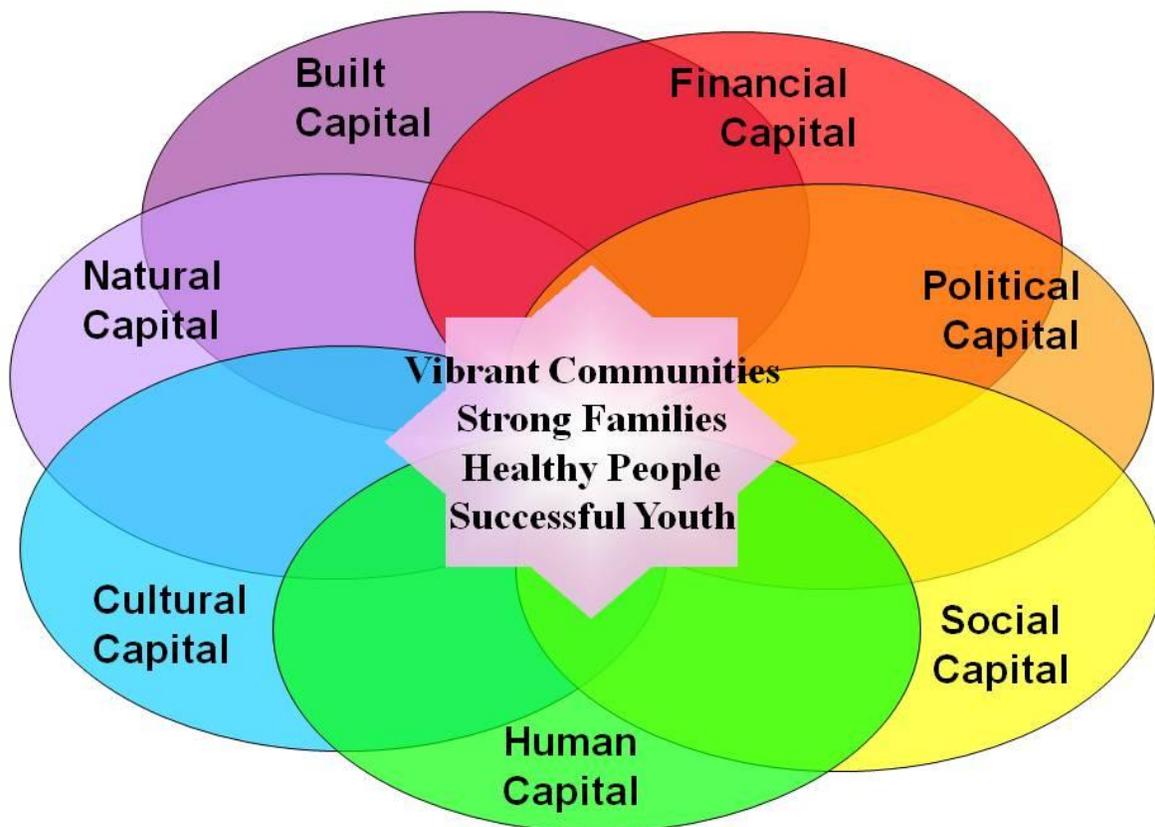


Analyzing Change and Reporting Impact within the Community Capitals Framework

A growing network of community development researchers and practitioners use a research-based framework developed around 7 community capitals to analyze change in rural areas in the U.S. and abroad (Flora, 2006). It is this work that forms the foundation and framework for the Rural Youth Development Program. Service Learning Community Action Projects strengthen human, social, civic, financial, cultural, natural and built capital to collectively produce vibrant communities, strong families, healthy people and successful youth.

The following discussion and adaptation of Community Capitals is taken from the work of Flora and Flora. All communities have resources that can be reduced or dissipated, saved for future use, or invested to create new resources. When those resources are invested to create new resources over a long time horizon, they are referred to as “capital.” The capitals are both ends in themselves and a means to an end. Only by a dynamic balance among the capitals and capital reinvestments can sustainable strategies emerge to address the threats posed by a global economy, a rapidly changing climate, and other critical issues facing communities across America.

Community Capitals Framework Diagram



Natural capital refers to those assets that abide in a location including weather, geographic isolation, biodiversity, natural resources, amenities, and natural beauty. Water, soil and air – their quality and quantity – are a major building block of natural capital (Costanza, 1997; *Flora C. R., 2001). By building on local and scientific knowledge, healthy ecosystems may be developed with multiple community benefits, where human communities act in concert with natural systems, rather than simply to dominate these systems for short term gain.

Cultural capital reflects the way people “know the world” and how to act within it as well as their traditions and language. It includes cosmovisión (spirituality, and how the different parts are connected), ways of knowing, food and language, ways of being, and definition of what can be changed. Cultural capital influences what voices are heard and listened to, which voices have influence in what areas, and how creativity, innovation, and influence emerge and are nurtured. Monitoring the condition of community capitals allows excluded groups to effectively engage with the cultural capital of dominant groups. Cultural differences are recognized and valued, and ancestral customs and languages are maintained.

Human capital includes the skills and abilities of people to develop and enhance their resources, and to access outside resources and bodies of knowledge in order to increase their understanding, identify promising practices, and to access data to enhance community capitals. Formal and informal educations are investments in human capital (Becker, 1964; Schultz, 1961). Human capital also includes health and leadership. The different aspects of human capital are important to acknowledge.

Developing human capital includes identifying the motivations and abilities of each individual to improve community capitals, increase the skills and health of individuals to improve community capitals, and recombine the skills and motivation of the community to move to a more sustainable collective future.

Social capital reflects the connections among people and organizations or the social glue to make things, positive or negative, happen (Coleman, 1988). It includes mutual trust, reciprocity, groups, collective identity, sense of a shared future, and working together (Putnam, 1993b). It is extremely important for creating a healthy ecosystem and a vital economy.

Bonding social capital refers to those close ties that build community cohesion. Bridging social capital involves loose ties that bridge among organizations and communities (Nayaran, 1999). A specific configuration of social capital – entrepreneurial social capital (ESI) is related to community economic development (*Flora C. a., "Entrepreneurial Social Infrastructure: A Necessary Ingredient, " 1993). ESI includes inclusive internal and external networks, local mobilization of resources, and willingness to consider alternative ways of reaching goals.

Political/Civic capital reflects access to power, organizations, connection to resources and power brokers (*Flora C. a., Rural Communities: Legacy and Change, 3rd edition, 2008). Political capital is the ability of a group to influence standards, regulations and enforcement of those regulations that determine the distribution of resources and the ways they are used. When

a community has high political capital, its people have the collective ability to find their own voice and to engage in actions that contribute to the well being of their community.

Indicators of political/civic capital include organized groups work together, local people know and feel comfortable around powerful people, including scientists and government functionaries, and local concerns are part of the agenda.

Financial capital refers to the public and private financial resources available to invest in community capacity building, to underwrite businesses development, to support civic and social entrepreneurship, and to accumulate wealth for future community development. Financial capital also refers to personal financial resources available for families to buy goods and services, invest in business opportunities, support the community tax base, and save for emergencies and retirement. Money that is spent for consumption is not financial capital. Money that is put aside and not invested is also not yet financial capital. It must be invested to create new resources to become capital.

Financial capital includes remittances savings (particularly by increasing efficiency through better management, credit more skilled workers, use of technology and better regulations), income generation and business earnings (by increasing human capital through skills and social capital through more integrated value chains), payment for environmental services, loans and credit, investments, taxes, tax exemptions user fees, and gifts/philanthropy. Often rural communities are viewed as bereft of financial capital, but, particularly with increasing globalization of the labor force, out-migrants can be even better organized to invest in their communities in a way that is cumulative for rural development.

Built capital includes the infrastructure that supports the other capitals. It includes such diverse human-made objects and systems such as sewers, water systems, electronic communication, soccer fields and processing such plants. And it includes the kinds of scientific equipment needed for the identification and eradication of invasive species.

For more information on community capitals, the Iowa State University web site has several resources. Two specific sites are:

<http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/projects/commcap/7-capitalshandout.pdf> and
<http://www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/pubs/Communitycapitals.pdf>.

Source: CSREES. (2009). 2009 Community Sustainability and Quality of Life Portfolio Annual Report