TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR RURAL PEOPLE IN PORTUGAL: SOME CLUES TO IMPROVE NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT
The paper concerns the evaluation of training courses in low-density rural areas within Portugal and focuses on the opinions and perspectives of the participants and their acquisition of social skills linked to the training courses. The training programs objectives were concerned with improving employment skills. The discussion addresses social capital to emphasize a non-formal educational strategy for adult rural populations and the implications in their livelihoods. Woolcock and Narayan (2000) have summarised, outlined and categorized several empirical studies surrounding social capital and their practical orientation for rural development. The studies affirm that excluded groups need to increase their social capital and relationships with other groups, entities and governmental figures to be empowered and participate in the decision-making process in their communities. The conclusions consider various clues to improve non-formal educational programs for promoting and strengthening initiatives with rural populations.

Keywords: Non-formal Education, Rural women, Rural development, Social capital.

INTRODUCTION
The paper is a revised edition of a previously published paper. The analysis addresses a set of educational interventions to strengthen social capital and empowerment among rural populations, particularly women. The overall question to be reviewed by this paper is: How can teaching-learning approaches (i.e. educational tools and methods, supervised experience programs, civic and leadership modules) be strengthened in these training courses in order for the teaching elements to play a greater role in constructing additional social capital for excluded groups in mountainous rural areas. The educational interventions will be an important point of discussion with regard to the data presented.
The relevance of educational activities to improve the social skills and social capital of adults in rural communities will be treated through various educational approaches. The discussion of the results will also serve to suggest improvements in rural training programs to enhance empowerment within similar contextual situations.

EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

Regarding the empowerment concept for rural development, the paper focuses on the human and social skills. These skills are needed by rural populations to become more involved in the decision making process within their communities in both governmental and non-governmental organizations in rural development (Luttrell et al. 2007). The empowerment process (multi-dimensional) is designed to strengthen self-confidence and the ability to solve community problems, while participating and learning in social groups (Amoo and Olowu, 2006). In this context, Bourdieu (1985), Coleman (1988), Grootaert and van Bastelaer (2002), Putnam, Leonardi and Manetti (1993), Portes (1998), Woolcock and Narayan (2000) and Uphoff (2000) define social capital and discuss the benefits of membership in social networks for society and individuals. Many authors address the importance of civic engagement to improve community-coordinated activities in a collective manner (Putnam, Leonardi and Manetti, 1993, Woolcock and Narayan, 2000 and Portes, 1998). For example one definition states, “social capital refers to the norms and networks that enable people to act collectively” (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000:226). In addressing civic engagement through voluntary participation in community organizations, the rural development process should improve collective decision-making and social capital. “Social capital can be understood most usefully by distinguishing two interrelated categories of phenomena: (a) **structural**, and (b) **cognitive**. The structural category is associated with various forms of social organization, particularly *roles, rules, precedents* and *procedures* as well as a wide variety of networks that contribute to cooperation, and specifically to mutually beneficial collective action (MBCA), which is the stream of benefits that result from social capital.

The cognitive category derives from mental processes and
resulting ideas, reinforced by culture and ideology, specifically norms, values, attitudes, and beliefs that contribute to cooperative behaviour and MBCA” (Uphoff 2000, p. 218). These thinking skills can be reinforced in the training programs through educational activities, methods and tools.

The empirical studies and definitions of social capital reflect or suggest that the quality and density of social networks relates to the rural development process. Social capital may strengthen the performance of the members in local organizations involved in local development. For this reason, the construction and strengthening of social capital with rural adults in the community through non-formal educational intervention, methods and tools can facilitate the mobilization and empowerment process. “Thus, the identification, protection and strengthening of existing social capital should be very integral elements of poverty alleviation strategies” (Grootaert and van Bastelaer 2002, p. 36). These strategies should include the role of non-formal educational programs provided by local development organizations and the state such as rural extension and rural training programs. In this endeavour, Woolcock and Narayan (2000) have outlined and categorized empirical studies surrounding social capital and their practical implications for rural development. The studies have defended the idea that excluded groups need to strengthen their social capital and relationships with other groups, entities and governmental figures to be empowered and participate in their community decision-making process. Woolcock and Narayan have listed the following categories of social capital: 1) the communitarian perspective (clubs, associations and civic groups) with the understanding that social capital is good; 2) the network perspective that emphasizes the vertical and horizontal associations among people that value the intra and inter organizational relationships of people in the community both at a formal and informal manner; 3) the institutional perspective treated social capital as a dependent variable without being good or bad. The capacity for people to intervene depends on the quality of the formal institutions (political, legal and economic) that make up the contextual system in which the stakeholders live and work; and 4) the fourth category - synergy perspective summarizes that embeddedness (nature and extent of the ties constructed by citizens and public officials) and complementarity (mutually supportive
relations between public and private actors) indicate the social capital synergy between citizens and governmental officials (2000, p. 236). These perspectives need to be considered in training courses. The synergy perspective reflects considerations for potential training activities with adult populations to increase social interaction and intervening with the leaders in governmental and non-governmental agencies within local communities involved in rural development. At the local level, the people need to intervene or interact, and training activities should be concerned about social skills and capacities such as communication skills, self-esteem, constructing personal relationships and initiative by the citizens in these communities. These skills are relevant and reflect intervening skills needed to construct social capital. However, social capital at a level for citizens to participate in the decision-making process in development organizations involves the building of formal and informal networks in the community and participating actively in the network or development organization. The training programs should consider internships, supervised experience programs and other voluntary leadership activities to promote social capital building.

The mobilization and educational process needs to be directed at those with less civic opportunities and social skills to increase empowerment and social capital within these social groups, while minimizing the negative consequences such as corruption, restriction on individual liberty, the possibility of downward levelling mentality and excess claims on the time of people (Portes 1998, Durlauf 1999, Loomis and Beegle 1975).

**METHODOLOGY**

This case study evaluation was financed by Ministry of Economic and Work Activities in Portugal (Desenvolvimento e Modernização das Estruturas e Serviços de Apoio às Políticas de Emprego e Formação (POEFDS), da Acção-tipo 4.2.2.1). The training programs evaluated by the former trainees were carried out during 2003-2005 and had 1,182 trainees (999 females and 183 males). Data collection was carried out using questionnaires (116 participant interviews), focus group interviews, and life story interviews (10). Isaac and Michael (1981), Patton (1980) and many others have supported such instruments to collect quantitative and qualitative data in research and evaluation.
projects. The training programs were organized by local development association or agricultural cooperatives to minimize the exclusion of rural populations to the employment market. The major objective of these training programs was to increase employment or employment skills for these marginalized populations in rural areas. The local level entities identified and selected the trainees for the training programs often based on location, that is the local development associations and cooperatives mobilized the trainees in their sphere of influence. The training programs used in many instances lectures, hands-on training and training laboratories. These excluded or marginalized populations had low educational qualifications and lacked social capital. The training courses put these people with other people from their community that in the past the trainees had little or no contact. In 2003-2005, the rural development training programs were implemented to strengthen employability and in some cases increase educational level through training equivalencies from the formal educational system. The training programs broached the following areas: conventional agricultural, forestry, organic farming, tourism (handicrafts), management, food processing and transformation of local products. The objective of the training was to increase employability or improve the capacity of the participants to create business enterprises. The training programs were overseen by the Instituto de Formação Profissional e Emprego (a governmental institution to finance training to increase employment) and also linked to the educational ministry. The majority of the training programs involved 60 to 250 hours. If the course (17% of the 116 interviewed) included a formal adult educational component (this component permitted the trainees to receive a diploma equivalent in the formal educational system) the number of hours reached the 1,000 hours plateau. With this additional component, many participants completed during the training the equivalent of 4th, 6th or 9th grade in the Portuguese formal educational system. Additionally, 53% of the participants completed one training course, while the rest completed from two to four professional training courses in areas previously identified. The participants who took part in the interviews were predominately women (87%), married (80%), and unemployed. Other social roles and aspects of this sample describe them as mothers, 45 years of age, low education level (over 50% with 6th grade or less) and their family income near the poverty level.
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
According to our study, only 4% found employment after the training course(s) and the training course(s) contributed to some extent to improve family income. The information collected from the life story interviews documents the challenges that rural women faced to attend the formal educational system when they were children. The difficulties included long distances from school, uninspired teachers, families that preferred to educate the son instead of daughter, lack of monies to support indirect and direct education costs and unfortunately when they showed some dislike or indifference for schooling they lacked parental guidance to instil in them the importance of schooling for the future (Koehnen and Baptista 2007). The discussion of results focuses primarily on six questions rated by these former trainees following their experiences in a training program. The self-ratings are triangulated by other observations and information from the study such as focus group interviews and life stories. The analysis addresses the teaching-learning initiatives and interventions that permit active learning by women and men in non-formal educational programs. The analysis considers additional educational aspects to strengthen social development skills and social capital as well.

The participants were asked to rate themselves using a numerical five-point scale (5=very high improvement; 4=high improvement, 3=average improvement, 2=low improvement and 1=no improvement). The ratings were completed after participation in rural training programs and based on their opinion; the changes were the result of the training programs. This low to very high rating by the participants expresses a personal growth from the teaching-learning experiences in the training programs.

Former trainees gained self-esteem and confidence (Figure 1) according to their rating from high to very high (45%). Social capital requires people to have greater self-esteem and confidence to at least begin interacting with governmental officials and employees. The mean rating for this category was 3.3. The training courses had a positive impact involving learning and self-esteem for these participants, where 78% believed the training programs changed their lives. The social development can be attributed to the participation in these training programs. The teaching-learning activities such as group work, discussion and social learning played
an important part in improving self-esteem. The training programs have an impact if rural women and men have the possibility to participate and interact with other colleagues in these rural areas and construct informal networks with other trainees and trainers.

Figure 1 - Self-esteem/confidence.

The participants rated an improvement in their communication capacity that is related to interactions and interventions with other people (Figure 2) as high to very high (39%). Communication is an important competency in the working world as well as non-economic interactions with family and community members. Communication with others and the linking process is important in initiating the construction of social capital. The mean rating for assertive communication was 3.1. These training courses required the trainees to present information orally in the classroom among their colleagues and trainers. This was an important teaching-learning activity to improve assertive communication skills. In fact, the focus group interviews identified an improvement in dealing with governmental officials in the employment area. The participants were able to confront local governmental officials with greater communication capacity, esteem and courage.
At least 31% (Figure 3) of the participants rated their social initiative (initiative is important for possible interventions with governmental officials and employees) high to very high after the training courses, while 21% rated their initiative as no improvement. The mean rating for initiative was 2.8. What is happening at the training site to increase their initiative and autonomy for a majority of these trainees? In some cases, the participants were responsible for identifying, explaining and justifying agricultural production activities and project proposals to increase family income in their discussion groups. In some training programs, the trainers used social interaction and role-playing to permit women and men to share their perspectives, aspirations and ideas for improving their livelihood and family owned properties while strengthening thinking capacities and interactions with other people.

Figure 3 - Initiative/autonomy

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Figure 3 - Initiative/autonomy
In the working world, many employers are looking for people that have good personal relations, social skills and job skills with fellow workers and customers. The information on Figure 4 can be considered positive in the improvement of social skills to improve interactions with employers, business men and government officials and lays the foundation for the construction of social capital in the community. The trainees rated themselves at least high or higher in their improvement with relationships (62%). The mean rating for personal relations was 3.6. The training courses contributed to creating friendships and relationships with the participants, instructors and guest from governmental organizations. Many training courses used various trainers in order to give participants the possibility to interact with different personalities and gain confidence to verbally interact and directly improve social capital.

Figure 4 - Personal relationships

According to Figure 5, the trainees are participating at a low level in community associations after the training programs. The mean rating for participating in associations was 1.6. In fact, 77% said they did not participate in these types of non-economic activities after the training. The training programs must do more to give the participants experiences in non-economic community activities as employment has been difficult to attain for these women. In fact, public transport is limited and poor in this mountainous rural area and reduces employment possibilities. The lack of transport limits job opportunities for women who need to search in a larger geographical job market (Mudukuti 2003). The non-economic
activities should take place in their local communities. For this reason, the participation activities in local associations can prepare this group to strengthen employment skills and possibly improve their ability to create micro or small businesses. The group needs more educational and supervised exposure to increase their participation in community activities. More engagement activities are required to focus on improving social and leadership skills by supervised voluntary experiences in community associations or other community activities. Phipps and Osborne (1988), Elliot, Boone, and Doerfert (1991) and Perrenoud (1996) reflect on the monitoring and supervisory component in training and education and the relevance of this type of experience for the trainee. The supervised experience can be occupational by creating a business project as an entrepreneur or a non-occupational project such as community service by landscaping and maintaining nursing home and school gardens, building a recreational area or park, organizing a cooperative for organic products or serving as an intern in community governmental or non-governmental organizations. These supervised experiences should have been integrated into the training programs as an additional educational component. In fact, a unit or module should be considered in the Portuguese training programs to explain and prepare for the process and allow the trainee to begin a preliminary project plan for the activity and formulate objectives. These activities should be individualized for each of the trainees. However, in addition, one could envision group projects to complement the individual project.

The training programs should have had this additional component and made visits to the project to construct the learning partnership. The training program should have encouraged greater participation in successful experiences within a non-occupational or occupational project. The project should use innovative practices and techniques, while maintaining accurate and complete organizational records. The learning partnership must be based on respect, trust and solidarity. The trainers during this process use educational methods, coaching, consultation, mentoring and monitoring of the individualized non-occupational experience with frequent visits (Koehnen and Baptista 2006).
Figure 6 shows that the trainees in general have made limited improvements in their participation in general community activities after completing the training programs. The mean rating for their improvement in participating within community activities was 2.3. However, 48% said they did not participate in these types of activities and only 22% rated their improvement in participation as high to very high after training. Once again, internships should focus on gaining experience in participating in additional community activities that are supervised by trainers. The principle objective to increase skills in order to become employed must not be the only reason for these training programs. The training programs must also focus on governance and leadership skills in these disadvantaged regions where participation in local governance and the construction of rural policies by these excluded groups is minimal. This population has unequal social capital in comparison to local governmental and non-governmental leaders in township governance, cooperatives and associations (Koehnen and Cristóvão 2006). These women and men need greater social and civic interaction with local leaders within their communities and supervised non-occupational internships should be considered for training programs. In addition, the training programs need to strengthen or include leadership and civic educational modules to encourage trust, respect and appreciation of diversity in the community. The participants need to develop a vision of the future, while promoting collective learning and resolution of problems. The module should assist the trainees to develop social and public leadership skills. The trainees must be prepared to be stewards and leaders for their community (Hastedde and Woodward 1996).
The training programs objectives were to increase employment or improve employment skills in a low-density mountainous region. The training programs should have also incorporated other teaching-learning activities and methods to attempt to increase participation and empower these less affluent members in the rural population. The evaluated training programs were not concerned with implementing non-economic initiatives in rural development. The training programs were primarily concerned about economic initiatives, but non-economic initiatives such as strengthening civic engagement and social capital skills would have been beneficial for these rural actors and the rural communities in which they live. The training program could increase the impact on their local community as well with an additional educational objective, the training programs could have developed teaching-learning modules and activities to permit participants to practice constructing networks and synergistic activities to reflect embeddedness and complementarity. The modules should include civic education (understanding local government and social services) and social development activities (in the form of leadership skills) (Koehnen, Baptista and Portela 2004). Sustainable rural development requires an active rural population involved in collective or community decision-making and problem solving. The non-economic initiatives (non-occupational) can complement the economic initiatives (occupational) for these rural training programs.
Non-formal educational programs in rural areas play an important role for rural development and allocative ability of human capital (Huffman 1974). The trainees in these programs were enthusiastic and enjoyed the educational experience, but were not highly successful in finding employment. Many participated in more than one type of course and felt the training had made an important contribution to their lives and the lives of their children. They believed the training programs had changed their lives. And yet, rural areas in Portugal have adult and excluded populations that are not engaged in community or associational activities (see Figures 4 and 5). The importance of fine-tuning these training programs to include internships based on a supervised experience at the occupational or non-occupational level needs to be considered. The rural population has not been favoured by an active formal educational system at the time of their childhood. For this reason, training programs need to develop educational activities and training objectives to increase and strengthen empowerment and social capital within these rural areas by having civic engagement experiences while working in governmental and non-governmental organizations in their communities. They need to be motivated to become volunteers engaged in parent-teachers associations, church activities, cultural activities or local cooperative as well as sitting in on town meetings in order to improve their social capital. These non-economic activities would be a part of the training programs and be supervised by the educators. In addition, these engagement activities could be followed up by various group discussion sessions of their experiences in a classroom setting. The teaching-learning activities need to permit the participant to construct additional networks that reflect the vertical and horizontal relationships found in their local governmental and non-governmental organizations. The engagement skills in the construction of leadership and social skills, social capital and power should be oriented toward collective actions within the communities that they live. Local organization involved in rural development should be concerned with involving the local populations in an advisory capacity in the management of rural development in order to increase community participation and construct additional social capital through participatory activities such as advisory councils that are made up of community volunteers and foster training program internships.
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Rural development policies require a holistic approach to strengthen processes in rural development and non-formal education. Rural development policies need to value or include the non-economic activities such as the participation in town meetings, internships in governmental or non-governmental organizations or other volunteer activities. The non-economic initiatives reflect a concern to build partnerships and networks in these rural communities. The construction of the community networks should involve the entire rural population. Those with unequal skills, disadvantaged, blocked from the educational system in the past and lacking in capacities to construct synergistic social capital need to be prepared and engaged in this process through continuous non-formal educational programs or a holistic extension educational system.

REFERENCES


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