

International Affairs

Helping African Citizens Make Informed Choices

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The Office of International Affairs awards seed grant funding to faculty for the purposes of expanding the scope of international research at Stanford. Last year, OIA awarded James Fishkin (<http://comm.stanford.edu/faculty-fishkin/>), Janet M. Peck Chair and Professor of Communications in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences and Director of the Center for Deliberative Democracy (CDD), a seed grant to help him establish a collaboration with a new international partner to expand his work educating citizens around the world to make informed choices.

Q: How would you define Deliberative Polling®?

The basic idea is that most citizens, most of the time, are not effectively motivated to become informed about complex policy issues. They are “rationally ignorant” to use the term made famous by the political economist Anthony Downs in 1957. Having only one opinion in thousands or millions it is easy to conclude that their views will not make any difference so why spend a lot of

time becoming informed? With the Deliberative Poll the participants in the sample have one voice in a few hundred and one voice in a dozen in each small group (the process divides a few hundred into small groups for moderated discussion). So each person can see that his or her voice matters and when people discuss and engage the issues, their views tend to change. About 70% of the policy questions asked in Deliberative Polls show statistically significant change from the opinions expressed before deliberation. Deliberative Polls attempt to show what people think when they are really thinking and become more informed.

Q: You recently reached a milestone with the announcement of the results of your most recent Deliberative Poll. May you tell me more?

Since 1994, CDD has conducted 70 Deliberative Polls in 21 countries and our work continues to grow wide and deep. However, last year marked a milestone for us as we conducted the first ever Deliberative Polls in Africa. Through collaboration with ResilientAfrica Network (RAN), a partnership of 20 African universities that is funded by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Deliberative Polls were conducted in the Mt. Elgon region in Uganda in July, 2014. The Makerere University School of Public Health ResilientAfrica Network conducted two Deliberative Polls in the Butalejja and Bududa districts to deliberate on how to deal with environmental disasters and population pressures that challenge life in vulnerable communities. The goal was not only to engage and consult with the community but to inform innovations and strengthen resilience. The Deliberative Polling **results** (<http://www.ranlab.org/deliberative-polling-in-uganda-on-resilience-issues-in-the-mt-elgon-region>) were made public to the community and district leaders in Mbale on January 21, 2015 and to policy makers in Kampala district on January 23, 2015.



Q: Deliberative Polling was created not for any geographic region in particular, so there is an expectation that the method can be used internationally. Despite differences in cultures, each project has its own challenges. What were some of the challenges you faced in Uganda?

One of the challenges was developing the agenda and briefing materials for the issues to be deliberated on. Ultimately, these were built upon earlier research by the East Africa Resilience Innovation Lab, part of RAN. The preparatory phases to clarify relevant resilience issues involved focus groups and key informant interviews in the two communities. In light of this work and the

areas' recurrent environmental disasters, the agenda focused on Resettlement Management, Land Management and Population Pressure. A stakeholder advisory committee of local and national officials, NGOs and academics worked hard to develop briefing materials on the issues that were balanced and accurate.

Due to recurrent floods and landslides in the region, the government had issued and implemented policy directives on land use in the region. But despite these directives, communities continued to encroach on high-risk zones (wet lands, river banks and mountains).

Q: Why was there an asymmetry between the government and community expectations regarding the risk mitigation policies rendering the policies unsuccessful?

The policy process is not adequately involving the community and often government is using a subjective assessment when crafting policy. The Deliberative Polling approach is a citizen-based data generation method that seeks to contribute to the process of developing interventions that respond to the felt needs of the community providing solutions through innovation. It is a unique approach of consulting communities through a representative sample deliberating on key policy issues.

Q: How did you present the materials to the participants?

Over 400 participants were randomly selected from the districts of Butalejja and Bududa to discuss three specific topics: Resettlement Management, Land Management and Population Pressure. They were joined by Makerere University faculty, district representatives, the office of the Prime Minister in Uganda, Stanford University Center for Deliberative Democracy (CDD) in the United States of America, and representatives from the ResilientAfrica Network (RAN).

The same briefing materials were used for Bududa and Butaleja. Given the low literacy rate of the population, a fifteen-minute video version of the briefings was produced by a student team from the Department of Mass Communication at Makerere University. This **video**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyy1shvkkug>) was shown on arrival and, at the request of the participants, it was shown again the second day. Participants were also provided with the written version of the briefing materials, which served as a guide to the issues for moderators.

The participants were questioned about thirty six policy options in interviewer administered questionnaires. Each interview lasted 35 minutes, both for interviews on first contact and after deliberations on site. A two-day schedule was developed and panels of competing experts and local officials were invited to participate in plenary sessions, answering questions developed in small group discussions on the three topics.



Q: Did you have any problems recruiting participants?

By international standards, the sample recruitment was extraordinarily successful. Random sampling of households and random selection within the households produced 210 completed interviews in Bududa and 232 in Butaleja. In each district there were only 11 potential respondents who declined to complete the initial interviews. This is a response rate on the order of 95%. Of the 210 who completed the initial interview in Bududa, 201 showed up on the day for deliberation. All 201 returned the next day for the second day of deliberation and completed the final questionnaire. Of the 232 who completed the initial interview in Butaleja, 217 showed up for the deliberations and all of them returned the next day to finish the discussions and then complete the surveys. Here, this is a participation rate for the actual deliberations that is approximately 94%.

The numbers participating were higher than we had planned. As in other Deliberative Polls we anticipated a drop off rate of perhaps 25%. But the recruitment here was very successful with only very minimal drop-off. This is a tribute to the effectiveness of the mobilization effort for those chosen in the random samples.

Q: What were the results of the Deliberative Poll?

In Bududa, 15 of the 36 policy options changed significantly with deliberation. The top priority for some of these deliberations changed significantly but others started high and stayed high or even went slightly higher after deliberation. During the deliberations, the participants talked about these issues in depth. Therefore the top priorities after deliberation have survived all the considerations offered in the briefings, by their fellow citizens and by the competing experts in the plenary sessions. The top priority of all 36 proposals (support increased from 96%-99%) was “the community should encourage girls to go to school as well as boys.” Some of the excerpts from the transcripts offer some insights into the reasoning behind the support of top priorities in Bududa. For example:



"It's so good because many girls are getting problems in giving birth because they get married when they are still young, now if you keep them in schools, your keeping them as their age increases and they grow."

In Butaleja, 11 of the 36 policy attitudes showed significant changes. While fewer in number some of these changes show interesting reversals with deliberation. Support for an early warning system using text messaging, went down from 60% to 42%. By contrast, support for the early warning system using sirens went up from 79% to 92%. We think that the unreliability of electric power for charging and the unreliability of the cell connections moved people to suggest sirens as a more reliable system than text messaging.

The top priority after deliberation in Butaleja was the government assisting in drilling for clean water (increasing from 95%-99%) and a close second (increasing from 97%-99%) is that "the community should encourage girls to go to school as well as boys."

Some excerpts from these sessions include the following comments for the government assisting with drilling for clean water:

"We gain because we may not be affected by diseases which come from the dirty water."

"I support the government to go on to drill more water for using, like that of boreholes. There are some places that do not have boreholes. Still let it just go ahead and adds more, so that we get good water. It will have helped us not to suffer from malaria."

Q: What are the next steps?

This is only a brief report with only four of the group interviews transcribed. We expect that when all the transcripts are available we will be able to code the small group discussions to get a greater sense of what motivated the changes in post deliberation views. When the results are properly shared and disseminated, we have hopes that some of the policy options will get implemented. Such effects will take time to mature and also to be analyzed. Policy impact will be the last part of the story and it is still to be written.

Nevertheless, we can see, even at this early stage, that the project successfully brought Deliberative Polling to Africa. Our collaborators were also equally satisfied with the outcomes. According to Professor Dorothy Okello of Makerere University and the Director of the East Africa Resilience Innovation Lab, "... we are very happy with the high degree of engagement exhibited by participants in the two districts that conducted the first DP events in Africa - from the top political leadership to the technical persons and the community representative sample. With such engagement, we believe that the process has yielded an important perspective for consideration in the planning and budgeting processes by key decision and policy makers responsible for service delivery."

The Deliberative Polls in Uganda have already been followed by a similar project in Ghana in the northern city of Tamale in January 2015. Results of that project, which seems to have been similarly successful, will be released soon.

For more information about this research and the Center for Deliberative Democracy, visit <http://cdd.stanford.edu/> (<http://cdd.stanford.edu/>).

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