

# Prosperity and Social Capital: Is Social Capital Declining in Nepal?



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## Abstract

The survey study assessed, analysed and presented the status of social capital in Nepal. The study used a survey research design and a quick survey monkey tool with eight indicators of social capital. The survey was conducted on a very small sample size selected randomly. It reviewed the literature obtained from three sources: academic and professional articles in the subject field, textbooks and web-resources. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the data.

The major findings and conclusions are (a) the **local social climate** largely seemed to be moderate, (b) there is a low level of **trust** among the Nepalese people, (c) people's **willingness** to co-finance public goods is low because of non-responsive and unfavourable government policies on Nepal's prosperity, (d) social investment in the education and social security of common and poor/marginalized people living with chronic diseases and disabilities is frustrating, (e) **willingness** of people to accept tax and co-finance public goods is weak because of the lack of government's recognition of taxpayers and insincere social responsibilities, (f) **willingness** to invest in local economy, national and regional assets is high; however, low level of law and order, and lack of an investment-friendly environment and policy support appeared as impeding factors to investing in the local economy, (g) **helpfulness** among the Nepalese people is remarkable, (h) it is widely believed that Nepalese people are **friendly**, and (i) **hospitality** among the Nepalese people is widely recognized as they are cordial and kind and welcoming towards guests and strangers.

**Keywords:** Social Capital, Prosperity, Friendliness, Helpfulness, Hospitality

## Introduction

Social capital is a commonly used concept and has different meanings for different people. It is linked to concepts such as civil society, culture, social connectedness, social networks and everything else.

There is a strong debate on what it is and what it is not. For some, it includes all aspects of society and social organizations, while, for others, it is contextual. Similarly, 'it is also important to remember that prosperity may mean different things to different people; for example, happiness and social networks may mean more to some people than economic wealth' (Hans, 2014, n.p.). According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the concept of social capital became fashionable only relatively recently, but the term has been in use for almost a century, while the ideas behind it go back further still. Social capital is defined by the OECD as "networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups". Social capital has been of great importance for societal well-being in recent years. "Studies have found that levels of social capital are related to levels of employment in communities, academic performance, individual physical health, economic growth, and immigrant and ethnic enterprise" (Poteyeva, 2018, n.p.). Social capital—one of the pillars of prosperity, used by the Legatum Prosperity Index™ 2018—measures the strength of personal and social relationships, social norms and civic participation in a country.

In Nepal, in recent years, as the need for prosperity has been proliferating and getting more and more importance, more efforts to link prosperity to social capital have become imperative. A common notion is that every social organization needs three kinds of capital: financial, human and social. In fact, these three capitals constitute "*Samriddha Nepal, Khusi Nepali*" (meaning Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali). We must view social capital in terms of "three dimensions: interconnected networks of relationships between individuals and groups (social ties or social participation), levels of trust that characterize these ties, and resources or benefits that are both gained and transferred by virtue of social ties and social participation" (Poteyeva, 2018, n.p.).

Despite an increasing focus on social capital, apart from the Legatum Prosperity Index study, there is little study that assesses, analyses and presents the status of social capital in Nepal. The situation whether the indicators of social capital are declining or not is unknown. It is commonly believed that our knowledge of social capital is limited. Hence, the main objective of this study is to assess, analyse and present status of social capital in Nepal.

## Literature Review

Studies and literature on social capital reveals that, although the term, social capital, has become popular relatively recently, its concept has been in use for almost a century. According to OECD, 'Social capital may first have appeared in a book published in 1916 in the United States that discussed how neighbours could work together to oversee schools, referring to social capital as those tangible assets [that] count for most in the daily lives of people' (OECD, 2009, p. 102). In recent years, social capital literature is found substantially since it is connected to the social relationships recognizing as academic literature. There are some definitions of social capital across all levels—individual, group and community, though there still seems to be a debate on what is or is not social capital. At the individual level, the definition of social capital considered only the number and quality of social relationships and the analysis included aspects related to an individual's goodwill and reputation. While the group level of social capital's definition focuses on social connectedness and norms of trust and reciprocity, the community level social capital is generally considered as system approach, i.e., the property of the collective—common trust, civic norms, civic engagement, and social and political participation. Hence, it is very difficult to measure social capital aiming to make it representative across all levels as there are various meanings and definitions of social capital (Claridge, 2018, p. 2).

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines **social capital** as 'a concept in social science that involves the potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through membership in social networks'.

Social Capital Research and Training (SCRT), (2018a) stated evolution of social capital as 'Social capital is a term that is commonly used; however the concept is often poorly defined and conceptualized' (SCRT, 2018a, n.p.).

SCRT, (2018b) summarized the different definitions of social capital given by different writers from two perspectives: external and internal. These two perspectives are further categorized into three: external/bridging/communal, internal/bonding/linking, and both types (SCRT, 2018b, n.p.). One of the

definitions from external/bridging/communal perspective is '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 & Wacquant, 1992, p. 119).

Social capital now has become a multi-disciplinary concept. It has been increasingly influential with a high degree of trust among network members, fostering a sense of mutual understanding that eventually permits them to effectively share their common goals. In this context, Field (2008) wrote:

Most of the discussion has its roots in sociology and political science, mixed—and increasingly so—with a good dash of economics, and I have assumed that most readers will either have some basic grasp of these fields, or if not will be sufficiently interested to look up some of their basic ideas and concerns. I also try to do justice to the growing influence of ideas about social capital in health science, urban studies, regional studies, social policy, criminology, business studies, social and economic geography and history (Field, 2008, p. 2).

Singh and Koiri (2016) wrote in their article, 'Understanding Social Capital', as 'social capital as a concept has become one of the most popular exports from sociological theory to every stream of social sciences. In recent years it is often seen as the glue that holds democratic societies together' (Singh, & Koiri, 2016, p. 275). They also quoted F. Fukuyama: "Social capital cannot be acquired by individuals acting alone; it is created and transmitted through cultural mechanisms like tradition, religion, or historical habit, which created shared ethical values and a common purpose" (Fukuyama 1995, p[p]. 26-27).

The notion of social capital has become a medium for entering into debates about social issues, which is central to the arguments of Robert Putnam and others who have contributed to understanding social capital and its value in different societies. In this context, Hans (2014) observed that "social capital is critical and crucial in modern modes of social relationship and educational growth like 'social networking' we examine its nature, some of the issues surrounding its use, and its significance for educators" (Hans, 2014, p.2).

**Social capital is one of the pillars of prosperity. The Legatum Prosperity Index™ uses the following nine pillars and their description of measurement that offer a unique insight into how prosperity is forming and changing across the world:**

**Table 1: Prosperity Pillars and their Description of Measurement**

Pillars of Prosperity	Description of Measurement
<b>Economic Quality</b>	The Economic Quality pillar ranks countries on the standard of living afforded by an economy, economic inclusiveness, antimonopoly policy, labour force participation, trade competitiveness and openness to trade.
<b>Business Environment</b>	The Business Environment pillar measures a country's entrepreneurial environment, its business infrastructure, access to credit, investor protections and labour market flexibility.
<b>Governance</b>	The Governance pillar measures a country's performance in four areas: the rule of law, integrity of government, government performance and political participation.
<b>Education</b>	The Education pillar ranks countries on access to education, quality of education and human capital.
<b>Health</b>	The Health pillar measures a country's performance in three areas: health outcomes (in physical and mental health), health systems, and illness and risk factors.
<b>Safety &amp; Security</b>	The Safety & Security pillar ranks countries based on national security, personal safety and the security of living conditions in that country.
<b>Personal Freedom</b>	The Personal Freedom pillar measures national progress towards basic legal rights, individual liberties and social tolerance.
<b>Social Capital</b>	The Social Capital pillar measures the strength of personal and social relationships, social norms and civic participation in a country.
<b>Natural Environment</b>	The Natural Environment pillar measures a country's performance in three areas: the quality of the natural environment, environmental pressures and preservation efforts.

Source: The Legatum Prosperity Index™ 2018

Table 2 presents overall comparative prosperity and pillar ranks of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries.

**Table 2: Overall comparative prosperity and pillar ranks among the SAARC countries**

Overall Rank	Country <sup>1</sup>	Economic Quality	Business Environment	Governance	Education	Health	Safety & Security	Personal Freedom	Social Capital	Natural Environment
67	Sri Lanka	59	95	71	79	49	83	107	35	54
90	Nepal	39	87	80	125	133	74	44	63	128
94	India	58	51	40	104	109	100	99	102	130
109	Bangladesh	85	123	89	111	100	61	109	97	135
136	Pakistan	104	117	92	124	122	136	127	107	148
149	Afghanistan	130	137	143	145	134	148	148	144	147

Source: The Legatum Prosperity Index™ 2018

In the overall Prosperity Index rankings, Nepal ranks second, after Sri Lanka, among SAARC countries. It climbed by two positions from 92 to 90 when compared to a year before (2017). According to the Legatum Prosperity Index, Nepal has moved up the rankings table by 24 places since the Prosperity Index began in 2006.

In the Prosperity Pillar rankings, Nepal performs the best on **Economic Quality** and **Personal Freedom** and scores the lowest on the **Natural Environment** and **Education** pillars. The biggest positive change, compared to a year before, came in **Business Environment**, which increased by 25 places, whereas it dropped four places on **Health** (see figure 1 for detail).

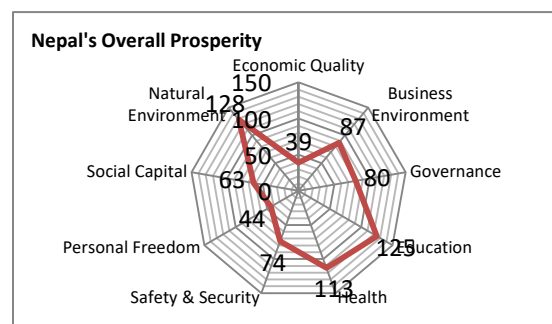


Fig. 1: Nepal's Overall Prosperity  
Source: Table 2.

<sup>1</sup>Bhutan and Maldives are not included in The Legatum Prosperity Index™ 2018.

## Methodology

This study was designed to assess the prosperity and social capital in Nepal by surveying a very small sample size selected randomly. The study used a survey research design, a method widely used in social studies as well as educational research. Survey research is one of the important areas of measurement in applied social research. The broad area of survey study incorporates any measurement procedures that involve asking questions. The design of this study primarily followed both quantitative and qualitative mixed methodological approaches. A survey questionnaire was specially designed to collect data and information on the assessment of social capital with respect to "Prosperous Nepal, Happy Nepali". The survey tool consisted of the eight Social Capital Indicators used by the Basel Institute of Commons and Economics, Gerbergasse 30, CH-4001 Basel, Switzerland. The survey tool was designed in two parts: personal information and main questions related to social capital indicators with a scale from 5 (high) to 1 (low). In addition to this, an open-ended question related to overall suggestions and recommendations in order to improve social capital in Nepal was asked.

Numerical and non-numerical data were analysed separately. All numerical data were analysed using IBM SPSS Software. Major statistical methods used were frequency distribution, percentages, means, and standard deviation. Similarly, non-numerical data were analysed using the process of content analysis (qualitative analysis) techniques. Feedback and comments were sought from peer reviewers, particularly on main results.

## Main Results

### Summary Profile of Respondents

**Respondents by qualifications and occupation:** Fifty per cent of the government jobholder respondents and 50 per cent of the social service respondents had Bachelor's degree. Similarly, other respondents (56%) and government jobholder respondents (29.3%) had Master's and above degrees. Their qualifications with occupations are given in Table 3.

**Table 3: Respondents by qualifications and occupations**

Education	Occupation				Total
	Government job	Social service	Business	Others	
Bachelor	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Master's and above	29.3%	12.2%	2.4%	56.1%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>14.0%</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>53.5%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Quick survey, 2018

**Respondents by gender and age:** The survey also analysed the age and gender of the respondents. The majority of the female respondents (75%) were from age group, 41-50 years, followed by male respondents (53.8%) from age group, 51 and above. The male respondents from age group, 21-30 and female respondents from age groups of 31-40 and 51 and above were none. Their gender with age groups is given in Table 4.

**Table 4: Respondents by Gender and Age**

Gender	Age (year)				Total
	21-30	31 to 40	41 to 50	51 and above	
Male	0.0%	20.5%	25.6%	53.8%	100.0%
Female	25.0%	0.0%	75.0%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>2.3%</b>	<b>18.6%</b>	<b>30.2%</b>	<b>48.8%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: Quick survey, 2018

### Results on Overall Assessment of Social Capital

The quick survey monkey covered a total of 43 randomly selected respondents from different walks of life. The survey questionnaire consisting of eight indicators of 'social capital' with a scale of 5 (high) and 1 (low) was distributed through email. Table 5 presents the survey data on social capital.

**Table 5: Overall Assessment of Social Capital (in per cent)**

Indicators of Social Capital	Low	Not so low	Medium	Not so high	High	Mean	Std. Deviation
1. Please characterize the local Social Climate	2.3	9.3	46.5	37.2	4.7	3.33	0.81
2. How is the trust among the people?	9.3	30.2	34.9	23.3	2.3	2.79	0.99
3. Are the people willing to co-finance public goods? (Public goods: security, healthcare, education, environmental issues, infrastructure, social aid, public media, arts)	9.3	32.6	39.5	11.6	7	2.74	1.03

4. Will the people accept taxes and contributions to co-finance public goods?	14	30.2	39.5	11.6	4.7	2.63	1.02
5. Are people willing to invest in local economy, national and regional assets? [Assets: shares in cooperatives, national and local stocks, shares in SME (small and medium enterprises), own or family business]	4.7	7	34.9	25.6	27.9	3.65	1.11
6. How is the helpfulness among the people?	7	7	39.5	39.5	7	3.33	0.97
7. How is the friendliness among the people?	0	14	44.2	34.9	7	3.35	0.81
8. How is the hospitality among the people?	2.4	11.9	40.5	33.3	11.9	3.40	0.94

Regarding the ‘**local social climate**’, the majority of the survey respondents (46.5%) stated that the ‘local social climate’ was moderate, whereas around 37 per cent stated that it was not so high, and a few respondents (4.7%) mentioned it was high.

To a question on the level of ‘**trust** in the Nepalese people’, about 35 per cent of the respondents stated that it was medium, followed by 30.2 per cent and 23.3 percent who said it was not so low and not so high respectively. Very few respondents mentioned that the trust in the people was high.

As regards the issue of **willingness** to co-finance public goods in Nepal, 39.5 per cent of the respondents stated that it was medium. Similarly, 32.6 per cent of the respondents noted that it was not so low, and 11.6 per cent stated that it was high.

**Willingness** of people to pay taxes and co-finance public goods was arguably weak. Altogether 39.5 per

cent of the survey respondents expressed that it was just moderate, with an average mean of 2.63, followed by 30.2 per cent who said it was not so low.

The survey also gathered data on **willingness** to invest in the local economy and national and regional assets<sup>2</sup>. It showed that 34.9 per cent of the respondents expressed that investment in the local economy and national and regional assets was medium, followed by not so high (27.9%) and high (25.6%).

With regard to **helpfulness** among the people, the survey data showed that it appeared to be medium (39.9%), not so high (39.9%), and high (7%). The survey noted that only 7 per cent of the respondents perceived that helpfulness among the people was low.

When asked about **friendliness** among the people, 44 per cent of the respondents stated that it was medium, followed by not so high (34.9%). While 14 per cent of the respondents reported that friendliness among the people was not so low, a few respondents (7%) responded that it was high.

Lastly, in responding to the question, “How is the **hospitality** among the people?”, 40.5 per cent of the respondents stated that it was above average, followed by not so high (33.3%), high (11.9%), and not so low (11.9%).

### Discussion of Results

The analyses of survey data showed that the ‘**local social climate**’ was largely found to be moderate. According to the qualitative survey data, most of the children, youth, parents, street senior citizens, orphans, as well as marginalized and poor women are socially victimized in one way or another. There is a lack of rule of law and desegregated policy on social capital, services for senior citizens, inclusion of social capital in school/college curricula and training packages, media campaigns, promotion of best practices, and community parks. In Nepal, each community has its own social cultural values and rites. In addition to these, the government is not able to (i) tap individual human resources (even small number) for nation building, (ii) assure people with policies and programmes that are for the welfare of people, and (iii) control corruption and play political roles focusing on people’s prosperity.

According to the survey, ‘**trust** among the Nepalese people appeared low. The respondents mentioned that trust among the Nepalese people was eroding and

<sup>2</sup>Such as shares in cooperatives, national and local stocks, shares in small and medium enterprises, own or family business

people, especially the young generation, had been too critical about the political rhetoric. In general, people are friendly and cooperative, but there is a lack of trust. People are getting divided along ethnic, regional, religious, social, and economic lines. Majority of the people are not trusted within the community mainly due to their political affiliations. The degree of trust among the people is declining and social justice is disappearing by the government's immature decisions. Individualistic approach has overridden the society losing collective trust. People living in rural areas are almost ignorant of social capital and their hand-to-mouth problems are rampant. Political partisan is everywhere, which has ruined social capital. Nepotism and favouritism are pervasive and only middle persons are benefitting from social activities. Due to the lack of trustworthy politics and governance, people are becoming increasingly pessimistic, which directly hinders the development of social capital. Social norms are largely defunct. There are no plans and actions to reverse the current social psychology. People hardly believe other people because of political partisanship and corruptions. People cannot even trust their friend circle because what is preached is not practised. With these caveats, unless people believe each other, the social bond with trust cannot become strong.

The level of **willingness** to co-finance public goods (e.g., security, healthcare, education, environmental issues, infrastructure, social aid, public media, arts, etc) is not inspiring in Nepal. The survey respondents shared their views that the government policy is not favourable for the youth to work in Nepal. Security system, healthcare, education, environmental issues, and so on are poorly managed. Social investment in common and poor/marginalized people with chronic diseases, social security and equal distribution of resources has always remained poor. Similarly, honesty, value of academics, implementation of Public Act and Rules have always been great issues in Nepal. The survey information suggest that political parties require bridging between the government and the people and providing better access of public goods as social capital to the people. The current federal system execution would be successful if the government created an enabling environment (e.g., access of public services to the people, recognition of contributions, and strengthened rule of law regardless of any differences in political ideology, caste, wealth or remoteness) for all segments of society.

Of other indicators of social capital, the indicator of **willingness** of people to pay taxes and co-finance public goods arguably appeared weak. The government does not fully recognize taxpayers and increases its social responsibilities. However, a survey

conducted by the Basel Institute of Commons and Economics (2016-2018) on the World Social Capital Monitor indicates 'in Bangladesh and Nepal entrepreneurship is highly appreciated'. The positive outcome of the social capital is missing, which requires highlighting and inculcating the value of social harmony right from childhood.

Mixed views on the **willingness** to invest in the local economy, national and regional assets were received from the respondents. Although some respondents reported that willingness to invest in the local economy, national and regional assets was high, negative attitude exists among the people in investing in these assets (e.g., shares in cooperatives, national and local stocks, shares in small and medium enterprises, own or family business). Low level of law and order, lack of an investment-friendly environment and policy support, etc have caused low level of motivation for investment in the local economy. Social capital requires increased government budget and highly efficient and capable human resources who can manage investment in the local economy. Although people want to invest collectively in local, national and/or regional assets, the business environment is not conducive because their identity has been partitioned along political and ethnic lines. Moreover, the government's policy is not yet open enough to capture people's sentiments on economic development in compliance with the changed socio-political context. Uncontrollable crowds in share applications opened publicly by some companies are evidence of the readiness of the people to invest and contribute to Nepal's economic and social development. One of the prerequisites to encourage and motivate people to invest in the local economy is creating an enabling environment with a strong institutional set up.

Looking at the survey data, **helpfulness** among the people seems to be appreciable. However, the survey respondents heavily criticized that the so-called Nepalese rich people are too selfish, whereas a large number of poor people have hand-to-mouth problems. People are using social capital for vested interest, and it will continue for quite a long time to come. Helpfulness among the Nepalese people varies across the country's geo-ecological regions. Moreover, it also varies from community to community.

The survey data showed that Nepalese people are remarkably **friendly**. Nepal is a diverse country and home to multiple religions, races, tribes, and cultures; there are over 100 ethnic groups, more than 90 languages and ethnicity. All ethnic groups have their own culture. They celebrate their rituals with other ethnic groups residing in the vicinity in a harmonious

environment. In this context, 'Nepal is also called the small country but the people of Nepal are of large hearts. Nepal is the country of friends and family as it is located between two countries of great light and weight India and China', writes Jitendra Sahayogee (Sahayogee, n.d.).

**Hospitality** among the Nepalese people is widely recognized and the survey data and information also support this statement. The average mean of 3.4 (with a ladder of 5 for high and 1 for low) and very low standard deviation (0.94) of respondents' responses also reveal that Nepalese people are cordial and kind to welcoming guests or strangers.

### Conclusion

Although the **local social climate** largely appeared to be moderate, it is not encouraging because of the lack of rule of law, desegregated policy on social capital, and strong political commitment to control corruption and create an enabling environment for people's prosperity. There is a low level of **trust** among the Nepalese people. Trust among the people is declining mainly due to unpopular and immature decisions of government, which also has negative impact on social justice. People's **willingness** to co-finance public goods is low because of non-responsive and unfavourable government policies to motivate people towards Nepal's prosperity. Social investment in education and social security of common and poor/marginalized people living with chronic diseases and disability is frustrating.

**Willingness** of people to pay taxes and co-finance public goods is also weak because of the lack of government recognition of taxpayers and insincere social responsibilities. While people's **willingness** to invest in the local economy, national and regional assets is high, low level of law and order, lack of an investment-friendly environment and policy support, etc are discouraging and preventing people from investing in the local economy.

**Helpfulness** among the Nepalese people is appreciable. However, the few rich are criticized for being too selfish and using social capital for vested interest. Helpfulness among the Nepalese people varies across the country's geo-ecological regions, from place to place and community to community. Nepal is recognized in the world as the country of friends and family. The survey found that Nepalese people are very **friendly**. All ethnic groups in Nepal celebrate their rituals in a friendly environment.

**Hospitality** among the Nepalese people is widely recognized. Nepalese people are cordial and kind towards guests or strangers.

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