Communications, Information, and Aspirations in Rural Uganda

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Aims, Organization, and Methods\(^1\)

THE FINDINGS reported below are based on a survey conducted in the last two weeks of September, 1966 by social science students at Makerere University College who interviewed 416 adult males in twenty-one different rural locations throughout Uganda. The purpose of the survey was to find out about the rural inhabitants' use of the radio, the newspapers, and other means of communication in securing information about their government and its policies; the amount and accuracy of their knowledge of public affairs; their satisfactions, problems, material aspirations and expectations; and their assessment of changes in their villages since independence. We also intended to test certain hypotheses about media exposure and its effects upon rural inhabitants' level of information and material aspirations, more specifically whether exposure contributes to a revolution of rising expectations.

After 3 days of training during which each student translated the questionnaire schedule into the vernacular language he was going to use in the course of the interviews, 21 students returned to their home localities or villages for their holidays and were given the assignment of completing 20 interviews each. Each student in addition had to write a sociographic report of his home locality describing size, location, crops, history, population and other relevant demographic and socio-economic information.

At the start of the interview, an opening statement to the respondent stressed that this was a Makerere University project conducted by the professors and the students and that the project was part of the student’s education. We gave as the main reason for the study that “we (Makerere students and professors) are interested in knowing the way in which news about events here, in the district, and in the entire country, gets to be heard by persons like yourself. We

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are also interested in finding out what you think should be done to make (name of locality) a better place to live and Uganda a better country." Students kept the personal identity of the respondents anonymous, as promised. This approach was successful in securing the cooperation of the population. Some were initially suspicious because they thought we were trying to find out whether taxes had been paid. In Buganda, because of the recent disturbances and the emergency, there were greater difficulties in securing participation of the respondents, and on some questions (for example on who the most important persons in the locality are) many respondents gave evasive answers or none at all. Yet in general the answers we got were detailed and frank. Open criticisms were voiced about officials and policies of the government.

It was not possible to draw a random probability sample of Uganda rural localities, and then a random sample of adult males from within the localities sampled. The time and expense involved for a good probability sample was judged excessive, and in any case, it was thought desirable to send the students to their home localities and villages, so as to capitalize upon their knowledge of the local setting and the goodwill of their neighbors and fellow villagers. Thus villages were selected on the grounds that the student field workers came from those localities, and the students themselves had been chosen with a view to a good geographical distribution throughout Uganda.

Within the localities thus chosen, the students selected their respondents in the following manner. 20 interviews were to be done in all in each place. 3 to 4 interviews were to be done with local leaders and important citizens, hereafter referred to as "influentials" for the sake of brevity even though some of them are only potentially influential. These were the resident chief or headman, the headmaster or teacher of the highest grade in the local school, and the resident owner or manager of the largest African shop in the area patronized by the inhabitants. These three positions, chief, teacher and trader, were selected for this survey in order to reach those inhabitants who potentially and often actually play an important leadership and communications role in the community. Furthermore one or two reputational influentials were to be interviewed if there were any in the community. The remaining interviews were to be conducted from among the other male inhabitants over 18 years of age, to the exclusion of migrant laborers and visitors, hereafter referred to as the "rank and file" respondents.

The effort to achieve a representative cross-section of Uganda rural settlements was not entirely successful. The Eastern part of the country is underrepresented in the sample, and the Western Region overrepresented. In the North the locations selected tend to be somewhat atypical in the sense of including more government offices, trading centres, and schools than an informed observer would expect, and in the West atypical in the sense of being more remote from the district capitals and the major lines of communication than one would expect. Nevertheless, for Uganda as a whole we have locations of all types: some in which the main cash crop is cotton, some in which it is coffee,