



## Harnessing Social Capital for Inclusive Growth: Lessons from Wang Itok, Phitsanulok

Parinya Soithong\* and Wanlapat Suksawas

Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand

\*Corresponding author. E-mail address: parinyas@nu.ac.th

Received: 13 December 2024; Revised: 31 January 2025; Accepted: 13 February 2025; Available Online: 19 March 2025

### Abstract

This research aims at examining the part of social capital, made up of trust, networks, and shared norms, in supporting inclusive growth as well as enhancing community resilience in Wang Itok Subdistrict, Bang Rakam District, Phitsanulok Province, Thailand. This research is conducted by using qualitative approach where data were collected through semi-structured interviews of 30 participants and non-participant observations to examine how strong social networks and high level of trust help the communities to access resources, coordinate activities, and respond to change. Reciprocity and mutual assistance play a crucial role in the process and are the key factors that define the culture of mutual assistance that does not only assist in fighting poverty but also contributes to sustainable development. The conclusions demonstrate that social capital is an important factor in the solution of the problems of social and economic character as well as in the creation of sustainable and resilient communities. This study presents practical uses of social capital to augment trust, boost community ties, and foster sustainable development, especially in remote and inaccessible regions.

**Keywords:** Social Capital, Inclusive Growth, Community Resilience

### Introduction

Social capital is an important factor that can be used for promoting inclusive growth and increasing the resilience of the community, especially in the rural and resource constrained societies. Social capital refers to the qualities of social relationships between people, belonging to the same society, which include trust, cooperation, and mutual support as the fundamental means of addressing social and economic issues (Putnam, 2000). Whereas, financial or physical capital can be built or invested directly, social capital is not tangible and is built over time through people's everyday activities thus making it a cheap and sustainable asset for development. Through the mobilization of these connections, communities can aggregate resources, collaboratively address problems, and adapt to external challenges, thereby establishing pathways to sustain resilience and self-reliance.

Social capital comprises three interrelated components: trust, networks, and shared norms. These elements collectively enhance relationships and facilitate collective action within a community.

Trust is the keystone of social capital, building trust in both intrapersonal and institutional ties. Interpersonal trust takes hold through mutual experiences and mutual treatment as seen in neighbours helping one another to harvest or to cope with emergencies. Trust in organizations, leaders, or systems at the community level refers to trust. Good governance by organizations, like temples or cooperatives, builds this form of trust. These trust structures, in aggregate, reduce uncertainty, lower transaction costs, and create a platform for cooperation.

Networks are the structural component of social capital both formal and informal. Formal networks—Cooperative farming organizations and credit unions—are used as arenas for resource sharing, knowledge transfer and group decision-making. Informal ties are paramount to delivering the very moment assistance during crises, such as lending tools or cash at the expense of agreements. These networks are key links for both acquisition of resources and information, enhancing a community's capacity to respond to challenges.

Norms and values serve as the base principles guiding behavior and expectations in a community. Norm, often perpetuated and reinforced by cultural routines and common events, builds a culture of reciprocity, mutualistic



assistance, and responsibility. In many rural communities, people often share labor during planting seasons, demonstrating the principle that helping others results in reciprocal assistance when the opportunity is present. These norms entail emphasis on the welfare of the group above the benefit of an individual, and the maintenance of social order over time.

The components of social capital—trust, networks, and shared norms—function collectively to foster an environment conducive to community flourishing. In rural regions such as Wang Itok Subdistrict, these factors are critical for improving economic self-sufficiency and resilience to external shocks, including natural disasters and market fluctuations.

Furthermore, poverty still represents a significant problem in Thailand, particularly in rural areas. In Wang Itok subdistrict, Bang Rakam district, Phitsanulok province, 605 are poor and receiving poor welfare and as many as 314 are in dire financial conditions (Thai People Map and Analytics Platform (TPMAP), 2022). The challenges described reflect broader economic conditions in the Lower Northern Region, as well as the rates of poverty in Phitsanulok (8.4% in 2021, which exceeded the national rates of 6.8% (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC), 2022). The fact that the area is very dependent on agriculture makes many households vulnerable both to fluctuations of crop prices and natural disasters.

Wang Itok Subdistrict exhibits robust communal ties and social networks, presenting considerable potential for utilizing social capital to mitigate poverty. Community-driven initiatives, including cooperative farming groups, women's savings associations, and temple-led welfare programs, have demonstrated potential in enhancing resilience and promoting economic self-sufficiency. These efforts highlight the significance of trust, shared norms, and collective action in enhancing community well-being and tackling poverty.

In Wang Itok Subdistrict, poverty alleviation is not solely dependent on government policies or external assistance but is primarily driven by community-led initiatives that harness social capital as a key mechanism for resource management and collaboration. The formation of agricultural cooperatives and women's savings groups exemplifies how social networks facilitate access to essential resources, financial capital, and market opportunities. These collective efforts not only help reduce economic burdens but also reinforce trust, enabling long-term cooperation among community members. By fostering strong interpersonal relationships and shared responsibilities, these networks empower local populations to enhance their economic stability and resilience.

Additionally, social institutions, particularly temples and community organizations, play a pivotal role in supporting both social and economic development. Temples function not only as spiritual centers but also as hubs for resource mobilization and community coordination, organizing initiatives such as food distribution programs for the underprivileged, vocational training sessions, and scholarship support for children from low-income families. These activities reflect the deep-rooted shared norms of generosity and collective responsibility, which continue to shape the community's social fabric. The recognition that assistance provided to others will be reciprocated in times of need fosters a cycle of reciprocity and mutual aid, which contributes to long-term poverty alleviation and economic security. By leveraging these social capital mechanisms, Wang Itok Subdistrict has successfully built a model of sustainable development, where communities work together to address socio-economic challenges through trust-based cooperation and collective action.

This research investigates the utilization of social capital to foster inclusive growth and alleviate poverty in the Wang Itok Subdistrict of Bang Rakam District, Phitsanulok Province. This emphasizes the role of trust, networks, and shared norms in facilitating collective action, resource mobilization, and sustainable development. This research



provides lessons from a rural community to enhance understanding of how social capital enables communities to attain long-term resilience and inclusive development, thereby offering important insights for policymakers and practitioners in comparable situations.

The objectives of this study are

1. To analyze how social capital—encompassing trust, networks, and shared norms—promotes community engagement, collaboration, and poverty alleviation in Wang Itok Subdistrict.
2. To explore the role of social capital and local institutions, particularly temples, in enhancing the sustainability of community-driven development.

### Methods and Materials

In this paper, the qualitative research is focused on how social capital, especially, networks, trust and shared norms can benefit in a way of community formation and decrease of poverty in Wang Itok Subdistrict. The qualitative approaches used in the study enable a deep understanding of the personal experience, perspectives and behavior of participants contributing to a rich understanding of how social capital works in this community context.

**Sampling:** Purposive sampling of subjects was used, with a specific aim of subjects with the right amount of subject expertise and who actively participate in life of the town, to better reflect a representative and diverse group of subjects. To ensure sampling and the diversity of the community, a broad spectrum of opinions[v] was included in the sampling process. To ensure that they could offer valuable qualitative responses to the issue under study, the following selection criteria were adopted.

**Length of Residence:** To ensure that participants were familiar with the social environment of the region and had strong connections with the community, participants had to have lived in Wang Itok Subdistrict for at least 5 years.

**Engaging in Active Community Participation:** Participants required to have participated in at least one community-based activity, such as cooperative farming, savings groups, or temple events, for at least a year to provide a complete picture of community involvement.

**Function in the Community:** People in a variety of roles were included in the sample, including leaders in the community, active participants in social groups, and people dealing with financial difficulties that are directly related to poverty.

**Acquiring Significant Informants:** The first group of participants were key informants, who were recruited after consultation with local authorities, i.e., temple abbot or village chief. They were selected due to their work on social and economic activities, and due to their deep knowledge of the area. They played a crucial role in recognizing important facets of social capital and comprehending the larger community context. A snowball sampling technique was employed to find more participants after the main informants were interviewed in the first place. In recommending people that might have valuable information, key informants ensured that the sample consisted of opinions from across socioeconomic backgrounds and demographic groups.

**Ensuring Diversity:** To achieve a deep understanding of social capital in different contexts, an attempt was made to include a broad spectrum of participants.

**Gender:** Men and women were included to study possible sex-based differences in use and perception of social capital.

**Groups by Age:** Participants were recruited across six age ranges: young people (18–30), middle-aged people (31–50), as well as seniors (51+), with an aim to more fully characterize generational differences.



**Jobs:** To inform us about the role of social capital in people's various economic positions, this sample is composed of individuals working in different occupations such as farmers, small business owners, unemployed, and community activists.

**The Quantity of Informants:** A total of thirty informants were obtained to provide a representative and cross-sectional perspective, yet actionable to analysis. A total of ten community leaders, including village headmen, religious leaders and group leaders, attended this meeting. Ten neighborhood associations activists (e.g., cooperative farming and savings groups). Ten people who are directly plunged into poverty, individuals who are poor, from the community as it fails, for example, to support a family, etc.

**Validation of Appropriateness:** Potential informants were approached to ensure agreement to participate before interviews. A quick pre-screening discussion made sure they fit the requirements for participation and could offer pertinent insights and experiences about networks, trust, and community standards.

**Data Collection:** Semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation were utilised to collect data with the aim of building up a complete picture of social capital in the community. This method guaranteed a deep, thorough understanding of the ways in which networks, norms, and trust worked inside Wang Itok's social structure. While observations offered a firsthand look at how social capital was used in daily community life, interviews gave participants the chance to share their own experiences and perspectives.

**Integrating Triangulation for Data Validation:** To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, this study employed data triangulation, incorporating multiple sources and methods to cross-verify the data collected. In addition to semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations, document analysis was utilized to supplement and confirm key themes that emerged during the interviews. Community meeting records, local development plans, and reports from cooperative farming groups and temple-led welfare programs provided contextual depth to the study. Furthermore, methodological triangulation was applied by combining qualitative approaches—interviews, observations, and secondary data—to identify patterns and discrepancies, enhancing the credibility of the results. The inclusion of investigator triangulation, where multiple researchers reviewed and interpreted the data independently before discussing findings collectively, minimized potential biases. This multi-faceted validation process strengthens the study's conclusions, ensuring that insights into social capital's role in poverty alleviation and community resilience are grounded in comprehensive, well-substantiated evidence.

## Results

### General Background of the Informants

In this study, informants were chosen to reflect the racial diversity of Wang Itok Subdistrict. 30 participants included individuals aged 18 to 65 years. This width enabled the inclusion of multigenerational views, which provided insights into how members of different age groups view and use social capital. Men and women were participants in the study, offering a disparate view of the role that gender may have in mediating trust, networking and shared norms inside the community.

It is found that participants came from a variety of occupational backgrounds, reflecting the economic and social dynamics of the subdistrict. Farmers formed a significant portion of the group, given their reliance on cooperative efforts and informal support networks. Other subjects included small business owners, local officials, and people affiliated with community groups. The occupational diversity of this study enabled it to investigate the

functioning of social capital in different domains, with a focus on its ability to mobilize resources and build economic resilience.

The informants' socio-economic status also differed (between those with unstable economic situations, such as facing bankruptcy, and those with more secured economic situations). This heterogeneity was fundamental to understanding how social capital can work as both a safety net for disadvantaged individuals and a resource for wider community renewal. Local authorities and leaders, including village chiefs and temple monks, also contributed, providing their perspectives on the formation and preservation of social capital at the institutional level. These informants made some of the most important points concerning the ways in which community norms and trust are maintained through these structured practices such as temple activities and commercial farming schemes.

In total, the informants contributed a rich mosaic of views that guarantee the study's ability to capture the complexity of social capital, and the influence of social capital on poverty alleviation as well as community participation in the Wang Itok Subdistrict.

### **Key Findings on Social Capital and Community Resilience**

This paper emphasizes the important contribution social capital makes to fostering inclusive growth, alleviating poverty and enhancing community resilience in Wang Itok Subdistrict, Phitsanulok Province. Through the examination of the key elements of social capital – trust, networks, shared norms – the results offer important suggestions as to how these factors work together to mobilize resources, promote collaboration and build resilience, and hence contribute to the long-term viability of the community.

#### **Social Capital as a Driver of Inclusive Growth**

Trust, a core component of social capital, emerged as essential to the functioning of both interpersonal and institutional relationships in Wang Itok Subdistrict. When interpersonal trust, built by common shared experience and mutual assistance, was crucial to facilitate the cooperation between community members and to enable collective action, for example, cooperative farming and savings groups.

It can be interpreted from examples of the interview. A young female explained (P1, Female, age 42), *"I've been essentially "borrowing" things for ages, like tools or snacks, from my neighbors. I don't stress about them bringing them back. Through years of trust earned, we have built this trust particularly during harvests or times of floods. The fact that it is trust between us that allows us to depend on one another without a guess is its own justification"*. This statement also highlights the way, as a function of time and especially when faced with difficult situations, shared experiences lead to the development of a trust and motivation factor from which will derive cooperative and collective economic work.

Another informant mentioned (P8, Female, age 49), *"At the planting time we back each other up hands down. If I lend a hand to my neighbor today, I'm pretty sure they'll return the favor when I need it. It's not just about the jobs but also about being there for each other"*. This reciprocal confidence in labor arrangements also bolsters the capacity of the community to cooperate, which in turn guarantees a consistent and continuous economic growth frame, especially in rural agricultural economies. Besides, a statement from another informant also indicated that (P7, Male, age 62), *"I feel good about the temple since they're open about how they use donations. Every time they raise money, they are very transparent with us as to whether the money is going—whether through helping those in need or through bettering the community center. That transparency is easy to be part of, if only because you know that the contributions are being made for a good purpose"*. A young lady added (P6, Female, age 28), *"Every time I pitch a new idea, I stress the benefit of the idea for all stakeholders" etc. "Probably the level of*





*trust is high among people, because they can see that I respect my (word) promises and keep to what I say. When we trust our leaders, it makes our projects keep going to give what we the community need*". This sentence is representative of the relationship between trust in community leaders and the quality of decision-making and collective action in the community, thus leading to inclusive growth and sustainability.

It can be said that not only does this belief in institutions increase participation in community initiatives, but it also yields an improvement in mobilization of resources for poverty reduction.

#### **Networks as Catalysts for Resource Mobilization and Collective Action**

The research found that both formal and informal social networks are irreplaceable about resource mobilization and group action in Wang Itok Subdistrict. These networks allow community users to share resources, disseminate information, and work together to deal with shared challenges, strengths, and mutual aid. Formal networks, such as farming cooperatives and women's savings groups, provided structured avenues for resource sharing and collective decision-making. A cooperative member (P5, Male, age 46) reflected on the collective action enabled by these networks: *"Last year, when the drought hit, we pooled money as a cooperative to rent a water pump. Individually, none of us could afford it, but together, we managed to save our crops and prevent financial ruin"*. His account illustrates how formal networks address resource gaps and enable collaborative problem-solving in times of crisis.

Similarly, a member of a women's savings group (P14, Female, age 37) emphasized the group's role in fostering both financial and emotional support: *"We meet every month, not just to talk about loans but also to share advice on managing businesses and family issues. It's more than a financial network; it feels like a family that supports each other through every challenge"*. This highlights how formal networks contribute to both economic resilience and emotional well-being, strengthening the fabric of the community.

Informal networks, including neighborly support and extended family ties, were equally vital in responding to immediate needs and emergencies. A young mother (P16, Female, age 29) shared how her neighbors stepped in during a time of financial difficulty: *"When my husband lost his job, our neighbors brought us food, babysat our kids, and even helped me find part-time work. Without them, I don't know how we would have gotten through that tough period"*. Her experience underscores how informal networks provide a critical safety net for families facing unexpected challenges.

A farmer (P8, Male, age 50) recounted the informal support he received during a health crisis: *"When I got injured during planting season, my neighbors didn't hesitate. They came to my farm, finished the work I couldn't do, and refused to take any payment. That's just how things are here—we help each other out because we know we might need the same help one day"*. This reciprocal support fosters a sense of community and strengthens long-term resilience.

Temple-centered networks also emerged as significant in mobilizing resources and coordinating collective efforts. A temple volunteer (P11, Male, age 35) described the community's response during a food distribution event: *"When the temple organizes something, everyone shows up. It's not just about handing out food, it's about coming together to ensure that no one in the community is left behind"*. This sense of shared responsibility, facilitated by the temple, reinforces social cohesion and encourages sustained collective action.

These examples show that both formal and informal networks play an important role in resource mobilization and collective action in Wang Itok Subdistrict. Formal networks are highly structured frameworks to target long-term problems, but informal networks are on-demand, adaptable, and support systems in crisis situations.



When combined, these networks represent a dynamic interconnected support system promoting resilience and supporting sustainable community development.

### **Shared Norms and Values in Strengthening Community Resilience**

Universal norms of reciprocity and collective responsibility are the foundation of the social reality of Wang Itok, one that cultivates an atmosphere of mutual help that promotes social solidarity and communal strength. These social norms, for instance, tend to promote an attitude of ensuring everyone's success over individual one's interest, promoting collective success. A middle-aged participant (P9, Female, age 50) described how these values manifest during planting seasons: *"In our village, during planting season, we go on rotating ourselves at each other's farms to work. It's not just about sharing the workload about showing that we're all in this together. Since if a farm should fail, it affects all of us where we aid each other to succeed, we believe that by reinforcing a communal sense of responsibility, everyone would be expected to share in and reap the rewards of their community's success"*. Another farmer (P15, Male, age 47) emphasized the cultural importance of these norms: *"Helping your neighbor is not a choice; it's how we've been raised. No kidding when times are bad, drought or flood, everyone is on call to help"*. This practice, rooted in local customs, reinforces a shared sense of responsibility, ensuring that everyone contributes to and benefits from the community's prosperity.

Another farmer (P15, Male, age 47) emphasized the cultural importance of these norms: *"Helping your neighbor is not a choice; it's how we've been raised. During tough times, whether it's a drought or a flood, everyone knows their role in supporting others. It's what keeps our community strong"*. His account illustrates how deeply embedded these norms are, functioning as an unspoken agreement that ensures no one is left to face challenges alone.

Elders in the community also play a critical role in passing down these values. One elder (P2, Female, age 67) explained: *"When I was younger, my parents always said, 'If you help others, they'll help you back when you need it'. That's why we teach our children to do the same. It's how we maintain balance and trust in the village"*. This generational transmission of shared values ensures that the culture of reciprocity remains strong across age groups.

Younger participants also recognized the influence of these norms in shaping their actions. A local teacher (P12, Male, age 28) shared: *"Growing up, we were taught to respect and help anyone in need, whether they're a neighbor or a stranger. It's something we carry with us into adulthood. It's what makes our community unique—we genuinely care about each other"*. This reflects the intergenerational continuity of shared norms, ensuring their relevance and impact in a modern context.

These shared norms also guide behavior during times of scarcity. A homemaker (P11, Female, age 40) described how neighbors came together during a recent drought: *"When water became scarce, everyone pitched in to make sure every household had enough. People shared what they had, even if it meant having less for themselves. That's just the way things are here—we look out for each other"*. This collective approach to managing resources illustrates how shared values contribute to sustainable poverty alleviation by ensuring equity and inclusion.

By fostering a culture of cooperation and mutual support, these deeply ingrained norms of reciprocity and collective responsibility enable Wang Itok to effectively address socio-economic challenges. They not only promote collective action but also create a resilient community where no one is left behind, even during times of adversity.



### **The Role of Institutions in Leveraging Social Capital for Sustainable Development**

Local institutions, particularly temples, play a pivotal role in Wang Itok, serving as central hubs for coordinating collective action and leveraging social capital to achieve sustainable development. These institutions go beyond their spiritual responsibilities, functioning as facilitators of social programs that enhance community cohesion and ensure equitable resource distribution.

One temple volunteer (P11, Male, age 35) described the impact of food distribution events: *“When the temple organizes food drives, everyone comes together. It’s not just about distributing food—it’s about reminding us that we’re all connected and responsible for one another. The temple ensures that no family is left out, which strengthens trust in the system”*. This account highlights the temple’s role in fostering solidarity and creating an inclusive environment. Another participant (P13, Female, age 40) emphasized how temple-led initiatives build trust and participation: *“When we donate to the temple, we see exactly how the money is used—whether it’s for helping families in need or improving community facilities. This transparency makes everyone more willing to contribute and join efforts”*. This reflects the temple’s effectiveness in building institutional trust, which is essential for mobilizing resources and encouraging collective action.

A community elder (P6, Male, age 65) shared how temples contribute to sustainable practices: *“During droughts, the temple organized water-sharing programs. They worked with community leaders to ensure that every household had enough water, even when resources were scarce. Their guidance kept things fair and peaceful”*. This demonstrates how local institutions act as mediators, promoting equitable resource management during times of scarcity.

Temples also support long-term development by nurturing shared values and norms that reinforce collective responsibility. A young participant (P14, Male, age 28) noted: *“The temple’s youth programs teach us not just religious values but also how to care for our community. We’ve learned how to organize events, help the elderly, and take on leadership roles”*. By instilling these principles in younger generations, temples contribute to the continuity of community-driven development.

Additionally, temple-led projects often serve as platforms for collaboration among diverse groups. A farmer (P9, Male, age 50) explained: *“The temple isn’t just for prayers; it’s where we meet to plan community projects, like improving irrigation or organizing markets for our produce. It brings everyone to the table and ensures that we’re working toward a common goal”*. This underscores the temple’s role in uniting the community and leveraging social capital for practical outcomes.

These examples illustrate how temples in Wang Itok function as trusted institutions that mobilize social capital for sustainable development. By coordinating initiatives, promoting trust, and fostering collective action, temples play a vital role in enhancing resilience and ensuring the equitable distribution of resources, particularly in resource-constrained settings. This aligns with Ostrom’s (1990) concept of community-managed resources, where trust in governance structures drives compliance, participation, and long-term sustainability.

### **Demographic Variations in the Perception and Utilization of Social Capital**

This study highlights significant demographic variations in how social capital is perceived and utilized within Wang Itok Subdistrict, reflecting differences in needs, roles, and access to resources among community members.

Women were especially active in formal networks, such as savings groups, which served as spaces for both financial support and emotional encouragement. A savings group member (P14, Female, age 39) shared: *“These meetings aren’t just about loans. They’re where we share advice, talk about our struggles, and support each other through hard times. It feels like a second family”*. Another participant (P7, Female, age 45) emphasized how





these networks empower women: *“Balancing work and family is tough, but the group gives us the confidence and resources to manage both. It’s not just about money, it’s about knowing someone has your back”*. These formal networks provide women with crucial platforms for fostering mutual trust and shared learning.

Younger participants demonstrated a marked preference for digital networks, leveraging social media to access job opportunities and share information. A young man (P21, Male, age 22) explained: *“I find everything I need online. If there’s a job opening or someone selling affordable tools, it’s all in the social media groups. It’s much faster than waiting for word-of-mouth or local meetings”*. This generational shift reflects an evolving utilization of social capital, where digital platforms serve as new conduits for connection and collaboration. Conversely, older participants expressed greater reliance on traditional institutions like the temple. As one elder (P10, Male, age 65) observed: *“I’ve always trusted the temple for guidance and support. It’s where we’ve always turned for solutions, and I feel at peace knowing it’s there”*.

These demographic differences also manifest in informal networks. Younger individuals reported forming peer-based groups to tackle specific issues, such as environmental initiatives. A youth leader (P18, Female, age 24) described her experience: *“We started a recycling project, and it’s been great seeing how many young people are eager to get involved. It’s a way for us to give back and show the community what we can do”*. Meanwhile, older participants highlighted the enduring importance of neighborly support. A farmer (P8, Male, age 55) noted: *“When I’m short on hands for planting, I can always count on my neighbors. We’ve built this trust over decades of working together”*.

These variations underscore the importance of tailoring social capital initiatives to meet the distinct needs and preferences of diverse demographic groups. By recognizing and accommodating these differences, communities can ensure that all members—regardless of age, gender, or role—are empowered to participate in and benefit from collective efforts, thereby enhancing the overall resilience and inclusivity of social capital-driven development strategies.

#### **Strengthening Social Networks: Bonding, Bridging, and Linking Social Capital**

The study reveals that bonding social capital, which refers to the strong ties within close-knit groups such as families, neighbors, and local organizations, plays a fundamental role in ensuring immediate support and resource sharing among community members. This is particularly evident in informal networks, where reciprocal labor exchanges and mutual aid practices reinforce economic security and social cohesion. A local farmer (P15, Male, age 47) highlighted this, stating: *“We don’t just help each other during planting season because we have to—it’s how we’ve survived for generations. If I lend a hand today, I know someone will do the same for me tomorrow.”*

However, while bonding social capital fosters trust and solidarity, it can sometimes limit access to external opportunities by reinforcing insular group dynamics. This underscores the need for bridging social capital, which connects different social groups and broadens opportunities beyond immediate communities. Wang Itok has demonstrated effective bridging social capital through cooperative farming initiatives and women’s savings groups, which link individuals from various backgrounds to share knowledge and resources. A cooperative member (P8, Female, age 50) observed: *“Before joining the farming cooperative, I only knew how to manage my small plot. But through this network, I learned better techniques, found new markets, and even made friends from different villages.”*

These bridging connections expand economic opportunities and promote inclusive growth by integrating diverse perspectives and skills.



Linking social capital, which connects communities with institutions and power structures, is also essential in facilitating long-term development. The findings indicate that temples and local leaders serve as intermediaries, linking residents to broader support systems, including governmental and non-governmental programs. A local leader (P3, Male, age 60) emphasized: *“We work with the temple and district officials to ensure that resources reach those in need. It’s not just about local support but also about making sure we have a voice in policy decisions that affect us.”*

Nevertheless, while linking social capital is evident in community-religious collaborations, connections to formal political institutions remain limited, which may hinder broader policy influence and access to external funding.

#### **The Role of Political Institutions and Democratic Participation in Social Capital Formation**

A critical dimension often overlooked in local social capital discussions is the relationship between community engagement and democratic participation. Putnam (2000) argues that strong social capital supports democratic governance by increasing civic engagement, trust in institutions, and collective decision-making. However, in Wang Itok, while social capital has successfully mobilized community-driven initiatives, political institutions and democratic mechanisms remain underutilized as vehicles for resource allocation and long-term development.

The research found that while community members trust and engage with local leaders and religious institutions, participation in formal political processes—such as local elections, policy advocacy, or engagement with municipal councils—is relatively weak. A community elder (P4, Male, age 65) noted: *“We trust our temple leaders and local elders to make decisions, but we don’t always know how to interact with the government or what role we should play in policy discussions.”*

This suggests a need for enhancing civic education and political engagement, ensuring that communities can leverage social capital not just for immediate economic survival, but also for influencing structural changes in policy and governance. Additionally, integrating local community networks with municipal and provincial governance structures could lead to more sustainable poverty reduction strategies by aligning community-driven initiatives with state-funded social welfare and development programs.

#### **Integrating Social Capital with Broader Development Frameworks**

This study highlights how bonding, bridging, and linking social capital collectively shape community resilience and economic sustainability in Wang Itok Subdistrict. While bonding capital ensures immediate support, bridging capital broadens opportunities, and linking capital connects communities to formal institutions, the findings suggest that stronger engagement with political institutions and governance structures is needed to maximize the long-term impact of social capital on poverty alleviation.

To achieve inclusive and sustainable growth, future efforts should focus on strengthening cross-group connections, increasing political participation, and fostering partnerships between local networks and formal institutions. By doing so, Wang Itok and similar rural communities can leverage social capital not only as a tool for grassroots survival but also as a strategic mechanism for policy influence, economic development, and long-term resilience.

### **Discussion**

This study now emphasizes the transformative role of social capital in fostering inclusive growth and reducing poverty in Wang Itok Subdistrict. By focusing on trust, networks, and shared norms, the findings illustrate how these elements drive collective action, facilitate resource mobilization, and strengthen long-term community



resilience. These insights not only validate existing theories but also provide practical lessons for leveraging social capital in rural and resource-constrained settings.

#### **Social Capital as a Driver of Poverty Alleviation**

Trust is found to be the foundation of social capital, encouraging the work of many and to lessen the risk of the whole. The study demonstrates that both interpersonal trust among community members and institutional trust in local leaders and organizations play complementary roles. Interpersonal trust, which develops over time through a variety of shared experiences and mutual assistance, is in tune with Fukuyama's (1995) claim that trust is a critical component for cooperation in an agrarian setting. Institutional trust represents an element of transparency and accountability by means of which shared resources are managed, it is reminiscent of Putnam (2000) focus on civic institutions contributing to social cohesion. For example, trust in cooperative farming groups has enabled farmers to pool resources and make collective decisions, reducing individual vulnerabilities and enhancing economic stability.

Networks, both formal and informal, also contribute significantly to poverty alleviation. Formal networks, such as joint farming collectives and women's thrift and loan societies, offer formal sites for the sharing of resources, learning of skills, and making decisions. Informal networks, including neighborly ties and familial support, allow for rapid responses during emergencies, such as providing food or labor in times of need. This dual use of networks exemplifies Woolcock and Narayan's (2000) assertion that bonding and bridging social capital equally facilitate effective resource mobilization. The reinforcement of mutually inclusive rules promotes both altruism and reciprocity in group activity, deterring free riders and cultivating a sense of community belonging.

#### **Social Capital as a Foundation for Sustainability**

Social capital is not only a catalyst for addressing immediate socio-economic challenges but also a critical foundation for long-term sustainability. Results show that norms and values, which are shared, and acquired through ritual or cultural activities, are important not only for social cohesion, but also for creating a shared identity. That is consistent with Pretty and Smith's (2004) conception according to which values agreed upon underline the policy of the field of inclusive and sustainable development. In particular, the reciprocity of neighbors' labor exchanges during the planting seasons highlights mutual aid, so that its anti-poverty measures will remain sustainable, regardless of the absence of support by third parties.

Economic sustainability in Wang Itok is further supported by cooperative farming groups, which enable resource pooling and risk-sharing. By working together, farmers have improved productivity and strengthened resilience against economic shocks, such as droughts or market fluctuations. These findings align with Krishna's (2002) assertion that communities with strong social capital are better equipped to implement and sustain development projects. The trust and cohesion within these groups have allowed them to achieve outcomes that individual efforts alone could not.

Local organizations, specifically temples, are the backbones of both community strength and sustainability. Temples in Wang Itok not only serve religious functions, but are also centers of collective action, resource mobilization and creation of trust. As one example, temple-organized projects (e.g., food distribution, educational activities) have always achieved extensive participation, thereby confirming their capacity to promote inclusive development. Such observation confirms Bourdieu's (1986) notion of institutionalized social capital, in which resources are controlled communally to the common good of the community. The leadership of temples for such an endeavour is consistent with Ostrom's (1990) proposition that there is a necessity for trusted governance mechanisms to encourage compliance and collective action.



To critically engage with the limitations of Putnam's conceptualization of social capital, particularly in the context of rural Thailand, it is essential to consider the dimensions of power and structural inequalities that shape how social capital functions in Wang Itok. While Putnam (2000) emphasizes the positive role of civic engagement and trust in fostering community cohesion, his framework does not adequately account for how power asymmetries influence access to and control over social capital resources.

In Wang Itok, bonding social capital within close-knit groups has been beneficial in creating strong communal ties and economic cooperation, but it can also reinforce exclusive social structures that limit the participation of marginalized groups. For instance, while cooperative farming networks provide economic security, participation is often restricted to those with existing social connections or land ownership, leaving landless laborers and migrants with limited access to these resources. This demonstrates that while social capital can foster mutual aid and resilience, it can also entrench existing social hierarchies, a dynamic that Putnam's framework largely overlooks.

Moreover, bridging and linking social capital—which connect communities to external institutions and political structures—are not always equally accessible to all members of society. In Wang Itok, religious institutions such as temples play a key role in fostering trust and community mobilization. However, their influence is not necessarily democratically distributed, as leadership roles are often dominated by elite figures or long-standing community leaders. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) critique of social capital, which highlights that access to social networks is unequally distributed and often favors those with pre-existing social and economic advantages.

Furthermore, while Putnam links social capital to democratic participation and institutional trust, the findings from Wang Itok suggest that social capital does not always translate into formal political engagement or influence over policymaking. Although local leaders and religious institutions serve as intermediaries, direct engagement with democratic governance structures remains limited, and participation in formal political processes is low. This presents a challenge, as without strong mechanisms for political participation, social capital may be constrained in its ability to drive structural change or address systemic inequalities.

#### **Reassessing Social Capital in the Context of Power Dynamics**

A more critical approach to social capital in Wang Itok requires acknowledging the ways in which power influences the distribution and mobilization of social resources. While social capital is an effective tool for poverty alleviation and community resilience, it must be understood not only as a source of cohesion but also as a mechanism that can reinforce exclusion and hierarchy. Future strategies should therefore focus on broadening access to social networks, particularly for marginalized groups, and enhancing political participation to ensure that community-driven initiatives are integrated into broader development policies.

By engaging with these limitations and power dynamics, this study expands upon Putnam's (2000) framework, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of social capital—one that not only recognizes its benefits but also critically examines its constraints in shaping equitable and inclusive development.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

#### **Conclusion**

This finding explicitly shows how social capital is vital in ensuring inclusive growth and alleviation of poverty in Wang Itok Subdistrict, Bang Rakam District, Phitsanulok Province. By establishing the essence of trust, networks, and shared norms, the research demonstrates how these core ingredients of social capital become focal points to enable communities to mobilize, improve collaboration, and sustain development in resource constituencies.



The findings provide important insights into social capital organs through which community resilience would be sponsored and long-term sustainability installed: all of which have lessons about rural and underprivileged areas.

To begin with, the study observed that both interpersonal and institutional trust are crucial for realizing the impact of social capital. Interpersonal trust, which is built by reciprocity and collective experiences, will likely strengthen close relationships among the community members, who are then encouraged to engage in actions such as cooperative farming or savings groups. Institutional trust, which is directly related to the local leaders and major institutions especially temples, encourages accountability and collaborative management of local resources. These dual aspects of trust will reduce transaction costs and enhance transparency while developing an enabling environment for collaboration to directly address enhanced community engagement and poverty alleviation objectives.

Second, networks play a key role in moving resources and making group choices. Formal networks, like farming co-ops and women's savings groups, give clear chances to share resources, swap know-how, and tackle shared problems. Informal networks such as neighbor and family bonds, act as safety nets when crises hit making sure even the weakest in the community get help. These networks allow people to pool resources and work together, which is key both to fight poverty now and to grow the community for the long haul.

Third, common rules and beliefs underlie such team spirit and group duty as in Wang Itok. The underlying culture of give-and-take makes it that residents feel good about helping each other, hence they do not need any extra push. This is evident in work swaps during planting seasons or participation in temple-organized activities. These rules make up a group identity that always prioritizes community good over individual interest. This cultural foundation sustains community-driven development and increases resilience to social and economic shocks, which is in accord with the vision to promote durable change via social connections.

Finally, the paper demonstrates how local institutions, of which temples are the most important, can utilize social capital to eradicate poverty and to achieve sustainability. Temples of Wang Itok not only fulfill spiritual purpose but also function as centers of collective action and resource distribution.

In summary, this study highlights the essential function of social capital—rooted in trust, networks, and shared norms—in promoting inclusive growth, reducing poverty, and encouraging sustainable development in Wang Itok Subdistrict, providing crucial insights for cultivating resilient and self-sufficient rural communities.

#### **Suggestions for Future Investigations and Policymaking**

To advance the role of social capital in fostering inclusive growth and sustainable development, several recommendations are proposed based on the findings of this study:

To expand the scope of research, advancing social capital in its many forms in areas around the metropolis and the peri-urbans is an area for future research as it would be easy to position its functionality within a social as well as an economic framework. Such work would provide deeper understanding of the level of customization that social capital can be able to provide to different communities whether in urban or rural settings. Furthermore, while this study used qualitative tools, the next angle could introduce more of the quantitative side of things by measuring the social capital impacts on poverty and community resilience using trust indices or network density measures.

For strengthening social capital through policy integration, there is a need to strengthen social capital as part of social policies that are key in rural development to ensure the growth is both equitable and sustainable. This could be through funding as well as sponsoring community-based organizations, informal networks, and cooperatives to strengthen resource mobilization and cooperation. Most importantly, social programs and educational initiatives aimed at strengthening commonly held norms of reciprocity, mutual aid, and collective responsibility





needs to be focused on as well. Then there is the need to pass power to credible community organizations such as churches and cooperatives to spearhead development

To address challenges to social capital, it is crucial to limit the risks that can destroy trust, fragment the networks, and disrupt common rules. Policy makers will need to concentrate on tackling conflict, social injustice, and roots of external impulses (migration and economic shocks). Supporting conflict resolution mechanisms, promoting equitable access to resources, and designing safety nets for vulnerable populations are critical steps toward maintaining and reinforcing the social structures that underpin inclusive growth.

These measures are being proposed in the hope that through the implementation of these strategies future research and policymaking will be able to utilize social capital as a mechanism to promote resilience and sustainability of rural communities such as Wang Itok. Each of these actions will not only support the bedrock of inclusive development, but also, they will act as a replicable prototype to be used by similar resource-limited countries all around the globe.

### Acknowledgments

This article is part of “The Study of Completed and Precise Solutions to Eliminate Poverty in the Northern Region: A Case Study in Phitsanulok Province”. The research has been certified for research project approval according to the main guidelines of international standards for human research ethics by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Naresuan University, COA No. 038/2022.

The researchers are grateful to everyone who supported and contributed to this study. Sharing experiences and information aided our study. Your insights on social capital’s significance in poverty reduction and community sustainability were useful. The researchers also thank our committee and colleagues for their guidance and recommendations, which helped the work to this point. Local officials, inhabitants, individuals, and institutions in Wang Itok Subdistrict are thanked for their study involvement. Their help and friendliness made the research deeper and better.

### References

- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The Forms of Capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (pp. 241–258). New York: Greenwood. Retrieved from <https://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/fr/bourdieu-forms-capital.htm>
- Fukuyama, F. (1995). *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: The Free Press.
- Krishna, A. (2002). *Active Social Capital: Tracing the Roots of Development and Democracy*. New York: Columbia University Press. <https://doi.org/10.7312/kris12570>
- Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council (NESDC). (2022). *Poverty and Inequality Report 2022*. Retrieved from [https://www.nesdc.go.th/ewt\\_dl\\_link.php?nid=14557](https://www.nesdc.go.th/ewt_dl_link.php?nid=14557)
- Ostrom, E. (1990). *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



Pretty, J., & Smith, D. (2004). Social Capital in Biodiversity Conservation and Management. *Conservation Biology*, 18(3), 631–638. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1523-1739.2004.00126.x>

Putnam, R. D. (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. In *CSCWoo: Proceedings of the 2000 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work* (p. 357). New York, NY: Association for Computing Machinery. <https://doi.org/10.1145/358916.361990>

Thai People Map and Analytics Platform (TPMAP). (2022). *Poverty Statistics 2022 in Thailand*. Retrieved from <https://www.tpmmap.in.th/2565/>

Woolcock, M., & Narayan, D. (2000). Social Capital: Implications for Development Theory, Research, and Policy. *The World Bank Research Observer*, 15(2), 225–249. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wbro/15.2.225>