Can Social Network Analysis Inform African Development Policies?

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Social networks and development

- **Social networks** play a critical role in reducing risk of farmers, herders, traders against disasters, food insecurity, and political crises.

- Very **little is known** of the ties that bind individuals in Africa.

- Can network analysis shed light on **hidden constraints** that influence social capital and resilience?
What is social network analysis?

• A **booming field of analysis** that has spread across academic disciplines

• A relational approach to understand the structure of **social, economic, and political** interactions

• Networks can be **formal or informal**

![Diagram of a network with ties and actors](image)
Social network analysis as a scientific tool

- Who is connected to whom?
- How do networks affect individuals?
- How do individuals affect networks?
- How do networks evolve?

2017 OECD study: How does cross-border cooperation really work in West Africa?
Social networks as an empowerment tool

- Who are the most central actors?
- Who is structurally peripheral?
- What are the causes behind marginalization?
- What strategies can marginalized actors adopt?
Social networks as a policy tool

- How do development interventions affect communities?
- Can structural constraints explain project failure?
- Is there a gap between policy design and implementation?
Social networks, food security and gender

• Food security
  • Can differences in social capital explain why certain households are more food secure than others?

• Gender
  • Are trade networks segmented by gender?
  • How do social networks reinforce gender inequalities?
Mapping women’s trade networks

- Roles in the cow pea supply chain network

Mapping women’s trade networks

- Gender in the cow pea supply chain network

WFP’s Gender and Markets Initiative

- A comparative study between Niger and Nigeria
- Gender roles and inequalities still predominant
- Land ownership predominantly male
- Strong border disparities despite common culture
A pilot study in the Lake Chad region

- Conduct a SNA to the regional markets around the Lake Chad in Q1/Q2 2018
- Building upon 2016 Regional Market Assessment
Perspectives

- SNA can highlight structural constraints and opportunities that remain largely unknown.
- SNA can complement qualitative and quantitative studies and surveys.
- Considering ties rather than just attributes is key to understand gender and market inequalities.
Related literature

- Walther O, Renk S. 2017. *Can social network analysis inform African development policies?* Dakar, World Food Programme ([download](#)).


- Read more about the West African Regional Markets/Gender Initiative at: [https://resources.vam.wfp.org/node/106](https://resources.vam.wfp.org/node/106)
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