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## **VALUABLE RELATIONS?**

Social capital in the urban informal fisheries sector, Kenya.

A dissertation for the Cand. Polit degree at the Institute for Sociology and Human Geography.

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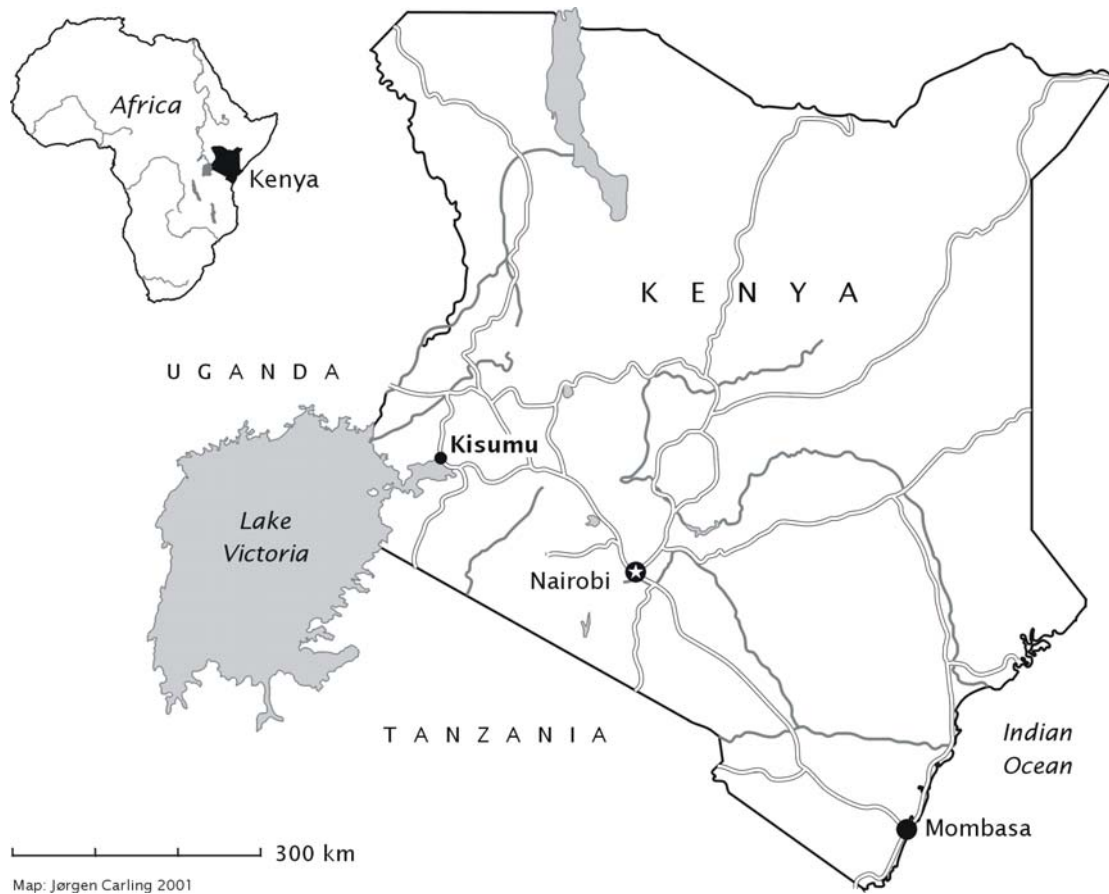
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## MAP OF KENYA

The field of study, Obunga, is situated within the city boundaries of Kisumu



## ABSTRACT

This dissertation addresses how agents in the urban informal sector use social capital to access scarce resources. Social capital denotes network-based social bonds that might facilitate access to a resource. An instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital is applied in the analysis. This view embraces agents actively constructing and using social bonds with other agents in order to access scarce resources.

The subjects placed at the centre of the discussion are leaders of micro-enterprises. They operate in Obunga, an informal urban settlement situated on the Kenyan shores of Lake Victoria. These agents, called *wuontich*, specialise in frying the fish skeletons which remain after the processing of Nile perch by modern processing plants. The skeletons are sold to inland markets where they are highly valued as food for human consumption. To obtain skeletons for their micro-enterprises, the *wuontich* need personal contact with middlemen, called *jawero*, who have a monopoly on the distribution of skeletons from the processing plants to the informal fish-processing field. I ask whether the *wuontich* instrumentally use their social bonds with the middlemen as social capital that might enhance their access to fish skeletons.

The discussion is based upon data from observations and in-depth interviews with informants operating in, and associated with, the skeleton industry. This material was collected during a four month long field study in Obunga. I claim that in this setting, characterised by poverty, an influx of migrants and a high HIV prevalence, the agents instrumentally construct and use social bonds as social capital to access skeletons. Social capital is shown to be a flexible resource that can be used by the agents under dramatic contextual changes. I emphasise, however, that social capital might not be a resource equally flexible to all. Female agents, and agents lacking economic means seem to have greater difficulties constructing and using social capital to access skeletons under dramatic contextual change.

I argue that the discussion of the instrumental construction and use of social capital generates three main findings not often mentioned in debates on social capital. The first finding indicates that inherent in this form of social capital is a flexibility that makes it a valuable resource to the individual agent. The second finding points out that instrumentally constructed social capital contains an instability that might hamper development at the community level. The third main finding indicates that this kind of social capital seems to require economic input

in order to ensure access to skeletons. Poor people might thus have difficulties realising the full potential of social capital as a resource in this setting.

Although the Obunga case study represents one specific field, I argue that it generates important questions that should be asked when studying social capital in the urban informal sector. The study provides arguments in favour of recognising that social capital might be instrumentally constructed and used in similar settings. The Obunga study also underlines the necessity of recognising the specific inherent qualities of social capital that is instrumentally constructed and used.

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Although several people have greatly contributed in the process of writing this dissertation, the responsibility for the findings presented here is entirely my own.

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Tale Steen-Johnsen

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

You see them everywhere when visiting developing countries: people who earn their livelihood from informal employment on the streets and in the crowded marketplaces. A table with a few bananas or a handful of matchboxes might be their only economic investment which they hope to earn from. The discussion in this dissertation arises from my year-long fascination with these micro-enterprises. I have often wondered how agents in the urban informal sector manage to keep their businesses running with limited economic means. After having studied social capital theories, I became interested in finding out whether social bonds might be a potential resource for the agents in this environment. I will in this dissertation study opportunities and limitations for the agents' instrumental use of social bonds as social capital that ensures easier access to a scarce resource.

The discussion of the instrumental use of social capital requires precision in what social capital is perceived to denote. Social capital has been ascribed a range of meanings during the last few years. Putnam, as an example, has equated social capital with organisational activity, and outlined the co-variance between local organisations and level of democracy (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti 1993<sup>1</sup>). This definition does not embrace social capital as a strategic asset in the fight for scarce resources. I will argue that an instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital is required for this analysis. This view includes the perspective of instrumental agents intentionally establishing social bonds and mobilising resources through existing bonds as a part of their economic strategy. A very important aspect of this concept is that the social bonds that might constitute social capital are rooted in larger social aggregates or networks.

The discussion of the instrumental use of social capital has several contributions to the social capital literature as it reveals qualities of social capital that are not often debated in social capital theories. I will argue that instrumentally constructed and used social capital contributes to a local level instability. This finding stands in opposition to most assumptions about the qualities of social capital. In addition, the debate about the instrumental use of social capital will provide

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<sup>1</sup> Although this much quoted book has several authors, Putnam has later been the author most associated with this social capital theory. I will thus only refer to Putnam when discussing this specific view of social capital.

arguments in favour of recognising a strong interaction between economic and social capital. The acknowledgement of the interaction of different forms of capital is often omitted when development agencies debate social capital as a resource for the very poor.

The micro-enterprises in the informal<sup>2</sup> urban economy constitute an interesting point of departure for a study of the instrumental use of social bonds as social capital. Informal economic activities stand out as unregulated by the institutions of society, in a context where similar activities are regulated<sup>3</sup> (Portes & Castells 1989:12). Despite its heterogeneity, it is possible to outline some basic characteristics of the informal sector. As early as in 1972, the informal sector was described as characterised by small-scale operations, labour-intensive activities and adapted technology (ILO 1972:6). The size, flexibility and lack of technology found in many micro-enterprises in the urban informal sector most likely compel the agents in this sector to use other forms of capital as a part of their business strategies. Instrumental use of social capital will thus be seen as an important part of the business strategies of agents operating in this specific economic sector.

The choice to focus upon the instrumental construction and use of social capital is explained by the fact that I believe this to be the prevalent form of social capital in this specific environment. I have also chosen this analytic perspective because I believe that an analysis of instrumentally constructed and used social capital opens for a very fruitful discussion of social capital in general. It should nevertheless be noted that the agents in the urban informal sector operate in complex social, economic and cultural environments that might influence their business strategies. The analysis of the instrumental use of social capital should be perceived as describing only one of many important aspects of business strategies in the urban informal sector.

## THE OBUNGA CASE

The case that provides the empirical material for the discussion is taken from the Lake Victoria fisheries. The specific setting to be studied is Obunga, an informal urban settlement on the Kenyan side of Lake Victoria. In this sector, micro-enterprises specialise in frying Nile perch skeletons<sup>4</sup> that are by-products from the formal fish processing companies. Fibres of flesh which remain on the skeleton after filleting make the Nile perch skeletons acceptable food in a region characterised by the scarcity of fish-protein. The skeletons are washed, dried and fried by Obunga agents before being sold to regional markets for human consumption. The informal fish-processing industry is seen as generating good profit margins, and many people move to Obunga to participate in this business.

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<sup>2</sup> The use of the term 'informal economy' has been widely criticised to be 'loose' and 'unclear'. I will nevertheless choose to apply it in this dissertation as it embraces notions of economic activity that is not easily covered by other classifications (see Vaa 1991:124)

<sup>3</sup> It is however important to acknowledge that the informal sector in many cases is subject to some government taxes and regulations, but to a much lesser extent than the formal sector. Vaa states that in cases where taxes are paid in the informal sector, the taxable income is not based on written accounts (1991:124)

<sup>4</sup> The informants in Obunga refer to Nile perch skeletons as; 'skeletons', 'fish', 'frames', 'carcasses' or 'mgongo wazi' (Swahili term meaning 'bare back'. It refers to the fact that the fillets are removed from the fish carcass)



Each micro-enterprise is led by a *wuontich*<sup>5</sup>, a work leader responsible for the acquisition and processing of skeletons. In Obunga, the majority of these *wuontich* are female<sup>6</sup>. The *wuontich* stands out as the leader of the enterprise as she employs workers who wash, dry and fry the skeleton. She owns her own frying pan called *djiko*, rents a plot where she conducts her business, and has her own business budget. The *wuontich* will be placed at the centre of the discussion, as it is her instrumental construction and use of social capital to obtain Nile perch skeletons that constitute the core of the debate. Analytic focus upon the *wuontich* is a conscious choice motivated by her position in the work organisation. The *wuontich* is responsible for her own business, and she thus has to make consecutive choices to ensure the continuation of her business activity. The *wuontich*' particular situation opens for the study of instrumental use of social capital.

The *wuontich*' business strategies in Obunga constitute a fruitful point of entry for a study of the instrumental use of social capital for two other reasons. The first reason is found in the distribution system. Nile perch skeletons are brought from the processing plants to Obunga by *jawero*<sup>7</sup>, or middlemen, who have a monopoly on the distribution of skeletons. As the skeletons are rarely distributed according to formalised rules, the *wuontich* presumably needs a personal relationship with the *jawero* in order to obtain supplies. I will explore to what extent social bonds between *jawero* and *wuontich* constitute social capital that might be instrumentally mobilised by the *wuontich*, and thus increase her access to skeletons.

The second reason for applying a social capital perspective in this analysis has to do with the specific social realities of this area. Obunga, as an informal urban settlement, attracts migrants from rural areas in search of a livelihood. As many *wuontich* lack social contacts in Obunga, they organise saving associations that facilitate their access to economic resources. The *wuontich*' perception of social contacts as a potential resource makes the social capital perspective interesting. In addition, it opens for an instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital as the purposive construction of social bonds that might facilitate access to other resources seems to be a part of the Obunga reality.

The organisation of the skeleton industry provides a methodological advantage in the study of the instrumental use of social capital. Approximately 40 micro-enterprises are clustered together in the same field. They all belong to the same umbrella organisation, but are economically independent of each other. This multitude of enterprises in the same socio-economic setting makes it possible to compare data from several informants operating in the same environment.

The specific position of the Obunga *wuontich* represents an interesting point of departure for the study of instrumental use of social capital in the fight for scarce resources. The *wuontich*' responsibility for a micro-enterprise makes the study of instrumentality possible. Instrumental use of social capital becomes interesting because the *wuontich* needs personal contact with the *jawero* to obtain skeletons. In addition, many of the *wuontich* are migrants who lack old social networks,

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<sup>5</sup> Plural form of *wuontich* is *wegitich*. In this dissertation *wuontich* will be used both in singular and plural form of the word.

<sup>6</sup> Thus the henceforth reference to the *wuontich* as 'she'.

but who engage in the construction of saving associations. This makes data on the instrumental construction and use of social capital accessible.

The findings from the Obunga case study will be related to the larger social capital debate. Yin states that in order to be able to generalise from a single case to a more overall theoretical debate, the discussion must stand in continuous dialogue with theoretical contributions in the field (Yin 1989:40). My use of a social capital perspective in the analysis, the continuous discussion with other theoretical contributions, and efforts to critically challenge my own findings will enable me to compare the findings from Obunga with the more general debate on social capital (Kvale 1997:198).

## ORGANISATION OF THE DISCUSSION

This dissertation consists of six basic chapters. Chapter two opens with a discussion of different theoretical perspectives on social capital. I present the views of central theorists and present arguments in favour of applying an instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital in the analysis of this specific field. Aspects of gender-specific social capital, and social capital as a limitation to business prosperity, will also be included in the theoretical framework.

Chapter three provides background information on the context of the skeleton industry. This information is relevant because it sets the backdrop for the instrumental construction and use of social capital among the Obunga *wuontich*. The material presented in this chapter will also stand in relation to chapter six, which discusses the *wuontich*' use of social capital under dramatic contextual change.

Chapter four outlines the methodological strategy applied during fieldwork and subsequent analysis of the empirical material. Potential influences on the material collected will be discussed, and space will be devoted to reflections upon my own role as a researcher.

Chapters five and six present the discussion of the *wuontich*' instrumental use of social capital. Chapter five seeks to explore whether social capital can be understood to be a strategic asset in the fight for scarce resources. I also discuss whether an instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital is applicable to this analysis. In addition, I will debate whether the theoretical assumption of the limiting qualities of social capital holds in this field. These discussions will provide insight into the factors that influence the *wuontich*' instrumental construction and use of social capital. This will provide material for a more general debate on the value of instrumentally constructed social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*.

Chapter six addresses the *wuontich*' construction and use of social capital under dramatic contextual change. The focus of the discussion is opportunities and limitations to the use of instrumentally constructed social capital under dramatic contextual changes. EU regulations, seasonal variations, declining supplies and conflict will be seen as dramatic contextual changes that affect the organisation of the skeleton industry and thus the use of social capital. The discussion of the use of social capital under these conditions will provide new insight into the flexibility and the nature of instrumentally constructed social capital.

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<sup>7</sup> Plural form of *jawero* is *jowero*. In this dissertation *jawero* will be used both in the singular and plural form of the word. The *jawero* are most often male. Thus the henceforth reference to the *jawero* as 'he'.

Chapter seven concludes the discussion by setting the findings from Obunga in relation to other theoretical contributions on social capital. I ask whether instrumentally constructed social capital, which may be a flexible resource to the individual agent, might contribute to increased instability at an aggregate level. This leads to a debate on how the relation between social capital and development should be perceived. I also present arguments in favour of acknowledging that economic capital might be required in order to make resources flow through social bonds. This perspective is often omitted in discussions of social capital and I argue that this finding indicates that the very poor might not be capable of realising the full potential of social capital in this setting.

## 2. THEORISING SOCIAL CAPITAL

In this chapter I will explore whether there are theoretical contributions that explain how agents instrumentally use social bonds to obtain a scarce resource. The concept of social capital will be used to shed light upon this issue. There are two main reasons for choosing to apply a social capital perspective in the analysis. First of all, social capital theories embrace a vision of social relations as a strategic asset to the possessor. In addition, the concept of social capital has been broadly used by development agencies to explain economic development in the urban informal sector (e.g. World Bank 1998). One might thus assume that the concept of social capital has potential analytic value for an analysis of the informal by-products sector in Kenya.

Social capital is widely recognised as an adequate tool in understanding how social relations can generate prosperity (Woolcock 1998:168, Portes 1995:12). The extensive use of the concept to explain a broad range of social realities has, however, led to an explosion in the number of interpretations of what social capital actually imply (Woolcock 1998:159, Portes 1998:2). In order to achieve an adequate theoretical framework for this specific analysis, it is essential to develop an adapted understanding of the concept. I will thus present central contributions to social capital theory, and subsequently argue why the analysis must embrace an understanding of the agent as using social capital instrumentally to acquire resources. This perception will be termed an 'instrumental, agent-oriented' view of social capital. The instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital will be supplemented with other theoretical perspectives. I will introduce the notion of gender-specific social capital, which implies that men and women might have unequal opportunities to construct and use social capital. This perspective becomes particularly interesting as the majority of the informants in this study are female. An understanding of social capital as a potential limitation to the agents' business prosperity will also constitute a part of the theoretical framework. This section will outline the fact that the social relations that might well be seen as a resource, might also additionally impose expectations of group-oriented behaviour on the agent. I will argue that these expectations might limit the agent's scope of action and thus hinder her business prosperity.

## GENERAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

It might be difficult to speak of a ‘general’ understanding of social capital, as this is an issue that is broadly debated in both theory and policy arenas. I will nevertheless briefly attempt to outline the understanding of social capital that currently dominates the policies of the World Bank, an institution that sets the tone for many other development agencies in the world.

The World Bank has aimed at utilising the concept of social capital when outlining policy positions in relation to poverty reduction strategies (World Bank homepage 2001). This institution sees social capital as an important resource for the very poor. In their policy documents the World Bank claims that social capital will contribute to local level trust and stability that will enhance economic transactions among the poor. It is stated that the existence of social capital contributes to cost reduction for firms and entrepreneurs and also enables poor people to start small enterprises and increase their income (World Bank homepage 2001). Social capital is seen as a factor with an important role to play when attempting to reduce poverty levels in developing countries (World Bank 1998).

The view presented in this dissertation differs from the World Bank’s perception of social capital. I will focus on how individual agents instrumentally use their social bonds as social capital. This perspective of social capital is not mentioned in the World Bank’s poverty reduction strategies. I will argue that not only is instrumentally constructed social capital the prevalent form of social capital in Obunga, it can also provide valuable insights to the social capital debate that dominates both policy arenas and academic circles. The discussion of instrumentally constructed social capital will provide arguments that will enable me to argue against the views of the World Bank and social capital theorists in the concluding chapter.

## AN ADAPTED UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In order to be able to discuss instrumentally constructed social capital, an adapted theoretical understanding of social capital must be developed. I will present central theoretical contributions in the social capital field and argue why I perceive an instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital to be appropriate for the analysis of the Obunga *wuontich*. First of all, I will attempt to trace the lines of social capital thinking back to classical sociological thought.

The notion of social relations as an enabling force is by no means a new thought in sociology. Classical theorists like Marx and Durkheim emphasised the positive consequences of social relations for societal development. Marx claimed that collective action would be a way to change oppressive socio-economic structures, while Durkheim saw social bonds as a countermeasure to anomie in modern society (Marx [1867] 1967, Durkheim [1897] 1951).

Portes acknowledges the links between classical sociological thought and social capital theories as he states that the concept of social capital recaptures insights from the very beginning of the sociological discipline (1998:2).

Recent literature on social capital can be organised along to various axes. In this chapter I will attempt to categorise the discussion of social capital according to two dimensions. The first dimension addresses whether theorists perceive social capital to be a resource for groups or for individuals, while the second discussion explores whether agency or norms are seen to be the source of social capital. Categorisation according to these dimensions will enable me to pin down the specific aspects of social capital theories that are relevant for my field of study. I will then move on to establish an adapted understanding of social capital. This adapted understanding will embrace a perspective of instrumental agents as constructing and using social capital to obtain resources. The objective is to develop an understanding that will be applicable to an analysis of social capital in the urban informal sector.

### **A resource for groups or for individuals?**

Whether social capital is perceived as a resource for individuals or for groups marks a dividing line in writings on social capital. In what follows I will present central contributions in social capital writing and establish whether they perceive social capital to be a resource for individuals or for larger aggregates of people.

Putnam's work on social capital is widely recognised and discussed. He claimed to see an interrelationship between organisational activity at the local level and degree of democracy in society as whole (Putnam et al 1993). Social capital is to Putnam "(...) features of social organisation such as trust, norms and networks that can improve efficiency in society by facilitating co-ordinated actions" (Putnam et al 1993:167). Norms regulate the actions of members so that they comply with collective rules. The collective action that arises from this compliance will in turn strengthen overall solidarity in society (Putnam et al 1993: 169). Social capital is a resource for the society as a whole, according to Putnam. While social capital originates in local level norms and trust, its effects must, according to him, be measured at the group or society level (Putnam et al 1993).

Peter Evans has also used the concept of social capital to explain how networks can be understood as a resource for society as a whole. He sees local level social capital as leading to state-society synergy, understood as an efficient collaboration between the state and civil society. State-society synergy is, according to him, an important prerequisite for societal development (Evans 1996). Evans disagrees with Putnam on what is to be identified as the sources of social capital. Where Putnam sees norms and trust as prerequisites for social capital, Evans emphasises the importance of links between state and society for the existence of social capital (Evans 1996:1124). Evans and Putnam have diverging views on the foundation of social capital, but they

both tend to explain social capital as a micro-level quality that is potentially beneficial to larger groups. The individual as constructor and benefactor of social capital is not emphasised in their theories.

Coleman has devoted more effort in depicting social capital as a resource for the individual agent. He sees social capital as an aspect of social structure that facilitates certain actions for individuals that participate in the structure (1990:302). Social capital is the value of social structure to the individuals (1990:305). By this statement he conveys his theoretical position of methodological individualism, in which the focal point is agency. Coleman's agents are rational, and although somewhat constrained by their social environment, they are in a constant search to optimise their possibilities by their own actions. Construction of social capital is thus beneficial because the individuals can access resources through their social contacts (Coleman 1990:309). Coleman's view of social capital is on this point in opposition to Putnam and Evans' focus on social capital as a resource for larger aggregates of people.

Bourdieu was the first to coin the term 'social capital' in a discussion of education and schooling in contemporary France (Bourdieu 1984). To Bourdieu, social capital is "(...) the aggregate of actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network (...)" (1984:248). He emphasises that membership in a group can give each of the members the benefit of collectively generated capital (Bourdieu 1984:248). This social capital might eventually be converted into various kinds of economic benefit for the agents (Bourdieu 1984:241). The agents use their social relations as a strategic asset to acquire a more favourable socio-economic position (Bourdieu 1984). It should be emphasised that this reading of Bourdieu might not reflect the totality of his theoretical position. Although Bourdieu embraces an understanding of agents as benefiting from social capital, he is preoccupied with transcending the division between agent and structure (Ritzer 1992:579). Bourdieu simultaneously offers a perspective of agents strongly dictated by internalised structures<sup>8</sup>. My reading of the agent perspective in Bourdieu's writings is motivated by the value of his subjectivist perspective in relation to the subsequent analysis. I will choose to focus on this aspect of Bourdieu's writings because these perspectives help explain the construction and use of social capital in Obunga. It should nevertheless be noted that my reference to the subjectivist perspective in Bourdieu's writings only represents a selected perspective in his overall theoretical framework.

Another theorist that has deeply delved into the various understandings of social capital is Alejandro Portes. In much-quoted articles on the subject, he has aimed at organising and explaining central writings on the issue (Portes 1995 and 1998, Portes & Sensenbrenner 1993). Portes has developed an understanding of the agent as the primary benefactor of social capital (1995). According to Portes, social capital is the ability of agents to command scarce resources by

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<sup>8</sup> Some of the objectivist perspectives in Bourdieu's writings will emerge later in the discussion.

the virtue of membership in some kind of social network (1995:12). The analytical interest is in the agent as a possessor of resources through social bonds with other agents. Although Portes points out that the possession of a social network may indeed represent limitations on the agent's scope of action, it is the agent's affiliation with the network and not the network as such that is described. Portes thus falls in the category of analysts that view social capital as a resource for the individual, rather than for the group as a whole.

The presentation of different contributions to social capital theory has showed that various theorists have diverging perceptions of whether social capital should be treated as a resource for individuals or for groups. Still another dividing line in social capital writing remains to be explored; whether the source of social capital should be sought in norms or instrumental action.

### **Instrumental action or norms as the source of social capital?**

This discussion will explore what various theorists identify as the force that makes social networks, and thereby social capital, emerge. Is the existence of social networks a result of instrumental action or a mere consequence of norms which enhance collective action?

In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that Putnam believes that networks arise because agents comply with local level norms and thus join groups and organisations (Putnam et al 1993:167). Putnam actually refers to trust and norms as more than sources of social capital; trust and norms he claims, are social capital in themselves because they enhance the efficiency of society at an aggregate level (1993: 167). In Putnam's writings, norms rather than instrumental action must be perceived as the force that makes social capital, in the form of social networks, emerge.

Although Peter Evans, as earlier discussed, shares Putnam's view of social capital as beneficial at an aggregate level, he differs from Putnam in his opinion on the sources of social capital. In his discussion of synergy, as efficient networks between state and society, Evans emphasises that both embeddedness and complementarity must exist to achieve synergy (Evans 1996:1130). Embeddedness refers to interactions, norms and loyalties that exist at the local level (Evans 1996:1121). Complementarity implies that both civil society institutions and government institutions must make conscious efforts to develop structures of collaboration between the two levels. Evans thus seems to indicate that social capital originates both in norms and in instrumental action.

James Coleman, like Evans, deals with the question of sources of social capital by including both norms and agency in his explanation (1990). He depicts a rational agent influenced



by his environment (1990). Coleman claims that norms and trust are necessary preconditions of social capital, but underlines that agents comply with these norms as a rational action (Coleman 1990:309). Coleman goes as far as stating that norms of reciprocity are actually products of instrumental action, created by agents who realise that they can best serve their own needs by complying to a collective structure of mutual obligations (1990:310). Agency should thus be seen as the basic source of social capital in Coleman's writings.

Bourdieu emphasises the importance of instrumental action for the construction and use of social capital (1986)<sup>9</sup>. Networks are not naturally given, he claims, but are products of endless efforts by agents or collectives to secure material or symbolic profits (Bourdieu 1986:249). Indeed, Bourdieu recognises that solidarity must exist in order to enable the agent to construct networks. The agent's instrumental use of social relations to achieve what he calls 'distinction', denoting a favourable position in society, is emphasised (Bourdieu 1984). Although Bourdieu falls in the category of analysts who view instrumental action as a source of social capital, it is important to recognise that he simultaneously describes the construction of social capital as having structural constraints (Ritzer 1992:578). Instrumental action is what makes social capital come into being, but underlying structures of power and class will define how social capital is constructed (Bourdieu 1984:468).

Portes claims that social capital is a product of two types of motivation: motivation of self-interest and motivation of compliance with social expectations (1995:13). Sources of social capital cannot be said to be one or the other but are rather a compound of these two kinds of motivation. Portes consequently sees both norms and instrumental action as sources of social capital.

By presenting different theorists' views of social capital I have shown that there are diverging opinions on whether norms or instrumental action is the source of social capital. Some analysts include both perspectives in their explanation. The important task is to develop an understanding of social capital that will prove applicable to a study of social capital as a strategic resource in the urban informal sector. This adapted understanding of the concept will be developed in the next section.

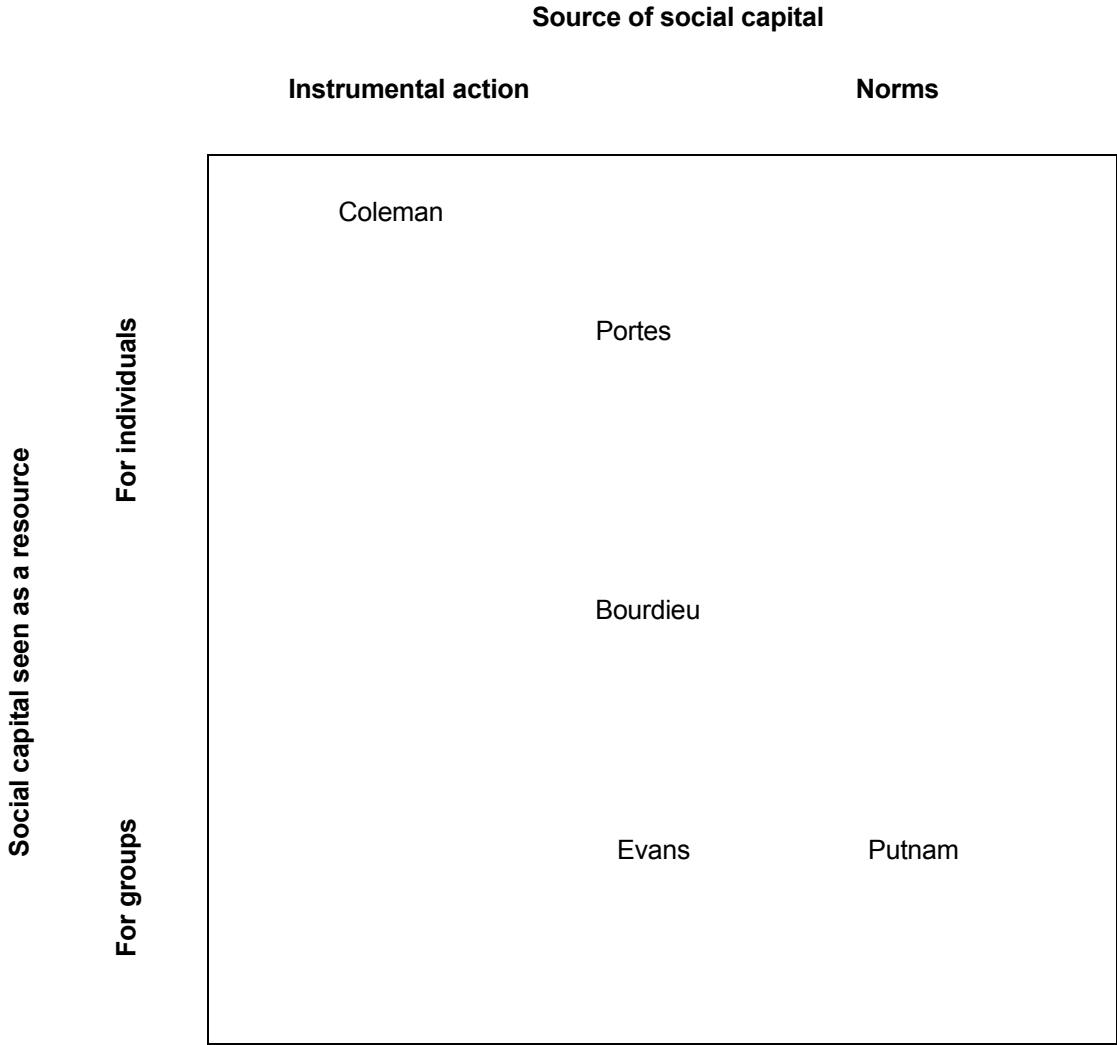
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<sup>9</sup> See previous subchapter for information on how I choose to read Bourdieu in this dissertation.

**An instrumental, agent-oriented view**

The various perceptions of social capital as a resource for individuals or groups, and of the sources of social capital, can be fitted into the following chart:

**Chart 1. Theoretical perceptions of social capital<sup>10</sup>**



We need to pin down which of these views is adequate for the analysis of the strategic use of social capital in the urban informal sector. I will argue that a view that recognises the individual as the primary benefactor of social capital is needed for this analysis. This view will be referred to as an ‘agent-oriented’ view of social capital. Furthermore, an understanding of instrumental action as the primary source of social capital will be applied. This view will be referred to as an ‘instrumental’ approach to social capital.

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<sup>10</sup> Bourdieu would probably resent being placed in this chart as he claims to have transcended the division between subjectivism and objectivism (Ritzer 1992:580). For the visualisation of the theoretical positions in this field I have nevertheless chosen to place his theoretical position inside chart 1.

The justification of applying an instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital lies partly in the specific features of the urban informal sector. The urban informal setting in developing countries is often characterised by a large influx of migrants. Traditional networks are often dissolved when people migrate from the rural areas and new social bonds have to be constructed in the urban setting. Hofferth and Iceland sustain this assumption. They have studied rural and urban households and have found that rural inhabitants were more likely to receive assistance from family and kin than their urban counterparts (Hofferth & Iceland 1998:596). This finding sustains the assumption of dissolved traditional networks in the urban setting. The inhabitants in the urban areas are often in a pressured economic situation and they have to apply coping-strategies in order to secure their livelihoods. Muller and Plantenga agree with this argument as they state that the construction of informal networks can be understood as a survival strategy for women in an urban context (1990:24). I argue that agency is a more prevalent source of social capital than norms in this environment. Instrumentality can not only be perceived as a source of social capital when new bonds are established, social capital can also be seen as instrumentally constructed when an agent deliberately transforms her social bonds into social capital. An example of this is when family relations are deliberately transformed into social capital by agents using these bonds actively to obtain resources. In such cases the source of social capital can also be seen to be instrumental action.

Not only will I see instrumental action as the primary source of social capital in Obunga, instrumental action will also be viewed as the force that makes resources flow through social bonds. This perception will enable an analysis not only of the establishment of social bonds that might potentially constitute social capital, but also of agents instrumentally using their social bonds as tools to obtain resources. I am preoccupied with both the instrumental construction and use of social capital, and subsequent reference to instrumentally constructed social capital will thus also include perspectives of instrumental use of social capital.

Even though the analytical focus of this dissertation rests upon the instrumental construction and use of social relations, it is important to acknowledge that agents never act in the absence of social norms. I will, however, focus upon instrumental action as a source of social capital. This choice is motivated by the fact that I see this to be the prevalent source of social capital in Obunga. In addition, I believe that a discussion of instrumentality as source of social capital provides valuable contributions to the social capital debate.

An instrumental, agent-oriented view has strong similarities with rational choice theories. There are, however, elements that make the instrumental, agent-oriented approach slightly different from a rational choice perspective. The assumption that micro-level strategic actions are influenced by their social context underlies this discussion. The explicit focus on structural influence on micro-level action makes this approach different from most rational choice theories. Although most rational choice theorists acknowledge structural influence on action, many of them do not treat this issue explicitly. One of the great dilemmas in rational choice theory has been to explain external contextual influence on the individual's choice (Ritzer 1992:446). The explicit focus on structural influence on individual action makes the instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital differ from most rational choice theories on this issue. It will later become evident that this focus is included in the theoretical framework.

An important perspective in the adapted understanding of social capital is inspired by Bourdieu. He states that a group provides each of its members with a 'credential' which entitles them to certain benefits (1986: 249). As the agents in the informal sector might have several instrumentally constructed business relationships, it is important to distinguish these from social capital. I will therefore emphasise that relationships which constitute social capital for the possessor have their origin and legitimacy in a social group or network. This can, for example, be manifested in the fact that two agents who perform a business transaction are members of the same group, and that the transaction is facilitated by their shared network affiliation. This understanding of social capital excludes ordinary one-to-one business relationships from being viewed as social capital.

I have introduced an understanding of agents constructing and using social capital instrumentally to obtain scarce resources. I will, however, claim that these agents to some extent are restricted in their construction and use of social capital by underlying gender values. This is an example of a structural constraint that influences individual action. The view of gender values as influencing action implies that male and female agents might have unequal opportunities to construct and use social capital. I will call this perspective 'gender-specific social capital'.

The perspective of social capital as potentially limiting to the agent's business prosperity will also constitute a facet of the theoretical framework. Social capital is commonly perceived as a potential resource to the possessor. I will introduce an understanding of social capital as simultaneously having the potential to limit the possessors' business prosperity. This potential limitation takes the form of pressure towards group-oriented behaviour. The potentially limiting capacity of social capital will be included as a part of the adapted understanding of social capital. This perspective represents yet another emphasis on the importance of recognising instrumental agents as influenced by surrounding structures.

#### **GENDER-SPECIFIC SOCIAL CAPITAL**

This discussion will explicate gender values as influencing the construction and use of social capital among the Obunga agents. This view implies that I argue that men and women might have unequal opportunities to construct and use social capital instrumentally to obtain resources. This perspective is particularly relevant because the agents studied in this dissertation are predominantly women who instrumentally use social capital in the form of social bonds with male agents to obtain resources. I will start by presenting arguments in favour of seeing social capital as gender-specific. Theoretical perspectives on how gender values can be seen as influencing instrumental agents will then be considered. Bourdieu's theories of 'habitus' are central in this context.

Many theorists have argued in favour of recognising the gender discriminating structures that exist in the informal sector. Hoyman for example, underscores that women are often the losers in the struggle for a livelihood in the urban informal sector (1987:76). Muller and Plantega emphasise that gender discriminating structures penetrate the informal sector (1990). These arguments emphasise gender as an important dimension to consider when studying the informal sector.

The gender dimension has also been mentioned in relation to social capital theories. Susan Johnson states that the concept of social capital contains dangerous gender-biases, and that these biases have not been fully scrutinised and exposed (Johnson 1999:110). She draws attention to what she calls 'the dark side of social capital'. This expression denotes the fact that the inclusion in social networks of some implies exclusion of others, and these 'others' might, according to Johnson, often be women (1999:113). Johnson further states that women might easily be barred from equal participation with men in social networks due to their reproductive role and their inferior socio-economic position in many societies (Johnson 1999:113). Nan Lin is another theorist who claims that men and women might have different possibilities to utilise social capital as a resource (Lin 2000:787). Johnson's and Lin's arguments in combination with other statements that emphasise the existence of gender discriminating structures in the informal sector speak in favour of applying a gender perspective in the analysis of social capital in Obunga.

I will thus apply a gender-specific view of social capital. This view embraces a vision of men and women as having unequal opportunities to construct and use social capital as a strategic resource in Obunga. Underlying this perspective is the assumption that female agents are more discriminated against in their use of social capital than their male counterparts. I assume that the reason for this gender-specificity is the existence of underlying gender values. Bourdieu's theories help explain how instrumental agents can be limited in their actions by underlying structures.

Bourdieu embraces a vision of instrumental agents who are simultaneously constrained by social structures. The term 'habitus' describes internalised social structures (1984:468). These structures are both products and are produced by the social world (Ritzer 1992:579). Although Bourdieu seeks to explain that 'habitus' contains class values, gender values can be perceived as a form of 'habitus' that influences the actions of individuals. This helps explain how instrumental agents are limited by gender values when they construct and use social capital. According to Bourdieu's theories, the limitations that 'habitus' imposes originate from cognitive structures which are produced and reshaped through individual actions. Such cognitive structures in combination with more explicitly stated gender values will be seen as limiting the female agents in their efforts to construct and use social capital as a strategic resource. Social capital will thus be recognised as a gender-specific resource in the analysis of the Obunga agents.

#### **SOCIAL CAPITAL AS A LIMITATION**

The instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital explains how the agents' deliberate construction of sociability can prove to be a strategic asset in the fight for scarce resources. What it does not explain is how the social networks that constitute social capital simultaneously may limit the agents' scope of action. I will argue that the agents are limited by social capital because they comply with norms enforcing group-oriented behaviour, in order to maintain their profitable relations with the social network. Compliance with norms enforcing group-oriented behaviour can be seen as imposing a limitation on the agent as she becomes less able to make choices that protect her own business interests. These arguments will constitute the basis of the discussion of social capital as a potential limitation to the agent's business prosperity.

Early as in classical sociology, Simmel pointed out the conflict between community solidarity and individual freedom in his essay on 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'

([1902]1978). Simmel recognised the limitations that community norms can place on the individual, and how participation in collective structures can limit the agent's scope of choice ([1902] 1978). Simmel's contributions to this discussion are statements on how the affiliation with a social aggregate has potential negative effects for individual prosperity. It is, however, important to understand the forces that make the social network limit the agent's access to resources.

The limitations imposed on the individual primarily take the form of expectations of group-oriented behaviour. Portes embraces this dimension as he explains how restrictions on individual freedom arise because group participation necessarily calls for conformity (Portes 1998:17). Membership in a network obliges the participant to comply with group norms. The compliance with norms governing group-oriented behaviour might have limiting effects on individual business prosperity as the interest of the group undeniably often collides with the business interest of the individual.

An interesting question to ask is why instrumental agents, constructing and using social bonds as a strategic asset, choose to comply with norms governing group-oriented behaviour. I will argue that the agents comply with norms as a strategic action in order to ensure the right to economic benefits from the social network. In order to uphold potentially profitable contacts with the network, the individual might have to suppress her own interests in order to satisfy the group. The compliance with group norms is the only way to maintain the potentially beneficial liaisons with the network. This is an example of the duality of social networks. In some ways it can be seen as positive social capital that facilitates access to resources for the individual agents. On the other hand, the social network imposes limitations upon the individual that might limit the agent's scope of action and thus hamper her business prosperity.

The discussion will thus incorporate a vision of social capital as simultaneously enabling and limiting. Social capital in the form of social networks might facilitate access to a resource. Arguments presented above showed, however, that the social network might limit the agent's scope of action in that she feels obliged to comply with group norms in order to uphold contact with the network. The ambiguity of social capital as a resource will thus be recognised as I incorporate an understanding of social capital as a potential limitation to the agent's business strategies.

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The aim of this chapter was to evolve an understanding of social capital that would be applicable to the analysis of social capital as a strategic asset in the urban informal sector. I have argued that an individual, agent-oriented view of social capital is required for this analysis. This theoretical framework has been supplemented with views of gender-specific social capital and social capital as a potential limitation to individual business strategies.

In order to explore whether these theoretical assumptions reflect Obunga reality, several questions must be asked. First of all, it becomes essential to explore whether the agents perceive social capital to facilitate their access to resources in the urban informal sector. It is also necessary to determine whether the agents actually construct and use social networks instrumentally in order to mobilise resources through their social bonds. I utilise a discussion of the value of social

capital to explore whether social capital is considered an important asset to the Obunga *wuontich*. In addition, I explore to what extent the agents see themselves as being limited by their membership in a social network that might constitute social capital. These discussions will enable me to explore the opportunities and constraints for the agents' instrumental use of social capital as a strategic resource, and thus provide valuable knowledge on the nature and importance of social capital as a resource to the agents working in this specific setting.

In order to achieve a full understanding of social capital as a potential asset to the agents in this setting, I will also ask if social capital is a flexible resource that might be used in situations of dramatic contextual change. Dramatic contextual change will be seen as contextual changes that induce significant changes in the organisation of the skeleton industry. The study of how the agents are limited or enabled in their instrumental use of social capital under such changed circumstances will help in answering whether social capital can be perceived as an important resource to agents operating in the skeleton industry. This discussion will also address the question of gender-specificity as related to social capital, as I explore whether women and men have unequal opportunities to utilise social capital in circumstances of dramatic contextual change

In order to discuss these topics questions it is necessary to establish what I perceive social capital and the instrumental construction and use of social capital to denote in this specific field. Social capital will in this particular context refer to social bonds rooted in family relations, saving group associations and work organisations. Instrumental use of these bonds will describe the *wuontich*' deliberate attempts to access skeletons by evoking her shared social bonds with the *jawero* who controls the skeletons. Instrumental construction of social capital will find its empirical expression in deliberate efforts from agents to construct groups or networks that will ensure easier access to skeletons.

All the above presented research questions will in combination help me understand the significance of social capital as a resource for the Obunga agents. These specific debates will enable me to depict the value and flexibility of social capital to the agents operating in this environment. These findings will provide contributions to the more general debate on social capital. These contributions will be presented in the concluding chapter.

### 3. CONTEXTUALISING SOCIAL CAPITAL

This dissertation applies a view of instrumental agents constructing and using social bonds to access resources. In order to discuss this topic it is necessary to explain the business relations in which social capital will be discussed as a potential resource. The *wuontich*' instrumental use of social bonds with the *jawero* as social capital that might ensure easier access to Nile perch skeletons will constitute the core of the discussion in this dissertation. Information on the *wuontich-jawero* relation will be expanded upon in the second section of this chapter and should be viewed as essential for the understanding of the subsequent analysis.

The business relations in which social capital is used as a resource cannot be seen in isolation. It has to be placed in relation to the organisation of the informal fish-processing industry. A description of this industry will help delineate why the *wuontich* potentially needs to use her social bonds with the *jawero* as social capital in order to access Nile perch skeletons.

In order to understand all the surrounding forces that might influence the construction and use of social capital, information on the Lake Victoria fisheries and on the informal settlement of Obunga will be presented. This information will help depict the context in which the skeleton industry is situated. This chapter is organised in three sections and the second section should be perceived as containing the core material for the subsequent discussion. The first section presents the Lake Victoria fisheries and how changes in this sector affect the output of fish into the skeleton industry in Obunga. The second section provides information on the organisation of the skeleton industry while the third section depicts the informal settlement of Obunga, the area in which the skeleton industry is situated.

Some of the information presented in this chapter will have particular relevance for the discussion in chapter six. In that chapter, the use of social capital under dramatic contextual change will be used as a point of departure for a discussion of the flexibility of social capital. The dramatic contextual changes that will be discussed in chapter six are EU<sup>11</sup> hygiene regulations, seasonal changes, declining supplies and conflict. Each of these contextual changes and symptoms of their influence on the informal fish-processing industry will be presented in this chapter.

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<sup>11</sup> The European Union



## THE LAKE VICTORIA FISHERIES

The informal fish-processing industry in Obunga depends on supplies from the industrialised fish-processing plants. The informal fish-processing industry will thus be affected by changes in the formal fisheries. I will present some basic information on the Lake Victoria Fisheries, and attempt to outline how the Obunga agents are affected by the organisation and development of the formal fisheries sector.

The Lake Victoria fisheries are dominated by modern processing companies (Jansen, Abila & Owino 1999:10). The basis for the establishment of the modern fish factories was an explosion in the Nile perch stock of Lake Victoria in the late seventies and early eighties. The Nile perch was a new species introduced to the Lake in the 1950s. Being a predator, the Nile perch fed on the indigenous species in Lake Victoria, making it possible to multiply the Nile perch stock during a short period of time (Witte, Goudswaard, Katunzi, Mkumbo, Seehausen & Wanink 1999:191). Catches steadily increased until 1991, but during the past few years the Lake Victoria fisheries have experienced declining catches (see chart 2). From 1995 to 1998 catches declined by approximately 10 percent. Most theorists agree that this development, in combination with the exploitation of the Lake Victoria biomass, gives reason for concern<sup>12</sup> (Abila 2000). Many researchers claim that the decline in catches partly has its explanation in the stiff competition between the factories for supplies (e.g. Wilson 1996). As the factories take out the majority of the mature Nile perch from the Lake, the local population have turned to illegal fishing methods in order to obtain fish (Geheb 1999:118, Geheb and Binns 1997:85). These processes have in combination led to the fact that the biomass in Lake Victoria is not exploited in a sustainable manner (McCormick 1997). The catches are considerably smaller than a few years ago and many of the factories around the Lake are currently struggling to get supplies (Jansen et al 1999).

**Chart 2. Tonnes of Nile perch caught in Lake Victoria, Kenya, 1965-1998**

1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1995	1998
13,000	16,998	16,581	26,914	88,589	185,101	181,888	158,876

(Source: Mugabe, Jansen and Ochieng 2000:3)

An informal industry has developed in response to the modern fish-processing factories (Geheb 1996). This industry specialises in processing by-products that are left after production inside the processing plants. As many as eight different by-products have potential use for human and animal consumption, as well as for industrial use. The skeleton industry in Obunga constitutes a part of this informal by-product industry.

There is a market for by-products in the regions around the Lake Victoria and in national Kenyan markets. The reason for this is that the local population is blocked from access to mature Nile perch. This fish is directly taken to the processing plants, processed and sent to overseas markets (Abila & Jansen 1997:4). As the factories compete to obtain Nile perch, they pay a higher price for the supplies than the local population. Local Kenyans are confined to the consumption of

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<sup>12</sup> As will become evident later, this development is also felt by the informal fish-processors.

premature Nile perch, other fish species and by-products. Several studies indicate that the per capita consumption of fish in this region is declining and that this development is a source of malnutrition and food insecurity (Mogaka 1999).

Declining supplies from the formal fisheries can be seen as a dramatic contextual change that is experienced at the local level. This can be explained by the fact that the informal by-products industry depends solely on supplies from the formal fish-processing plants, and variations in these supplies severely affect business prosperity in Obunga. Several informants in Obunga expressed that they had noticed that the catches from Lake Victoria had decreased and that the fish size was decreasing due to over-exploitation. Peter<sup>13</sup>, simultaneously operating as *wuontich* and *jawero* in Obunga, expresses how he has noticed these changes:

There have been changes. Now the fish is very small compared to earlier. Earlier you could get skeletons weighing 3-10 kg. Now you even receive skeletons weighing only one kilogram from the factory.

As the informal fish-processing industry depends on supplies from the factories, the agents in this sector acutely feel any decline in the production of Nile perch caused by over-exploitation of the resources in Lake Victoria. The discussion in chapter six on the use of social capital under dramatic contextual change will show that the construction and use of social capital among the *wuontich* is altered when the catches from Lake Victoria decrease.

### **EU and International markets**

The EU and international markets are significant for understanding the skeleton industry in Obunga. As demand for Nile perch in these markets is decisive for the output of by-products into the skeleton industry, their influence on the local by-product industry is substantial. In this dissertation their influence is particularly seen in the EU-imposed hygiene regulations that prevented a large bulk of local inhabitants from entering factory premises (Mitullah 1998:62). This led to the introduction of a new distribution system in Obunga under which the *jawero* operated as middlemen between the Obunga agents and the factory. These EU hygiene regulations will be treated as a dramatic contextual change that affected the organisation of the skeleton industry.

Following the explosion in the Nile perch stock in the 1980s there was a transition towards export of fish fillets (Abila & Jansen 1997). The most important markets for processed fillets are currently the EU, Israel and Japan. The orientation towards international markets has made the formal fish-processing industry dependent on international regulations. EU officials have been particularly worried over the hygienic standards in the fish-processing factories, and bans have on several occasions been launched on import of fish from Lake Victoria (Mitullah 1998:60). These bans have been enforced in response to the failure of local factories to meet hygiene standards (Daily Nation 2000 a). The latest ban on fish import to the European Union was issued in February 1999, and it was a reaction to alleged fishing with pesticides. This ban lasted for over two years and was only recently lifted (Daily Nation 2000 b).

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<sup>13</sup> All the informants have been given fictitious names and are presented in appendix 2.

The EU has for a long time promoted the ISO<sup>14</sup> 9002 certificate as a basic requirement for processing routines in the factories (Jansen 2000). This certificate details the proper handling of fish in all parts of the production chain. This is of specific interest to the skeleton industry as it set standards for the handling of by-products from the factories. EU inspectors have assessed the distribution of by-products to the local population as unhygienic. As a response to this, several factories have introduced a system where a few agents are given a monopoly on the distribution of skeletons from the factories. Random individuals can no longer go to the processing plants to buy skeletons; they have become dependent on supplies from *jawero* taking the skeletons from the factory to Obunga. Peter acknowledges how EU regulations have affected the local system of distribution:

The factory only wants to give skeletons to certain people. They do this because the EU thinks that is more hygienic.

This new system giving a monopoly on distribution to a few individuals is a direct consequence of EU hygiene regulations. This is an example of how local level realities might be affected by bureaucratic decisions made in Brussels, and will in chapter six be discussed as a dramatic contextual change that has affected the construction and use of social capital among the Obunga agents.

#### THE INFORMAL FISH-PROCESSING INDUSTRY

In this section, the informal fish-processing industry will be presented<sup>15</sup>. An overview of the various work groups and the system of distribution is provided. This information is necessary in order to understand why the *wuontich* is so dependent on having personal relations with the *jawero* in order to get supplies, a reality which constitutes the basis for the discussion of social capital as a potential asset to the *wuontich*. In addition, a presentation of the Umbrella Group, the organisational body in the skeleton industry, will be given. During the period of fieldwork this group came in conflict with certain agents in the skeleton industry. This situation is in chapter six discussed as a dramatic contextual change that affected the construction and use of social capital for the Obunga agents. Information on this situation of conflict will thus be presented. The significance of gender values in this industry will also be discussed. Ultimately, information on seasonal variation and its impact on the skeleton industry will be presented. Season will later be discussed as a dramatic contextual change that influences the construction and use of social capital<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>14</sup> International Standardisation Organisation

<sup>15</sup> As significant information on the informal fish processing industry and the informal settlement of Obunga is hard to find, the information presented here is based upon statements from informants. This information is also published in Steen-Johnsen (2000).

<sup>16</sup> It will later become evident that although seasonal variations have a cyclic character, they still have a dramatic impact on the organisation of the skeleton industry.

### **The organisation of the informal fish-processing industry**

The carcass industry is a complex work organisation with many levels. The three most significant positions are; *jawero*, *wuontich* and worker (see appendix 5). The *jawero* have a monopoly on the distribution of skeletons from the factory to the *wuontich* who specialise in processing skeletons and selling them to local and regional markets. The *wuontich* employ workers who cut, wash, dry, fry and pack the carcasses before they are sold.

Earlier, anyone could go to the processing plant to obtain supplies. Currently, due to EU-imposed hygiene requirements, the processing companies often only allow a limited number of people on their premises. These few people, the *jawero*, get a monopoly on the distribution of by-products to the local population. The *jawero* transport skeletons from the factory to Obunga where they employ people to count and grade the skeletons. The skeletons are then distributed to the *wuontich* according to lists or personal preferences.

The *jawero* stand out as powerful agents in the field. The mere appearance of them often suggests status and wealth. They are well dressed and their attention is sought after. The *jawero* were at the time of research exclusively men. There are examples of women attempting to enter into this business, but the men seem to counteract women who attempt to become *jawero*.

Carcasses from the factories are distributed via the *jawero* to the *wuontich*. The *wuontich*, who are most often female, have their own small enterprises in processing and selling the skeletons. They own a frying pan (*djiko*) and employ workers to wash, cut, dry, fry and pack the skeletons. These workers are in that sense employees in the *wuontich*' micro-enterprise. In Obunga, every *wuontich* owns her own wooden stall where the skeletons are hung to dry before they are processed.

In order to remain in business the *wuontich* needs to get regular supplies. As the availability of supplies is often low, the *wuontich* has to make an extra effort to obtain resources. In order to access the skeletons she has to have some kind of personal contact with the *jawero*. It is her potential use of social bonds with the *jawero* to access skeletons that will constitute the starting point for a discussion of the instrumental use of social capital in this dissertation.

### **The Umbrella Group and the conflict with the Mgongo Wazi Group**

The Umbrella Group is the official regulating body in the skeleton industry<sup>17</sup>. This group organises and co-ordinates all work-related activities in the skeleton industry. The office bearers are officially elected with government officials present. In order to operate on any level in the skeleton business, membership in the Umbrella Group is required.

In order to ensure equal distribution among the *wuontich*, the Umbrella Group has developed a set of rules that regulates distribution of skeletons. The Umbrella Group often intervenes and sets prices for the skeletons. There are sanctions of expulsion and fines if these rules are violated.

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<sup>17</sup> Although some regulating bodies can be found in the skeleton industry, this sector can still be termed informal. The reason for this is that the people engaged in this industry pay no tax that are officially recorded and have no safety net in the form of officially guaranteed insurance and benefits (see Vaa

The struggle for control over the prices and the distribution of fish has led to severe conflicts in the skeleton industry. During the period of research, the situation was actually reduced to open conflict between some of the *jawero* and the Umbrella Group. The conflict was concentrated around a disagreement on the suspension of two *jawero*. The Umbrella Group suspended these *jawero* because they were suspected of secretly attempting to acquire tenure of the land where the skeletons are fried. The suspension implied that the *jawero* could not distribute carcasses to the *wuontich*, a situation which implied a profit loss for the *jawero*.

The two suspended *jawero* established their own group, called the Mgongo Wazi Group. This group was initiated to curb the legitimacy of the suspension the Umbrella Group had effectuated. The conflict over the right to distribute carcasses came to involve agents at all levels of work organisation in Obunga. The two rivalling groups mobilised support from the *wuontich* and the workers. As they both had *jawero* members at the factory, the respective groups would only distribute carcasses to their own supporters. The conflict between the two groups eventually resulted in physical fighting (see appendix 4).

The introduction of the Mgongo Wazi Group as a result of the conflict implied that the original system of distribution in Obunga was altered. This will be discussed as a dramatic contextual change which influenced the way in which the individual *wuontich* constructed and used social capital in Obunga.

### **Gender relations**

The majority of the people engaged in the skeleton industry are female. I have introduced a perspective of gender-specific social capital. This perspective implies that the construction and use of social capital must be seen as influenced by gender structures in the surrounding society. I will thus discuss gender structures in Luo society, and outline why I believe the female *wuontich* in Obunga enjoy greater economic liberty than their rural counterparts. The existence of a certain gender-bias in the Obunga environment will, however, also be emphasised. This information contributes to the understanding how construction and use of social capital is influenced by gender structures in this particular environment.

A study of the economic development in western Kenya has recognised that Luo women have lost economic influence in the economic household sphere during the last decades (Francis 1995). There is a strong tendency among Luo men to consciously limit the women's decisive power in the rural household. Luo women in rural areas often depend on their husbands and sons to access economic goods, and they are thus generally deprived of autonomous economic influence. Women's decisive power (*teko*) is generally limited to questions concerning cooking and child-care (Francis 1995). A study of a Luo fishing community on the Tanzanian side of Lake Victoria also underscores male authority in decision-making processes outside the household (Gerrard 1991).

There are however spheres where the traditional Luo male authority over women is challenged. Many of the women engaged in the carcass industry in Obunga are single women and

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1991:124). It is nevertheless important to acknowledge that even informal industries are to some extent subject to regulations.

widows. In the female-headed household, male authority will naturally be limited (Cohen & Atieno Odhiambo 1989). Many women operating in the skeleton industry have had to move to Obunga in order to create their own economic basis. This gives them larger economic autonomy.

Many of the *wuontich* in the carcass industry are women, and they employ men to process the skeletons. During interviews, there were few references to problems with female authority over male workers. It was widely understood that this was an economic relationship and as long as the female *wuontich* paid the male worker, conflicts would normally not arise. The *wuontich* Janet sustains this as she says:

There is no problem being a *wuontich* over a male worker. He does his work and you pay him. The link between women and men in Obunga is money. The female *wuontich* can tell a man what to do.

Many of the women have managed to become *wuontich* and they are in this respect responsible for their own business. The position of a *wuontich* can in many ways be conceived as position of power, and it is evident that many of these women are highly respected in the field. It should nevertheless be noted that even though the position of a *wuontich* implies power, it is nonetheless a vulnerable position. The skeleton industry is subject to rapid changes and most of the female *wuontich* do not have an economic safety net. Many women stand as sole providers for their children, and they must in this respect be seen as economically vulnerable.

It seems as if the women working in the skeleton industry enjoy a certain amount of economic freedom. Earlier quoted articles describing gender divisions among the Luo indicate that there are often gender inequalities among the Luo (Francis 1995). And indeed, the gender divisions are visible in the skeleton industry as well. An example of this is that positions occupied by men (e.g. cutting skeletons) are much better paid than positions occupied by women (e.g. washing skeletons). This gender inequality reflected in the salary system indicates that the Obunga agents operate in an environment organised according to underlying gender values.

Another example of social organisation according to gender values is that men occupy the most lucrative positions in this industry. It is, for example, extremely difficult for a woman to become a *jawero*. The position of *jawero* is the position with the highest status and profit possibilities. The inability of women to become *jawero* is yet another sign of a certain gender bias in this environment. A relevant question is whether these gender values affect the agents' abilities to construct and use social capital. This topic will be discussed in chapter six where I explore whether men and women might have unequal possibilities to construct and use social capital under dramatic contextual change.

### **Seasonal variations**

The people engaged in the carcass business have a solid understanding of the interrelationship between season and profitability. In the rainy season (April-August)<sup>18</sup> the market is flooded with skeletons and there is a deficit of customers to buy the skeletons. Along with this difficult

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<sup>18</sup> The seasons are classified in accordance with statements from local informants. It should nevertheless be noted that the seasonal variations are subject to change.

situation, the rainfall makes it difficult to dry and fry the skeletons. Many people leave the business during this season. Peter expresses the impact of the rainy season this way:

In the rainy season there is rotting fish [skeletons]<sup>19</sup> everywhere. I always run away from business during that period.

Both *jawero* and *wuontich* struggle to keep their business going during this season.

The dry season (December-March) on the other hand is commonly referred to as the ‘peak season’. Profitability during this season is what gives the carcass industry a reputation for being lucrative. During this season there is a great market for the skeletons, and the customers are numerous. The amount of fish coming from the factory is low, and the prices are kept very high. Both *wuontich* and *jawero* make a profit during this period. Competition for supplies is hard during this season and the *jawero* exercise their power in their general control of the distribution of the carcasses. The dry season is the ‘season of conflicts’ as many people struggle to remain in business. Generally the *wuontich* who are able to obtain supplies in this season are the ones who have been able to maintain their relationship with the *jawero* throughout the year.

The short rainy season (September-November) is, however, the period when most people are employed in this business. Prices are at an acceptable level and the supply of skeletons is quite stable. In addition, there are customers coming regularly to buy the carcasses.

Informants thus claim with reason that seasonal variations have a strong impact on their business. Input of skeletons, amount of customers and thus profitability change according to season. Season should thus be considered a very important backdrop for the skeleton industry, and season will accordingly be treated as a dramatic contextual change that severely influences the construction and use of social capital in this business.

## **THE INFORMAL<sup>20</sup> SETTLEMENT OF OBUNGA**

In order to understand the socio-economic status of the majority of the people engaged in the carcass industry, it is essential to familiarise oneself with the characteristics of the Obunga area. I will present general background information on Obunga, and also discuss merry-go-rounds and saving associations as a part of this reality. Migration patterns and family relations will also be presented, as these structures will later be discussed as social capital that might facilitate the *wuontich*’ access to resources.

Obunga is an informal settlement situated within the city boundaries of Kisumu. Approximately 20,000 women, men and children live in Obunga. The settlement has schools, a medical ward, pharmacies and an orphanage, but many of these facilities do not seem to be functioning. There are small enterprises, but the skeleton industry constitutes the largest and most organised form of business activity in Obunga. Some of the agents in the skeleton industry have additional business activities that they turn to when profitability in skeleton business goes down.

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<sup>19</sup> Text put in these brackets mark my own explanatory comments. This will be the case for all citations in this dissertation

<sup>20</sup> Informal is used to describe the Obunga settlement because it to a large extent remains unregulated by the government. The area is by many inhabitants called a ‘slum’.

AIDS is rampant in Obunga. In certain age groups, between 30 and 40 percent of the population are infected with the HIV virus (Kenya Ministry of Health 1999). The informants claim that the high HIV/AIDS prevalence has led to a strain on the micro-level economy in Obunga. The inhabitants in the area express that earlier traditions for mutual assistance have vanished, and currently everyone has to rely on himself. The former *wuontich* Mary says:

A problem is that people are dying more than before. This affects the helping system in that the people just start helping themselves.

Mary seems to indicate that people have difficulties helping each other because the frequency of funerals has multiplied during the last years. Expenditures for medical bills pose a serious strain on personal economies. This reality constitutes a very pronounced backdrop for the skeleton industry in Obunga, and the constant strain on existing networks imposed by high HIV prevalence might contribute to the fact that people relate to social networks in a more instrumental way. As it becomes impossible to respond to all the economic claims of their social networks, one can imagine that people treat bonds as a resource that they might benefit from while simultaneously not letting their social networks impose excessive economic claims on them. These specific features of social networks in Obunga will constitute a part of the subsequent discussion.

Obunga can be seen as a typical informal settlement with most of the social and economic problems often found among urban dwellers in poor countries. Alcoholism, crime, violence and health risks are parts of everyday life. A daily, ongoing struggle for income characterises the lives of the people who live and work here. This specific reality forms the backdrop for an understanding of social capital as a strategic resource for agents operating in this area.

### **Informal<sup>21</sup> organisations and merry-go-rounds**

Many of the agents in the skeleton industry are organised in small saving associations. Such groups will in this dissertation be seen as social networks that can be used as social capital. I will later discuss whether shared merry-go-round membership between *jawero* and *wuontich* can be seen as social capital that can facilitate the *wuontich*' access to skeletons. I will therefore present a general background on informal saving associations and then outline how these groups are organised in Obunga.

Informal saving associations are common in developing countries where small entrepreneurs have difficulties raising money from formal institutions (Granovetter 1995:137). Granovetter refers to Geertz when he outlines that the basic principle of such small credit associations is that a lump sum is distributed to each and every member at a fixed interval. If there are ten members in the saving association who meet once a week, and if the weekly contribution from every member is one dollar, then every ten weeks the members will receive ten dollars each (Granovetter 1995:137).

Ardner emphasises that credit associations will fail unless the members in the group meet their obligations. She continues by suggesting that the pressure of public opinion might be enough

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<sup>21</sup> Again, the term informal is used to describe these organisations because they are rarely subject to official regulation and government control.



to enforce the members to pay their share to their group. She calls this norm pressure ‘enforceable trust’ (Ardner 1964:217).

Granovetter acknowledges that some environments are characterised by a lack of enforceable trust. In a case from Modjouko in Indonesia, he outlines a setting where a large part of the population has migrated from the rural to the urban setting. He underlines that very few of these have carried with them persisting ties from the rural environment (Granovetter 1995:131). Granovetter explains that in this atomised setting it has been difficult to establish economic associations due to the lack of trust and durable business ties among the agents (Granovetter 1995:132).

A system of credit associations, called merry-go-rounds, is widespread in Obunga. They are organised according to the same principles outlined above by Granovetter. These groups meet one or two times a week and most often consist of at least ten people. Many of the groups are constituted of people with common traits such as common place of origin, similar work etc. The contributions are often small and start at 10 Kshs<sup>22</sup> up to several hundred shillings a week. There has, however, been a tendency for the participants to run away when they have received their share of the money. This might be due to lack of ‘enforceable trust’ as Ardner describes it (1964). As the Obunga setting is indeed characterised by a large population of immigrants, this might be one of the reasons why group pressure is insufficient to secure commitment from the participants. Nevertheless, some of the merry-go-rounds function quite well. Granovetter claims that shared geographic origin might be a criterion for a sufficient level of trust for the association to function (1995). Some of the most successful credit associations in Obunga are based upon place of origin.

The majority of the participants in the skeleton industry participate in one or several merry-go-rounds. Participation in such groups seems to be a common way of raising additional funds. Merry-go-round membership will later be treated as a social affiliation that might be used as social capital by the *wuontich*. The assumption is that in cases where *jawero* and *wuontich* participate in the same merry-go-round, these social bonds can be used by the *wuontich* as social capital that ensures easier access to skeletons. The discussion of the importance of merry-go-round membership as social capital will thus constitute an important part of the subsequent analysis.

### **Migration and family relations**

Family is another social network that will later be treated as potential social capital to the possessor. The degree to which shared family bonds between *jawero* and *wuontich* can be seen as a form of social capital that facilitates the *wuontich*’ access to skeletons will be discussed in chapter five. To provide background material for this discussion I now give some basic characteristics of family relations in Obunga.

Obunga is an area characterised by a large population of migrants, of whom many are female. Some seem to have come with family members and yet others have arrived alone. Family patterns in the rural areas in combination with traditional Luo laws seem to explain why such a substantial number of widows and single women migrate to Obunga.

Studies of rural-urban migration have acknowledged that women might migrate from rural to urban settings as an attempt to escape the subjection experienced in the rural setting. In the city the women have more extensive possibilities to be independent from the rural social setting (Moser 1993). The quest for freedom and an income seems to be a motivation factor for many of the women who choose to migrate to Obunga. Many of them have little family network, and they stand as sole providers for their children. Others are barred from returning to their homelands. According to Luo customs, the wife belongs to the husband's family when she marries (Francis 1995). The husband's family might chase her from their land. This can happen even though the marriage is not dissolved until the wife's family has paid the dowry back (Markussen 2001). In cases where the women are chased from the husband's village, they have few possibilities of returning to their parent's land as they formally still belong to the husband's family. In these cases, the women might have few other options than to move to settlements like Obunga in search of a livelihood.

In addition to all the migrants in Obunga there is a group of people who own land in Obunga and who have their homesteads in this area. These refer to themselves as 'Obunga people' and claim authority in the carcass business. Although they represent a minority, they are extremely conscious that the carcass industry is situated near an area that belongs to them. The 'Obunga people' nickname the immigrants 'Oluwo Reru' which basically means 'those who came walking along the railway'. This nickname is slightly offensive and refers to the fact that many of the people working in the carcass business are immigrants. Normally the division between the Obunga people and the 'Oluwo Reru' is not stated explicitly, but arguments referring to this division seem to be evoked in situations of conflict.

Few people seem to have family members living in Obunga. There are, however, a few families that operate in the skeleton industry, and some of these families stand out as strong and united. Family bonds are later discussed as a social capital that might facilitate the *wuontich*' access to skeletons. The assumption is that the *wuontich* who share social bonds with a *jawero*, can use these bonds as social capital that ensures easier access to skeletons.

## CONCLUSION

The central theme in this dissertation is the *wuontich*' use of social capital to obtain the Nile perch skeletons that she needs to maintain her business activities. The information presented in this chapter has provided the necessary background information to be able to conduct this discussion. It has been explained that due to the organisational system in Obunga, which ensures the *jaweros* exclusive right to distribute skeletons, the *wuontich* needs to have personal contact with the *jawero* to access skeletons. As the later discussion will deal with the importance of social capital, two important types of social networks, family relations and merry-go-round groups were presented. Information on these social networks was necessary because the subsequent discussion will ask whether family bonds or merry-go-round membership might be used by the *wuontich* as a form of social capital that might facilitate her access to skeletons.

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<sup>22</sup> 1USD =86 Kshs (as pr 14/06/00).

The *wuontich*' construction and use of social capital must, however, be put in a broader context. To depict the social and economic backdrop for the discussion of the Lake Victoria fisheries, the organisation of the skeleton industry and the informal settlement of Obunga were presented. This information will to a various extent be referred to in the discussion; some of it will simply underlie the discussion in a more subtle way.

Certain contextual factors will nevertheless constitute a visible and important part of the analysis. In chapter six a discussion of the use of social capital under dramatic contextual change will open for a discussion of the flexibility of social capital.

It will become evident that alterations in the use of social capital also induce alterations in the way in which social capital is constructed and used. The information presented in this chapter will thus constitute an important backdrop for the understanding of the use social capital as a resource in Obunga.

## 4. STUDYING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The basis for all findings presented in this dissertation is the methodological process of studying and interpreting the empirical material from Obunga. I will discuss the strategies I have applied during fieldwork, and the process of interpreting the empirical findings. These discussions will display both the strengths and weaknesses of the methodological approach with a particular focus on how I chose to deal with the weaknesses.

The first part of this chapter describes the process of collecting empirical material about social capital in Obunga. This section will present the process of accessing the social reality of Obunga during fieldwork. I present how I used interviewing and observation as a means to obtain data on the construction and use of social capital in Obunga. Space will be devoted to discussions of my own role and how it affected my access to data. Trust, memory and conflict will also be discussed as elements that might have influenced the access to certain kinds of data.

The second part of this chapter will deal with the process of interpreting the empirical material on social capital. The organisation and interpretation of the empirical data will be discussed and I will present how I attempted to assess the findings in a critical way. The process which led me to a focus upon the *wuontich* will also be recaptured. In addition, I will discuss how the key concepts in this dissertation are expressed empirically. Strategies applied to critically challenge my own findings during the process of organisation and interpretation will stand as a central theme in this discussion.

### METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

The main body of the empirical material that constitutes the basis for this dissertation was collected through interviews. In total, twenty-five agents operating in the skeleton industry, six government officials, two NGO workers and two researchers were interviewed. I actively sought to interview informants with different positions within and relations to the skeleton industry. The majority of these informants were interviewed because my contacts in the field facilitated my association with these individuals. Others were independently chosen on the basis of their position

or background. Material from fifteen of the informants has been used in the discussion.<sup>23</sup> Some of these informants were interviewed several times. The interviews were semi-structured in the case of most Obunga informants.<sup>24</sup> In the case of the officials, researchers and also some key-informants in Obunga, new questions were prepared for every interview. These interviews essentially circled around ‘themes’ and had a more explorative character than the semi-structured interviews.

A research design based upon qualitative interviews can be changed during the process of research and it might therefore embrace the multiplicity of reality (Holter 1982:11). This flexibility was necessary to embrace the social realities of Obunga. When I first arrived in Obunga, I had a notion that several stable saving associations would offer economic protection to the fish-processors in a strained environment. The empirical reality challenged aspects of this notion. I found that there were several saving associations, but these were not as stable and well-functioning as I had presumed. The *wuontich* Betty was among the informants that indicated that the saving groups were not stable associations. She says:

Often the people run away with their share and the group collapses.

Other statements indicated that the Obunga agents had an instrumental attitude towards the group. They seemed to use the group to obtain a resource and then abandon it, disregarding the threat of the normative sanctions that would follow. These findings stressed the level of instrumentality among the agents. I realised that I had to include perspectives of how agents used social networks for their own benefit. The flexible character of qualitative methodology allowed me to incorporate these new perspectives into discussions with the informants.

When using qualitative interviews it is, however, important to recognise that the researcher will always to some extent influence the answers given. The production of interview-data takes place during a conversation where the researcher actively takes part. The researcher thus influences the information conveyed to her during an interview (Kvale 1997:28). The interview technique of the researcher might, however, contribute to the production of rich data in that the informant speaks freely about relevant issues. The production of such data is based upon the ability of the researcher to guide the informant through the themes without asking leading questions (Kvale 1997:95). I attempted not to ask leading questions and to simultaneously be sensitive to new topics introduced by the informant. My own influence on the empirical material was inevitable, but I consciously attempted to limit the ‘researcher effect’ on the material by being sensitive to my own influence and by attempting to let the informants speak freely about the topics raised during the interview.

The use of an interpreter might also have influenced the data I got access to during interviews. As most of the female informants in Obunga did not speak English, an interpreter translated the questions while I was interviewing. Two factors might have influenced the access to data during such interviews. All the information between informant and researcher is inevitably ‘filtered’ through the interpreter, and this might influence the content of the data. In addition, the interpreter’s presence might influence the flow of information from the informant,

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<sup>23</sup> These have been given fictitious names and are presented in appendix 2.

<sup>24</sup> The interview guide can be found in appendix 3.

in a positive or a negative way, because of the fact that the informant knows the interpreter (Berreman 1962:7). As the interpreter I worked with was from Obunga, her presence during interviews might have influenced my access to data. In order to deal with this aspect I attempted to be sensitive to the potential influence of the interpreter on the material I got access to. In addition, I trained the interpreter prior to the interviews in order to ensure that she was informed about the processes concerning interpretation of interviews. I attempted to minimise the influence that the interpreter and I had on the answers given. It should nevertheless be acknowledged that as qualitative interviewing is a dialogue between two or more persons, the interviewer will inevitably have some influence on the answers given (Kvale 1997:28).

Observation also constituted a part of the methodological strategy. As the informants knew that I had come to Obunga to write about the skeleton industry, it was accepted that I was always writing in my books. I was thus able to jot down the most important aspects of my observations. I thus avoided the time lag from observation to logging that is often a problem in field research (Hammersley & Atkinson 1996:89). Observation data can be used in various ways, either to detect new information that the informants do not convey through interviews or to verify statements from informants. In the Obunga study, observation was used to do both. Data from observation sometimes inspired ideas for new questions to be asked, in other cases observations were used to verify that the informants' explanations corresponded with the actual situation in Obunga. An example of the latter situation can be found in my field notes:

Today in the field I observed that several *wuontich* were loudly quarrelling. Fiona explained to me that one of them had accused another *wuontich* for having received more skeletons because she was the *jawero*'s cousin (Field notes 15/10/99).

The observation of this quarrel supported the information earlier given to me by the *wuontich* Betty. She claimed that there were quarrels in the field because the *jawero* gave priority to family members. I saw this as an indication that social capital could ensure easier access to skeletons. My observation of the quarrel in the field added weight to this statement and was thus used to complement the data collected during interviews.

The combination of semi-structured and unstructured interviews contributed to a flexible methodological design that allowed me to alter the theoretical focus according to the empirical findings. Certain elements of the interview situation most probably influenced my access to data, but I attempted to deal with these challenges by being sensitive towards my own and the interpreter's influence on the material. Data from observation will supplement the interview data where available, but due to the character of the Obunga setting,<sup>25</sup> observational data constitutes a limited part of the empirical material constituting the basis for analysis.

## MY ROLE

The information that the informants choose to convey to the researcher will inevitably be influenced by whom they perceive the researcher to be. I will discuss aspects of my influence on the information that I had access to in Obunga. Discussions of my

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<sup>25</sup> The informal fish-processing area is characterised by high activity, thick smoke and boiling fish-fat. It is thus difficult to spend time and to make observations in this field.

affiliation with a well-known NGO, my age, gender and status as a student will be discussed as potential influences on the material collected in Obunga.

My affiliation with an NGO might have influenced the information that the informants chose to convey to me. The Obunga case was presented to me by a senior researcher who had been working with questions related to the Lake Victoria fisheries for several years. The contact with the senior researcher and the NGO he worked for ensured easy access to the skeleton industry in Obunga. I was introduced to important 'gatekeepers' and was simultaneously given legitimacy by my affiliation with the NGO. The affiliation with this NGO may simultaneously have implied that I was blocked from certain information. Hammersley and Atkinson underline that 'sponsors' who provide legitimacy for the researcher can be important for access to the field of research (Hammersley & Atkinson 1996:89). They simultaneously emphasise that such sponsors might have a limiting affect on access to data. The most well intended sponsor might influence the content of the fieldwork because the researcher is continuously associated with this person (Hammersley & Atkinson 1996:103).

I tried to influence my own role in the field by emphasising that I was a student and that I was not performing any assessment for development projects. Many of the informants still seemed to associate me with the NGO of the senior researcher who had introduced me to the field. I discovered this by the fact that some of the informants seemed to underplay the problems and conflicts in the field in fear of loosing potential development assistance. An excerpt from my field notes explains how this was expressed during an interview with the *wuontich* Jason:

He kept on denying the importance of the conflict between the Mgongo Wazi Group and the Umbrella Group. He told me after the interview that he was worried that I would present a bad picture of Obunga because of the current problems. I got a feeling that he was trying to underestimate some of the problems in the field because he is afraid that NGOs will not help Obunga if they know about all the problems (Field notes 19/11-99).

The affiliation with the NGO might have influenced the answers given to me by the informants. Hammersley and Atkinson emphasise that informants will inevitably attempt to place the researchers in roles that they know (1996:109). Considering the sponsorship by the NGO and my colour of skin, it is probable that I was placed in the well known role of 'donor'<sup>26</sup>. Although I attempted to present myself as a student, this seemed to be an unfamiliar category to the informants. I found it hard to escape the established perceptions of Europeans as donors, but attempted to compensate by deliberately using local terms and references to distinguish myself from other NGO workers visiting the field for short periods. I attempted to display that I was different by staying for a long period of time and greeting the skeleton dealers in the local language. Such 'impression strategy' might be a way to compensate for ascribed roles in the field of research (Hammersley & Atkinson 1996:112). The emphasis on displaying my interest in the local language and culture might to some extent have bridged the gap created by my incomprehensible role as something between a student and a donor. This was probably more so the case for the people who got to know me well over a long period of time.

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<sup>26</sup> The Obunga informants have several times experienced that Europeans come to the field for a short period to assess the opportunity for development projects in this area.

My age and gender most likely influenced the way that the informants perceived me. Local cultural perceptions of my age and gender in combination with my eagerness to present myself as a student might have contributed to making my role quite incomprehensible. I was too old to be a regular student, and women my age normally should be preoccupied with the home and children. My status as married but childless just added to the fact that the informants did not understand my role. Notes from my field diary explain this:

Today I was presented to the skeleton fryers by one of the leaders in the Umbrella Group. He explained that I was a student doing research for the university. One woman wondered if I was married and whether I had any children. The leader asked me and I said no. When confronted with these facts the women started laughing. I got a feeling that they did not understand how a married woman my age could not have children. I also assume that they see me as a fairly 'old' student despite my 26 years of age (Fieldnotes 15/9-99).

Solberg highlights the importance of taking a role that is known to the informants to obtain access to the field (1982:129). My intention to present myself as a student might not have facilitated access to data considering my age and gender. Many of the informants simply did not seem to recognise my role and I thus became incomprehensible to them. This might have limited my access to data. My deliberate attempts to display myself as a person who was different from other NGO workers, in combination with my repeated visits to the field seemed, however, to have contributed to the fact that the informants to some extent got used to my presence and chose to share information about their own situation with me.

#### **MEMORY AND CONFLICT AS INFLUENCING ACCESS TO DATA**

I will discuss how certain kinds of data proved difficult to access during fieldwork. The discussion will circle around how data about change is more easily accessed than data about more underlying features of sociality. I emphasise that when dealing with data about change it is important to be aware that retrospective data about 'before' as opposed to 'now' have several potential weaknesses. The eruption of a conflict in Obunga will be discussed as a factor that produced new valuable knowledge of social capital. I will also highlight that the eruption of conflict might have limited my access to data to some extent because I found it difficult to maintain my contacts with both the conflicting parties.

This dissertation introduces an understanding of dramatic contextual change as influencing the organisation of the skeleton industry and thus the construction and use of social capital among the *wuontich*. This understanding will constitute the basis for the discussion of the flexibility of social capital. Data about dramatic contextual change is not always easy to obtain. As some of the contextual changes I will discuss, such as declining supplies, are dramatic yet subtle, it proved difficult to get the informants to reflect upon these changes. Other dramatic contextual changes, such as seasonal variations, are more overt and thus easier to obtain information about. For information on dramatic contextual change I had to rely almost exclusively on the informants' memories of these changes.

Repstad underlines that retrospective data based on memory are not always trustworthy (1993:71). He also stresses that people often remember palpable events and changes better than altered feelings and emotions. I tried to apply this insight during interviews as I obtained information of dramatic contextual change by asking about more palpable changes in the skeleton



industry. An example of this is that I asked whether the informants knew anyone who had left the skeleton industry, and I asked about their reflections on why these people had to leave. By asking about the stories of specific people who had left the skeleton industry, I collected information on how a dramatic contextual change like declining supplies can force people to abandon their business in the skeleton industry. The strategy of asking for palpable changes gave access to changes that might be subtle but that still had an immense effect on the skeleton industry.

The eruption of conflict provided access to rich data on how dramatic contextual change affects the construction and use of social capital. During the period of fieldwork the Mgongo Wazi Group broke out and started an alternative distribution network. This provided valuable insight to discussions of the strategic construction of social capital and the effect of dramatic contextual change on the construction and use of social capital. On the other hand, the conflict might have decreased the opportunity to obtain certain kinds of data. The reason for this is that I was commonly associated with the leaders in the Umbrella Group. When I first entered Obunga the Mgongo Wazi Group did not exist and there was consequently no conflict between the two groups. I thus found it natural to enter the field through contacts that I had in the Umbrella Group leadership. One of the women in this group became a close friend and I often ate at her house when visiting Obunga. When the conflict broke out I struggled to make contacts on the other side of the conflict in order to access views from all the parties in the conflict. Peter, a *wuontich* in the splinter group, became my strongest contact on the rivalling side of the conflict. Despite this, there were still indications that people associated me with the Umbrella Group. The last week before I left I was put in an impossible situation because of the conflict. I had planned to arrange a farewell party in a house belonging to an Umbrella Group official. Notes from my field diary explain my dilemma:

The farewell party at Sara's house with all my informants and Peter from the Mgongo Wazi Group seems to be hanging in thin air. Last night Fiona came and told me that the groups had started fighting. The Mgongo Wazi Group had allegedly attacked the Umbrella Group members during a meeting, using sticks and stones. The Mgongo Wazi Group people ran to the police and now eleven people from the Umbrella Group are being held in prison. Peter has run away from Obunga. It is horrible. I have no idea what to do. It seems impossible to have a party in a house owned by an Umbrella Group member in this situation. It would be like celebrating a victory over the Mgongo Wazi Group (Fieldnotes 4/12-99) (See also appendix 4).

I chose to not participate in the party but to let the others eat and drink the food that was prepared for the guests. My affiliation with prominent members of the Umbrella Group made it impossible to present myself as neutral. This is closely linked to the findings I made in Obunga. During this period, group affiliation was a prime criterion to obtain skeletons. Everyone in the field knew to which group the other belonged. The division made it impossible to stand between groups as the Obunga agents seemed to categorise each other according to group affiliation. This reality in combination with my contacts with the Umbrella Group made it impossible to be perceived as neutral. Despite my efforts I was most probably seen as closely affiliated with the Umbrella Group leaders.

My affiliation with the Umbrella Group probably affected the information conveyed to me by informants. Green reports the very same dilemma from her fieldwork during a strike. She became associated with one of the parties in the conflict and her access to information from the

opposing party was restricted (Green 1993:105). Most likely, the material underlying the discussions in this dissertation is biased because of this. In retrospect, one might say that contact with the Umbrella Group influenced the access to empirical material in several ways. In some ways it ensured an easy access to the field, but during the conflict contact with the Umbrella Group most likely contributed to limiting my access to data from the opposing Mgongo Wazi Group.

The discussion has emphasised that several mechanisms influence the access to data during the process of fieldwork. The role of the researcher might affect the information that the informants choose to convey to her. I also outlined how memory and conflict are factors that influence access to data. This discussion has outlined the specific features that I felt influenced my access to data. A continuous reflexivity towards the factors that influence access to data has been outlined as a central part of my strategies to deal with the challenges of accessing the social reality of Obunga. I now move on to discuss the organisation and interpretation of the empirical data from Obunga.

#### **STRATEGIES FOR CHALLENGING MY OWN FINDINGS**

Through the process of fieldwork and analysis I came to focus upon the *wuontich*' use of social capital to obtain a resource. In chapter five I will explain why I came to choose this particular perspective in an analysis of social capital in Obunga. In the present chapter I will merely explain how I attempted to continuously challenge my own findings in a critical way.

Social capital was a concept I brought with me into the field and it was therefore important to challenge this concept through the analysis. The use of negative cases and the weighing of interviews have been the main strategies that I have applied to ensure reflexivity in the process of interpreting the empirical material.

To uphold a critical distance to the analytical categories applied in the discussion I used an approach where I consistently looked for 'negative cases' that would challenge my own assumptions. The analysis will show that I discuss these negative cases where available. Miles and Huberman emphasise that looking for negative evidence is one way of confirming findings (1984:241).

The idea of the instrumental construction and use of social capital among the Obunga *wuontich* was also challenged by weighing the data. Again, Miles and Huberman provide an important tactic for testing findings. They say that the weighing of data might ensure that only material of high quality is included in the analysis (1984:236) During fieldwork, the interviews were given points from zero to four according to certain criteria.<sup>27</sup> Only interviews graded two points or more will underlie the analysis. The use of a tape recorder was given one as opposed to zero points because this conveys rich and detailed data. Lack of disturbance, by for example interruption during the interview, was awarded with one point. Interviews conducted without the interpreter were also given one point, as the information was not 'filtered' on its way from the informant to the researcher. Feeling of good communication is the last criterion and was rewarded with one point. Good communication was characterised by a continuous flow of conversation.

Weighing according to these criteria resulted in the fact that only thirty-four of a total of seventy-five interviews have been used as a basis for the discussion.

All these criteria might be discussed as potentially negative or positive to the interview situation. An obvious argument against the use of such criteria is that they are set according to subjective evaluations of the interview situation. One might also argue that this grading of interviews is somewhat reductive in that it does not embrace the full complexity of the reality surrounding the interview situation. Another critique might be that the women interviewed with interpreter and without the tape recorder in Obunga were at a maximum given two points for lack of disturbance and good communication. The use of a Dholuo-English interpreter was often a necessity in Obunga where very few female informants spoke English.<sup>28</sup> To compensate for this I have chosen to put as much emphasis on interviews given two points as interviews given four points.

Despite the discussions surrounding these criteria, I argue that 'grading' is a useful way of weighing the evidence.<sup>29</sup> This might be an important precondition for a good and thorough analysis of the empirical material.

The discussion has showed that several tactics have been applied to challenge the theoretical concept of the instrumental use of social capital in relation to the empirical findings. These strategies have contributed to upholding an important critical distance to the empirical findings.

#### THE EMPIRICAL EXPRESSIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL AND INSTRUMENTALITY

Establishing empirical expressions of the theoretical concepts is a challenge that must be dealt with adequately. A reoccurring problem in qualitative analysis is that the observable data do not correspond exactly with the theoretical concepts (Phelan & Reynolds 1996:115). I will address this problem in relation to two of the most important terms in this discussion, namely, social capital and instrumentality.

During fieldwork I did not have a precise understanding of the empirical expressions of social capital, but I interviewed *wuontich* in depth about their social relations with the *jawero*, and what they perceived to be the prime criteria for access to skeletons. While interpreting the empirical material I realised that I needed a more narrow definition in order to distinguish social capital from ordinary business relations. The richness of the data allowed me to define social capital in a more precise manner. I was inspired by Bourdieu's explanation of social capital where he emphasises that membership in a group or a network provides the members with a 'credential' that facilitates the canalisation of resources through social relations (Bourdieu 1986:249). I thus started to look for the importance of merry-go-round membership and family bonds as two empirical examples of network associations that would stand as a guarantor for the flow of resources between members of this same group in a business setting. Later, the Mgongo Wazi

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<sup>27</sup> This methodology is also described by Hunt, Wilder and Wahlke 1964. See also appendix 2

<sup>28</sup> Many of the female Obunga inhabitants seem to lack formal schooling. They use Dholuo as their primary language.

<sup>29</sup> Having reviewed these interviews I have verified that the rejected interviews did not contain any systematic information of value to the analysis.

Group will also be included as a network that has potential value as social capital. The empirical expression of social capital in Obunga is shared group membership between a *wuontich* and a *jawero* who interact as business partners in Obunga. Family bonds and merry-go-round membership have been mentioned as examples of such networks. The discussion will explore the extent to which shared membership in a network between *wuontich* and *jawero* is significant for the flow of resources through their relationship, and thereby constitutes social capital to the *wuontich*. An important aspect of the operationalisation of the term is that these bonds only constitute potential social capital to the agent. It is when resources are mobilised through these bonds that the social relation constitutes social capital. The main theme of the discussion will be the mechanisms that influence mobilisation of resources through these social bonds.

Instrumental construction and use of social capital constitute integral parts of the analytic discussion. This poses a challenge, as data on the informants' motivations for action is relatively inaccessible. During interviews it proved challenging to encourage the informants to reflect upon motivations for the choices they made. The data obtained referred more to concrete action and praxis than to motivations for these actions. A present danger is that I might interpret the action as instrumental while the agent herself has got a whole range of motivations for making that exact choice. Barth discusses the inaccessibility of the informants' motivations for action in his analysis of a Balinese society (1993:159). He claims that by spending time with the informants in their social universe, it becomes possible to make intelligent guesses about their motivations for action (1993:160). As I conducted a broad range of interviews and spent considerable time in Obunga, I should be equipped with some knowledge about the social and economic reality of the informants. This might, according to Barth facilitate my interpretations of the *wuontich*' motivations for action. It is nevertheless important to understand that data about instrumentality are subtle. Motivations for action are rarely stated explicitly. The interpretation of actions as instrumental should thus be perceived as associated with a certain level of uncertainty. This insight will underlie the subsequent interpretation of the instrumental use of social capital among the Obunga *wuontich*.

## THE CASE STUDY

A case study represents a bounded context in which one studies events, processes and outcomes (Miles and Huberman 1984:28). Although the Obunga study describes such a bounded context it is nevertheless my intention to use the Obunga findings in a more general debate on social capital in the urban informal setting. Lofland claims that one of the criteria for generalisation from a case study is the use of a generic analytical framework. I have attempted to engage in a dialogue with major theoretical contributions on social capital. This has enabled me to relate my findings to the larger debate on social capital. The establishment of findings has been generated in a continuous dialogue with major theorists. It has thus become possible to 'lift' the findings from the Obunga study up to a higher level and relate them to more general debates on social capital in the urban informal sector.

Another prerequisite for the generalisation of the findings in a case study is the validity of the data collection the analysis. This chapter represents an attempt to display a critical and reflexive attitude to the process of collecting and analysing the empirical material from Obunga.

This critical attitude is, according to Kvale, a prerequisite for the validity and thus the generic value of the findings (1997:168). The discussion has shown that I have reflected on my own role and my influence on the informants in the field. It also demonstrates that I have attempted to criticise my own findings and theoretical assumptions during the process of analysing the material. These are all factors that contribute to increasing the validity of the data and thus form a basis for the generalisation of the findings from the Obunga case study.

The critical discussion of the methodology and analysis in combination with the dialogue with major theoretical contributions will stand as arguments in favour of the contribution of the Obunga findings to the larger debate on social capital in the urban informal sector.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has described the process of collecting and analysing material describing construction and use of social capital in Obunga. The strengths and weaknesses of using in-depth interviews and observation as methodological strategy has been described. I have also explained how certain factors, like my own role and the subtle character of certain data might have influenced my access to data on the *wuontich*' use of social capital in Obunga.

The second part of the chapter dealt with the process of interpreting data on social capital. My efforts to uphold a critical distance to my own concepts have been described. I have also outlined that the weighing of interviews and the use of negative examples have been the two main strategies that I have applied to challenge my own assumptions and concepts. The weighing of interviews will underlie the coming discussions in a subtle way. The use of negative cases as a strategy will become visible through the debates in the next two chapters, as I continuously attempt to challenge my findings by providing contradictory examples. This will enhance a critical debate of the findings.

## 5. THE VALUE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

In this chapter I will attempt to assess the value of social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*<sup>30</sup>. This will be done by discussing different aspects of how social capital is constructed and used in Obunga. Social capital will in this discussion be understood as network-based social bonds between *jawero* and *wuontich* that facilitate the *wuontich*' access to skeletons.

The discussion will address whether the *wuontich* perceive social capital as a valuable resource that facilitates their access to skeletons. Statements from the informants are used to establish the types of bonds that might constitute social capital in this environment. The limiting capacity social capital will also be discussed. This limiting capacity will be expressed as pressure towards group-oriented behaviour. I will explore whether the agents see themselves as being under such pressure from the social groups that might constitute social capital. These debates will provide knowledge of the possibilities and limitations for the use of social capital in Obunga. This information will give indications of the value of social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*.

In chapter two, I outlined that a conception of instrumental agents constructing and using social capital to obtain resources would be applied in the analysis. I will debate whether this theoretical assumption is applicable to the Obunga setting. This debate will also provide information on the value of social capital as any potential instrumental use of such probably increases its value as a resource in this setting.

The discussion will start with an overview of how I came to reflect upon social capital as an important resource to the *wuontich*. I then move on to debate whether the *wuontich* themselves see social capital as a valuable resource that facilitates their access to skeletons. This debate will be followed by a discussion of the potentially limiting capacity of social capital. I then discuss whether the *wuontich* construct and use social capital instrumentally in this environment before I sum up the main findings from the preceding discussion.

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<sup>30</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the discussion in this chapter deals with the value of social capital to the *wuontich* during the dry season. The next chapter will discuss the seasonal impact on the construction and use of social capital.

## UNDERSTANDING THE *WUONTICH* BUSINESS STRATEGIES

Social capital has been outlined as the analytical tool that will be used to understand the business strategies of the Obunga *wuontich*. I will attempt to recapitulate the empirical findings that allowed me to start reflecting upon social capital as an appropriate key to the understanding of how the *wuontich* manage to keep their businesses running.

Theoretical writings on work organisations in informal settlements had prepared me for the importance of social capital to the survival of the Obunga *wuontich*' businesses (Portes 1995, Tvedten & Nangulah 1999). Specific research on Kenyan society also suggested traditions of strong informal networks in more formalised work structures (Macoloo 1988, Seierup 1994).

It was nevertheless ongoing quarrels and conflicts that brought my attention to the importance of social relations in the skeleton business. When I first arrived in the field there was shortage of supplies, and I was informed that many people were dissatisfied with the way the skeletons were distributed. The distribution was supposed to be conducted according to formalised lists, but many *wuontich* complained that the *jawero* gave priority to *wuontich* with whom they had special affiliation. This seemed like an indication that the skeletons were still distributed according to personal contacts rather than according to a formalised system.

Disagreements on the distribution of fish evolved into a conflict between the Umbrella Group and some of the *jawero*. Actions taken during this conflict and the language used by the involved parties further sustained my assumption of social alliances as a resource in the skeleton business. A main motivation for the two parties seemed to be mobilisation of people in their quest for power. This strengthened the notion I had of social networks as a resource in Obunga.

Other factors also indicated social bonds as a potential resource to the people employed in the skeleton industry. All business relations, between *wuontich* and *jawero* and between *wuontich* and worker alike, were conducted by people in personal interaction. Several statements from the informants revealed that social bonds, like membership in a saving group or family relations, could be mobilised for business purposes. This praxis suggested that the key to business success might lie in the content and quality of these interactions. The assumption of social capital as an important asset in the skeleton business thus evolved.

The detection of social relations as an important part of the *wuontich*' business strategies was, however, only a very first step towards a deeper understanding of the nature of social capital. The aspects of social relations that constitute them as capital to the possessors need to be discussed and explored in depth in order to capture the complexity of social capital. What is the nature of these relations? To what extent do my theoretically informed expectations reflect the empirical situation in Obunga? These questions will be raised in my attempt to understand the value of social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*.

## PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

This discussion will deal with social bonds as a potential asset in the *wuontich*' struggle to obtain skeletons. I will discuss whether the *wuontich* perceive the *jawero* to give priority to *wuontich* to whom they have social affiliation when the skeletons are distributed. The discussion will show that there are diverging opinions on whether social capital actually facilitates access to skeletons

or not. In addition, I will attempt to pin down the degree to which social bonds only constitute social capital to the *wuontich* under certain conditions. My focus is laid on the Obunga agents' own perceptions of social capital as a valuable asset in this industry. The empirical expressions of social bonds that potentially constitute capital to the *wuontich* will become evident as the informants themselves express what they perceive to be the types of social affiliation that facilitate access to skeletons.

Do social bonds between *wuontich* and *jawero* matter when the skeletons are distributed in Obunga? Former *wuontich* Janet seems to indicate that the *jawero* favour some of the *wuontich*. She expresses:

The fish is not equally distributed. The *jawero* have their customers to whom they give priority.

The citation indicates that certain underlying mechanisms in the relationship between the *jawero* and the *wuontich* incline the *jawero* to give priority to some of the *wuontich*. The question is whether it is already established social bonds or other factors that motivate the *jawero* to give priority to certain *wuontich*. The *wuontich* John seems to indicate that it is already existing social bonds between *jawero* and *wuontich* that will ensure that the *wuontich* gets priority when the fish skeletons are distributed:

The *jawero* are biased. They distribute according to relations.

John says that relations matter when the fish is distributed. But how are these relations expressed empirically? What relations do the Obunga *wuontich* themselves feel give priority to skeletons? Citations from Frank might bring us closer to the answer. Frank is a successful *jawero* and he describes the specific social bonds that matter when he distributes the skeletons:

The fish is not equally distributed; the *jawero* have their customers to whom they give priority. It is an advantage to be in the family or the merry-go-round of a *jawero*.

Frank states that the *wuontich*, who have family bonds<sup>31</sup> or shared group membership<sup>32</sup> with the *jawero*, may be given priority when the skeletons are distributed.

The former *wuontich* Mary seems to sustain John's perception of this as she explains how one of the smaller *jawero*, Peter, prioritises when he distributes the skeletons:

The *jawero* will give his family first. Like Peter, he always gives to his mom first.

Peter himself admits that he gives priority to his family first when questioned about issue.

These findings are a strong indication that social bonds between *wuontich* and *jawero* facilitate the *wuontich*' access to skeletons. Family bonds and shared membership in a saving –

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<sup>31</sup> I will not attempt to make a further specification of what relations 'family bonds' denote. The significant finding is that the *wuontich* themselves perceive family bonds to ensure easier access to skeletons

<sup>32</sup> Not all *wuontich* are fortunate enough to be a member of the same merry-go-round as the *jawero*. The reason for this is that earlier established merry-go-rounds might be difficult to enter for the *wuontich*. In addition, some of these groups are constituted by people who have migrated from the same area. Such groups seem to be inaccessible for *wuontich* migrating from other areas.



group have been mentioned as examples of social bonds that facilitate this access. These findings sustain the assumption that social capital is indeed a valuable asset for the Obunga *wuontich* in the struggle to obtain fish skeletons. Social networks, manifested in family relations and shared merry-go-round membership, clearly represent social bonds through which resources might be mobilised in Obunga.

There are, however, diverging opinions on this issue. Some informants seem to indicate that personal affiliation has less significance when the skeletons are distributed. The *wuontich* Eve sees the distribution of skeletons as a mere business transaction between the *jawero* and the *wuontich*:

The *jawero* just gives you fish as a businessperson. If you don't get today you will get tomorrow.

The statement indicates that the skeletons are distributed according to a formalised business relationship between the *wuontich* and the *jawero*. In this view, established social bonds are less important factors when it comes to the distribution of the skeletons. This finding probably decreases the value of social capital to the *wuontich*. Many of the informants in Obunga share this view. This finding represents a counter-argument to the assumption of family bonds and merry-go-round affiliation as social capital to the *wuontich*. I will argue that the earlier cited statements on quarrels over unequal distribution of skeletons, and the priority given to family members and merry-go-round associates suggest a reading of social bonds as valuable social capital ensuring easier access to skeletons.

Family bonds and merry-go-round membership have been mentioned as social bonds that might constitute social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*. In order to achieve a thorough understanding of this issue I will now present arguments against viewing family bonds as important social capital in this area. This discussion underscores that as there are few family bonds in Obunga, such bonds do not constitute important social capital to the *wuontich*. Several informants claim that family bonds have been broken, as many people have migrated from rural areas to Obunga in search for a livelihood. Nelly, a District Social Development Officer engaged in Obunga issues, puts it this way:

The family is supposed to be the first helper in case of problems. A problem with rural-urban migration is that family bonds dissolve. Everyone is trying to find a livelihood for him or herself. The old ones are left at home (...) with the high AIDS related death rates the bonds get strained and they get weaker.

The *wuontich* John seems to sustain this as he says:

Family relations are not so common in the skeleton business.

These citations point to the same issue from different angles. Nelly depicts socio-structural characteristics of Obunga that explain the relative absence of family bonds in Obunga, while John experiences the exact same reality at a very local level. These citations indicate that family bonds should not be overrated as social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*, due to the fact that very many of them do not possess these social bonds with the *jawero*. Nelly also points to the fact that family bonds, to the extent that they exist, might be strained and weak due to severe economic pressure.

Observations from Obunga, combined with citations from informants still indicate that family relations, to the extent that they exist, matter and constitute social capital to the *wuontich*

when the skeletons are distributed. The strongest indication of this is complaints from many of the *wuontich* that the *jawero* do not distribute the skeletons equally, and that they give priority to their family and saving group associates. Excerpts from my field notes explain the situation:

There are complaints among the members in the Umbrella Group that the fish is not distributed equally, they have had meetings where this was discussed. The *wuontich* say that the *jawero* give skeletons to their family and merry-go-round members, and that those without such connections are disfavoured (Field notes 03/10-99).

The *wuontich* Betty sustains this observation as she explains:

When there is little fish the *jawero* look for their merry-go-round friends and family first: many people don't get. There are quarrels over this because of the discrimination.

The clearly voiced complaints from some of the *wuontich* over unequal distribution of skeletons taken together with strong signs of disagreements among the informants, sustain the argument that the *jawero* gives priority to the *wuontich* with whom he shares social bonds. The quarrels that Betty refers to might sustain the previous observation that many of the *wuontich* indeed have no family bonds with the *jawero*. But Betty simultaneously points out that to the extent that family bonds exist they can be seen as social capital to the *wuontich*. As many of the *wuontich* lack such bonds, the injustice of family members being given priority might exacerbate the quarrels and complaints.

The significance of family bonds as social capital has been discussed and merry-go-round membership has been mentioned as a social bond that might constitute social capital. I will now move on to discuss the significance of both these types of social relations. Betty's citation mentions both merry-go-round affiliation and family affiliation as facilitating access to skeletons. It is, however, worth noting one particular aspect of what Betty expresses in the above citation. She claims that the *jawero* give priority to their family and friends when 'fish is little'. Low supplies of fish naturally lead to stronger competition over resources. Could it be that family bonds and merry-go-round membership are more valuable as social capital in periods of low supply than in times of abundance?

Many empirical findings point in this direction, especially because the informants, without exception, say that during times of abundant supplies, e.g. in the rainy season, the *jawero* have difficulties disposing of the skeletons. The *wuontich* do not want to process high numbers of skeletons because the prices are low and the customers few. The specific impact of variations in supplies on the construction and use of social capital will be discussed in the next chapter. In this chapter I merely indicate that the value of social bonds between *wuontich* and *jawero* seems to be considerably higher in times of low supplies. The findings indicate that level of supply might influence the value of social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*. The informants also mention one other factor that might affect the way resources are mobilised through the social network. Mary reveals that the *wuontich* might have to fulfil certain criteria in order to convert her social bonds into social capital. Referring to a *wuontich*' situation she says:

Being in the same merry-go-round as the *jawero* can be important but the most important thing is that you pay regularly to the *jawero*.

Mary identifies payment rather than social affiliation as the most important dimension of the *jawero-wuontich* business relation. She continues by saying that economic capital might be the

most important factor considered when the skeletons are distributed even between family members:

With *wuontich* and *jawero* it is the payment that counts, the *jawero* will not give to his cousin if she does not pay.

These citations indicate that the assumption of social bonds as a strategic asset for the *wuontich* is only valid if other criteria, like prompt payment for the skeletons, are effectuated. Mary continues:

In this business money talks. So many people depend so much on this money. In this business money is number one and relations are number two. When it comes to blood relations, money might well be number two.

Mary's citations indicate that family and merry-go-round relations can only be used as social capital when the economic capital flows between *wuontich* and *jawero*. This statement is also sustained by other informants. Input of economic capital might be needed to realise the full potential of social bonds as social capital. In her first citation she states that even the cousin has to pay, but she later makes an exception for what she calls 'blood relations' which might denote the closest family members. For other people with whom the *jawero* shares social bonds and for people not in close family with the *jawero*, payment seems to be a requirement for social bonds to constitute social capital.

In order to achieve a full understanding of the value of social capital to the *wuontich*, it might be interesting to explore what agents with no social capital in the form of social bonds with the *jawero* do to obtain skeletons. It actually seems as if the main strategy to obtain skeletons of the *wuontich* who has no social bonds with the *jawero* is prompt payment and a good business relation with the *jawero*. Peter says that if you do not know the *jawero* it is of particular importance to work hard and to pay the *jawero* in advance:

If you do not know the *jawero* it is important to be seen as reliable and to get many customers. These good business women are often the young ones. They can afford to pay many *jawero* in advance and they therefore get a lot of fish, capital and customers.

It seems to be particularly important to do business well and to give an impression of reliability if the agent does not share social bonds with the *jawero*. This might be a strategy to create a relationship of confidence that will ensure access to skeletons. On the other hand, reliability and advance payment seem to be an important criterion to obtain skeletons even for the *wuontich* who share social bonds with the *jawero*. The deduction from this might be that as the informants claim that it is an advantage to share social bonds with the *jawero*, social capital seems to enhance access to skeletons. It nevertheless seems to be important for all the *wuontich*, with or without social capital, to maintain good business relations with the *jawero* in order to obtain skeletons from him.

The empirical findings as a whole seem to sustain the assumption that social capital is a valuable resource to the *wuontich* in Obunga. The informants themselves have mentioned that family bonds and shared saving group membership between *wuontich* and *jawero* increase the *wuontich*' access to skeletons. The transmission of resources according to such bonds can be seen as social capital as it represents social relations which enhance economic profitability in a given context. Family bonds and merry-go-round membership will necessarily have different qualities as social capital, as they represent different types of social bonds. Some of these differences will

hopefully emerge as they are discussed separately as bonds that might impose a limitation on the *wuontich*' scope of action.

The discussion has nevertheless shown that the assumption of social capital as a valuable asset to the *wuontich* needs some modification. It seems as if certain criteria must be present in order to fully utilise social capital as a valuable asset. A very important finding is that economic capital seems to be a criterion for social bonds to be converted into social capital. This view was not incorporated in the theoretical framework for the sheer reason that this issue is not much present in social capital theories. Social capital is commonly viewed as a form of capital prevalent among the poor because they lack other forms of capital (World Bank homepage 2001). The findings from Obunga underline, however, that input of economic capital seems to be a criterion for social bonds to function as a strategic asset to the *wuontich*. This has implications for theoretical reflections on poverty and social capital. The very poor might not possess the economic means required to realise the full potential of social capital. The view of social capital as a non-monetary form of capital among the poor thus needs modification.

The need for the input of economic capital to realise the full potential of social capital can also be seen as affecting the value of social capital to the *wuontich*. This resource is not readily usable but needs economic incentives to facilitate access to skeletons. The expenses associated with the use of social capital might imply that the value of this resource decreases to some extent.

#### **SOCIAL CAPITAL AS A LIMITATION**

This discussion will address the limiting effect social bonds might have on the Obunga *wuontich*. It has been emphasised that social bonds under certain circumstances can represent valuable assets to the *wuontich* in Obunga. The theoretical framework of this dissertation points out, however, that social capital can also be a hindrance to the agent's scope of action. It was emphasised that possession of social bonds might impose limitations in the form of pressure towards group-oriented behaviour.<sup>33</sup> This aspect of social capital will be discussed with specific reference to the potentially limiting impact of merry-go-round membership and family bonds on the Obunga *wuontich*. These relations will be dealt with separately. I will also discuss whether the potentially limiting capacity of social capital might have an affect on the value of this resource to the Obunga *wuontich*.

It was previously stated that the *jawero* might distribute fish skeletons in favour of the *wuontich* with membership in the same saving group as them. Membership in a merry-go-round might thus represent social capital to the *wuontich*. On the other hand, merry-go-round membership can imply restrictions on the *wuontich*' business activities in the form of pressure towards group-oriented behaviour. Membership in a merry-go-round might imply that the participant's personal economy is closely scrutinised by the other members in the group to ensure that the member fulfils her economic obligations towards the group. The *wuontich* Eve explains the logic behind forming a merry-go-round group. She emphasises the importance of choosing people for the group who are easily monitored:

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<sup>33</sup> 'Group-oriented behaviour' can denote a broad range of norm pressures. In this discussion I choose to see pressure towards group-oriented behaviour as the expectation to comply with economic obligations.

What they consider when they choose people is the frequency of the person in the field. If you come frequently there is less chance that you will run away from the contributions.

Eve states that members of merry-go-rounds are surveyed in the field, in order to ensure that they remain faithful to the group. This praxis is further sustained by the fact that many of the merry-go-rounds are composed of members with the same occupation in the field. Several informants claim that this is done in order to be able to keep an eye on the economic activities of the members of the group. Mary outlines an important criterion for asking a *wuontich* to join the merry-go-round:

An important thing is that you can survey the person's business and know about her money if she is in your merry-go-round. Some merry-go-rounds go according to where you have your stall, and some don't.

Mary underlines that it is important to have a certain overview of the potential member's economic dispositions. She even indicates that physical proximity in the field helps in monitoring the *wuontich*' economic behaviour. Both Mary and Eve underscore that members of the merry-go-rounds are under surveillance in the field. The question is to what extent this surveillance imposes a limitation on the *wuontich*' business activities.

One would imagine that surveillance by other saving group members would implicate a limitation on the *wuontich*' business activities. There is clearly an element of pressure towards group-oriented behaviour in this activity. The question of the exact impact of this praxis on the *wuontich*' business activities remains unanswered. During interviews very few informants complained that other merry-go-round members scrutinised their actions in any way. The most obvious sign of imposed limitations is negative assessment from other *wuontich* in cases where the *wuontich* chooses to run away from her economic obligations to the saving group. In these cases the *wuontich*' future actions can be limited in the sense that she is excluded from saving group participation in the future. The Umbrella Group official and former *wuontich* Sara explains:

Some people are con-people. They know that they cannot afford to pay for everyone in the merry-go-round, so they get an early number and they leave when they have got their own share. But you can get a bad reputation and then you will not be allowed in other groups.

Sara points out that those merry-go-round members who do not comply with the collective expectations and run without having paid their share risk being excluded from other groups in the future. But exclusion can hardly be perceived as a limitation of the *wuontich*' business activities as exclusion is based upon a deliberate action taken by the *wuontich* herself. It is hard to establish that the *wuontich* feel limited in any way by their merry-go-round membership. On the contrary, the fact that many of them choose to run away from the groups might indicate that the pressure towards compliance with collective norms is low. Once again Sara explains:

Another thing is that there was more money in the business earlier. Today there are many problems and few merry-go-rounds. The reason why many merry-go-rounds fail is that there is too little money. Some people also leave when they have got their money. Some people don't care what others say about you when you leave before you have paid your share to the others in the group.

Sara indicates that many *wuontich* really do not care about the threat of exclusion from the merry-go-rounds if they run away from your economic obligations. This could be a sign that merry-go-round membership has low limiting capacity on the Obunga *wuontich*. Indeed Sara underlines that

'some' people do not care about the sanctions of others when they run away from the group. This might thus not be the case for all the *wuontich*. The significant leakage of people from these groups seems however to be an indication that people do not feel particularly inclined to comply with expectations to honour economic obligations. This is an argument that contradicts the initial theoretical perspective of agents strategically complying with norms to obtain a resource. A logical deduction from the above findings seems to be that the limitation of social capital, symbolised in pressure towards compliance with economic obligations, seems not to be very prevalent in the case of social capital in the form of merry-go-round membership.

One could ponder upon the reasons for this. On the one hand, merry-go-round membership seems to constitute important social capital to the *wuontich*. On the other hand, the *wuontich* do not seem particularly eager to fulfil the obligations that would ensure continuous affiliation with the group. The reason for this might be that some of the *wuontich* have several options for income-generating activities. Nathalie, a Community Development Assistant in Obunga, underscores this reality:

People in Obunga are coming and going all the time. There are severe fluctuations in staff. Some go back to their homes when the business is bad.

The lack of limitations in the form of group-oriented behaviour might have its explanation in the fact that the *wuontich* are able to switch between income-generating activities. One might assume that dependency on the merry-go-round decreases when one has several income-generating activities. The limitation in the form of group-oriented behaviour thus becomes less severe.

If this assumption is true there might be reason to believe that a difference between men and women exists in this field. Female *wuontich* might be more dependent on the merry-go-round as social capital and thus be more exposed to limitations imposed by the group. The reason for this is that many of the women who have come to Obunga have few opportunities to go home to their village to engage in agricultural activities, which is an important income-generating activity in this area. The reason why many women are restrained from returning to their villages is intimately associated with Luo marriage customs<sup>34</sup>. The District Development Officer Nelly explains that many women have lost their possibility to go home to the village:

Some times the in-laws from the villages can throw them away. The women don't know their legal rights. In some cases there is a big pressure against them.

Mary sustains this view in her explanation of the situation:

Many women were chased away so they cannot go back to the village. Many of them are not liked by the family of the husband. It is difficult to go back and stay with the parents. Like myself, I am a single mother but at my age I am not allowed to go home and stay with my parents. I can just go as a visitor. Some of the in-laws snatch land from the women. Others are ok and think about the kids.

If this is the case, one might believe that the women have fewer arenas for income-generating activities and are thus more exposed to limitations in the form of group-oriented behaviour. This assumption is interesting but difficult to sustain for two reasons. One of them deals with the fact that the women actually seem to have alternative arenas for work outside the skeleton business.

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<sup>34</sup> See chapter three for in-depth information on these mechanisms.

The other reason deals with lack of information on the people who choose to dishonour their obligations to the saving group.

Even Nelly later admitted that the women, be the widowed or single, actually have possibilities to go home to their own parents and engage in agricultural activities there. They also have the possibility to earn money from *Changaa*<sup>35</sup>-brewing, sale of clothes or prostitution:

Some sell their bodies when business is low. Some like this and some people do not. Some look upon their body as a source of income. It is not as much prostitution as earlier, but these numbers will increase. Doing petty trade is another source of income to these ladies, they sell teaspoons of soap and small quantities of other commodities (...).

The citation highlights the fact that the women are not solely dependent on the skeleton business for income. A logical deduction from this might be that they are less dependent on merry-go-round membership as social capital. The assumption of a gender difference in the dependence on merry-go-round membership as social capital, and thus vulnerability to limitations imposed by this group, seems to be difficult to sustain. Another reason for this is that there are no specific data confirming that men are more inclined to run away from the merry-go-round group than women.

The most reasonable deduction from this is that since the Obunga agents seem to have several sources of income they are less vulnerable to limitations imposed by the saving group. As merry-go-round membership is not necessarily the most important form of social capital for people who switch between arenas of work, one can imagine that they feel less prone to be limited by social demands for group-oriented behaviour. Social capital, in the form of merry-go-round membership, thus seems to have a small limiting capacity on the Obunga *wuontich*.

Family bonds were previously mentioned as social bonds that could represent social capital to the *wuontich* in Obunga. Several quotations stated that the *jawero* tend to give priority to family members when the skeletons are distributed. One could on the other hand imagine that family bonds represent a limitation on the *wuontich*' business activities. Granovetter emphasises that family bonds might indeed limit the possessor's scope of action (Granovetter 1995). He points out the fact that non-economic loyalties, like family bonds, are not particularly growth-oriented. This opens for a view of family bonds as limiting the *wuontich*' business prosperity. Whisson states that among the Luo, such family bonds have traditionally had a strong limiting capacity on business prosperity (Whisson 1988). Betty explains how she reasons when she employs workers:

It is better with people from the field than family. The family can play around with the business.

Mary puts this in a more emphatic way:

Many people have employed family members but they went down (...) the family is often after your downfall (...)

Mary and Betty do not give concrete examples of the limiting capacity of family bonds. They merely hint that employing family members might be problematic. They provide indications that family bonds might indeed impose certain limitation on the *wuontich*.

Against the assumption of family bonds as a limiting capacity stands the finding that *wuontich* do not seem to feel obliged to employ family members as workers. As the theoretical framework is open for an understanding of the totality of the family network as social capital, it is

relevant to also look to the *wuontich*-worker relation rather than merely to the *wuontich-jawero* relation to find signs of the limiting capacity of family bonds.

The *wuontich* Peter states that employing family members as workers might be bad for the business, as they do not always perform well:

The family members don't work with the same courage so some people don't want them.

This sustains the assumption that family bonds might indeed impose a limitation on the *wuontich*' business prosperity. Family members might work less diligently and expect the same payment. In that capacity they might contribute to decreased profits for the *wuontich*.

The latter part of Peter's citation reveals, however, that the limiting capacity of having family members as workers is not as severe as anticipated. He states that since family members do not work very hard: "some people don't want them". He continues:

The *wuontich* can choose anyone, they can go through the family member but usually they employ ordinary workers.

Peter points out that the *wuontich* do not feel obliged to hire family members as workers. Other *wuontich* and workers in the field sustain this attitude. Mary says:

In business there are really no relationships. You don't need relatives in your business. My business is my business.

By this statement she seems to indicate that the *wuontich* do not feel particularly inclined to hire family members. Due to the fact that employment of family members does not seem to be obligatory, family bonds cannot be said to have a limiting capacity on the *wuontich*' business activities. Of course, family bonds might impose a limitation in other respects, but examples of this were not given in the conversations with the informants.

This finding contrasts with Granovetter's earlier presented assumption that family bonds might limit the agent's business strategies. He claims in a study of Indonesia that family bonds that can be perceived as an asset can simultaneously limit the individual's business opportunities. Granovetter does not actually use the term social capital, but his findings still underline that family bonds in the Obunga study display different qualities than what is often expected in the urban informal sector.

It has proved difficult to sustain the view that family bonds limit the business prosperity of the Obunga *wuontich*. The *wuontich* profit from their family relations with the *jawero*, but obviously do not feel obliged to hire family members as workers. If family bonds impose limitations on the *wuontich*, it was not readily apparent through interviews. It must be noted that this finding can perhaps partly be explained by methodological weaknesses because I did not introduce a division between close and more distant family relations. I thus have to base my findings upon the fact that the informants do not perceive family relations (in a broad sense) to significantly limit their scope of action in the skeleton industry. That family bonds might have a limiting capacity in relation to other social or economic arenas is very possible.

This finding leaves certain questions unanswered. Why is it that the Obunga *jawero* choose to give priority to the *wuontich* with whom they share family bonds, while the *wuontich* do not feel particularly inclined to employ workers they are related to? It is hard to find an answer to

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<sup>35</sup> Local alcoholic brew.



this discrepancy in sense of obligation felt at the various levels in the work organisation in Obunga. One explanation for this might be that the *jawero* might give priority to family members because he does not face a potential loss by this action. As he would demand the same payment from family members as from other agents, he might as well give priority to agents that he is related to. A *wuontich*, on the other hand, might face a potential loss by employing family members, as these often are seen to work less diligently than others. The choice to give priority to family members might thus be anchored in business concerns. It could be that Obunga agents honour family bonds only when they do not risk losing profit from it. This would explain why the *jawero* seem to honour family bonds to a greater extent than the *wuontich*.

The discussion has shown that it is difficult to establish that merry-go-round membership has a limiting capacity in relation to the *wuontich*. The *wuontich* seem to be relatively free from any pressure arising from group-expectations. One reason for this might be that the dependence on the merry-go-round as social capital seems to be limited. Many of the *wuontich* obviously have several arenas for income-generating activities and this enable them to be more instrumental in dealing with what obligations to respect. Social capital in the form of merry-go-round membership apparently does not have a strong limiting capacity on the Obunga *wuontich*, and the *wuontich*' participation in several work arenas might be one of the explanations for this.

Social capital in the form of family bonds does not seem to have a strong limiting impact on the *wuontich*' business prosperity. The limitation imposed on the *wuontich* by family members seems to be in the form of an obligation to hire family members as workers. The empirical material, however, sustains that the *wuontich* feel obliged to hire family members as workers. The totality of the findings presented here suggests that social capital in the form of family relations does not seem to have a strong limiting capacity in the form of group oriented behaviour in the skeleton industry Obunga. The initial assumption that this aspect of social capital would be present in Obunga thus needs modification.

The absence of limitations imposed by social capital might increase the value of this resource. As this is a resource that might be used without having to deal with the limiting effect of pressure encouraging group-oriented behaviour, one might assume that this increases the value of social capital to the *wuontich*.

It has been highlighted that social capital does not have a particularly limiting effect on the *wuontich*. Mariken Vaa presents similar findings in her study of an informal settlement in Bamako, Mali. She claims that the urban informal economy allows entrepreneurship and multiple employment strategies. In addition, she sees that it seems easier to escape the control of neighbours and kin in such settings (1991:142). This corresponds well with the Obunga reality where social capital does not seem to have a strong limiting capacity on the *wuontich*.

On a more general level, the absence of noticeable limiting capacity of social bonds might be perceived as a sign of social disintegration in this environment. Obunga appears to be an environment where sociability still counts as a resource, but where the inclination to submit to social norms is low. This finding stands in opposition to other studies of the urban informal sector that state that social networks that might be seen as a resource simultaneously impose limitations on the agent's scope of action (e.g. Portes 1998:9). The limiting capacity of social bonds might exist in Obunga, but it does not seem to be particularly prevalent in the skeleton industry. The

reason for this might be, as mentioned earlier, that Obunga is characterised by a large portion of immigrants struggling to uphold their livelihood. This feature of society seems to make instrumentality among the agents prevail, also in relation to social bonds. The specific social and economic realities of Obunga thus help explain why the Obunga agents do not perceive themselves to be significantly limited by their family relations and merry-go-round networks.

#### AN INSTRUMENTAL, AGENT-ORIENTED VIEW OF SOCIAL CAPITAL?

The theoretical framework indicated that an instrumental, agent oriented view of social capital would be applicable to the Obunga setting. The agent-orientation derives logically from the analytical choice to focus upon the study of social capital as a strategic resource to the Obunga *wuontich*.

The discussion of the instrumental perspective of social capital opens for deeper methodological and theoretical reflections. It has previously been established that instrumentality per se is a difficult category to detect. With these methodological limitations in mind, I will attempt to establish whether the Obunga agents instrumentally mobilise resources through their social contacts. However, the theoretical framework goes further than just stating that resources might be deliberately mobilised through existing social contacts. It opens for a view of agents deliberately constructing social networks in order to mobilise resources through them. These assumptions are theoretically challenging because only a few theorists speak of this specific feature of social capital. As a consequence, the theoretical guidelines available in this field are very vague. I nevertheless attempt to address this issue by discussing whether the agents merely mobilise resources instrumentally through existing contacts or establish social bonds with the specific aim of mobilising resources through them. If agents construct such networks strategically, can such relations be termed social capital, or do they merely constitute what we would call a 'business relationship'?

In order to capture the nuances in this field I will treat not only family relations and merry-go-round membership as social bonds that might constitute social capital but also other forms of groups and networks. The discussion will provide arguments why I perceive also these other networks to constitute social capital to the *wuontich*.

Do the Obunga *wuontich* instrumentally mobilise resources, in this case supplies of skeletons, through their existing social contacts? Instrumentality denotes a deliberate action taken in order to convert a social bond into social capital. The underlying assumption indicates that priorities given to *wuontich*, with whom the *jawero* shares a social bond, are not given without some incentive on the benefactor's side. It is a consequence of deliberate actions taken by the benefactor of the exchange.

It is difficult to detect any deliberate steps taken by the *wuontich* to be given priority because they share social bonds with the *jawero*. There are, however, some hints of instrumental mobilisation of resources through social contacts. The *wuontich* Ann explains what she does in order to get skeletons from the *jawero*:

If work is little it depends whether you know the *jawero* or not. If he knows you he will give you fish. You have to tell him about your problems and then he will give you sympathy (...) it depends on the personal connection with the *jawero*.

Ann indicates that a *wuontich* might approach the *jawero* in order to motivate him to give her priority when the skeletons are distributed. She also indicates that the *wuontich* evokes the social bonds between them. It seems like the personal approach strategy is conducted between agents with previous social affiliation. This indicates an instrumental mobilisation of social capital.

On the question of what ensures a continuous flow of skeletons, most *wuontich* say 'advance payment'. This issue was discussed earlier this chapter, and it was stated that reliable payment for the skeletons was an important aspect of realising the full potential of social capital. In Obunga, there are many ways to handle the issue of payment for the skeletons; the most favourable solution for the *jawero* is to get advance payment. Could payment be a way of instrumentally mobilising social capital? Mary talks about this:

If two *wuontich* are ready to pay the *jawero* will choose the one who is in the family or in the merry-go-round of the *jawero*.

Mary touches upon a theme that has been mentioned earlier, namely that social capital can only be perceived as a strategic asset when the *wuontich* has advance payment for the skeletons. This corresponds well with other findings in the field. Two prominent attitudes can be detected in the interviews. One of them says that personal affiliation between *wuontich* and *jawero* is a strategic asset when the fish is distributed. The other attitude stresses advance payment as the most significant criterion for obtaining supplies. These findings combined with Mary's statement indicate that payment might be used instrumentally by the *wuontich* in order to mobilise resources through their social contacts. Other findings also hint at this praxis. Again Mary explains:

The best thing you can do for your *jawero* is to pay him cash.

She continues:

Also relatives have to pay.

The quotations stress the fact that payment is an important criterion to obtain skeletons, even in cases where bonds between *jawero* and *wuontich* exist. Eve outlines what happens if a *wuontich* does not respect the norms of payment set by the *jawero*:

There might be some conflicts on the distribution of fish. Because if you give your money to the *jawero* and he does not give you fish he can normally keep the money for a week. And when your money is with the *jawero* you will be unable to buy fish for a week. You have to reduce your work and maybe start washing skeletons for someone else until you get your money. The *jawero* might refund your money if you make a fuss but if you make a fuss you might have ruined your possibilities of getting fish in the future. Many people do not disagree with the *jawero*, because if you do the *jawero* will not consider you when you have a problem.

The citation seems to reveal that violation of the norms of payment might lead to decreased access to skeletons. Eve also indicates that the *wuontich* comply with these norms as a means to access skeletons. Two deductions can be made from this. First of all payment seems to be a way of mobilising resources through social contacts. Secondly, the *wuontich*' respect of the rules of payment set by the *jawero* may be an instrumental attitude employed in order to access skeletons.

When debating instrumentality, it is also necessary to detect whether the *wuontich* construct new social networks that might later be used as social capital. Previously in this discussion, social capital was seen as a feature of pre-existing social networks like the family and merry-go-round saving group. I will now bring my understanding of social capital one step further as I explore how networks might be established for the sole purpose of accessing skeletons.

Bourdieu states that the concept of social capital embraces agents as strategically constructing social networks in order to mobilise resources through them. He says:

The existence of a network of connections is not naturally given (...) the network of relationships is the product of investment strategies, individual or collective, consciously or unconsciously aimed at establishing or reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short term or in the long term (...) (Bourdieu 1986: 249).

Strategically constructed social networks can thus also be perceived as social capital. The question is: do the Obunga *wuontich* construct networks strategically in order to obtain skeletons or other resources?

An example of the instrumental construction of social networks in order to obtain skeletons might be the incident of the establishment of the splinter group (the Mgongo Wazi Group) in Obunga. The splinter group was initiated by a handful of powerful *jawero* who wanted to escape Umbrella Group sanctions.<sup>36</sup> An empirical expression of instrumentality would be if the *wuontich* joined the splinter group with the specific aim of obtaining skeletons through the affiliation with the group. As a backdrop to this discussion, it must be said that the splinter group demanded overt statements of affiliation from *wuontich* before they would distribute the skeletons. Only *wuontich* with explicit affiliation would be given skeletons.

John explains that affiliation with the Mgongo Wazi Group is a way for the *wuontich* to access supplies:

The strength of the Mgongo Wazi group is that they own the fish. The members support the Mgongo Wazi because of the fish.

This citation tells us that affiliation with the Mgongo Wazi group is a strategic advantage because this network controls a large bulk of the supplies. It also emphasises that the *wuontich* choose to join this group as a means to access the skeletons. The latter part of the citation indicates a certain degree of instrumentality among the *wuontich*. This might imply that the *wuontich* affiliate with this network in order to access fish, and these actions can be viewed as instrumental construction of networks as a means to access skeletons.

On the other hand, Peter explains his motivations for joining the Mgongo Wazi Group:

I changed groups because it was difficult for me to stay in the Umbrella Group. The Umbrella Group thought that I was telling secrets to the Mgongo Wazi Group and I was thus suspended from the Umbrella Group.

This quotation reveals that there might be other reasons than access to fish that motivate the *wuontich* to change groups. As the division between the two groups was deeply rooted in personal controversies, there might be an entire spectrum of motivations for joining the Mgongo Wazi Group. In many cases the motivation of accessing fish might only be one among many for joining the group. Still, one might assume, and the earlier quotations sustain this, that the prospect of accessing fish is the major reason why people join the Mgongo Wazi Group. If so, this indicates that people join networks as a result of instrumental considerations. We have thus probably found

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<sup>36</sup> See chapter three for the full story of the conflict. See also appendix 4.

signs of instrumental agents in Obunga using networks as tools to access scarce resources. It is, however, important to take into consideration the whole array of motivations that might lie underneath the decision to join the Mgongo Wazi group. Social expectations, underlying obligations to other members in the group and even sanctions, as in Peter's case, might be equivalent motivations to join the splinter group.

The conflict between the Umbrella Group and the Mgongo Wazi Group opened in ways previously explained for a new situation in the field. For some of the key actors in the conflict it became important to establish a large group of people as this would be an asset in the struggle for the right to distribute the skeletons. I will argue that several agents instrumentally constructed social bonds that could later be used as social capital. At both *jawero* and *wuontich* level, latent social bonds, like clan affiliation, were evoked deliberately in order to attract members to the two groups. The *jawero* Jason expresses how some of the office bearers in the Umbrella Group used rhetoric playing on clan affiliation in order to mobilise supporters during the conflict:

These are still trying to gain power. They are not members of the Kanya Kuar<sup>37</sup> clan but they say they are in order to get support.

Jason explains how clan was used as a tool to mobilise supporters during the conflict between the Mgongo Wazi Group and the Umbrella Group. He indicates that a strong instrumentality underlies the mobilisation of supporters:

This 'clanism' thing is like a campaign from the Mgongo Wazi Group. They say that some people are victims of people from other places. The Mgongo Wazi Group was using that language to snatch people from the Umbrella Group. This kind of language was used by the officials.

Jason is talking about how the Mgongo Wazi leaders use clan as a tool to mobilise supporters. As he himself belongs to the Umbrella Group, his statement might be severely biased against the Mgongo Wazi Group. But interestingly enough, Peter from the Mgongo Wazi Group applies almost the same interpretation to the mobilisation strategies used by both groups:

There is Ugeniaism, Alegoism and Luhyaism<sup>38</sup>(...) both sides use the same language to gain supporters.

Both Peter and Jason sustain the assumption of instrumental and deliberate construction of social capital. They add the perspective of clan as a potential resource in this strategic construction of social bonds. Clan is not a common denominator that inevitably binds people together. It is a social category, or latent social capital, that might be instrumentally evoked by agents when necessary.

I have tried to argue that there are certain traces of instrumentality in the way social relations are established and used in Obunga. But if a social bond is constructed for the sole purpose of obtaining a resource, is it then not a pure business relationship rather than a relation that might constitute social capital to the *wuontich*? Very few theorists discuss this aspect of social capital in depth, preferring instead to treat existing social bonds through which resources are mobilised. I will now try to explain why I choose to see these instrumentally established social bonds as social capital rather than mere business relations.

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<sup>37</sup> Significant clan based in Obunga.

I will argue that group membership is what distinguishes social capital from a one-to-one business relationship. Again, Bourdieu helps explain this (1986). His understanding of social capital boils down to membership in a group which provides its members with collectively owned capital or a 'credential' which ensures them access to a resource (1986: 249). He opens, as earlier mentioned, for an understanding of these bonds as products of 'investment strategies'. So, if a *wuontich* joins the Mgongo Wazi Group with the specific aim of accessing skeletons, and does so by the virtue of her membership in the group, this would in a Bourdieuan understanding of the issue qualify as social capital. It is group membership that distinguishes social capital from a one-to-one business relationship. The actual exchange might be conducted between two agents, for example *wuontich* and *jawero*, but the reason for which the *wuontich* is given access to skeleton is the fact that the Mgongo Wazi *jawero* control the large bulk of skeletons and that they only distribute these skeletons to members of this group.

The establishment of social capital as originating in group affiliation excludes quite a substantial number of relations to be viewed as social capital. As the network represents the basis upon which the transaction is conducted, only network-based relations must be viewed as potentially constituting social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*. The empirical examples of network-based relations that have been mentioned are merry-go-round membership and family bonds. The Obunga agents also mention friendship as a social bond that ensures increased access to skeletons, but if these friendship relations do not have their origin in networks, they cannot be identified as relations that constitute social capital to the *wuontich*. For a social bond to be seen as social capital it must have its reference to, or root in a larger network that provides access to a resource by its virtue of being a network.

The discussion asked whether an instrumental, agent oriented view of social capital would be applicable to an analysis of Obunga. The debates that followed underlined that the *wuontich* seem to be instrumentally mobilising social capital by directly approaching the *jawero* to ensure that resources flow through the social bonds. In addition, the discussion of the conflict seemed to indicate that the agents in Obunga even construct new networks in order to be able to use them as social capital. These findings sustain the theoretical assumption of instrumentality as a prevalent source of social capital in Obunga.

One can probably also assume that the ability to instrumentally construct and use social capital increases the value of social capital to the Obunga *wuontich*. As this is a resource that that can be mobilised at the agent's will, it seems to be readily usable as a strategic asset in this environment.

## CONCLUSION

The discussion in this chapter has provided an understanding of the value of social capital. Citations of Obunga informants revealed that social capital is indeed a valuable resource to the agents because it facilitates access to skeletons. Family bonds and merry-go-round relations were found to be social networks that could be used as social capital and thus facilitate the agent's access to skeletons. Indeed, economic input and seasonal variations were seen to be factors that

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<sup>38</sup> Area-based clans and tribes.

affected the value of social capital to the agents. Social capital nevertheless seems to be perceived as a valuable resource that might facilitate access to skeletons in Obunga.

My theoretical framework also assumed that the social network would have a limiting effect on participants in the network. Findings from Obunga indicate that this assumption must be moderated. Neither family bonds nor merry-go-round membership were seen to have a particularly limiting capacity on the agents. This finding indicates that the value of social capital as a resource is high because the use of this resource does not seem to imply any cost to the agents in the form of pressure towards group-oriented behaviour.

Through the theoretical debate I launched the assumption that an instrumental, agent-oriented view of social capital would be applicable to the analysis of Obunga. The discussion has shown that the agents indeed seem to instrumentally mobilise resources through their social bonds. It was also recognised that the agents constructed new social networks in order to later use them as social capital. This view of the instrumental *wuontich* stresses that social capital is not a static commodity, but a resource over which the agents enjoy a certain amount of control. This probably increases the value of social capital to the *wuontich*.

The discussion revealed, however, that it is important to distinguish between social capital and one-to-one business relations. It was stated that in order to view a social bond as social capital, this bond has to be rooted in a larger network that provides a 'credential' that facilitates transactions through the social bond. This finding implies that only social bonds rooted in larger networks should in the subsequent discussion be viewed as constituting potential social capital to the *wuontich*. This distinction becomes important as I continue the discussion of social capital in Obunga as it sets a standard for what relations should be viewed as constituting social capital to the *wuontich*.

## 6. THE FLEXIBILITY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The focus of this chapter is how the Obunga *wuontich* construct and use social capital, in the form of social bonds with the *jawero*, under dramatic contextual changes. Dramatic contextual changes will be perceived as externally imposed shocks that profoundly influence the organisation of the skeleton industry. This debate will provide material for a discussion of the flexibility of social capital. Flexibility will broadly refer to opportunities for the construction and use of social capital under dramatic contextual changes.

The discussion will show that existing ways of organising interaction are challenged by dramatic contextual changes. In the establishment of new interaction and exchange patterns, certain features of the social relation become visible. Power relations manifest themselves because certain agents take control over distribution after the transition. Likewise, inequalities emerge as certain agents lose their ability to fully participate in the new exchange structure. A study of these processes can provide new knowledge of the flexibility of social capital in Obunga. One of the major findings that will come out of the discussion is that instrumentally constructed and used social capital is characterised by instability. The reason for this is that the *wuontich*, although encountering some limitations in their construction and use of social capital, in most cases seem to be able to flexibly establish new social bonds and to use old social bonds in new ways. This aspect of social capital will become particularly evident through the discussion of how a situation of conflict made the *wuontich* construct new social bonds that might function as social capital.

I have in this chapter chosen to deal with both the social bonds between *wuontich* and *jawero* that might be used as social capital, as well as the larger networks that provide the 'credential' that might facilitate transaction through these bonds. Both these aspects will be seen as parts of social capital in Obunga. The inclusion of these elements in the discussion is done in order to ensure a broad understanding of the construction and use of social capital under dramatic contextual changes. In every subchapter I will attempt to specify which part of the social capital relation I am discussing, and also outline to what extent I see this as construction of new bonds that might constitute social capital or new ways of using already established bonds as social capital. Construction and use of social capital will not be distinguished as separate entities in the larger discussion of the flexibility of social capital.



It has proved challenging to obtain data on how the *wuontich* construct and use social capital under some of the dramatic contextual changes. Certain dramatic contextual changes are subtle, albeit dramatic, and therefore not reflected upon by the informants. In addition, the statements that are used in this chapter often describe a business relation rather than what I have already established as social capital: namely social bonds between *wuontich* and *jawero* that are rooted in shared group membership, family structures or merry-go rounds. I have attempted to deal with these challenges by continuously evaluating whether the statements actually describe features of social capital relations.

Four dramatic contextual changes will constitute strategic entry points into the discussion of the flexibility of social capital in Obunga. These four entry points are: EU regulations, seasonal variations, declining supplies and conflict. Under each heading, the background for the contextual change will be presented, after which the *wuontich*' construction and use of social capital in the new situation is discussed. I then debate what the *wuontich*' construction and use of social capital in this situation reveal about the flexibility of social capital. The discussions of seasonal variation and declining supplies are in many ways intertwined as they both deal with variations in supplies. Comparisons between the *wuontich*' use of social capital under these two contextual changes will thus be made consecutively.

## EU REGULATIONS

One dramatic contextual change that profoundly affected the organisation of the skeleton industry was the introduction of EU hygiene regulations. I will discuss how the *wuontich* constructed social capital under this dramatic contextual change. I emphasise that this discussion deals with the social bond between *jawero* and *wuontich* that might be used as social capital, but not the network that these bonds emerge from. The discussion will show that there seemed to be gender inequalities in the *wuontich*' ability to become *jawero* under dramatic contextual change. This will be referred to as limitations to the *wuontich*' ability to construct social capital, as she seemed to have difficulties taking up the more powerful positions of the social capital relation. The findings from the discussion will pave the way for reflections on the flexibility of social capital. I will start the discussion by outlining why EU hygiene regulations represent a dramatic contextual change for the skeleton industry.

In early 1999, the European Union launched a ban on import of fish from Lake Victoria. The ban was effectuated as a response to the failure of local processing companies to meet the ISO 9002 requirements. In an attempt to raise the hygienic standard, the processing companies decided to reduce the number of people entering their premises. Whereas they earlier distributed skeleton to any individual, the processing companies now decided to exclusively distribute Nile perch skeletons to a handful of individuals. These individuals, the *jawero*, came to act as middlemen between the factories and the Obunga *wuontich*.

The new distribution system, induced by the EU regulations, implied that social capital had to be used in new ways in order to obtain skeletons. Mary explains:

The *jawero* is connecting the factory and the people.

Whereas earlier the *wuontich* could go to the factory to obtain skeletons, all distribution now had to go through the *jawero* under the new distribution system. Ann says:

Whether you get fish or not depends on whether you know the *jawero* or not.

Not only does the *jawero* link the factory and the people, but a personal relation to him also seems to matter for the acquisition of skeletons. The previous chapter underlined that these personal relations could be viewed as social capital, as they were often based in shared group membership between *jawero* and *wuontich*. It seems as if the *wuontich*, under the dramatic contextual change, used social capital by mobilising skeletons through her shared social bonds with the *jawero*.

Findings from Obunga underline that the *wuontich* encountered a constraint to her construction of social capital under the new distribution system. This constraint seemed to have a gender dimension. Informants indicate that the female *wuontich* were limited in their construction of social capital under the new distribution system, as they were unable to enter the position of *jawero*. Sara explains how she, because of her sex, was blocked from entering the position of *jawero*:

I tried to be a *jawero* but could not handle it because the men would fight me for the fish. I tried for one year but had to give up because I could not get hold of fish. Even the workers at the factories would discriminate me and tell me to go back home. The men will step on you, there is great fight for frames.

John displays the same attitude from a male point of view:

There are extremely few female *jawero*. The men use techniques to control them. There used to be female *jawero* but the men blocked them out of business. The women do not manage to raise 100,000 shilling for deposits and the men don't allow them to.

Although Sara and John do not refer to social capital in the form of shared social bonds between *jawero* and *wuontich*, the citations point to a more general feature of the construction of social capital. They indicate that female *wuontich*, under the dramatic contextual change, were blocked from entering what one might call the most powerful position of the social capital relation. These *wuontich* were confined to occupying the position in the exchange relation where they had to mobilise skeletons through their social bonds with the *jawero*. This must be noted as a constraint to the female *wuontich*'s ability to construct social capital under dramatic contextual change.

These findings indicate that agents might have unequal opportunities to construct social capital under dramatic contextual change. I will use theoretical input to discuss how gender inequalities might impose limitations on agents. Portes explains how economic actions of diverse sorts are embedded in overarching social structures that affect their form and their outcomes (1995:6). He draws on Granovetter's writings when he outlines this theoretical perspective. Portes claims that as agents belong to larger social aggregates in which many other agents take part, any instrumental action will be guided by expectations from the other agents participating in the structure (1995:8). According to this theoretical view, the female *wuontich* is limited in her construction of social capital under the dramatic contextual change, because she complies with expectations governing gender behaviour.

John and Sara's statements do not, however, indicate that the female *wuontich* is limited in her construction of social capital because she complies with such norms and expectations. On the contrary, the female *wuontich* seems to challenge these norms by attempting to become *jawero*. An earlier quotation from Sara said: "I tried to become a *jawero*". This indicates that the

limitations imposed on female *wuontich* in their struggle to become *jawero* do not take the form of compliance with gender discriminating norms. Even though the agents are probably limited in some sense by underlying norms guiding gender behaviour, the citations above show that complementary explanatory factors must be provided that can explain how the female *wuontich* are limited in their construction of social capital under dramatic contextual change.

Perspectives from Bourdieu's writings can help explain why the female *wuontich* is constrained in her construction of social capital under the new distribution system. Bourdieu acknowledges that underlying objective structures influence actions, but he simultaneously acknowledges that these structures are reshaped and reinforced by individual actions (1984:483). He attempts to construct a bridge between subjectivism and objectivism (Ritzer 1992:579). Bourdieu opens for a view of the Obunga situation that embraces both underlying gender values and the actions of agents reinforcing these values as limiting the female *wuontich*' instrumental construction of social capital. Let us turn to Sara once again with Bourdieu's arguments in mind:

I tried to be a *jawero* but could not handle it because the men would fight me for the fish. I tried for one year but had to give up because I could not get hold of fish. Even the workers at the factories would discriminate me and tell me to go back home. The men will step on you, there is great fight for frames.

One could imagine that in a Bourdieuan sense, underlying gender values will open for the exclusion of the female *wuontich* from *jawero* positions. The reason for this might be that these gender values prevent women from entering high-status positions as *jawero*. These underlying structures seem to be reproduced by the instrumental actions of the male *jawero* that enforce the discrimination of women from these positions. In this case the male *jawero* seem to be reinforcing these structures by 'fighting' the women. In addition, the workers at the factories engage in discriminating behaviour that segments the distribution of power between the sexes. A full understanding of this issue would require meticulous studies of the interaction patterns in Obunga. One might merely tentatively conclude that based on the above statement, Bourdieu's view of agents and structures as mutually shaping and reinforcing interaction patterns can to some extent explain the gender inequalities in the ability to enter the most powerful position in the social capital relation.

This discussion carries a message about the flexibility of social capital. Flexibility was initially defined as opportunities for construction and use of social capital under dramatic contextual change. It has been shown that the female *wuontich* encounters constraints in her construction of social capital under dramatic contextual change. This can be seen as impairing the flexibility of social capital. The EU hygiene regulations induced a new distribution system under which the female *wuontich* is unable to enter the most powerful position of the social capital relation. This constraint has been shown to emerge from gender values which are enforced by the actions of individuals. This finding indicates that the *wuontich* are not able to freely construct social capital under dramatic contextual change. The female *wuontich* encounter certain constraints in their efforts to construct social capital under the new distribution system. Underlying gender values must thus be acknowledged as a constraint that might emerge under dramatic contextual changes, potentially reducing the flexibility of social capital.

## SEASONAL VARIATION

In the preceding chapter I discussed how the *wuontich* used social capital, in the form of shared group membership between *jawero* and *wuontich*, to obtain skeletons during periods of stable supplies. I will now move on to discuss how the *wuontich* use social capital during the rainy season. This season affects the organisation of the skeleton industry by causing a high flow of supplies and terrible conditions for drying and frying the skeletons. The rainy season will thus represent a dramatic contextual change in opposition to the more ‘normal’ dry season. A study of the *wuontich*’ use of social capital in the rainy season will provide material for a discussion of the flexibility of social capital.

I will start by describing the impact of season on the skeleton industry. I then discuss how the *wuontich* use social capital by investing in their social relations with the *jawero* under the dramatic contextual change that the rainy season represents. This is done in order to ensure that the social bonds can be used as social capital during the lucrative dry season. This discussion will thus deal with the *wuontich-jawero* relation rather than the social networks that these relations are rooted in. The discussion also deals with maintenance of old bonds rather than construction of new bonds, and I will thus refer to this as ‘use’ rather than ‘construction’ of social capital. Theoretical perspectives will be provided to discuss how long-term planning represented by investment in social bonds is possible in a rapidly changing environment like Obunga. A central argument will be that it is the cyclic character of seasonal variation that makes long-term investment in social bonds possible. I will further discuss how only *wuontich* with certain economic means seem to be able to engage in long-term investment in social capital. The discussion of the *wuontich*’ instrumental use of social capital under dramatic, yet cyclic, contextual changes will constitute the basis for a discussion of the flexibility of social capital.

Season greatly affects the output of supplies. The rainy season is characterised by a high amount of Nile perch being caught in Lake Victoria and processed by the factories. The outflow of skeletons into Obunga is consequently high, but the customers are few and the conditions for drying and frying the skeletons are poor. During this period, both *jawero* and *wuontich* lose money. During the dry season, the situation is reversed. The supplies are scarce, the conditions for drying and frying excellent and the customers pay a high price for the skeletons. The few *wuontich* who manage to obtain skeletons during this period have high profit margins.

The *wuontich* does not appear to actively use social capital as a resource during the rainy season. Mary explains how the abundant supplies make the *wuontich* less inclined to use her social bonds with the *jawero* as social capital:

At times when skeletons are many they [the *jawero*] send their workers directly to the *wuontich*. So this time it is a loss to the *jawero* because he has already deposited a lot of money. They come and convince the women to take the fish at a lower price.

Mary’s statement indicates that the low profitability during the rainy season creates a situation where the *wuontich* are not particularly interested in taking supplies. In fact, instead of the ‘normal’ situation during the dry season where the *wuontich* approaches the *jawero* and attempt to mobilise resources through social bonds, the *jawero* has to ‘convince’ the *wuontich* to take the

skeletons. We can thus assume that the *wuontich* does not actively utilise social bonds as social capital to obtain resources during the rainy season.

Other findings add nuances to this picture. Eve explains how the *wuontich* relates to social capital during the rainy season by investing in her relations with the *jawero*. This investment will ensure her access to skeletons during the rainy season:

Those who get fish [during the dry season] are the ones who take fish during the rainy season. Then they go with a loss. In the dry season there is gain. If the *jawero* see that you take in the rainy season they give you in the dry season. So if you get fish depends on how you do your business.

Emily makes it clear that this is also the case for the *wuontich* who share social bonds with the *jawero* and intend to use these bonds as social capital during the dry season:

The *jawero* know the people who were there in the rainy season; they give more fish to them than to those who ran away. Even for people in the same merry-go-round it is important to stay in business during the rainy season in order to get in the dry season.

The two statements in combination indicate that to be able to use social bonds as social capital in the dry season, these bonds have to be maintained during the rainy season. Social bonds with the *jawero* are maintained by buying skeletons from the *jawero* even though the *wuontich* face potential losses through these actions. The *wuontich* thus seem to relate to social capital under dramatic contextual change by engaging in long-term investment in their social bonds with the *jawero*.

One could of course argue that the *wuontich*' investment in social bonds during the rainy season has more to do with long-term business strategies than with the nature of a social capital relation. I do, however, believe that as the Obunga setting is characterised by economic marginalisation, access to money is the most important part of the social capital relation. This is shown by the fact that even in relations founded in larger social networks, economic maintenance of the relation is required for the social bond to constitute social capital in the dry season.

There are however negative cases that challenge the assumption that the social capital relation needs maintenance during the rainy season. Janet's description of how she conducts her business stands in opposition to the above arguments:

I always go home to the village in the rainy season. There is fish everywhere and you can't even sell it to anyone. I come back to do business during the dry season.

Although Janet does not mention that she utilises social bonds to access skeletons in the dry season, she still indicates on a more general level that maintenance of relations with the *jawero* is not needed to obtain skeletons during the dry season. I will nevertheless argue that as several informants emphasise that actions taken during the rainy season matter for the acquisition of resources during the dry season, this seems to characterise how the *wuontich* use social capital under the altered conditions for action that the rainy season represents.

The study of the instrumental use of social capital during the rainy season carries an important message about the nature of social capital relations in Obunga. It seems as if the investment in social bonds during the rainy season implies that the *wuontich*' use of social capital must be perceived as part of a long-term planning strategy. This finding implies that the social bonds that might constitute social capital in Obunga must be considered as characterised by stability and predictability. This finding must be seen as standing in opposition to the theoretical

framework that outlined Obunga as an environment characterised by instability and unpredictability.

James Coleman's theories shed light upon the *wuontich*' investment in social capital during the dramatic contextual change that the rainy season represents. His theories explain why the *wuontich* is willing to accept losses during the rainy season in order to uphold the relation with the *jawero* during the dry season. He claims that if A does something for B and A trusts B to reciprocate in the future this creates a form of 'credit slip' held by A to be redeemed by some performance by B. This is a form of social capital he claims, and it can only exist in environments characterised by a certain level of trustworthiness (Coleman 1990:306). One might easily claim that the *wuontich*' acceptance of the skeletons during the rainy season creates a 'credit slip' held by the *wuontich* to be redeemed by actions from the *jawero* during the dry season. This possibility to create obligations can be seen as a factor that makes the *wuontich*' long-term strategies possible. On the other hand, Coleman claims that the creation of obligation will only be possible in environments characterised by trust. He specifically mentions urban area markets as settings where creation of obligations are difficult to achieve (1990:307). Although Obunga has earlier been described as a setting characterised by fragmentation and individualism, the *wuontich*' creation of obligations with the *jawero* indicates that there is a level of trust that enables reciprocity and the creation of 'credit slips'.

The cyclic and reoccurring character of seasonal variation might create the level of trust that enables long-term investment in social capital by the *wuontich*. Obunga is, as I have earlier discussed, characterised by unpredictability and rapid alterations. In this environment season can be seen as a factor which creates predictable changes in a cyclic manner. This predictability might enhance the level of trust in the social capital relations and explain why the *wuontich* are willing to invest money in social capital relations in this otherwise unstable environment. Coleman's theoretical perspectives must thus be coupled with the predictability that cyclic seasonal variations create. These factors in combination might explain the *wuontich*' willingness and ability to engage in long-term planning strategies in relation to social capital relations. Long-term planning and investment strategies should thus be perceived as characterising the *wuontich*' use of social capital under dramatic, but cyclic contextual change.

Other aspects of the *wuontich*' instrumental use of social capital under the dramatic contextual change that the rainy season represents can also produce new knowledge about social capital relations in Obunga. The investment in social bonds during the rainy seasons was said to imply certain costs for the *wuontich*. Not all *wuontich* seem to have the economic capital to nurture the relationship with the *jawero* during the rainy season. Toby explains:

Whether you stay or not depends on your own economy. If you have some additional business it is easier to stay in the business throughout the year.

Additional business activities seem to be required to maintain social bonds with the *jawero* throughout the rainy season. It may seem like a paradox that those with additional income-generating activities invest economic resources in maintaining a relationship where they are the dependent party. Nathalie might have an explanation for this dynamic:

Skeleton business has got a lot of money. Many people move to Obunga because of this business (...) Obunga is known as a good business area because of the fish.

This statement indicates that as profit margins are considered good in this business, *wuontich* with additional business choose to invest economic capital in the maintenance of social bonds with the *jawero*. It seems as if only *wuontich* with certain economic capital are able to invest in social capital relations under dramatic contextual changes.

It might be worth noting that the demands for economic capital to maintain social capital seem to be less severe for family members. Betty explains:

Those who stay [in business] are the ones who get fish. They get money and they keep the business going. Some people are only there in the rainy season but sooner or later they will collapse because the business is not good in this season. Those who get fish all the time are the girlfriends and family of the *jawero*.

Betty suggests that social capital rooted in family bonds might require less investment of economic capital to last throughout the seasons. Emily, however, stated earlier that *wuontich* who shared merry-go-round group membership with the *jawero* had to invest economic capital in order for social capital to be valid during the rainy season. One might thus assume that social capital rooted in family relations needs a lower input of economic capital to be effective.

The discussion of the *wuontich*' use of social capital during the dramatic contextual change that the rainy season represents, carries a message of the flexibility of social capital. A certain flexibility, seen as opportunity for the use of social capital, seems to exist during the rainy season. Although the social bonds are not used directly as social capital during this season, the *wuontich* still have the possibility to engage in long-term investment in their social bonds in order to constitute social capital in the dry season. It seems that it is the cyclic character of seasonal variation that creates a level of predictability that enables this long-term investment in social bonds. But as the word investment indicates, the maintenance of social capital requires economic capital. The economic demands of investment in social capital should be noted as reducing the flexibility of social capital to *wuontich* with little economic capital. Their inability to invest in social bonds during the rainy season makes it difficult for them to use these social bonds as social capital during the dry season. Social capital thus seems to be a flexible resource, open for investment under dramatic, cyclic, contextual changes, but primarily to *wuontich* with certain economic means. This relation between economic and social capital will be further discussed in the next sub-chapter.

## DECLINING SUPPLIES

Declining supplies represent a dramatic, but more permanent contextual change than seasonal variation. Although causing subtle change, this contextual change has severely affected the skeleton industry in that many *wuontich* have been pushed out of business because of insufficient supplies. I will focus once again on the *wuontich-jawero* relation and emphasis is given to the instrumental use of social capital under this dramatic contextual change. This discussion will provide material for reflections on the flexibility of social capital.

I will start by establishing why Obunga is experiencing a decline in supplies, before I move on to discuss how the *wuontich* use social capital under this dramatic contextual change. The increasing importance of social capital to obtain skeletons in a situation characterised by scarcity will constitute an important part of the discussion. Economic capital, as an important

prerequisite for the effectiveness of social capital as a resource is also a prominent aspect in this debate. As both declining supplies and seasonal change represent variations in supplies, comparisons between the *wuontich*' use of social capital under these two dramatic contextual changes will be made consecutively. This comparison might produce new knowledge on the nature of social capital in Obunga.

Lake Victoria has in recent years experienced a decline in catches. A variety of reasons lie behind this development, the most prominent being over-exploitation of the resources in the lake (Jansen 1997). This development has led to a situation where the companies are processing fewer and smaller-sized Nile perch. As a direct consequence of this, the outflow of skeletons into Obunga has been steadily declining during the past years.

It has proved challenging to obtain information on how the *wuontich* use social capital to obtain resources in a situation characterised by increasing scarcity. The informants often outline season as the factor that has most considerable influence on this business. Peter expresses how season has a more visible impact on the skeleton industry than declining supplies:

The business has not really changed. The difference is more about season.

Peter's view of season as more decisive for business might have its explanation in the fact that in an industry where day-to-day survival is an explicit goal, the long term trends becomes more subtle. This is also a methodological issue as data describing long term and slowly changing structures are often hard to obtain through retrospective interviews. It should also be noted that seasonal variations will exist even in situations characterised by declining supplies. These conditions for action might overlap, and this should be noted as part of the backdrop for the discussion conducted here.

An earlier quoted citation from Ann can, however, help explain how the *wuontich* use social capital to obtain skeletons in situations characterised by declining supplies. Her statement conveys a general reflection upon how it becomes increasingly important to actively mobilise resources through social bonds with the *jawero* when supplies are scarce:

If work is little it depends on whether you know the *jawero* or not. If he knows you he will give you fish. You have to tell him about your problems and then he will give you sympathy (...) It depends on the personal connection with the *jawero*.

The possibility is present that Ann is referring to seasonal variation rather than to the general decline in supplies. The core of her statement stands, however, as an example of a more generic mechanism; when there is scarcity, it becomes important for the *wuontich* to approach the *jawero* and evoke the social bonds that exist between them. Ann does not say that these social bonds are rooted in shared group membership in merry-go-rounds or family bonds. Betty, on the other hand, says that social capital, in the form of shared group membership between *wuontich* and *jawero*, becomes increasingly important in times of scarcity.

When there is little fish the *jawero* look for their friends and family first: many people don't get.

Betty indicates that social capital becomes an increasingly important asset in times of scarcity. This importance is sustained by Ann's description of how the *wuontich* approached the *jawero* directly to obtain supplies in a situation characterised by scarcity.



These statements also point to another feature of the *wuontich*' use of social capital under dramatic contextual change. Apparently, it does not suffice to possess social bonds with the *jawero* to obtain skeletons. In order for these bonds to constitute social capital in situations of scarcity, the *wuontich* has to approach the *jawero* to evoke the social bonds that exist between them. The importance of personal contact as a prerequisite for social capital to be valid in periods of scarcity is an important aspect of the *wuontich*' use of social capital under dramatic contextual change.

The acceptance of higher prices for the skeletons appears to be a feature of the *wuontich*' use of social capital in a situation characterised by scarcity. Ann describes how the *wuontich* gets skeletons when there is little work:

If there is little work there is disagreement. The people with the money get the fish.

A major strategy that the *wuontich* might apply to maintain her social capital under this dramatic contextual change thus seems to be accepting to pay a higher price for the skeletons. Although Ann does not say whether the people who get the fish are agents with shared social bonds with the *jawero*, she seems to outline a more general feature of the relation. It is therefore reasonable to deduce that economic capital is an important requirement to obtain skeletons even in cases where social bonds that can be utilised as social capital exist between the *wuontich* and the *jawero*. This assumption is sustained by the findings in chapter five that outlined prompt payment as a prerequisite for social bonds to constitute social capital. This situation has similarities with the *wuontich*' use of social capital during the rainy season. It was earlier stated that in order to maintain social capital during the dry season, the *wuontich* has to accept a loss during the rainy season. In both cases, economic means are required for the *wuontich* to be able to instrumentally utilise social capital under dramatic contextual changes.

These findings tell us that economic capital might be required for the utilisation of social capital in Obunga, especially in periods of scarcity. As a result, it might be that the *wuontich* with economic capital are able to use social capital as a strategic asset. This dynamic can be theoretically described. The relationship between economic capital and social capital is debated by Bourdieu (1986). He claims that social capital can be derived from economic capital (1986:252). This theoretical assumption seems to recognise that only *wuontich* with economic capital are able to maintain their social capital through shifting conditions for action. Bourdieu continues to say that economic capital invested in social capital comes in the form of expenditure of time and attention (1986:253). This statement appears not to correspond with the Obunga setting as the *wuontich* seem to invest hard cash rather than time and attention in their social capital relations. Recalling that Obunga is a setting characterised by shifting relations and a struggle for economic survival, it might be easier to understand why it differs from the French reality described by Bourdieu. Bourdieu's recognition of the interrelationship between economic and social capital still has explanatory value in the Obunga setting. During periods of declining supplies and through seasonal variations, it seems as though acceptance of higher economic demands is an important strategy to adapt social capital to dramatic contextual change. This implies that only *wuontich* with economic means are able to maintain and use their social capital in these changing circumstances.

With reference to the interrelation between economic and social capital, it is tempting to argue against those who claim social capital to be a resource for the very poor who lack other

forms of capital. The World Bank, for example, believes that social capital enables the poor to initiate small enterprises and increase their income (World Bank homepage 2001). This view of social capital can be contrasted with Mary's statement on what happens to the *wuontich* with few economic means when there is scarcity of resources. She says:

Many people have been pushed out of this business due to a variety of reasons. The poor are driven out of business. Fish business is very difficult to be with (...) the weak people are driven out. Some people are just weak because they can't organise the money. You need to have money to pay the *jawero* in advance. You have to do your savings. It can of course be difficult if you have many children.

Mary's statement underlines that social capital does not seem to be a resource for the very poor *wuontich* in Obunga for the sheer reason that they have to pay in advance in order to make resources flow through social bonds. These findings stand in opposition to the World Bank's view of social capital as a resource of the poor.

The relationship between poverty and social capital stands out as an interesting feature of this discussion. Granovetter has attempted to explain the interrelationship between reproduction of poverty and social capital. He sees that in some environments social capital might have a limiting effect on the agent in the form of excessive claims from other members of the social network. These claims reproduce poverty in that they prevent investment and the construction of social bonds that transcend the social network that the agents belong to (Granovetter 1995:144). Earlier discussions have shown that there is little pressure towards group-oriented behaviour in Obunga. Granovetter's theoretical assumption is thus not immediately transferable to the Obunga setting. Social capital in Obunga might rather be seen as to some extent reproducing poverty in other ways. As the use of this resource requires economic input, it is likely to assume that the very poor are not able to realise the full potential of social bonds as social capital under shifting conditions for action. In that way one might say that the nature of social capital helps reproduce poverty in Obunga, although in ways other than those described by Granovetter.

Again, social capital has proven to be a flexible resource in that the *wuontich* are able to utilise social capital to obtain skeletons also in a situation characterised by declining supplies. At the same time, it should be noted that this flexibility is limited in that an increased effort seems to be required for social bonds to constitute social capital. This increased effort is expressed by the *wuontich*' direct approach to the *jawero* to evoke the social bonds that exist between them. Social capital has proven to be a flexible resource, but not to the *wuontich* who lack economic capital. As dramatic contextual change has caused the prices for skeletons to rise, economic capital has become an increasingly important prerequisite for social capital to be valid. This excludes the *wuontich* who lack economic capital from realising the full potential of social capital as a resource, and should be noted as a limitation to the flexibility of social capital. The discussion has showed that this particular limitation to the flexibility of social capital might contribute to reproduce poverty, as the very poor *wuontich* might encounter restraints to their use of social bonds as social capital under dramatic contextual change.

## CONFLICT

During the period of fieldwork a conflict evolved in Obunga. Following this conflict, two groups rather than individual *jawero* came to control the distribution of skeletons. This situation had consequences for how the *wuontich* used social capital to obtain resources. The first part of this sub-chapter will establish conflict as a dramatic contextual change that affected the organisation of the skeleton industry. I then recuperate the events that led to the conflict, before I move on to discuss the *wuontich*' use of social capital in this situation. This discussion will contribute perspective to the debate on the flexibility of social capital under dramatic contextual change.

The discussion will focus on the larger network that provides the *jawero-wuontich* relation with the legitimacy that makes these bonds constitute potential social capital to the *wuontich*. I will here discuss the construction of new social bonds that might constitute social capital rather than altered use of existing social capital relations. The discussion will reveal that old bonds that might constitute social capital seem to be easily replaced<sup>39</sup> by new social bonds that might fill the same function. This finding provides an important argument in favour of viewing instrumentally constructed social bonds as characterised by instability.

Treating a micro-level conflict as a contextual change might be perceived as problematic. One might argue that as the *wuontich* themselves are a part of the conflict, this could hardly constitute a contextual condition to which they adapt. I will nevertheless argue that as this conflict was initiated and nurtured by certain individuals among the *jawero* and the Umbrella Group, the common *wuontich* had very little influence over the course of action. The conflict will thus be seen as a dramatic contextual change to which the *wuontich* adapted their social capital.

I will briefly present the events that led to the establishment of two major groups in the field. The two opposing parties in the conflict were a group of *jawero* and the Umbrella Group, which is the officially elected work organisation in Obunga. Before the conflict started, the Umbrella Group operated as a work organisation that controlled business activities in the skeleton industry. The conflict started when two *jawero* were suspended by the Umbrella Group because they attempted to acquire tenure of the land where the skeletons are fried. This provoked a conflict as it was seen as a sign that these two *jawero* wanted to take control of the skeleton industry. In order to be able to distribute skeletons to the *wuontich*, these *jawero* established their own group, called the Mgongo Wazi Group, in opposition to the Umbrella Group. The Umbrella Group now came to stand as one of the parties in the conflict rather than as the group who represented all the agents in the skeleton industry. The conflict between the groups resulted in physical fighting and the imprisonment of several members of both groups<sup>40</sup>.

The new situation with two groups dominating the field implied that group membership became the new criterion to access skeletons. Both groups had *jawero* taking skeletons from the factory and they insisted on distributing skeletons only to their own supporters. Many *wuontich* seemed to follow the *jawero* with whom they shared social bonds to the new group. Betty explains how the new system of distribution was organised:

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<sup>39</sup> This is not to say that these bonds are dissolved, but that they might be closely intertwined in new forms of social capital or lose their value as bonds that ensure easier access to skeletons.

<sup>40</sup> See appendix 4 for newspaper clipping on this event.

The business has changed because there is discrimination in the field. There is a fight between the Umbrella Group and the Mgongo Wazi Group. You have to state your affiliation before you get fish.

Even though many of the old bonds between *wuontich* and *jawero* seemed to persist, openly stated group affiliation became the new, prime criterion to obtain skeletons. Membership in these groups can be viewed as social capital as it provides its members with a ‘credential’ that facilitates the canalisation of resources through social relations (Bourdieu 1986:249). One might thus say that under the new system, group affiliation was a new kind of social bond that could be used as social capital.

Statements from Betty indicate however that it was possible to access supplies without participating in a group, after the dramatic contextual change that the conflict represented. She explains:

I do not want to take a stand because I do not want to be on the losing side. If I am lucky I will get fish anyway.

Evidently not all *wuontich* adapted to the new situation and started utilising social capital, in the form of group membership to access resources. This indicates that group membership did not seem to be an absolute requirement to obtain fish skeletons. This finding contradicts the above presented assumptions. But even though Betty is not member in a group, she still adapted to the new realities in the field. Her strategy was to balance between the groups because as she says, “she does not want to be on the losing side”. She indicates that this strategy might fail as she says: “if I am lucky I will get fish anyway”. It is hard to say why Betty chose to apply this strategy to get fish. But even though Betty did not use group affiliation as her primary strategy to obtain skeletons, she still adapted to the new bonds that constitute social capital when she conducted her business. This indicates that openly stated group membership became an important way of instrumentally constructing new social bonds to ensure access to skeletons under the dramatic contextual change that the conflict represented.

The *wuontich*’ adaptation to the situation where two groups dominated the distribution underlines that the *wuontich* are able to respond to new types of situations and to establish new social bonds that might constitute social capital if necessary. John displays this instrumental attitude to social capital:

The strength of the Mgongo Wazi Group is that they own the fish. The members support the Mgongo Wazi Group because of the fish.

The theoretical framework outlined instrumental agents, constructing and using social bonds for their own benefit. John’s statement sustains this view as he explains how *wuontich* joined the groups because this would help them to access skeletons. The ways in which the *wuontich* responded to the new situation and constructed new social bonds that might be used as social capital emphasise their use of social bonds as a means to obtain an end.

This finding brings us closer to very interesting aspects of the social capital literature. In most writings, the construction and use of social capital as a resource is commonly associated with predictability and stability (e.g. Coleman 1990, Putnam 1993). This view of social capital as stable social structures is often explained by an understanding of social capital as rooted in and reinforced by social norms. As presented above and in the theoretical framework, instrumental action seems to be a more prevalent source of social capital in Obunga than norm

compliance. Instrumentality as a source of social capital seems to enhance instability in social capital relations, as these relations seem to be consecutively changed in order to facilitate access to a resource. This is a very important aspect of instrumentally constructed social capital that will be discussed in depth in the next chapter.

Bourdieu acknowledges that instrumental action might be a source of social capital but he fails to describe the potentially unstable nature of these social bonds. He claims that social bonds that constitute social capital are enacted and enforced in exchanges (1986:249). Bourdieu does not, however, describe that new social bonds that might be used as social capital might override old social bonds when it becomes difficult to conduct exchanges through the 'old' social bonds. By omitting description of this feature of social capital, Bourdieu overlooks the potentially unstable nature of social capital. As social capital is commonly assumed to be a social feature that enhances economic growth and institutionalisation, the instability of these bonds as seen in Obunga has an important message in the social capital debate.

The *wuontich*' instrumental use of social capital under conflict carries a message about the flexibility of social capital. Flexibility was initially defined as opportunities to utilise social capital under dramatic contextual change, and the *wuontich* seemed to be able to flexibly use newly constructed social bonds as social capital during the conflict. This flexibility has been explained by the *wuontich*' instrumental attitude to the social capital that they possess. As social capital seems to be viewed as tools that might be utilised to obtain skeletons, new social bonds that might constitute social capital seem to be easily constructed by the *wuontich*. This indicates a high degree of flexibility in social capital as a resource for the Obunga *wuontich*. The negative side effect of this flexibility is that it might contribute to local-level instability that in the long run might jeopardise business prosperity in this area. This aspect will be discussed in depth in the concluding chapter.

## CONCLUSION

Inquiries into how the *wuontich* construct and use social capital under dramatic contextual change have provided new knowledge of the flexibility of social capital in this environment. I will now briefly try to recuperate the major findings from the preceding discussion.

The way in which the *wuontich* instrumentally construct and use social capital under dramatic contextual change indicates the flexible nature of social capital as a resource in this environment. The example from the conflict in Obunga showed that when the context is dramatically changed, agents are able to instrumentally establish new social bonds that might be used as social capital in order to obtain skeletons. This finding indicates the flexible nature of social capital, as the *wuontich* seem to be capable of establishing new bonds that might be used as social capital.

Social capital does not, however, seem to be a flexible resource to all the *wuontich* in Obunga. The discussion revealed that there were gender inequalities in the *wuontich*' ability to construct social capital under the new distribution system that was introduced as a response to EU regulations. The female *wuontich* were blocked from entering positions as *jawero*, and were thus unable to occupy the most favourable position in the exchange relation. This gender inequality in

the ability to construct social capital should be noted as a limitation of the flexibility of social capital

Other findings also suggested that social capital is not an equally flexible resource to all the Obunga *wuontich*. The discussion of the *wuontich*' instrumental use of social capital to obtain resources in the course of seasonal variations and declining supplies, demonstrated an inequality in the ability to use social capital. I showed that in order to instrumentally utilise social capital under these conditions for action a certain economic input was required. *Wuontich* who lack additional businesses seem to have difficulties realising the full potential of social capital under these dramatic contextual changes. This indicates that social capital should not be perceived as a resource equally available to all agents. This can also be viewed as reproducing poverty as the very poor might have difficulties obtaining resources through their social bonds due to the high demand for economic capital.

I argue that the flexibility of social capital enhances instability in the social bonds that might constitute social capital. As the agents apparently have an instrumental attitude to these bonds, they seem to be eager to continuously construct and use social capital that ensures access to a resource. Although the discussion showed that maintenance of existing bonds was at times the best strategy to access skeletons, it was also shown that the *wuontich* easily replaced old social bonds that had constituted social capital with new bonds that might fill the same function if this ensured access to skeletons. My argument is thus that the instrumentality that opens for flexibility in social capital simultaneously contributes to instability in social bonds. In other words, social bonds are maintained according to their value as social capital that might ensure access to skeletons.<sup>41</sup> The ability to flexibly adapt social capital to new situations might increase the value of these bonds to the individual, but it might also enhance instability at the aggregate level. This issue will be explored in depth in the concluding chapter.

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<sup>41</sup> This is not to say that, for example family bonds will be dissolved when they no longer ensure access to skeletons.

## 7. RE-THEORISING SOCIAL CAPITAL

The analysis of the Obunga agents' business strategies has several implications for the social capital debate. Three major contributions to this debate generated by the Obunga study will be presented here. First of all, I will argue that instrumentally constructed<sup>42</sup> social capital seems to be a flexible resource that is usable to most agents under dramatic contextual change. I will underscore that most theoretical contributions omit this perspective when they discuss social capital.

The second main contribution to the social capital debate is the argument in favour of recognising that the flexibility of instrumentally constructed social capital might contribute to instability at the community level. I claim that the agents' instrumental construction and use of social bonds might contribute to instability in these bonds, as they seem to be maintained according to their ability to facilitate access to skeletons. What is seen as flexibility at the individual level might thus contribute to instability at the community level. I will use these arguments to challenge the World Bank's claim that there is a direct interrelationship between social capital and level of trust and development in a community. I further argue that the World Bank fails to recognise that instrumentally constructed social capital can contribute to distrust at the community level, hampering local-level development. The World Bank has been chosen as a representative for other development agencies in this debate. The reason for this is that I perceive it as an influential producer of ideas in development co-operation.

The third main contribution to the social capital debate is the argument in favour of recognising that economic capital might be required in order to be able to utilise social capital as a resource. I argue that many theorists and development agencies, represented by the World Bank, do not acknowledge the interaction between economic and social capital as they tend to see social capital as a resource for the very poor. I will challenge this view as I claim that findings from Obunga indicate that input of economic capital seems to be an important factor in making resources to flow through social bonds. These findings indicate that the poor might have difficulties realising the full potential of social capital in this environment.

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<sup>42</sup> 'Instrumental construction' will in this chapter refer both to instrumental construction and to instrumental use of social capital.

The concluding paragraph will sum up my argument by stating the value of the Obunga study for the general debate on social capital. I will argue that this case study, even though representing only one particular setting, has relevance for the study of social capital in the urban informal setting. The Obunga study shows that in a setting where poverty, migration and high HIV prevalence prevail, instrumentally constructed social capital might be the most prominent form of social capital. This finding can generate important questions when studying social capital in similar socio-economic settings.

#### **THE FLEXIBILITY OF INSTRUMENTALLY CONSTRUCTED SOCIAL CAPITAL**

In this chapter I will argue that instrumental action as a source of social capital makes it a very valuable resource for the individual agents. The reason for this is that social capital that is instrumentally constructed and used seems to be easily adapted to dramatic contextual change. I will simultaneously point out that this feature of social capital seems to be omitted in many discussions of this topic, because many theorists fail to recognise the inherent qualities of instrumentally constructed social capital.

The Obunga study found that instrumentally constructed social capital was a flexible resource to the individual agent. The agents seemed to be able to use old social bonds in new ways and construct new social bonds that might be utilised as social capital under dramatic contextual changes. Indeed, it was stated that social capital might not be a resource equally flexible to all, but it still seems to be a resource that in most cases can be flexibly used by the Obunga agents. This is an important feature of instrumentally constructed social capital that makes it a valuable resource to agents operating in a rapidly changing environment.

The potential flexibility of instrumentally constructed social capital is not often discussed in social capital literature. I will argue that this is the case because most theorists see instrumentally constructed social capital as deeply embedded in social networks that will influence the actions of individuals. Portes, for example, acknowledges that instrumental motivation might well be a source of social capital, but he simultaneously emphasises that these instrumental agents might be limited by the enforceable trust that makes the resources flow through the collective structure (1998:9). Portes seems to perceive the social networks that constitute social capital as more stable than what they proved to be in Obunga. He thereby does not acknowledge the potentially flexible nature of instrumentally constructed social capital that allows the agent to use it as a resource under varying contextual conditions.

Another theorist who opens up for seeing instrumentality as a source of social capital is Bourdieu. While Bourdieu does not recognise the potential flexibility of social capital, his theories still seem to open to such a reading (1986). In acknowledging that social capital is the product of endless investment strategies that are aimed at reproducing social relationships usable as social capital in the long run, he acknowledges the flexible and changeable character of instrumentally constructed social capital (1986:249). Bourdieu does not overtly acknowledge the flexible character of instrumentally constructed social bonds, but his focus on individuals constantly investing in social bonds seems to be tangent to a notion of flexibility.

This discussion indicates that the flexible nature of instrumentally constructed social capital is not often explicitly discussed in social capital literature. The reason for this might be that



the social networks that are seen as constituting social capital are perceived as more static and stable than what was found to be the case in Obunga. As the Obunga study found that instrumentally constructed and used social capital was a flexible resource to agents operating in this sector, it is nevertheless relevant to raise this topic as an issue. The reason for this is that similar forms of social capital might exist in similar settings. This makes it relevant to discuss the potentially flexible character of instrumentally constructed social capital.

Although the discussion revealed that social capital is not equally flexible to all Obunga agents, the flexible character of this kind of social capital makes it a very valuable resource in a rapidly changing environment. This flexibility has a flip side, however. The discussion in the next sub chapter will show that instrumentality as a source of social capital opens for the flexible use of this resource, but it might also generate instability and distrust in social bonds.

### **INSTRUMENTALLY CONSTRUCTED SOCIAL CAPITAL AND DEVELOPMENT<sup>43</sup>**

The preceding chapter underscored that social capital that is instrumentally constructed and used might be a flexible resource to the individual agent. In this chapter I will argue that instrumentality as a source of social capital simultaneously might contribute to distrust and instability at the community level, thus hampering development. My argument is that many theorists and development agencies fail to recognise the potentially negative interrelation between the existence of instrumentally constructed social capital and the level of development in a community. An important part of the argumentation is that the lack of acknowledgement of instrumentally constructed social capital has consequences for development assistance. Because this issue is rarely raised in theoretical debates, development agencies, here exemplified by the World Bank, continue to associate a high level of social capital with a high level of community development.

The Obunga study showed that in an environment characterised by poverty, migration and high HIV prevalence, instrumentally constructed social capital prevailed. I acknowledge that this kind of social capital does not exist in similar settings by necessity. The findings from this study make it relevant, however, to problematise whether instrumentally constructed social capital might have a negative impact on community development in similar settings.

Coleman acknowledges that social capital in rare cases might have its source in the intentional organisation of networks, but he fails to describe the unstable character of such social bonds (1990:313). In his description of this form of social capital, Coleman emphasises that intentionally constructed social capital might have several positive side-effects, like the establishment of organisational structures that might be available to other agents. (1990:313). In this discussion Coleman does not, however, acknowledge that instrumentally constructed social capital might have an unstable character, and that such bonds might be easily dissolved. The preliminary deduction from this is that even though Coleman acknowledges intentional construction of social bonds as a source of social capital, he does not see the qualities of these bonds as having a potentially unstable character. His writings do thus not explain the specific features of instrumentally constructed social capital in the Obunga setting.

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<sup>43</sup> 'Development' is a broad term. In this dissertation it predominantly refers to establishment of larger enterprises and economic activities that require stability and a certain level of trust to prosper.

Woolcock does not see instrumentality as a prominent source of social capital. He states that rather than focusing upon rational agents constructing networks, one should concentrate on detecting sources of social capital in social patterns of action and in institutional structures at the macro level (1998:185). Because he applies a macro focus on social capital, he does not problematise instrumentality as a source of social capital. This implies that he does not focus upon the inherent qualities of instrumentally constructed social capital. The potentially unstable nature of such bonds is thus not covered in Woolcock's writings on social capital.

The view of social capital as enhancing local development has penetrated policy institutions that deal with such issues. Social capital is commonly perceived as the socio-cultural glue that binds society together and ensures social and economic progress (Mohan & Stokke 2000:225). An example is the World Bank's attitude towards social capital as a value that enhances development (World Bank 1998). The World Bank states that social capital makes transactions more efficient by increasing trust between the involved parties. Social capital, the World Bank claims, can enhance development by reducing opportunistic behaviour (World Bank 2001). Social capital is thus positively associated with community development. As the World Bank traditionally produces ideas that are widely accepted by other development agencies, this positive view of social capital as enhancing development is probably widespread among other development agencies as well.

I will argue that the issue of instrumental construction of social capital is not thoroughly discussed by central development theorists. This has consequences for a common perception, among for example policy makers, of the relationship between social capital and development. I claim that the Obunga case displays features of social capital that have consequences for any assumptions of social capital as enhancing development. The discussion has shown that social capital in Obunga is instrumentally constructed and used as a part of the *wuontich*' business strategies. I have found that these bonds are rooted in the individual agent's wish to access a scarce resource. The deduction from this is that such instrumentally constructed bonds, rather than being a socio-cultural glue, can be viewed as unstable and easily dissolved according the agent's preferences. A reasonable deduction from this is that instrumentally constructed social capital might have an unstable character that hampers, rather than enhances local development.

Espinoza is one theorist who actually acknowledges the instability of instrumentally constructed social capital (1999). In a study of poor people in Santiago, Chile, he reports that scarce resources are most likely to be obtained by means of weak and asymmetric ties (1999:163). The Obunga study has shown that the social ties between *jawero* and *wuontich* are indeed asymmetric and weak. The *wuontich* makes continuous efforts to use the social bonds with the *jawero* as social capital, but the empirical data showed that these bonds are rapidly changed and easily dissolved. Espinoza is thus one of the few theorists who acknowledge the weakness of such instrumentally constructed social capital. One can only assume that the inherent weakness of these ties contributes to an instability that does not favour local development. This aspect of instrumentally constructed social capital is, however, rarely reflected in development policies (e.g. World Bank 1998).

Granovetter provides another example of the implications unstable social networks might have for local development (Granovetter 1995). In Estancia, the Philippines, small-scale entrepreneurs are said to be primarily concerned with their own welfare and short-term benefit.

The expectations that people work only for their own benefit is so powerful that even partnerships between kinsmen only last for a short period of time (Granovetter 1995:133). This case has clear parallels to the strategic use of social bonds in Obunga. It has been said that a situation characterised by high degree of instrumentality disfavors an environment of lasting economic activities (Granovetter 1995:133). As the existence of social capital is commonly associated with increased economic prosperity, the findings from Obunga and Estancia underline that the existence of social capital does not necessarily equal development. It seems as if in cases where strong instrumental motivations underlie the mobilisation of resources through social networks, the level of trust is low and the basis for the establishment of larger economic enterprises is consequently weak.

Two conclusions might be drawn from this. First of all, although some theorists acknowledge the unstable nature of instrumentally constructed social capital, this issue does not seem to be fully acknowledged in social capital writings. The consequence of this is that central theorists do not fully capture the implications of instrumentally constructed social capital for social stability and thus development.

My second conclusion from this discussion is the lack of acknowledgement of instrumentally constructed social capital that is reflected in development policies might contribute to wrong assumptions of the interrelation between social capital and development. Because social capital is often associated with increased trust and stability in academic writings on this issue, this lack of acknowledgement is displayed even in prominent development agencies. I claim that agencies that view a high level of social capital as equal to economic development risk omitting the essential insight that instrumentally constructed social capital might be unstable and valued according to its ability to facilitate access to resources. It might thus be relevant for development agencies to ask whether social bonds that are instrumentally constructed and used, might contribute to local-level instability and distrust rather than to local development.

## **SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CAPITAL**

I argue that it is important to acknowledge the interrelation between economic and social capital. My argumentation is based upon findings from Obunga that indicate that economic capital might be necessary to realise the potential of social capital. The Obunga study makes it relevant to discuss this topic as it provides knowledge about what might be important qualities of instrumentally constructed social capital in similar settings. I will attempt to demonstrate that the interrelation between economic and social capital is not discussed thoroughly enough in central social capital contributions. My central argument is that the lack of discussion regarding this topic might lead to premature presuppositions that social capital is a form of capital that does not require any economic input to be valid.

Few theorists explicitly acknowledge the interrelation between economic and social capital. Putnam even claims that the stock of social capital tends to be self-reinforcing and cumulative (1993). In this statement he does not include the perspective that economic capital might be required in order to make resources flow through the social bonds that constitute potential social capital.

Bourdieu acknowledges that social capital is a product of investment strategies, individual or collective, aimed at reproducing social relationships (1986:249). He continues by stating that such work demands expenditures of time, energy and even economic capital (1986:250). In this he acknowledges that economic input might be needed to realise the potential of social capital. One very important aspect of his writings, however, states that agents might have differential access to the construction and maintenance of social capital depending on their class background and economic position (1994). In this argument he makes the important distinction that social capital is not a potential resource to all agents regardless of their economic situation. This corresponds with the Obunga setting where economic capital was required in order to mobilise resources through social bonds. The consequence of this finding is that the form of social capital found in Obunga might not be a resource that can be easily used by the economically deprived.

Coleman acknowledges that agents might have to invest economically in their social bonds in order to realise the full potential of social capital. He states that by contributing to a network, one agent might create an obligation of repayment on the part of the agent that he contributes to (1990:306). But Coleman does not seem to acknowledge that economic output is required to mobilise resources through social bonds. He sees it rather as a part of creating obligations between agents and increasing the level of trustworthiness (1990:306). His view of economic input into a social relation is thus more a form of creating an obligation than directly mobilising a resource through the social bond. Coleman does thus not discuss how various agents might have different possibilities to construct and maintain social capital depending on their economic status.

Portes and Sensenbrenner do not explicitly address the issue of economic investment as a requirement for social capital to be valid, but they still provide an empirical example that illustrates this issue. They present the Dominican entrepreneur Nicolas who enjoys a good reputation that enables him to collect large sums for investment in other businesses. These investments seem to allow him to take up new loans (1993:1334). Although not stated explicitly, it seems that all the money going out from Nicolas' business ensures his access to new economic means. This could be seen as an example of the fact that mobilisation of economic resources through social contacts might require some kind of economic investment. Although not stated explicitly, Portes and Sensenbrenner seem to acknowledge that input of economic capital might be required to realise the full potential of social capital.

The above-presented arguments emphasise that the issue of economic capital as an important element in initiating flow of resources through social bonds is only moderately debated in social capital literature. Although the possible interrelation between social and economic capital is mentioned by several theorists, these theorists do not emphasise that direct economic input might be required to realise the full potential of social capital. One reason why this topic is not much debated might be that social capital in debates on economic organisation is treated as having different qualities than economic capital. It is often presented as the x-factor that gives an added dimension to debates on the economy. I nevertheless claim that the interaction between different forms of capital should be explicitly acknowledged. The Obunga study has illustrated that the possession of social capital does not guarantee access to a resource. Certain economic resources must flow through the social bonds in order for these bonds to realise their full potential as social

capital. This has implications for how social capital should be perceived. If economic means are required for social capital to be valid, one can assume that the very poor might have difficulties realising the full potential of this resource. As economic capital was shown to make resources to flow through social bonds, this might also be the case in other settings where instrumentally constructed and used social capital prevails. Instead of viewing social capital as a potential resource to deprived agents who do not possess economic capital, one must recognise the relation between economic and social capital in discussions of the urban informal sector.

## CONCLUSION

The continuous dialogue with other theoretical contributions, in combination with strategies for challenging my own findings, has enabled me to relate the findings from the Obunga case study to the larger debate on social capital (see Yin 1989:409). The Obunga study showed that in an urban informal setting characterised by inflow of migrants, poverty and high HIV prevalence, the instrumental construction and use of social capital prevail. This finding makes it relevant to ask if social capital that is instrumentally constructed and used can also be found in similar settings.

But the discussion has brought us further than just to stating that instrumentality is the prevailing source of social capital in this environment. I have shown that social capital that is instrumentally constructed and used might have qualities that are not often debated by theorists and development agencies who are preoccupied with this issue. The discussion detailed how instrumentally constructed and used social capital might contain a flexibility that makes it a valuable resource to the agents in this setting. It was further stated that this flexibility might cause instability at the community level. The reason for this is that the agents are able to instrumentally use their social bonds and adapt them to changing contextual conditions. This might in turn contribute to an instability in these bonds that might cause distrust and hamper local level development. In addition, arguments have been presented in favour of seeing the intimate relationship between social capital and economic capital, as certain economic resources might be needed in order to mobilise resources through social bonds. This might imply that economically deprived agents might have difficulties realising the full potential of social capital.

All these findings generated by the discussion on social capital in Obunga can be seen as valuable contributions to the understanding of how social bonds might be used as a resource by agents operating in the urban informal economy. The study makes it relevant to ask whether instrumentality might be a prevalent source of social capital in similar settings. In addition, the Obunga study underscores the importance of recognising the specific inherent qualities of social capital that is instrumentally constructed and used.

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**All the sources that have been used in this dissertation are listed above.**

## 9. APPENDICES

**APPENDIX 1. LIST OF TERMS**

<i>Changaa</i>	:	Local alcoholic brew
<i>Djiko</i>	:	Frying pan. Used for the processing of Nile perch skeletons
<i>Homestead</i>	:	Traditional family home
<i>Jawero</i>	:	Middleman, taking skeletons from the processing plants to Obunga
<i>Kanya Kuar</i>	:	Significant clan based in Obunga
<i>Oluwo Reru</i>	:	Term used about migrants coming to Obunga, means: ‘those who came along the railway’
<i>Teko</i>	:	Descision-making power
<i>Wuontich</i>	:	Owner of micro-enterprise. Employs workers to wash, dry and fry Nile perch skeletons

APPENDIX 2. LIST OF INFORMANTS<sup>44</sup>

Name	Occupation	Affiliation	Economic status	Interview circumstances <sup>45</sup>			
				Recorded on tape	Conducted in English	Lack of disturbance	Good communication
Ann	<i>Wuontich</i>	Not stated	Married, Six children in Obunga. Shared economic responsibility for the household. No additional income-generating activity.			x	x
Betty	<i>Wuontich</i>	Balancing between groups	Both husband and child dead from AIDS. Economic responsibility for herself only.			x	x
Emily	<i>Wuontich</i>	Not stated	Has bought land in Obunga. Widow. Seven adult children. No additional income-generating activity.			x	x
Eve	<i>Wuontich/worker</i>	Not stated	Married in Obunga. Has three children. No additional income-generating activity.			x	x
Fiona	Interpreter	None	Not employed in Obunga. One child. Income from sale of second-hand clothes.		x		x
Frank	<i>Jawero/ Group official</i>	Mgongo Wazi Group	Has good income from his business as <i>jawero</i> . Economic responsibility for his household.			x	x
Janet	<i>Wuontich</i>	Not stated	No relatives in Obunga only a few friends. No additional income- generating activity.			x	x

<sup>44</sup> All the informants have been given fictitious names

<sup>45</sup> In cases where more that one interview has been conducted, these circumstances describe the impression of all the interviews seen as a totality.



Name	Occupation	Affiliation	Economic status	Interview circumstances			
				Recorded on tape	Conducted in English	Lack of disturbance	Good communication
Jason	<i>wuontich/ jawero</i>	Umbrella Group	Married, two children. Wife seriously ill. Rents a house in Obunga. No additional Income-generating activities.		x	x	
John	<i>wuontich/</i> Group official	Umbrella Group	Married, three children. Has a house and Land in the area. Other income-generating activities not stated.		x	x	x
Mary	Former <i>wuontich</i>	None	Single mother, economic responsibility for two children. Works as secretary.	x	x	x	x
Nathalie	Community Development assistant	None	No data on family relations. Paid by the government for her work as community development assistant in Obunga		x	x	x
Nelly	District social development officer	None	No data on family relations. Has high ranked job in the government system.		x	x	x
Peter	<i>wuontich/ Jawero</i>	Mgongo Wazi Group	Family from Obunga. Owns land there. Married, two children. Various other income-generating activities.		x	x	x
Sara	Former <i>wuontich/</i> Umbrella Group official	Umbrella Group	Married. Six live children. Economic responsibility for her household. Owns land and has got a house in Obunga. Other income generating activities are poultry and midwifery.		x	x	
Toby	Worker	Umbrella Group	Is old and sole provider for his four children. No additional income-generating activities.		x	x	

**Personal data**

- 1) Where do you come from?
- 2) Have you got land? Where?
- 3) Why did you move to Obunga?
- 4) Are you married?
- 5) Have you got any children? How many?
- 6) How many people depend on your salary?
- 7) Have you got anyone who helps you with money for your household? Who?

**Work structure**

- 8) How long have you been working here in Obunga?
- 9) Tell me about how you started working in Obunga?
- 10) Tell me about the work you do.

***Wuontich:***

- 11) How did you start to be a *wuontich*?
- 12) How many people do you employ?
- 13) Tell me about the different kind of work that they do.
- 14) How do you get people to work for you?
- 15) Do you have any kind of contract with your workers? Tell me about this contract.
- 16) Do you have the same workers all the time? Why/why not.
- 17) How do you get fish?
- 18) What decides if a *wuontich* gets fish or not?
- 19) Where do you have your *djiko*?
- 20) Does it matter where in the field the *wuontich* has her *djiko*? Why?  
If yes
- 21) How does one get to have the *djiko* in a good place?

**If IP is a woman.**

- 22) Do you have men working for you?
- 23) Tell me about how it is to be *wuontich* over male workers?

**Worker:**

- 24) Tell me about the work that you do.
- 25) How did you start working with your *wuontich*?
- 26) Do you work for different *wuontich*? Why? How do you change between *wuontich*?



**All:**

- 27)What do you think about work these days?
- 28)Why do you think it is that way?
- 29)How has the business changed the past two years?
- 30)When there is little work-how do you share the work between you?
- 31)Are there any disagreements on this? If yes, what do these consist of?
- 32)How are these disagreements solved?
- 33)What is the main difference between those who manage to stay in business all the time and those who don't?
- 34)Have you ever had to leave this business? Why?
- 35)Does it happen that you disagree upon how the work is done here? What do you do then?
- 36)Is there something you would like to change about your work? What can you do about it?

**Umbrella group**

- 37)Tell me about the work of the Umbrella Group?
- 38)Does it happen that you disagree with the Umbrella Group, What do you do then?

**Diversification/vulnerability**

- 39)From what sources do you get money for your everyday life.
- 40)Do you work with skeletons every day?  
If no
- 41)-How do you get money on days you do not work?
- 42)Have you got any additional business? Tell me more about this.

**Social capital and resources**

- 43)Are you member of any group here in Obunga?  
-What does the group do?
- 44)Who are the members of this group (Neighbours, family, «colleges»)?
- 45)Are you a member of other groups? Tell me more about these
- 46)What do you do to become a member of such a group?
- 47)Are anyone excluded from these groups? Why?
- 48)Do you help each other here at the marketplace in Obunga? In what way?
- 49)Who helps you when you are ill/got problems
- 50)Who do you help when they are ill/got problems?
- 51)Are all the people here in Obunga helped in the same way? Explain?
- 52)If someone does something that the others dislike, what happens then?
- 53)Are there people here in the marketplace you tend to be with? Why?

**Men and Women**

- 54)What do you think is the main difference between women and men here in Obunga?Explain.
- 55)Do you think it is easiest for a man or for a woman to earn good money here in Obunga?  
Explain.

# Six hurt, 11 held in Kisumu fish fight

By **GEORGE KIAYE**

Eleven people were arrested following a running battle between fishmongers in which six people were seriously injured.

The rival groups totalling 120 people were fighting over a possession of a site at Obunga Village next to the moribund Kisumu Breweries plant.

Those arrested included area councillor Odhiambo Oyolo, who was claimed to have led one group as they attacked each other with crude weapons.

However the people held were

later released on personal bonds pending investigations.

Business at the sprawling village was halted by the fighting, Kisumu police confirmed yesterday.

Trouble started when the so-called Obunga Umbrella Group led by Councillor Oyolo, went to the site and attempted to evict their rivals, trading as Obunga Mgongò Wazi Group.

The chairman of Obunga Mgongò Wazi Group, Mr Jacob Ochieng' Okulo, said that in spite of the attack, the rival groups had

a pending matter in court to determine legal occupation of the site.

He said the Obunga Umbrella Group had already gone to court to seek an injunction to restrain his group from operating at Obunga open air fish market. The hearing had been set for December 23.

"It is therefore contempt of court for the group to move in and try to evict us forcefully before the matter is heard and determined," claimed Mr Okulo.

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(Source Daily Nation 8/12-99)

APPENDIX 5. WORK ORGANISATION

→ Flow of skeletons  
..... Employment relationship

