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The role of Landcare group networks in rural Australia: exploring the contribution of social capital

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Abstract

In this paper, the authors report their qualitative research examining the origins, modus operandi and outcomes of two networks. The concept of social capital explains, at least in part, the apparent success of these networks. The two networks attracted substantial funding, created opportunities for participation and shared learning, carried out extensive on-ground works, improved communication structures, adopted more professional management practices and increased the knowledge of members. The key elements of social capital that were important in achieving these outcomes were trust, norms, expectations of reciprocity and linkages. Empowerment acted as a bridge that linked social capital with other factors contributing to network outcomes. The success of these Landcare networks suggests that top-down government stimulus can be a catalyst for bottom-up community development.



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Keywords

Social capital; Empowerment; Landcare; Networks; Community participation; Learning organisations; Rural development

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