

CHAPTER 2

THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter mainly focuses on the theories and concepts applied in the thesis. I will review three bodies of literature relevant to my research. These are (1) Networking and trust as social capital of the community; (2) Burmese culture and tradition in post-disaster reconstruction; and (3) Communities experiencing disaster. This chapter also describes the conceptual framework of the study.

2.1. The concept of social capital

In this thesis, when I use the phrase “social capital”, I am referring to the networks of the community members, the trust among individuals in the community and the actors in their networks, as well as the culture and practices of the community which create collective action and solidarity for the community. Social capital refers to networks and relationships that people have that can help them in their life. It is the trust between people and their practices for working together. Social capital has to do with their culture, their norms and beliefs, and the things that they value.

To conceptualize the term of social capital, I review some scholarly work on the concept of social capital. Many scholars had discussed different types and characteristics of social capital. The French anthropologist, Pierre Bourdieu, in his work “Forms of Capital”, states that social and cultural capital can be deduced from economic capital. He posits that most information and connections are shared through social networks such as friends, family members, colleagues, neighbors, or even from the links among social connections of different groups. More importantly, people need to participate in the mechanism of the existing social structure of a specific place in order to access or to generate information, knowledge, competency, practices,

norms, or even recreation. Bourdieu also defined social capital as “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu in Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu’s definition of social capital views social capital as a network of social connection. People from the community find jobs, education and information from members usually of the social networks which they have access to. Those social networks mostly come from daily activities, and also from common culture, practices, belief, identity and interests. These social networks can also be described as a social structure mechanism comprised of individual members delivering and accessing resources such as information. Interacting with this mechanism is the process by which social capital is formed among members of a group.

Another form of definition for the social capital common in the literature is the network perspective that sees social capital as both “bonding and bridging” force. Bridging social capital is also called linking social capital in some literature. Robert Putnam makes a distinction between two kinds of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. Putnam (2000) sees bonding social capital as “undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity” among homogeneous individuals. Bonding social capital is often described as horizontal ties between individuals within the same social group, in other words, it is opposite to vertical ties between different social groups. Bonding social capital is often associated with local communities where many people know many other people in their own community. Bonding social capital is associated with norms and trust which can have both positive and negative manifestations and implications for social exclusion. To apply this concept to a post-disaster study, it would mean that people from a community might be able to help each other before getting help from outside, that they would share their resources, and that people might feel united. It would mean that community members might feel “we are together” as they have been living in the same village for a long time. In this scenario, people know each other well and regularly connect with each other regarding jobs, cultural and religious activities and daily practices. Thus bonding social capital helps the local community to work together.

On the other hand, bridging social capital is important for the long-term recovery process in the post disaster context because it serves to “encompass peoples across diverse social cleavages” (Putnam, 2000). Bridging social capital refers to ties between individuals which cross social divides or between social groups. Bridging social capital may not involve many shared norms but is likely to be associated with reciprocity and trust. It may provide access to network resources outside of an individual’s or social group’s usual circle. Ssereter and Woolcock (2004) discuss “linking social capital” which is highly related to this bridging social capital. For them, linking social capital is composed of “norms of respect and networks of trusting relationships between people who are interacting across explicit, formal or institutionalized power or authority gradients in society.” Linking social capital may reinforce existing ties between members and from a governance perspective, may often exclude women, newcomers, and minorities from participation and distribution of resources.

In addition, James Coleman’s (1988) perspective on social structure and members focuses on social capital at the group level with the discussion on how groups develop and maintain social capital as a collective asset. He explores how those collective assets enhance the group members’ level of opportunity. Social capital facilitates individual or collective action, produces networks of relationships, reciprocity, trust, and social norms but whether society is better off as a result depends entirely on the individual uses to which it is put.

I was interested in these kinds of social capital because I wanted to know what kind social capital are most important in the community that I studied. An important aspect of social capital is shared culture, values and practices.

2.2. Burmese Culture, Tradition and Community of Practice in Post-disaster Reconstruction

In the context of Burmese society, helping each other is a way to make merit as well as a main tenant of a life well lived. In Tun Myint's study, "Roots of Democracy in Burma", he states that:

"For burmese families and communities, Buddhism is the deepest culture in the communities and also *setana* is applied to evaluate the state of a person's trustworthiness, respect, affection, and moral standing demonstrated by his relationships with family and community. *Setana* stands above the physical and social identity of people in Burmese social behaviors in the sense that racial identity, gender, color of skin, formal educational level, economic status, or the physical look of a person does not come first in the judgment of a person. *Setana* comes first in measuring behavioral aspects of a human being whose intentions and actions are believed to produce transformative consequences to human society" (TunMyint, 2009).

The meaning of "setana" is the "goodwill" towards the other people. The social structure of the rural Burmese village is rich in cultural traditions and social bonds. Often, the traditions are viewed as tying a community to its past, to drain its agility, and to resist forward movement after the disaster. People share their resources to others to show their "*setana*" to the others and thus maintain their value and identity as "good people". This belief reinforces social interactions between people in a community.

Additionally, most of the people from a village are interacting very closely, sometimes like relatives. In Burmese culture, there is a saying that says "Ein Nee Nar Chin Swe Myo Yin" meaning neighbors are close like relatives even though they do not have blood ties. This kind of thinking reinforces the idea that villages have the responsibility to take good care of each other. Their actions towards their neighbors show their moral value. The judgment of a person's character depends on

the way they act towards others. Therefore, the cultural traditions and social bonds have become an asset or “social capital” for the community.

Religion plays a strong role in Burmese society and is intricately linked to the nature of social capital in Burmese communities. As the predominant religion amongst Burmese communities, Buddhism is the most influence factor in the Burmese rural community and the monks are revered as highly respected people by the community. The monks are also the decision makers for the society, sometimes acting as negotiators or mediators between quarreling neighbors or couples. Monks also offer spiritual guidance for the people, teaching them how to live more happily and peacefully. The religion is also reflected in the practices of the community in the rural area in Myanmar. Monasteries are a common place for the village society to meet for religious ceremony and culture activities. People usually go to the monasteries on the Sabbath days. They may participate in meditation camps or listen to the monk's sermons. These religious practices ensure that the people and the monks have regular and continual interaction. Under the leadership of the monks, they will work together on many activities such as preparing for religious festivals.

Etienne Wenger says the communities of practice are “groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly” (Wenger, 1998). Communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective action and interest. People in these communities of practice may share the same problem and are learning together about how to manage that issue. The group holds a common interest in their own development and growth in relation to the issue they collectively face. In Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott and Willoan M. Snyder's book called “Cultivating Communities of Practice” they posit that “communities of practice are groups of people who share about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott and Snyder, 2002). People can learn from each other by working together to expend their collective knowledge. In rural area in Myanmar, the village community people are used to gather and working together in many aspects of their social, religious, and culture practices. As people spend time together, they can share information, help each other, and offer advice. People are integrated from the

perspective of livelihoods too. People meet each other while at the work place for example farming on the farm and fishing in the river. The daily practices and culture values of rural Burmese communities-reinforce the interaction, the cooperative and the feeling of mutual purpose within a community, helping to develop a community of practice.

These main conceptual themes dictate the need to study the practices, culture and tradition of the target community. More specifically, this paper investigates how communities of practices and cultural values facilitated the community participation in the post-disaster situation in Tha-Gyar-Hin-O village. A final concept that will greatly add to this inquiry is that of “communities experiencing disaster”.

2.3. Communities Experiencing Disaster

The other bodies of literature that I studied are the materials on communities experiencing disaster. Community members are typically the first responders during an emergency, and they take actions to save and protect themselves, their families and their communities. These actions can be considered *emergent behaviours* (Drabek and McEntire, 2003). Drabek and McEntire mention that in responding, disaster-affected communities “spontaneously begin their own recovery processes. It is the role of formal recovery agencies to provide structured support, communication and coordination to assist these efforts. Disasters are typically a ‘local’ phenomenon. Local communities are facing both the immediate impact of a disaster and the initial, emergency response, which, experience has shown, is crucial for saving lives and helping peoples”.

Smile (1995) studied roles of collective actions through organized citizen groups in two communities -one community affected by Hurricane Hugo in 1989 and the other community affected by the Loma Prieta Earthquake in 1989. She concluded that the pre-disaster period collective behaviors could be one of the critical indicators to predict post-disaster period collective behaviors. In other words, if a community is better equipped with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) which are actively involved in community development in the pre-disaster period, then there is a better

chance for the community to maintain the high level of participation in community recovery activities in the post-disaster period. In terms of the pre-disaster period collective behaviors within the Myanmar context, we can see that the Burmese communities in the rural area regularly engaged in collective activities such as social and religious practices and festivities. People in these communities have a long history of working together and helping each other in daily life as well as specific times of celebration or grief. Numerous community-based organizations, or CBOs, have cropped up over the years in rural villages in Myanmar reflecting the organic emergence of social and religious groups in society.

Many scholars point out that the empowerment of the local people in the pre- and post-disaster situation is highly important for disaster management. The participation of local people in disaster preparedness and management is crucial to reduce the devastated impact of disasters. Participatory approaches to the disaster preparedness and management often pre-suppose a basic capacity within local communities (Battisata and Baas, 2004). This approach recognizes that the participation of local people can be the entry point of a comprehensive natural disaster prevention and preparedness plan. Thus, long term social development in a community is the most important aspect of the social reconstruction process in a post-disaster situation. In the UNDP 2009 report, "Community-Driven Recovery: Cyclone Nargis One Year On", they report that the social system of Myanmar communities in the delta and in the rural societies generally offers considerable opportunity to use community-based approaches for organizing livelihoods most effectively. There are a number of reasons for the strength of such social capital in the rural economy. First, there is a tradition of rural community members taking collective action in pooling labour and carefully prioritizing and implementing village social and economic infrastructure schemes. Second, in the absence of effective social security, community members support each other in times of need, which was evident in their response to Nargis. Third, kinship ties are strong and are reinforced through marriage within the communities.

The United Nations' International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR) recommends that "the local community groups should have the chance to influence decisions and manage resources to help reduce their vulnerability and better enable them to cope with risk. To be effective, knowledge must be presented in a way that is related to local conditions and customs." In the post-disaster reconstruction process, participation of the community is highly important as is the need for local values, traditions, coping mechanisms and strategies to be taken into account when developing reconstruction plans.

In addition, post-disaster management needs to be considered within the wider perspective of development, specifically the sustainable development approach. The concept of sustainable development emphasizes the needs of future generations while responding to the modern-day development needs McEntire suggests that:

"The sustainable hazard mitigation concept, which is very similar to sustainable development concept, appears to be more related to disaster management in this approach. Sustainable development and sustainable hazard mitigation view disasters from a broad perspective and connect the issue of disasters to other problems. These concepts provide a wider approach to disaster in comparison with disaster-resistant community and disaster-resilient community. They are not, however, holistic because they ignore man-made disasters"(McEntire et al. 2002).

2.4. Research Conceptualization

In this thesis, the main center of my analysis is the community. In figure 2.1, the community element is understood to include the community's social structure and social relations. I hypothesize that these internal dimensions of the community will shed light on the post-disaster experience of the community. After the village was devastated by Cyclone Nargis, the community members came to each other's aid in the immediate emergency stage well before the village received help from the outside. The villagers' further responses during the relief and recovery stages, as well as their participation to the post-disaster reconstruction, depends greatly on the resiliency, resources and capacity already present in the community. The Myanmar

government, local non-government organizations (LNGOs) and international non-government organizations (INGOs) were some of the outside groups that aided in the post-disaster scenario. The community had relations with these outside agencies which were working for post-disaster reconstruction. The nature of these relationships influence and can be influenced by the community and its inherent strengths. The community members also have their network of market-oriented relationships due to their livelihoods. The center square and surrounding outer circle represents the community's socially-connected networks that can be considered as aspects of the community's bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000). These attributes includes the cultural, tradition, socio-economic networks and trust. The practices of the Buddhist religion and culture values are the most influential factors for rural Burmese communities; it can also produce significant social capital within the community. The community's social phenomena and its accumulation of social capital, enables the community to evolve through post-disaster reconstruction and towards sustainable development.

To better understand the local communities within this framework, I studied the community of Tha-Gyar-Hin-O village where there was evidence of community empowerment at various different levels of society, particularly in the strong interactions of community members. I have also studied the community members' external relationship with outside agencies implementing reconstruction projects in the village. Both these horizontal and vertical networks can be examined by looking at the community reconstruction process.

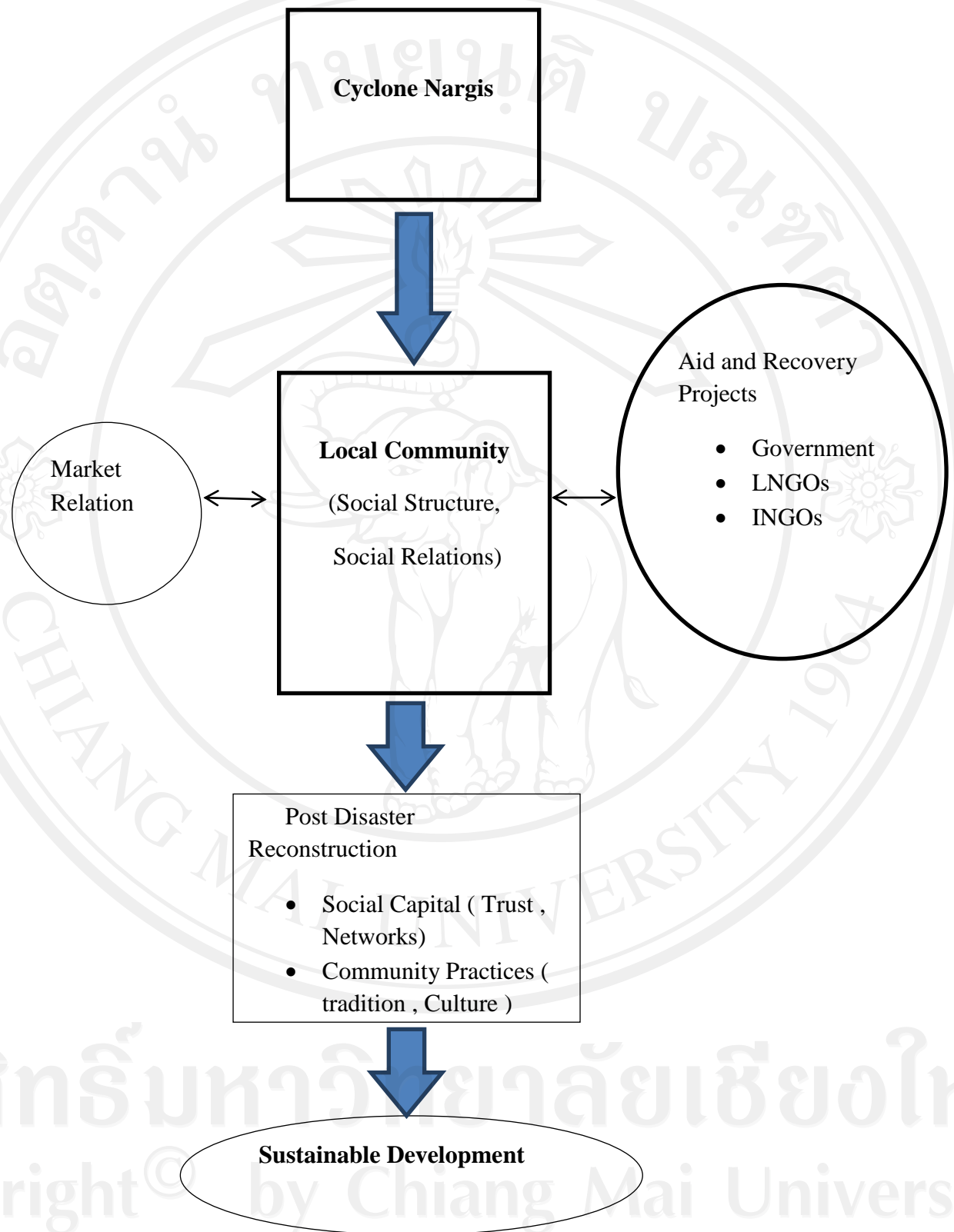


Figure 2.1 Conceptual Framework of the Study