

ABSTRACT

A Study of the Relationship Between Empowerment and Local Institutions in Two Communities, Oledai and Agolitom, in Rural Uganda

by

Chia-Hsin Hu ¹

The research will investigate how people's welfare is linked to people's participation in formal and informal institutions. This research will be done as a micro-economic study in two communities, Oledai and Agolitom in Kumi District in eastern Uganda, to investigate empowerment in relation to local institutional structures and people's participation in formal and informal institutions. This project will develop a micro-level dataset containing approximately 250 households in total, through the implementation of two quantitative surveys.

The dataset produced will allow me to investigate the impact of clans, farm labor groups, religious institutions and informal social networks that are the main institutional structures in the lives of poor people. All of these institutions have a central explaining power in the patterns of empowerment and disempowerment, which is not yet documented sufficiently in the economic literature.

This project does not intend to provide a representative quantitative work for Rural Uganda as a whole. The value of this study is that it will pioneer in-depth quantitative research on empowerment and institutions in places, which, like most of rural Africa, are at the margins of formal development work.

The value of using two communities, Oledai and Agolitom, is that they express very different welfare outcomes despite possessing the same informal institutional structures. Understanding this will shed light on how the institutional processes of empowerment are experienced by most rural Africans.

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For full research/trip experience read below:

Field

TRIP REPORT

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This study of the relationship between local institution participations and poor people's welfare was conducted in Kumi District, eastern Uganda, between September 11 and December 5, 2002. The fieldwork included three months of quantitative surveys as well as some group discussions for triangulation purposes.² During the entire research period, there were routine visits to the host institution, Economic and Policy Research Centre (EPRC) at the Makerere University, for exchanging research experiences. A formal seminar which combined the preliminary results of the field work and my research experiences in the United States was delivered at the end of the funded research period, with the primary aims of building capacity and the sharing of research between the EPRC and myself.

This research report is organized as follows. Section I reports the preliminary research findings. Section II details the daily activities and research agendas during the stay in Uganda. Section III is my experience for the entire trip, including the interactions with local researchers, villagers, and the host institution.

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² What is meant by this is the fact that the introduction of the surveys and the preliminary analysis of the surveys was an iterative process which incorporated comments from the staff at EPRC as well as local researchers in the field. Several modifications had to be made to make the surveys effective and understood by local people.

Detailed Trip report

Week of September 11, Entebbe

September 11: Arrived in Entebbe, Uganda.

September 12: travelled to Kampala to familiarize the city and to get in touch with EPRC, Makerere University.

September 13: National Census day; Stayed in Entebbe.

Week of September 15, Kampala and Ngora

September 15: Arrived in Kampala.

September 16: Visited EPRC, Makerere University, and delivered the gift for SAGA to EPRC Director John Okidi.

September 17: Arrived in the research site base, Ngora.

September 18: Arrived in the local hosting NGO, Vision Terudo and met with my research team, including a research fellow, Ben Jones, and three research assistants, Stella Akello, Ben Enou, and Christopher Osakan.

September 19: Discussed the field research schedule in detail with the whole team; designed the research program and finalized the institutional interview technique.

Week of September 22, Kampala and Ngora

September 23: Reviewed the questionnaires and interview reports.

September 24-26: Collected data regarding the assets and cattle of households; discussed the questionnaire results (household surveys); discussed the problems encountering in the interview process.

September 27: Arrived in Kampala; stayed in the Guest House of Makerere University.

September 28 & 29: Met with research fellows from EPRC, including Nicodemus Mugira-Baabo (Finance and Administration Manager of EPRC) and Ashie Mukungu (Young Professional of EPRC) at the Makerere University; familiarized with the research facility of Makerere University.

Week of September 30, Ngora

September 30: Back to Ngora to continue the research.

October 1-3: Filed work; investigated the present market values for the assets and cattle in the local markets.

October 4: Field work, conducting household surveys in Agolitom; visited the primary school of Agolitom.

October 5: Visited Isaiah Oonyu, a fellow of Vision Terudo, in Nyero.

Week of October 6, Ngora

October 7-11: continued Field work; continue the data collection in Oledai and Agolitom.

October 9: National holiday -- Independence Day.

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Week of October 13, Kampala and Ngora

October 13-14: Arrived in Kampala/Entebbe to collect research information; fixed computer problems.

October 15: Back to Ngora.

October 16-17: Finalized the data on household surveys; discussed the wealth ranking with the research team.

October 18: Field work in Agolitom.

Week of October 20, Ngora

October 21-25: Began to collect data on social network surveys; keyed in all the collected information.

October 26: Arrived in Kampala, Makerere University; left a copy of household survey data in EPRC.

Week of October 27, Kampala and Ngora

October 28: Visited Makerere University in the morning; back to Ngora.

October 29-November 1: Field work; created community leadership and committee lists; discussed interview skills for collecting information on leadership and the importance of different committees.

Week of November 3, Ngora and Kampala

November 4-6: Began the data collection of community leaderships; cleaning up the committee lists for verifying the leadership; finished up the data collection of social network data.

November 7: Photography for the trip report (Market, Agolitom, and Oledai).

November 8: Cleaning the committee and leadership lists.

November 9: Arrived in Kampala/Entebbe.

Week of November 10, Kampala

November 11-15: Reported to EPRC; finalized the data collection; prepared presentation materials.

Week of November 17, Kampala and Ngora

November 18: Presentation preparation.

November 19: Presented my research paper at EPRC.

November 20: Back to Ngora; collected additional data for the last time; farewell.

November 22: Back to Kampala.

Week of November 24, Kampala

Travel & sightseeing in the Queen Elizabeth National Park, West Uganda.

Week of December 1

December 2: Arrived in London, UK (stop-over).

December 5: Arrived in Washington, DC.

I. Preliminary research findings

Introduction

There is growing attention to the relationship between poor people's welfare and their participation in formal and informal institutions. To bring empowerment, accountability and access to local markets in rural areas researchers suggest that the economy needs active participation of local people in social and economic institutions (Hydén 1990, Brett 1992 and North 1992). Uganda has been at the forefront of innovations in decentralized government and the reform of local institutional relations (Abrahams and Platteau 2000). However, to what degree the main sources of political and social power are located outside the formal institutional system remains unanswered. It was therefore the intention of this research to advance our knowledge of how household welfare is determined by local institutional structures and people's participation in those structures (Narayan et. al. 2000). This research used a micro-economic study in two communities, Oledai and Agolitom in eastern Uganda, to provide evidence of how participation in different formal and informal institutions can affect the pattern of empowerment and disempowerment in the lives of poorer people in rural Africa.

Methodology

The quantitative surveys were done for approximately 250 households in the two rural communities of Oledai and Agolitom. The dataset produced allows me to investigate the impact of clans, farm labour groups, religious institutions, and informal social networks that are the main institutional structures in poor people's lives³. How are fundamental power inequalities manifested, reinforced or changed through people's participation in formal and informal institutions is the key question that this research project intends to answer. It is also worth of mentioning that this quantitative research is accompanied by the qualitative research led by Ben Jones⁴.

The two quantitative surveys were a household survey and a social networks survey. The household survey established a wealth ranking of households, through a set of measures that mirror locally understood measures of welfare. The questionnaires included systematic questioning on household structures and assets, expenditure, and well-being. This survey has borrowed from the National Household Survey 1999/2000 of the Uganda Bureau of

³ Informal and semi-formal institutions tend to dominate the socio-political landscape in rural Africa, as Franics (2000) has argued, the state is often unwieldy, corrupt or erratic in its local manifestations – courts, police, civil service, basic services – and so there is a reliance on those more informal institutions such as clans, churches, farm labour groups and so on.

⁴ At this point, it is worth indicating that the surveys were conducted while ongoing ethnographic work was being carried out in Oledai and Agolitom. This qualitative work is led by Ben Jones, a PhD candidate with the Development Studies Institute of the London School of Economics. This qualitative research is already funded by the Economic and Social Research Council of Great Britain, and provides an important opportunity to ground this type of micro-economic analysis in systematic research of another kind.

Statistics. Several modifications were made, however, to make this survey more practicable and understandable for the two study communities.

The social networks survey, by contrast, was concerned with constructing a dataset which expressed people's patterns of participation in formal and informal institutions, and drew heavily from the survey work of the Local Level Institutions Initiative of the World Bank⁵. As such it was concerned with generating such outputs that would allow us to test whether participation in particular institutions is an important determinant of welfare (Grootaert 2001).

Preliminary findings

The household surveys assessed the wealth status of local people in Oledai and Agolitom with both expenditure and income approaches. The questionnaire included questions such as the amount of cattle, the value of property, the amount of assets of each household, and their monthly expenditures on basic needs as well as school fees and costs.

The social network survey was used to reveal the extent to which interviewed households participated in local institutions, both formal and informal, and the quality of that participation. The characteristics and effectiveness of the most important institutions, everyday social interactions, and demographics of the household head are also provided in the social network survey.

According to preliminary analysis of the survey results, among all the associations that the households belong to in both communities, the most important kind of associations were social and cultural groups, these accounted for 73% and 70% of all memberships in Agolitom and Oledai, respectively. This type of institutional structure is generally regarded as more informal, and the finding is in line with much of the current anthropological literature on the region (de Berry 1999). The next two most important types of memberships are credit and saving groups and production, farming, and trading groups.

The similarity in the data patterns in Table 1 between the two communities is evident across both the institutional and the welfare indicators that the surveys investigated. This marked similarity is a strong indicator of the robustness of the data, given that the two communities inhabit similar localities, just ten kilometers apart.

Seven dimensions are used to measure and reveal the characteristics of local institutions (see Table 1). In Agolitom, a household has averagely 4.4 memberships in local institutions. In Oledai, each household averagely belongs to 3.6 associations. The smaller number of memberships implies that households are less active in participating in local level institutions. Another observation across the two villages is that the richer households participate more in these local level institutions than the poorer households. That said, for Agolitom, except that the richest quartile (the first quartile of income) is far more active in seeking memberships, the differences between the rest of quartiles is not significant. In Oledai, the difference in the number of the membership is evenly spread out among different

⁵ see <http://lnweb18.worldbank.org/ESSD/essdext.nsf/9ByDocName/SocialCapital>

income quartiles. The implication is that richest households tend to more actively seek memberships than the poor households.

The active participation of the members in local institutions is measured by the extent of active participation in the decision making process, the number of meeting attendance, and the cash or/and work contribution. In Table 1, the index of participation in decision making, on a scale from 0 to 100, shows that the average indices of two communities are almost the same. However, the richest group of households in Agolitom is more actively involved in the decision making process than the richest households in Oledai.

As to the meeting attendance, the result is a bit ambiguous in terms of no significant pattern found within Agolitom and also no similar pattern found across Agolitom and Oledai. For instance, the richer households do not attend meetings more frequently than the poorer households in Agolitom. According to the interviews with villagers in Agolitom, the meeting absence does not necessarily correlate to the lack of the participation in the business of association meetings, because some most influential households which are often absent in the routine association meetings in fact actively participate in the decision making process via a remote way; committee members will go to the influential households after the meeting to seek advices for decision making. Therefore, it suggests that the meeting attendance measure may not be able to catch the 'non-physical' participation in local institutions. Instead, it only measures whether households 'physically' participate the meeting. Nonetheless, in Oledai the data shows that the rich more actively and 'physically' participates local meetings than the poor.

In both Agolitom and Oledai the interviewed households make moderate in-kind contributions via cash or work to the local institutions which they belong to. The survey did not ask villagers to indicate the actual amount of fees or work hours/days for the in-kind contributions. Instead, the questionnaire asked the villagers to scale their contributions from one to five. Therefore, there is no further information regarding to the actual amount or level of contributions. Since the index is based on the interviewed households' true opinions with considerations of their own income levels, this measure of in-kind contributions can be seen as the reflection of the extent or the burden of the in-kind contributions to the households. As indicated in Table 1, regardless of the wealth levels most households contribute to their local institutions. And the poor households contribute the same extent based on their income levels as the richest, not in terms of the actual amount.

Effectiveness index shows how households rank their most important local institutions in terms of their effectiveness. In Agolitom, households consider their three most important institutions are fairly effective, scored 75 out of 100, and there is no much difference in the effectiveness opinion between different income levels of households. The average in Oledai is similar with the average in Agolitom. However, there is a pattern showing that in Oledai the richer households feel their most important associations are more effective than what the poorer households feel about their most important associations.

This survey specifically asked households whether they are benefited from participations in the three most important institutions in both individual and community levels. The information generated an index of beneficiary from participations. And it shows that in general households in Agolitom feel benefited from participations more than households in Oledai. And across the two communities, the richer households feel benefited more than the poorer ones.

The heterogeneity index measures, on a scale of 100, the extent of the internal diversity of the three most important associations, according to six criteria: education background, wealth level, gender, community, clan/ateker, and religious denomination. The averages of the two communities are similar. However, Oledai's heterogeneity index, ranges from 37 to 56, has a larger variation compared to Agolitom's index, ranges from 45 to 50.

As the table indicates, the most significant correlated with household welfare was the extent to which the household participates in the decision-making of an institution. There are two potential explanations for this, one is the traditional explanation of those working on social capital which is that actively engaging in social networks carries with it tangible benefits in terms of social welfare. There is a more historicist and difficult argument that the research can be used to test, and this is that institutions themselves are used as a means for building household welfare, by this we mean that those households with access to positions of influence are able to capture resources, while those households which are simply members of institutions see no benefit from their participation. This will be explored by comparing the relationship between welfare and committee membership, which would be a proxy for having control over resources, and welfare and institutional membership, which would mean participating in an institution in a way that does not provide access to resource flows.

If this argument can be sustained by the data it would provide a radical and important contribution to the literature, which has usually couched "social capital" in a normative language which is very positive (Pritchett and Narayan 1999).⁶

⁶ Though there are critiques of the positive view of social capital. See Accounting for the Dark Side of Social Capital', *Journal of International Development*, vol. 9, no.7 (1997), pp.939-949.

Work in progress

Information collected are already interpreted numerically and keyed into a dataset. To observe the relationship between local institutions and poor people's participation in institutions, as well as looking at the pattern of participation and welfare in detail, we will proceed empirical testing with a reduced-form model which household welfare levels are dependent on their patterns of participations in local institutions (variables discussed earlier), the characteristics of households (demographic control variables), and the other exogenous factors of their welfare levels. The methodology of Christian Grootaert (2001) is currently considered in this empirical part of research, and it is the hope to find out the determinants of empowerment and wealth in relation to people's participation in institutions with statistical evidence.

**Table 1 : Social Capital Dimensions,
Local Institutions and their Characteristics**

	Memberships	Index of Participation in Decision Making	Meeting Attendance	Effectiveness Index	Index of Heterogeneity	Index of Beneficiary	Index of Combined Cash and Work Contributions
<i><u>Agolitom:</u></i>							
1st Quartile	5.6	65.8	3.0	75.2	49.7	60.1	59.4
2nd Quartile	4.1	52.7	3.5	78.7	47.4	56.3	57.8
3rd Quartile	4.1	53.3	5.7	73.4	44.9	58.5	51.4
4th Quartile	4.0	47.1	4.1	74.4	47.1	54.0	50.5
<i>All</i>	4.4	55.0	4.1	75.0	47.0	57.2	55.0
<i><u>Oledai:</u></i>							
1st Quartile	4.0	60.2	4.7	83.3	55.9	56.5	55.3
2nd Quartile	3.8	54.5	3.3	75.1	48.9	53.9	50.9
3rd Quartile	3.2	48.8	3.4	75.5	44.9	48.8	56.2
4th Quartile	2.7	42.2	3.0	61.5	36.5	49.5	40.6
<i>All</i>	3.6	54.0	3.8	77.0	49.0	52.2	53.0
<i><u>Agolitom & Oledai:</u></i>							
1st Quartile	4.8	61.9	3.6	79.0	53.2	57.8	57.7
2nd Quartile	3.9	56.9	3.8	78.1	48.0	55.8	55.4
3rd Quartile	3.7	48.1	4.5	74.1	44.1	53.8	51.8
4th Quartile	3.7	50.3	3.8	74.1	46.4	51.8	50.7
<i>Total</i>	4.0	54.3	3.9	76.3	47.9	54.8	53.9

Variable definitions:

Memberships: average number of (social groups/institutions) memberships per household belongs to.

Index of participation in decision making: scale (0 to 100) of extent of active participation in decision making in the three most important groups.

Meeting attendance: average number of times a household member attended the three most important group meetings in the last month,

Effectiveness index: score (0 to 100) of effectiveness of the three most important groups.

Index of heterogeneity: scale (0 to 100) of internal heterogeneity of the three most important groups, according to six criteria.

Index of beneficiary: score (0 to 100) of activeness of the three most important institutions in terms of benefiting people and community.

Index of combined cash and work contributions: score (0 to 100) of fees paid or days worked last month as membership contribution in kind

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Experiences in Uganda

After the three months field experience, I have a whole different perspective in conducting research and analyzing data. The field work incorporates more than just a design of a research project rather it is a whole package of research design, local environment and support, and financial sustainability.

During the research period, I experienced several obstacles including managerial problems toward local research assistants, cultural adjustment, and unexpected increases in research expenses due to more frequent travel. This research project definitely faced more problems than it was projected before departure. However, thanks for some researchers and kind Ugandans including people in the Economic Policy Research Center (EPRC), the problems were resolved and the project moved toward finishing via their assistance of housing, transportation, and explanations on issues of cultural divergence. I am very grateful for what they have done for me.

Having a host institution in or nearby the research field is a very important and useful resource for smoothing the research process. There are many things that could not have been done or easily resolved by a new comer, like me, in the village within such a short period of research durations. Therefore, the SAGA Research Program is very important not only in terms of building capacity for local research institutions but also obtaining local supports for field researchers.

I particularly would like to acknowledge some researchers and staff in EPRC who helped me very much during my stay in Kampala. They are John Okidi, Nick Mugira-Baabo, Fred Muhumuza, Ashie Mukungu, and Caroline Kasoke. Thanks for them being so friendly and kind in providing me their precious research facilities and friendship in Uganda.