The CIIF Evaluation Consortium

Final Report for

Evaluating the Outcomes and Impact of

The Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF): Professional Contribution to the Sustainability of Self-help Groups and Their Social Capital Created in CIIF Projects

For

Health, Welfare and Food Bureau

By the CUHK Research Team

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Summary of Key Findings and Recommendations

The focus of this study is to explore and describe professional contributions to the sustainability of self-help groups and their social capital created in projects of Community Investment and Inclusion Fund (CIIF). Its emphasis is on good practices, which will have important implications for designing and implementing similar projects in the future. As suggested by some members of the CIIF Committee, this study also records positive and not-so-positive comments from interviewees, as there is always room for improvement in any community practice projects.

1.1. Findings

Based on data provided by 358 group members of the CIIF projects, the following major outcomes emerged.

With regard to bonding social capital among group members, the average group member experienced a moderately high level of reciprocity among group members (M = 62.1, on a 0~100 scale), modest levels of networking with group members (M = 58.5), trust in group members (M = 56.6), help from group members (M = 50.4), help given to group members (M = 50.1), and continuity in group members (M = 48.1).

With regard to bridging social capital with neighborhood members, the average group member experienced modest levels of help from neighborhood members (M = 57.2), attitudinal continuity in neighborhood members (M = 55.9), reciprocity with neighborhood members (M = 50.3), help given to neighborhood members (M = 50.1), networking with neighborhood members (M = 47.0), and trust in neighborhood members (M = 44.2).

With regard to social cohesion with neighborhood members, the average group member was modest (M = 45.9); this measure included agreeing with, communicating with, joining activities with, and helping neighborhood members.

With regard to capability in terms of dealing with problem solving, the average group member was at a moderately high level (M = 66.6).

Regarding group sustainability, the average group member found a moderately high level of group function (M = 62.3), and a modest level of group structure (M = 52.8). The average group member also expressed a moderately high intention to continue in being with the group (M = 68.8).

1.1.1. Significant Success Factors

Encouraging, acculturating, and matching were professional practices that yielded consistent and statistically significant contributions to the group member's bonding social capital, capability, and group sustainability.

In contrast, anchoring was a professional practice that significantly contributed to the group member's bridging social capital.

In addition, the professional's input to the community also significantly contributed to the group member's social cohesion with neighborhood members and structural group sustainability.

The involvement of professionals from other agencies significantly contributed to the group member's bridging social capital, functional group sustainability, and social cohesion.

The involvement of managers of the business sector significantly contributed to group sustainability.

Finally, the group policy to enlist members as leaders significantly contributed to group sustainability.

Encouraging or potential building was an essential professional function that served to

elicit the group member's potentialities. It referred to the professional's offering of opportunities for realizing strengths and emotional support in the recent six months.

Acculturating is a professional practice that serves to change the values or mindset of group members and community members. It refers to the professional's sharing of mutual help spirit to the community, promoting mutual help spirit in groups, and promoting mutual help spirit among service recipients of groups in the recent six months. Notably, it is one of the pithy strategies advocated by the CIIF.

Matching is another practice advocated by the CIIF. It refers to the professional's arranging of services based on the groups' strengths and arranging service receivers for groups in the recent six months. It embodies the spirit of complementary or plug-and-socket matching.

Anchoring refers to the professional's arranging of members to join other organizations and groups as they join a network with other organizations in the recent six months. It aspires to be a means to build bridging social capital.

Professional input to the community comprises conducting fieldwork or outreach activities, raising funds from the outside, mobilizing community support, promoting support from neighborhood members, asking for support from the business sector, promoting support form other professionals, and providing professional advice in the recent six months. It aspires to strengthen bridging social capital and social cohesion in the community.

1.1.2. Significant Hindrance Factors

Mentorship pairing and anchoring are professional practices that showed statistically significant negative impacts on group sustainability. On the other hand, homogenizing is a professional practice that displayed significantly negative impacts on bridging the group member's social capital and social cohesion with neighborhood members.

Homogenizing, as suggested by professionals in focus groups as a means to consolidate social capital, refers to arranging people with the same background to join activities, and arranging friendship among people of the same background in the recent six months.

1.1.3. Comparisons with Non-CIIF Self-help Groups

Bonding social capital from group members, bridging social capital from neighborhood members, group sustainability, and capability were all statistically significantly lower in the CIIF project group member than in the non-CIIF self-help group member. The significant differences held even after statistically controlling all significant backgrounds and experiences related to professional practice. Specifically, the CIIF project group member, in general, was 4.9 points lower on bonding social capital, 2.9 points lower on bridging social capital, 7.4 points lower on group sustainability, and 4.1 points lower on capability. All these outcomes had scores ranging from the lowest of zero to the highest of 100 at the individual member level.

Social cohesion with neighborhood members, on the other hand, was the only outcome found not to be statistically significantly different. However, with the CIIF project group member in general, social cohesion was 2.7 points higher than that of the non-CIIF self-help group member.

The significantly different findings are surprising, given the efforts and inputs in the CIIF projects. They led to double checking to assure the adequacy of measurement and analytic procedures. As data acquired in the study could not explain the differences, further research covering other factors is necessary to shed light on the explanation.

These statistically significant differences in outcomes, albeit seemingly weak in a practical sense, were worthy of attention because of low average levels of the outcomes.

Accordingly, the means among group members of the CIIF projects were only 23.6 on bonding social capital, 18.2 points on bridging social capital, 41.1 points on capability, and 40.5 points on group sustainability. The low levels of means implied that a small difference could account for a substantial portion of the mean. Hence, the non-CIIF group member was, generally, 20.8% higher on bonding social capital, 15.9% higher on bridging social capital, 10.0% higher on capability, and 18.3% higher on group sustainability. On the other hand, only the mean of social cohesion, 45.9, was higher and the difference between the CIIF and the non-CIIF group members was not statistically significant.

If the CIIF project employs the outcomes of the non-CIIF self-help group as benchmarks for other self-help groups in the CIIF project, the CIIF project group will need to improve most of their outcomes by 10-20% in order to reach the benchmarks.

1.2. Recommendations

1.2.1. Policy Level

- Clarifying and highlighting the goal, such as promoting bridging social capital, because it is different from and even contradictory to promoting bonding social capital
- Tuning down the monitoring of CIIF projects, including blocking the progress of work and monitoring the progress of the project, as it would impede the structural sustainability of the CIIF project groups and arouse many negative comments from NGOs
- Promoting family-type projects, those involving parents and other family members, as they were statistically higher on bridging social capital
- Providing more support to empowerment-type projects, as they were statistically lower on group sustainability and social cohesion among neighborhood members
- Providing more support to ethnic minority projects, as they were statistically lower on group members' capability and social cohesion with neighborhood members

1.2.2. Practical Level

- Using the performance, notably social capital, group sustainability, and capability, of the non-CIIF self-help groups as benchmarks, at least in the short run
- Encouraging group members to realize their potentialities to foster group sustainability and capability, especially when not being intimate with other group members
- Acculturating group members for mutual support and self-actualization to further foster group sustainability and capability
    - Acculturating group members for mutual support and self-actualization to foster social cohesion when not being intimate with other group members
- Matching group members to services according to their strengths and weaknesses to foster bonding social capital and group sustainability
    - Matching group members to services according to their strengths and weaknesses to foster bonding social cohesion and capability when not being intimate with other group members
- Anchoring group members to other organizations to foster bridging social capital
- Making more input to the community, including conducting fieldwork or outreach activities, raising funds from the outside, mobilizing community support, promoting support from neighborhood members, asking for support from the business sector, promoting support from other professionals, and providing professional advice to foster social cohesion and group sustainability
- Involving professionals from other agencies to foster bridging social capital, group sustainability, and social cohesion

- Involving managers from the business sector to foster group sustainability
- Facilitating more members as leaders to foster group sustainability
- Avoiding the use of anchoring if the goal is to foster bonding social capital and group sustainability
- Avoiding the use of mentorship pairing if the goal is to foster group sustainability and social cohesion
- Avoiding the use of homogenizing in grouping members of similar characteristics if the goal is to foster bridging social capital and social cohesion

1.2.3. Research Level

- Conducting longitudinal research to assess changes in outcomes and their factors
- Designing field experiments to examine the impacts of policies and professional practices rigorously
- Facilitating further research with the present research framework, including its design, sampling, measurement, and analytic techniques to generate evidence-based findings in a more representative and rigorous way regarding:
    - Outcomes such as bonding and bridging social capital, group sustainability, social cohesion, and capability examined in the present study
    - Professional inputs and project/group characteristics examined in the present study
    - Policy and practical concerns suggested by the present study, such as the definition of the community and the role of the CIIF Secretariat