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Social capital, civil society, and good governance: civic traditions in Johannesburg's shack settlements and Greater Pietermaritzburg's villages under chiefly rule

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the relationship between social capital/civil society and good governance/economic development both conceptually and empirically through case studies in the urban, rural, and peri-urban South Africa. As a starting point, this thesis attempts to answer the following six questions: How is social capital identifiable? Is its production exclusively confined to horizontally structured forms of associational life? Can peasant societies generate social capital? Do social capital networks accentuate divisions within communities between those who have access to authority and those without? Can political institutions play a role in producing social capital or does the enlargement of state authority take place at the expense of the associational networks which do produce social capital? And what kind of organisations in rural settings can best bridge sectional concerns and promote wider communities of trust? Can traditional existing political institutions be adapted to modern democratic requirements? I believe that in answering these questions I have gone some way in resolving some of the conceptual dilemmas identified by critics of the concept of social capital.

I was then in a position to test and explore two hypotheses. Firstly, I argue that there is a relationship between social capital (a product of civil society) and good governance as well as economic and democratic development. Secondly, I argue that positive social capital will be under-produced in societies in which there is a weak market economy, that is, where members of civil society do not have independent sources of income. I demonstrate that civil society, the state, and markets have a symbiotic relationship and that they all have a role to play in the production of positive social capital.

This thesis employed various data collection methods in order to navigate around the case studies chosen for the purposes of this study, viz. individual and group interviews, focus groups, direct observations, research surveys, secondary literature, and local newspapers.

Evidence emanating from this thesis suggests that there is a vibrant civil society and, by implication, social capital in poorly resourced areas found in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas of South Africa, which has to some extent contributed to good governance as well as economic and democratic development. However, I conclude by arguing that the informalisation of the economy as well as high levels of unemployment in these areas certainly inhibit civil society from playing its important democratising and governance role since the production of positive social capital is constrained by this new reality.

KEY WORDS: social capital, civil society, civic engagement, democracy, leadership, good governance, networks, state, informal economy, civic associations, markets, and rural-urban divide.