7	Chacarita (*n*=7)
	Piedras Blancas (*n*=55)	4,138	13.3	Piedras Blancas (*n*=55)

* per thousand persons (ratio of 1:100=10; ratio of 1:200=5)
**deliberately under-sampled as explained in text

it clear that this is not a population that needs to be persuaded of the virtues of biodiversity and its conservation.

Of particular relevance to the discussion of social capital is the next most frequently cited asset—community identity or membership, cited as a strength by 45.6 percent of the interviewees. Qualitative responses spoke of a "sense of community," "community unity," and "community solidarity." They spoke of benefits from schools and clinics, from water service providers, microfinance and development committees, and from many other local organizations. This second most-cited asset aligns with what Gittell and Vidal (1998) call bonding social capital. Responses to this question implied a qualitative distinction between these strong notions of belonging to a local, beneficial community (village or town in most cases) and a much less salient sense of belonging to, and benefitting from, the larger region (see below).

Employment and tourism were the next main assets, cited by 34.1 percent and 28.9 percent of our interviewees respectively. And finally, community organizations, the various civic groups of each community, were mentioned by 19.3 percent of the sample, making them the fifth most commonly perceived asset.

The data also revealed that interviewees had more difficulty identifying assets in their communities than they did challenges and constraints. Reflecting the development challenges faced by this region, 43.3 percent of those surveyed could not identify at least three strengths of their communities, and 10 percent were unable to identify even one. In comparison, less than a quarter of those sampled (24.7 percent) were unable to identify three challenges in their community.

Turning to community challenges, infrastructure, mentioned by 53.3 percent of those surveyed, was the number one concern of our sample of interviewees. This finding suggests that the government's focus on infrastructural improvements is not without merit. However, the qualitative information reveals that the geographical scale of need, local rather than regional, may be perceived differently by local stakeholders than by the government. While communities are much more concerned about local, small-scale infrastructural improvements—most notably, roads and bridges—for ease of access in the rainy season, they gave no indications of the need for an airport or hydroelectric project. The fact that national-level policy based on infrastructural development in the form of the Diquís hydroelectric project and the proposed

Table 2. Most Cited Community Strengths and Challenges

Strength	Percent Mentioned as Primary Strength	Percent Mentioned as One of Top Three Strengths
Nature and Natural Resource	23.9	56.1
Community Identity	**17.4**	**45.6**
Employment/Commerce	11.5	34.1
Tourism	12.8	28.9
Community Organizations	**9.2**	**19.3**
Challenge	**Percent Mentioned as Primary Challenge**	**Percent Mentioned as One of Top Three Challenges**
Infrastructure	17.9	53.3
Unemployment	17.4	41.8
Lack of Broader Identity	**18.2**	38.7
Drugs/Alcoholism	7.8	26.6
Failure of Government	9.1	24.0

international airport overlaps little with local resident concerns provides further indications of the paucity of linking social capital from relationships between local residents and powerful actors at the national level (or beyond).

Employment shows up second on the list of community challenges and is thus perceived simultaneously as a strength and a challenge in communities. Although tourism is the region's principle employer (Horton 2009; Hunt et al. 2015), it has not yet reached all communities in Osa. Thus, tourism is not providing, or not yet providing, sufficient employment opportunities for the residents in those communities, including many of the lesser-studied communities sampled here. Furthermore, even those with the opportunity to work in the tourism sector do not always have an interest in doing so (Hunt et al. 2015). The data indicate that residents across the region, especially those residents who apply their skills outside of the tourism sector and others who live outside the primary tourism hubs, perceive less opportunity in other economic sectors. The perception of employment as a weakness of local communities is likely further influenced by the tumultuous history of earlier agricultural export programs and the poor economic and environmental performance of many current livelihood options.

The most striking challenge after infrastructure needs and unemployment in the region is the absence of a regional Osa-Golfito inter-community identity and of benefits from that identity. Responses to the survey as well as the key informant interviews both indicate very little interaction between communities across the region, very little sense of benefit from what there is, and thus little opportunity for a broader sense of belonging to develop. Inter-community activity is restricted to interactions with direct neighbors during recreational activities (such as soccer) or else for meeting needs for health care, education, and commerce (as in individual visits to a larger town for banking services or medical care).

Informants attest that there are generally few collaborative events or activities and fewer collaborative organizations between communities and thus little opportunity for broader, over-arching identity to form. In striking contrast to the usage of international conservationists (Cuello, Brandon, and Margoluis 1998; Nuñez, Borge, and Herrera 2007) and tourists (Hunt et al. 2015) who typically speak of "the Osa," we found there is little sense of belonging to or being part of "Osa" among local residents. Although we found within-community social benefits to be a commonly perceived strength of communities, we also found a lack of real and perceived social benefits at the regional level among communities. Community organizations remain isolated from one another and are not bridging together collectively to confront the development challenges facing their region. Additional evidence for the lack of overarching regional social benefits and regional identity is provided in our assessment of social organization below.

Collective Action and Social Organization in Osa and Golfito

We assessed the extent of collective action in the region in several ways. First, we collated an exhaustive list of organizations operating in the communities from individual responses to the survey. We tallied an impressive 187 unique organizations operating in the study area. Secondly, we assessed the average number of members in each of these organizations. We found that, on average, organizations have 13.1 members (see Table 3), though total group size ranges from 3 to 160 individuals.

Next, we categorized organizations by the focus of their activities and compared average membership to the thematic focus of each organization. When organizations

Table 3. Characteristics of Organizations in Study Region

Organization Theme	Quantity	Percent of Total Organizations	Average Number of Members	Principle Funding Source
Well-being	49	26.2	12.3	Local Activities
Development	30	16.1	21.8	Government
Trade-specific	29	15.5	17.1	Donations
Water Quality	21	11.2	6.9	Personal Funds
Religion	19	10.2	22.7	Donations
Infrastructure	19	10.2	9.4	Government
Education	18	9.6	5.4	Local Activities
Tourism	15	8.0	14.3	Dues
Sports	13	7.0	7.9	Local Activities
Finance	11	5.9	19.4	Dues
Health	8	4.3	7.1	Local Activities
TOTAL	**187**	**100**	**13.1**	**Local Activities**

addressed multiple community concerns simultaneously, they were counted in both categories. Our analysis indicates that overlapping concerns for human *bienestar* (well-being) and *desarrollo* (development) were the most frequently cited foci of the organizations identified, reported 26.2 percent and 16 percent of the time, respectively (Table 3). Groups assembled around development concerns also had a high average number of members (21.8 members per group), second only to church organizations, which had an average membership of 22.7 individuals.

Organizations addressing potable water needs (11.2 percent of the total organizations identified) are also mainstays in the communities. Committees working in support of local schools are well-represented (9.6 percent of the organizations), as are church-related groups (10.2 percent) and athletic organizations (7 percent). Finally, though fewer in number, local finance and micro-credit enterprises account for 5.9 percent of all organizations identified, signaling their status as valuable community assets where they occur.

We then categorized organizations according to the geographic extent of their activities. This analysis showed that the activities of 137 (73.3 percent) of the 187 organizations in our sample are restricted primarily to one of the local communities. There are fifty organizations (27 percent) that operate across more than one named community, and only twenty-eight organizations (11.8 percent) in the region have contact with national- or international-level actors. These data are consistent with the lack of bridging capital documented above among the communities. High levels of internal collective action and benefits within communities (bonding capital) have not produced broader interactions and benefits at higher levels, resulting in very little bridging or linking forms of social capital that enable integration of local development concerns with national and international policies and processes affecting the region.

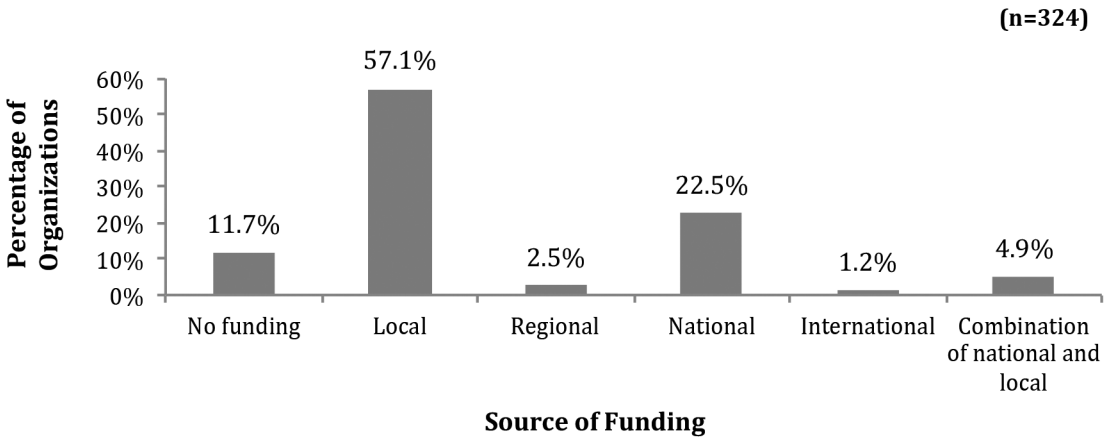
Sources of funding for local organizations as reported by respondents were also categorized by their geographical origin. A total of 324 funding sources were described for organizations in the sample, and each was coded as local, regional, national, international, or combined local-national sources (Figure 2). As a proxy indicator of linking social capital in the region, this measure provides insight into how local-level organizations connect, at least for funding purposes, with more powerful actors at the regional, national, and international levels. We found that 57.1 percent of all funding sources were reported as being local, 2.5 percent were regional, 22.5 percent national, 1.2 percent international, and 4.9 percent were described as mixed national-local sources. Thus, by far the greater number of funding sources—185 in all—were of local origin.

All indications are that the majority of collective action occurring in Osa-Golfito communities is funded locally; as a consequence, the lack of regional, national, and international funding leaves many capital-intensive community needs out of reach. The capacity to interact with and benefit from key actors at the regional level and beyond is a key characteristic of linking social capital (Szreter and Woolcock 2004; Titeca and Vervisch 2008) and has been identified as critical to human-centered development in other regions of Latin America and elsewhere (Bebbington 1999).

Discussion: Building Bonds, Bridges, and Links to Development

The analysis here explores ways that theorized forms of social capital manifest in southern rural Costa Rica. Social networks are "one of the primary resources they [the poor] have for managing risk and vulnerability" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000:242). Our data indicate that the benefits of collective activity within communities—that is, the bonding social capital (Gittell and Vidal 1998)—is strong within the many communities

Figure 2. Source of Funding Support for Local Organizations in Study Region (*n*=324 Sources Identified by Respondents)



across the region. There are many local organizations that each have relatively high average memberships and diverse kinds of benefits for their members, including such things as water access, microfinancing, sports, religious outlets, health support, and educational opportunities. They are held in high regard locally and are ranked among the key strengths of local communities.

In contrast, the evidence of bridging social capital—that is, activity that provides benefits from organizational networks and relations across communities in the region (Gittell and Vidal 1998; Titeca and Vervisch 2008)—is much weaker. We found surprisingly few organizations whose intercommunity activities provide routine benefits to members. There is a notable disconnect with any form of regional integration, and "regional organization for the common good" was cited as a key community challenge far more frequently than were concerns of poor educational and health quality. Whereas health and education are the traditional foci of development efforts, in the Osa and Golfito region neither theme was listed among the challenges most cited by local residents. Since education and health access continue to offer challenges in Osa and Golfito, local residents may feel that collective action across broader scales is prerequisite to greater representation of local concerns.

Furthermore, our data also indicate markedly less interaction, and therefore less benefit, between local residents and national or international actors than we expected and certainly less than anticipated from the history of international conservation efforts reviewed earlier (Menke 2012; Nuñez, Borge, and Herrera 2007). We found little evidence of linking social capital among even the most active and widespread organizations working in these communities. With the benefits from these key bridges and linkages absent, barriers to improved livelihoods and capabilities that have historically plagued the region may very well persist as others have noted elsewhere (Titeca and Vervisch 2008; Woolcock and Narayan 2000).

If the theoretical perspectives on social capital are to be applied to policy prescriptions here, then our evidence suggests there may be greater promise in investments that increase rural residents' capacity to retain or improve access to a specific type of asset—the accumulation of the bonding and bridging forms of social capital necessary for improved access to regional, national, and international-level institutions and actors (Bebbington 1999). Such a recommendation echoes the conclusions of Agrawal and Gibson (1999:639) who point out how different actors have differential access to resources and power, and "for community actors to possess some leverage in their dealings with state officials, it would be imperative that they organize themselves into larger collectives or federations that can span the gap between local and the national."

Among the organizations in the Osa-Golfito region that do span this gap and do provide bridging benefits are the microfinance organizations that are tied to national NGOs. The national-level microfinance organization, Foundation for International Community Assistance (FINCA), and the international microfinance organization, Kiva, have helped locally managed Community Credit Businesses in the region, which in turn have helped foster entrepreneurial growth as well as long-term financial planning in several communities in the study region. Benefits from this kind of networking contribute directly to inter-community bridging and extra-regional linking forms of social capital (Imai, et al. 2012) and thus, provide examples of what future development investments can build upon in the Osa-Golfito region.

Other forms of social capital-inducing entrepreneurship have been fostered by the Nature Conservancy funded Asociación de Emprendedores para el Desarrollo Responsable (Association of Responsible Development Entrepreneurs) and through the creation of agricultural cooperatives among small producers of African oil palm. Others (Friis-Hansen and Duveskog 2012) have noted that the empowerment facilitated

by microfinance and entrepreneurial training leads to more improved resident well-being than the technical solutions emphasized in many development programs.

With tourism as the region's primary economic motor, opportunities to develop social capital within that sector must likewise be considered. Further financial support and business training among local tourism businesses and organizations, for example the Tourist Guide Association of Piedras Blancas (AGITUR), is likely to contribute additional bridging and linking social capital. As Jones (2005) notes, high levels of social capital can lead to strong initial outcomes from newly introduced ecotourism revenues; however, if transparency is not also maintained and corruption assiduously avoided, social capital can quickly erode. When ecotourism projects provide mechanisms to equitably distribute benefits, social capital is more likely to increase.

Another effort that is currently underway that may contribute to new forms of social capital is the initiative by the national Consejo de Competitividad (Competitiveness Council) to develop a regional "brand" for products exported from the region (MEIC 2012). While this brand would most likely capitalize on the internationally recognized conservation and biodiversity reputation of the Osa Peninsula, it could also facilitate the development of bridging social capital. By promoting greater interaction between regional actors both among and within communities, branding activities may help build benefits at this level, including fostering a regional identity. If individuals come to view themselves as part of the greater sociopolitical landscape, Osa and Golfito residents will likely be more capable of confronting the primary development challenges facing their region in the next two to three decades.

Yet given the lack of social networks linking local residents to national-level actors, the most "fundamental" relation for the development of social capital is local residents' relation with the state (Szreter 2002). State spending in the region is one path to developing these ties, with obvious implications for the social capital of local residents, though the nature of the changes will determine if the implications are favorable or unfavorable for them. In Costa Rica, it remains unclear how the government's current development policy will affect the rural poor. Our findings suggest that locally identified development priorities are not well-represented in the government's plans for mega-infrastructure like the Diquís hydroelectric project (Grupo Independiente 2012) or the international airport.

Conclusion

Local residents in Osa and Golfito are caught in a vortex of national and global processes that they have little institutional or political capacity to address. These processes include market forces that favor palm oil production on land available for agriculture; the attractiveness of the area to tourism development, even in ecologically vulnerable wetland areas; an increasing presence of real estate interests catering to second-home and residential tourism; and the increasing interest of chain hotels, cruise ships, and other purveyors of mass tourism in and around the Osa Peninsula. The actors and forces that have the most influence on these processes are almost entirely exogenous to the region, continuing a history of decidedly top-down development.

Assessing development needs from the ground up—an approach with many advantages judging from our experience in the Osa-Golfito region—yields another meaning of development that more fully conveys the subjective experience of poverty (Scoones 1998). A recommendation for enhancing both bridging and linking forms of social capital, in a way that reflects this subjective experience of poverty, would be for local actor-level interventions to catalyze regional, inter-community networking while, at the same time, providing avenues for local actors to connect to and benefit from more powerful national and international actors. Such an approach presents the greatest promise for development centered on human well-being in the Osa and Golfito region. Our work suggests that development interventions can be reoriented to better address these local meanings of, and needs for, development.

It was thus our goal to carry out an anthropological assessment of social organization and social capital in communities in the Osa and Golfito region in an effort to "correctly identify the range of stakeholders and their interrelations" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000:242). Our approach highlights the fact that investment has historically been lacking to "help build bridges between communities and social groups" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000:242). We suggest addressing the constraints to social capital identified here by facilitating local resident access to state-level actors in a way that does not reproduce the structural inequalities and the exclusion of the poorest (Cleaver 2005). Our effort and those of other organizations operating in the region add a "voice to those calling for information disclosure policies" and "encourage informed citizenship and accountability of both private and public actors who purport to serve the public good" (Woolcock and Narayan 2000:242). Without sound development policy in place to support bridging and linking social capital, the history and current sociopolitical context of Osa and Golfito suggest that external actors and forces are likely to further erode the quality of life for local residents. Finding ways to connect to external actors—and to develop social capital across the region and up to the state—will be critical to maintaining and improving human well-being in this region.

Note

[1]These wetlands are on the Ramsar List of Wetlands of International Importance. See http://www.ramsar.org/about/wetlands-of-international-importance for more information.

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