

Sources of social capital in the networks of fish-pond farmers and their implications for adaptive capacity

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ABSTRACT

Social capital potentially strengthens the resilience of farming households to climate-related risks, but few studies have considered households engaged in aquaculture. This study examines how social networks among fish farming households contribute different forms of social capital, and how this in turn, affects adaptive capacities. The study was conducted in three villages in the provinces of Chiang Mai, Phayao, and Chiang Rai, in Northern Thailand. Guided by social capital frameworks, information was gathered via repeated semi-structured interviews and participant observation during 2013-2014, and includes 32 fish farming households and 16 key informants. The study found that social networks increased the adaptive capacities of fish farming households; in particular, the stronger the bond with relatives and neighbors, the more likely the farmer was able to adapt and reduce his or her risks. Benefits from social networking included: the sharing of knowledge and techniques; access to credit; mutual assistance in times of crisis; and negotiating power. All of which helped to reduce production risks. Comparisons among fish farming cooperatives in different sites, however, showed that the quality of bonding ties was important in enabling less well positioned farmers to access social capital that arose from bridging ties, whether from horizontal or vertical links. The presence of binding ties alone was not a good predictor of the distribution of benefits or outcomes of social relations in fish farming groups. Further research on the building of trust in the social networks of fish farming is recommended, as successful cooperatives appear to play a significant role in strengthening the adaptive capacities of their members.

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