Patterns of Youth Mobility in Uganda

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Introduction

An increasing dissatisfaction with existing explanatory models of population movement has in recent years stimulated a re-examination of the basic assumptions underlying these formal structures. Both in the Western world and within developing countries the traditional gravity model formulation incorporating a structural constraints approach to aggregate level movement has been consistently modified to include measures of comparative advantage in order to improve its explanatory power (Lowry 1966; Masser and Gould 1975). Of equal importance is an expanding body of research into an alternative scale and method of analysis which focuses directly on the individual decision-maker in an attempt to uncover the fundamental behavioural processes behind spatial movement (Morrill 1963; Wolpert 1965).

Within this context the analysis of migration selectivity is particularly useful in clarifying the influence of personal characteristics on motivation for movement and on the spatial pattern itself (House et al. 1968; Shryock and Larmon 1965). In Tropical Africa the widespread modernisation process during this century has produced a marked increase in types of mobility (Gould and Prothero 1975) many of which are the subject of detailed analysis. This paper focuses on one particular migrant group, namely, the growing numbers of educated young people for whom rising job aspirations stimulate movement from traditional rural areas (Caldwell 1969). Although they remain a small minority within the youthful sector of the population, nevertheless the social and economic implications of such mobility are particularly acute for countries which suffer marked regional disparities in income and employment opportunities. Detailed micro level study is therefore essential into the factors affecting the decision to move. By means of a particular case study attention is given to the influence of personal knowledge and information acquired by young people in education on their propensities to move and on their choice of residence (Hannerberg et al. 1957; Johnston 1974). The analysis concentrates on one country in East Africa, namely, Uganda, where marked educational expansion took place during the decade following independence in 1962 and where the link between education and mobility has become well-established. A
cross-section of students with high migration propensities are considered, namely, those about to terminate secondary school and those attending higher education (Makerere University) for whom the search for further training or employment is imminent.

Background to the Migration Decision

Both in the developed and developing worlds considerable importance has been attached to the role of information acquired directly through past movement and indirectly through interpersonal communication and social contact on patterns of population mobility (Goodey 1968; Southall 1971; Hirst 1975). As regards young people in education the need to be spatially mobile has proved in many developing countries to be an essential prerequisite both of access to education and to subsequent employment (Gould 1971; 1973), thus providing them with wide personal experience of their country. Within Uganda this has been particularly so. During the early independence years a widespread inter-district movements of students from home area to be educated reflected central government attempts at that time to encourage social and cultural mixing of young people in the interests of national unity. At the secondary level all institutions maintained national catchments so much so that students were under no obligation to attend their nearest school and indeed the Department of Education in conjunction with School Boards distributed students widely throughout the national area in a deliberate attempt to promote long-distance movement. At the level of higher education social contact between the educational 'elite' reached a maximum within a single institution, Makerere University, in the capital city, Kampala (Goldthorpe 1965).

This movement for educational purposes represented for many the first significant break with the extended family and in view of the many influences brought to bear within a culturally heterogeneous community could be regarded as an importance stimulus to detribalisation (Mitchell 1956). While definition and measurement of this latter process is the subject of considerable debate (Hirst 1972) nevertheless there is some agreement that the separation from home environment brought about by movement encourages a change in social relationships and cultural values. Traditional codes of behaviour, customs and the disciplines of tribal authority are more easily modified or rejected. Given that experiences are widened a critical question of relevance to development planning is this—what are the implications for the subsequent migration possibilities and preferences of young people during their career? It may be suggested that greater knowledge of the range of alternatives outside the home environment acts as a catalyst to further movement. However, existing evidence suggests that this may not necessarily be the case. The experience of alternative locations does not automatically lead young people to regard village life as inferior, so much so that the volume of rural-urban movement following education is less than predicted (Currie and Maas 1974) rendering inadequate