A STUDY OF THE INFORMATION NEEDS AND USES OF THE INFORMAL SECTOR IN UGANDA: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

By Robert Ikoja-Odongo^[1]

University of Zululand X1001, KwaDlangezwa 3886, Tel. 27 035 9026484. Fax 27 035
90226082

c/o email docholla@pan.uzulu.ac.za South Africa

ABSTRACT

The study investigates the information needs of the informal economic sector in Uganda. The uses to which the sector puts the information it acquires are explored as well as the role and impact of information in the growth and development of the sector. A survey research technique was used in the pilot study, with the data collected largely through focus group discussions, interviewing of key informants and organizations, and observation through voice recording and photography. Preliminary results show a variety of information needs, uses, effects, channels, languages, sources, and constraints. This study has been extremely valuable for testing research instruments. The study's results indicate a need to simplify the packaging of information and to improvise on its delivery.

1. Introduction

The informal sector has experienced rapid growth in developing countries and has consequently attracted increasing attention. In Uganda, the informal economy is stimulating interest among academics, researchers, social development activists, and policy planners. It is generally believed that the rapid growth of the sector has been influenced by unemployment. Increasingly, the informal sector is developing as a resilient economic base.

As an economic system, the informal sector in Uganda dates back to the 1970s, gaining more visibility in the 1980s, and consolidating in the 1990s. Many factors have contributed to this development, including the economic crises of the 1970s and the 1980s resulting from the expulsion of enterprising Indians, the collapse of the formal economy, political instability (Okumu, 1994), retrenchment, downsizing the public service workforce, lay-offs in public sector organizations, demobilization of servicemen, the increasing number of school drop outs, on-going rural-urban migration, the increasing entry of women and children to the sector, frozen vacant positions in the public sector (Ssemogerere, 1996), and the automatic entry of illiterate people into the sector (Katabira, 1995).

The informal sector is estimated to be growing at an annual rate of twenty-five percent

(Katatumba, 1998). It employs about twenty percent of the working-age population, and about sixty percent of those engaged in it depend on their business for at least half of their income. There are about 800,000 informal sector enterprises in Uganda providing opportunities to an estimated 1.5 million people. This amounts to about ninety percent of the total of non-farm workers. This growth rate constitutes an important opportunity for research and development. One area important for research is the sector's information-gathering behavior, the assumption being that information availability and access are critical factors in the sector's development.

In spite of efforts made by the government of Uganda to address the variety of constraints facing micro and small enterprises, the lack of access to information remains a major hindrance to the sector's growth (Kutesa, 1998). First of all, very little is known regarding its information needs. It is not clear to information-delivery stakeholders where the sector gets its information, how it uses it, and in what form. It is also not known to what use this information is put once it has been acquired. Thus, the impact of information resources on the growth and development of the sector cannot be measured nor can its information needs be addressed. This is partially due to the lack of an adequate audit of the sector. This incomplete state of knowledge results in uncertainty regarding how to support the sector's development.

This paper presents the results of the preliminary survey of information needs and uses of the sector from the pilot study district (Soroti District) in Uganda. The study was exploratory and primarily directed at testing research instruments to determine their suitability for use in a major study scheduled to begin in 2001. The instruments were designed by using a variety of sources, including the researcher's own perceptions and a review of relevant literature (Wilson, 1981; Haan, 1989; Kaniki, 1995).

2. Methodology

The pilot study was undertaken in Soroti District, one of forty-five districts of the country. The district covers 5,630 square kilometers in eastern Uganda. Its population, which was 450,390 people at the time of the last census (1991), is estimated to be growing at a rate of 2.5 percent annually. The majority of the population (eighty-five percent) live in the rural areas. Many languages are spoken, but Ateso, Kumam, English, and Kiswahili are dominant. The major economic activity is agriculture (*Uganda Districts Information Handbook*, 1997; *The Monitor Business Directory*, 2000).

The survey involved the use of pre-designed interview schedules, focus group discussions (FGDs), observation, site photography, and voice recordings. Interviews were conducted with a sample of those engaged in informal activities, key informants, and organizations directly or indirectly connected with the sector. The study was conducted in the months of June and July 2000.

The sample was drawn from the current list (1998) of micro and small enterprises and their owners secured from the Private Sector Promotion Centre, Soroti. This list was comprised of forty activities that met our definition of informal sector. The sample frame consisted of ten activities for which thirty-eight FGDs were held with fishing communities, metal

fabricators, blacksmiths, stone-quarry workers, brick makers, carpenters, builders, mechanics, craftsmen, transporters (*boda boda* bicycle riders), and others (beekeepers, a produce dealer, a confectioner). Informal activities were found to exist in both urban and rural areas. Sampling took into account that dichotomy.

The main interview schedule was a mixture of open-ended, closed-ended, and multiple-choice questions. Demographic factors, general entrepreneurial characteristics, and community views of the informal sector formed the basis of the study. Information-seeking behavior, information access and flow, the role and impact of information on informal activities, constraints on accessing information, and suggestions on how to solve the information gap were the issues of assessment.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic factors

Males and females; adults, youth, and children; the able bodied and the disabled; and educated people and illiterates are found in the informal sector. Education, an important factor in the development of knowledge and skills, plays a significant role in determining the nature of individuals in any activity, including the informal sector. The sample size was forty participants. This study found that the majority (twenty-four or 60%) had attained some formal education. Of those, eleven (27.5%) had attained at least primary education, thirteen (32.5%) had also received secondary education, nine (22.5%) had attained diplomas, and two (5%) were graduates in engineering and pure science. In the area of skills, over fifty percent (57.1%) were found to have gained them by experience, 33.3% through formal training, 7.1% on the job and through apprenticeship, and 2.4% from both formal training and apprenticeship. English, local languages, and Kiswahili are widely used for communication.

3.2 General business characteristics

Most of the entrepreneurs (62.5%) were found to be engaged full time in informal activities, 32.5% part time, and five percent on a casual basis. Fifty percent of the businesses had existed for fewer than five years and the majority for fewer than ten. The main reasons for becoming involved in the sector were basically income generation (46.5%) and anticipated profits (18.6%). Lack of motivation to continue with informal activities comes largely from AIDS, accidents, natural calamities, age, low demand for products or services, and a lack of funding to boost or consolidate existing businesses or to produce a new line. Other factors include bad debtors, high taxes, high rents and electricity bills, lack of credit and business management skills, competition from technology, lack of basic infrastructure such as workshops, flooding of the market with factory goods, floating islands (suds), theft of nets, drought and too much rain, an increase in the number of school drop-outs joining the sector, and the threat of environmental degradation.

There is some thinking among scholars that government involvement in the informal sector is minimal. However, available literature (e.g., Popola, 1981; Sethuraman, 1981; Maliyankono & Bagachwa, 1990; Gbessa, 2000) indicates that there is a growing link between the government and the sector. According to this research, government involvement is both positive and negative. One positive aspect is that the government

usually provides the informal sector some tenders to build schools and health centres, to make furniture for schools, to supply classroom aids, to repair government vehicles, and to maintain roads. Sometimes individuals win tenders to perform specialist jobs such as painting, joinery, etc. A negative aspect is taxation. Besides paying a graduated tax, most informal sector workers pay taxes (income tax) (58%); thirty-seven percent pay license fees. Free riders (those who avoid paying taxes), however, said their scales of operation were too dismal to attract the government's eye, they were too mobile to be caught, or their activities were seasonal. But the truth is that the degree of compliance with the law depends on the geographical location of the enterprise, the size of the unit, and the length of time it has existed (Monaldonado, 1995).

On business ownership, findings indicate that a majority (63.1%) of units are held by sole proprietors, 26.3% are partnerships, 5.3% are family businesses, and the remaining five percent are companies. Many of these businesses (42.1%) employ fewer than five people. On average they employ two.

3.3 Customers

In relation to customers, individuals (48.2%) have been found to be the major beneficiaries of the products or services from informal activities. This finding appears to be consistent with the results of other studies. Private organizations accounted for twenty percent, companies 16.5%, and the government 15.3%. This seems to indicate that the informal sector is not simply a service for poor and low-income earners alone but is patronized by all sectors of society.

FIGURE 1: CUSTOMERS

3.4 Business records.

Regarding business records, findings indicate that seventy-one percent of those interviewed kept records, while twenty-nine percent did not. It was found that sales records, purchase records, and debtor records were the most frequently kept types. Some respondents felt that they earned too little, saw no need, or just did not bother to keep records. Whether the finding that records were kept will significantly challenge the notion that informal sector enterprises do not keep records and, when they do, they mostly rely on mental records (Univ. of Sierra Leone, 1991; Matsebula, 1996) is yet to be determined.

3.5 Earnings

Since other studies indicate that the informal sector's earnings remain small for a variety of reasons, it was necessary for this study to confirm these findings. Our results indicate the same pattern. For example, 62.5% earn on average from ten to twenty-two U.S. dollars per day. Only five percent earn between ten and thirty per day, 7.5% earn somewhere between thirty and fifty U.S. dollars per day, while five percent earn more. Average monthly earnings are consistent with the daily patterns. For instance, 11.4% are earning less than twenty U.S. dollars per month, another 11.4% are in the category of twenty to fifty U.S. dollars per month, twenty percent earn between fifty and one hundred U.S. dollars, and another 20.5% earn between one hundred and two hundred U.S. dollars, while 18.2% earn between two hundred and five hundred per month. Earning in the range of five hundred to one thousand dollars are 11.4%. Very few make more than that monthly. When earnings in the informal sector are compared with those earnings in the formal sector, it is found that there are some similarities, especially for those who earn at a level of fifty or more U.S. dollars per month.

3.6 Information needs and information-seeking behavior

As a starting point, it was necessary to determine if respondents had ever experienced the need for information for their work. It was encouraging to note that respondents had had such experiences, and they were given an opportunity to narrate instances when such needs were felt. Findings indicate that their information needs varied at different times. Marketing information needs rated highest at 22.7%, the need for raw material and/or supply information was second at 15.9%, and seeking advice was third at 13.6%. Looking for contracts amounted to 9.0%, advertising services came to 9.0%, needing information about government policies that affect them constituted 4.5%, and information on seasonal effects amounted to 4.5%. Other information needs (15.4%) were related to the size of fishing nets, control of water hyacinths, getting rid of floating islands (suds), competitors, and particular designs of products and new tools.

FIGURE 2: INFORMATION NEEDS

3.7 Information use

Findings indicate that information was used for accessing more markets (25%), locating sources of raw materials/supplies at cheaper prices (16.6%), obtaining information about business development (10.4%), establishing prices and pricing techniques (6.3%), achieving business and technical skills (6.3%), and negotiating contracts (8.3%). Information was also used for seeking new tools. This indicates that information usage is linked to the larger framework of planned social change, bringing usage into close contact with social problem solving.

3.8. Information-seeking methods

Information-seeking methods were an important area to investigate. Those interviewed were provided an option list of fifteen items and were asked to indicate those they found applicable. One hundred seventy-seven frequencies were noted. A summary of findings follows.

TABLE ONE: INFORMATION-SEEKING METHODS

<i>Information-seeking methods</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percentage</i>
-Contacting people who know	29	16.4%
-Talking and listening to people	25	14.1%

-Asking friends, relatives, and neighbors	21	11.9%
-Recourse to personal experience	15	8.5%
-Reading newspapers	15	8.5%
-Radio	11	6.2%
-Asking extension agents	10	5.6%
-Inquiring from educated people	6	3.4%
-Inquiring from area counselors	6	3.4%
-Using social networks	5	2.8%
-Asking the opinions of leaders and role models	4	2.2%
-Asking supervisors	3	1.7%
-Asking and listening to politicians	3	1.7%
-*Others	24	13.6%
	177	100%

*In this category were mentioned use of a library, letters, telephones, and visiting customers.

3.9 Information access and flow

Respondents were also asked if they had been able to find the information they wanted. A majority (87.5%) indicated they had, while 12.5% had not. Those who had been successful were asked if the information they had located satisfied their need, and they all said it had. To crosscheck the validity of their answers, they were asked to identify the sources they had used to get information. This was also a closed-ended question with eleven items. One hundred twenty-six frequencies were noted. Interpersonal contacts received the highest rating of 40.5%; personal experience came second with 13.5%; radio ranked at 10.3%; newspapers, customers, discussions, applying to contractor, letters, and fellow workers made up 9.5%. Other sources included the library, cultural ceremonies, associations, area leaders, and supervisors. These findings parallel the findings on information seeking. To draw conclusions on this issue it was pertinent to find out what methods key informants and organizations used in disseminating information to the informal sector. It was determined that radio; newspapers; interpersonal communication through workshops, local committees, demonstrations; and attaching practical work to information delivery—for example football, drama, manuals—had been found to be most effective.

Equally important was how this information was received. Eighty-three frequencies were noted. Findings indicate that word of mouth (34.9%); printed media (19.2%); and letters, radio, and television (14.4%) were the primary transmitters. Seminars, libraries, and discussion groups were reported much less often. These findings strongly indicate that word of mouth is the preferred method because the majority of entrepreneurs interact with each other, with local administrators, and with business associates. In this way they obtain information concerning their businesses without spending additional time looking for or extracting information from other sources. They prefer to converse as they work and in the process receive needed information. In addition, information via word of mouth can be delivered in a language that is understandable. It takes only a short time to deliver the information, and an information seeker can easily refer to the provider for further clarification. The inconvenience of illiteracy is thus easily avoided. Because these sources

had proved helpful, most people preferred to continue to use them. The most reliable and frequently used sources remained the radio, word of mouth, written materials, and the telephone.

In the study it was also necessary to determine the topics for which information was frequently sought. The goal here was partly to reconfirm the information needs of these people. Almost replicating the finding regarding their information needs, the following topics were cited as those for which information was sought: marketing and markets, raw materials/ supplies, prices and price fluctuations, the processing of agricultural products, contracts, competitors, and the security of the country.

It was an assumption of the study that the informal sector uses public institutions to satisfy their information needs and some of these institutions were listed, including public libraries, the Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA), the Uganda Small Scale Industries Association (USSIA), the Uganda National Federation of Informal Sector Associations (FISA), the Private Sector Promotion Center (PSPC), and the District Chamber of Commerce. Findings indicated the following:

-
- People in the informal sector in Soroti are aware of a public library, but most do not use it. Those who use it do so infrequently.
 - Although aware of the UMA, they are not adequately using it. Those who do use it receive training only occasionally. The UMA is located 360 kilometers from this district.
 - Most people (55%) are more conversant with the USSIA because this association is represented in every district. Unfortunately, eighty-eight percent of those who are aware of it do not use it.
 - The majority of the people (87.27%) are not aware of FISA. Most people (79.5%) are aware of PSPC and use it to some extent (44.8%) because the center is located in the district headquarters and has been training grassroots people in the Village Banks Scheme, business management skills, and apiary development.
 - Although aware of the District Chamber of Commerce, few rely on it for information services. The 33.3% who use it do so to gain information on taxation policy, loans, trade shows, and marketing.
-

In order not to restrict them in their responses to these organizations only, they were also asked to note other organizations from which they receive information. Those listed were Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); churches; the Prime Minister's office in charge of poverty alleviation in the district; the Presidential Commission for Teso (PCT) of which Soroti District is a part; the International Labour Organization (ILO); and sectoral government departments, i.e., fisheries, commerce and trade, and community-based services (youth, probation, and gender).

Interview responses from leaders of these organizations confirmed that indeed their organizations continuously interact with *Jua Kali*, the informal sector, as part of their work schedule. This finding appears to confirm the assumption that the informal sector is actually served by public institutions and that there are many places from which the

informal sector receives information.

3.10 Role and impact of information

In relation to the perceived information needs of the entrepreneurs, it was assumed that information contributed to the development of the sector and had a continuing impact. An understanding of the role and impact of information was necessary because information should, in the first place, address the more immediate and practical needs of the sector on which the effectiveness and sustainability of information systems and services depend. Beginning with the role, respondents overwhelmingly (97.5%) stated that information helps them in their work. The kind of information to which they referred was progressive information, which really translates to their information needs. Essentially, information was applied to business management, i.e., the identification of markets, sources of raw materials/supplies, and the selling of products more profitably. Key informants and organizations were also asked whether information actually helps the informal sector. They affirmed that such information was crucial. It helped them in credit management, business management, creating awareness, and reducing bad practices such as fish poisoning and the use of illegal nets. It also helped them in securing and managing loans. Information provided the informal operators the opportunity to change from primitive to modern methods. Because information was essential for the development of awareness, the sector was progressing. The findings, therefore, sustained the accuracy of the assumption.

Respondents were asked to describe the aspects of their work that sometimes required information, the aspects of their work that always depended on information, and those aspects that did not require information. The first question was perhaps the most difficult. Those who attempted to respond gave the following answers: labour payments, hours of work each day, and duties to do on site. As to the aspects that depended entirely on information, the same picture of information needs kept recurring, i.e., the search for markets and marketing strategies, sources of raw materials/supplies, contracts, orders, and product designs. Others included how to determine production quantities, training plans, floating islands, fishing sites, types of spares, and technical know-how of various trades. Aspects that did not need information at all were paying laborers, storage of products, quarrying, moulding work, and excavation work.

An open-ended question was then asked in order to determine the effect of information on problem solving. As expected, many different answers were given. At the top of the list were winning contracts, increased access to markets, more profits, and cheaper sources of materials/supplies. Immediate benefits were expansion of business, more profits, new lines of business, more sales, and more job opportunities. Also included were better management, loss reduction, and quality control. The long-term benefits of using information were the ability to pay taxes easily, higher living standards, business growth, and business consolidation. The overall impact, therefore, of using information was that they were better than before. By impact is meant the changes brought about by the use of information in the ability of people to satisfy their needs (Menou, 1998). It is sense made out of the use of information. And because of information use together with other input, there had been a general business improvement. Information use resulted in business expansion, led to better business management, promoted marketing and alternative ways of

doing business, and led, albeit in a small way, to the adoption of technology.

3.11 Constraints on information access

Even though it was determined that the information needs of the informal sector had been identified and that information use led to tangible benefits, it was recognized that such benefits were gained at a price. The study, therefore, sought to identify constraints on information access since such problems should be taken into account when planning or providing the sector with information. Respondents were asked if they ever felt difficulties in getting information for their work. A majority (82%) answered affirmatively, stating that difficulties cropped up occasionally. When asked exactly what these constraints were, a common response had to do with the unreliability of information they received, especially when the source was word of mouth, the preferred channel for receiving information. Word of mouth has, of course, inherent weaknesses. Information is delivered by different people and is often inaccurate. It is common to share hearsay as correct information. In some cases, information is distorted as it passes from one individual to another, and frequently people with information do not release it easily when asked. They hide it. It is presumed this is a natural consequence of competition and the perceived need to use information to one's own strategic advantage. The inability to secure required information was also stated as a difficulty. This may result from a variety of causes, including an inability to determine where the needed information might be, the inability to go to the place the information may be located, a lack of time to search for information, the lack of a specific place to get information, ignorance resulting from illiteracy, non appreciation of information, the incapacity to look for information due to a disability, failure of telephone lines, information brokers requiring a commission, and the packaging of information in languages not understood by the information seeker.

Key informants and organizations were asked the same question regarding possible constraints on information access. They, too, raised issues such as language barriers, illiteracy, poor absorption and adoption rates, high mobility among entrepreneurs, poor mobilization, poor timing of information delivery, inaccessibility of many information sources, and problems in transmittal methods including using English when many would benefit more from local languages. The cost of radios, poor attendance at meetings, and lack of demonstration aids were cited as other factors. By age group, it was found that children's needs were more immediate, usually food, and that they cannot concentrate. Many women experienced husband hazard, i.e., husbands not allowing them to attend meetings where information could be delivered or loading them with so much work that they fail to have time or they are too tired. The disabled were found to be interested in free things and expect high attention. Many youth require allowances in exchange for attending meetings.

To transcend these problems is one reason entrepreneurs prefer interpersonal contacts even though this method has its own deficiencies. Possible solutions to constraints were identified as follows: using a library, paying a commission to an information broker, attending seminars and social gatherings in the hope that someone who is sympathetic will leak information, and taking time to look for information.

At this point it was necessary to ask what impact a complete lack of information would have on their businesses. Absence of information hindered progress. Uncertainty, redundancy, delayed marketing of products, episodic depletion of materials or supplies, resorting to peasantry, demotivation, not knowing when disaster would strike (in the case of fishermen), and ignorance were the expressed answers. Interestingly, one respondent answered “no effect.”

3.12 Suggestions for solving the information gap

An overwhelming majority (95%) stated it was possible to provide the informal sector with information services. A dismal five percent said this was not possible. Those who said it was possible proposed the types of information they would like most. An eleven-option list was provided for their guidance. Findings indicate the following results:

N=188

<i>Suggestions for solving the information gap</i>	<i>frequency</i>	<i>percentage</i>
-information about training 11.7%	22	
-information about viable businesses 11.7%	22	
-information about capital to start and sustain businesses 11.2%	21	
-information about cheaper sources of materials/supplies 10.6%	20	
-information about markets -government information on business development 9.5%	19 18	10.1%
-news about business trends -success stories from other countries with similar businesses 8%	16 15	8.5%
-information about how to start viable businesses 8%	15	
-information about information centres 5.85%	11	
-information about banking, machinery, mobile phones, pricing, advertising 4.8%	9	
	188	100%

Those who felt it was not possible to provide the informal sector with information services said that the sector is very disorganized, people are doing all sorts of things just to earn a living, some are illiterate, some have difficulties reading and writing effectively, and some are too poor to sit down for the sake of information. These are their feelings as expressed from their hearts.

Those who said it was possible preferred that such information be presented as follows: it should come with technical details (33%) and should be complete with packages, models,

and designs; it should be factual (24.2%); it should be in the form of advice (17.1%); it should be presented as news (15.7%) or as opinion (7.1%). Others felt it should be presented as was deemed fit (2.9%). In addition, they preferred it printed (36.5%), orally (27%), illustrated (17.3%), on radio (13.5%), or in other forms (5.7%). The above findings appear to match the nature of the respondents' activities and levels of education.

FIGURE 3: INFORMATION PACKAGING

How extensive information should be was also discussed. Many of the entrepreneurs (48.2%) preferred the information be exhaustive to remove the need to search for more elsewhere, while thirty-one percent felt it should be on a selective basis to meet individual needs. Others (20.8%) stated it should depend on the nature of the information. The preferred languages of presentation tallied with the respondents' demographic characteristics. English was most preferred (47.5%), local languages were next (37.5%), and Kiswahili was third (12.5%). The remaining 2.5% expressed the need for information in Sudanic languages (Arabic and Kinubi). English is the official language in Uganda, and Kiswahili is the national language. There are over fifty local languages.

The study also attempted to determine the types of information services the informal sector desired. This received a great deal of response. Respondents were given a sixteen-item option list from which to select those types they wanted. Results are stated in frequencies as follows: exposure visits-16; demonstration service-15; one-stop centre for buying and selling information-13; question and answer service-11; referral (information brokerage) service-9; inquiry (CAS) service-9; trade information exchange service-9; public shows-7; lending service-6; packaging of information-6; advertising, mobile phones, letters-6; film shows-5; photocopying service-5; and on-line information service-4. These responses appear to imply that there is a need for a practical information service containing elements such as information technology, audio-visual aids, print materials, training packages, translation services, publication services, and exposure visits. This translates to something like a resource centre with a strong emphasis on information brokerage.

The management and the location of such a centre were important questions at this stage of the study. Findings indicated a general preference for a centre run at the committee level. The committee would be accountable to members constituted as a general assembly. It was felt that people with knowledge of information management should operate the centre from a central place, preferably from their district headquarters. There would be a link person at

the local site to collect and disseminate information to others at special times. The system should recognize all informal trades and be able to gather information on those trades. The arrangement of information should also be by trade. Thus the information system would be user friendly.

Finally, ideas were sought regarding how to help the sector grow. As would be expected, many ideas were submitted. A summary of these in a ranked list of frequencies follows: provision of loans-17; training-13; support by the government in the marketing of products beyond what the sector could achieve on its own-9; provision of modern tools-9; storage facilities-5; improvement of facilities (electricity, roads, landing sites, bigger workshops, transport)-5; formation of associations-4; reduction of taxes-3; improvement of links between suppliers and members of the sector-3; more trainable members of the labour force-3; induction of appropriate technology-3; widening the scope of businesses-2; standardizing pricing-2; quality control-2; avoidance of environmental degradation-1; enforcement of laws and the repeal of outdated ones such as the Crocodile Act-1; and sustained national security and peace.

To promote growth of the sector, key informants and organizations suggested training support, loans and grants, the repeal of laws that negatively affect the sector, the formation of associations, tools, and improved marketing. Other suggestions included the development of landing sites, the development of roads to guarantee quick movement, refrigerators in which to keep fish, the enforcement of improved sanitation, technology for the breaking of stones, machinery to test the quality of bricks, and planting more trees to help avoid desertification and ensure a sustainable timber supply.

3.13 Recommendations

In addition to the proposals from the respondents, key informants and organizations made the following suggestions for improving information dissemination to the informal sector. For the fishing industry, it was recommended that fishery management be introduced in primary schools and that the fisheries (Crocodile Act) law be repealed. They recommended that family institutions be strengthened by reinforcing cultural values, i.e., promoting positive cultural aspects. Other ideas included training for functional literacy, providing practical education, maintaining continuous interaction with the sector, holding education and sensitization workshops, simplifying what we call information by breaking it into components, providing knowledge and skills to the sector formally through education and informally through workshops, publishing newspapers in local languages, supporting verbal communication with follow-up readers, attaching a component of economic activity to information, and offering field trips to help the sector gain exposure.

4. Conclusion

Although it is not advisable to draw final conclusions from a preliminary or small study directed towards the improvement of research instruments, the preliminary results of this study have provided information that may stimulate debate from both economic and information-behavior points of view. The informal sector is found in both rural and urban areas, being more prevalent in urban areas, and is dominated by persons with low skill levels. The sector has information needs that should be met. Although there are many

different places that can provide information useful for the sector, there is not one single place where these people can obtain all the types of information they may need. The informal sector faces many constraints when attempting to access information. Sometimes even those engaged in formal institutions may not be able to obtain needed information, and the process is much more difficult for inexperienced persons. Also, although there is some level of information delivery to the sector, forms of receiving are frequently inadequate. This can be partially attributed to the personal characteristics of the workers, especially low education. There is a conspicuous absence of an information system that can link different information sources to the sector support institutions on the one hand and to the informal sector on the other. Word of mouth as a source of information is commonly used by entrepreneurs. Interpersonal contacts, personal experience, radio, and newspapers are the most prevalent means of accessing information for the sector. Market information, sources of supplies, advice, contracts, and government policies are the most important information needs of the sector. It is essential that this study result in a model that accurately depicts the information behavior of the information-poor population and tests whether western/elite models of information behavior have a role to play in meeting the needs of this sector.

References

- Haan, H. 1989. *Urban informal sector in developing countries*. Geneva:ILO.
- Kaniki, A.M. 1995. "Exploratory study of information needs in the Kwa-Ngwanase (Natal) and Qumbu (Transkei) communities of South Africa." *S.Afr.J.Libr.Inf.Sci.* 63(1).
- Katabira, S. 1995. *A study of the various informal sector activities of Katwe area*. Kampala : Makerere University B.A. SS dissertation (unpublished).
- Katatumba, B. 1998. *Keynote address: Information accessibility to micro and small enterprises workshop*. Kampala:MSEPU/IDRC.
- Kutesa, F. (Ms). 1998. *Keynote address: Information accessibility to micro and small enterprises workshop*. Kampala: MSEPU/IDRC.
- Maldonado, C. 1995. "The informal sector legislation or laissez-faire?" In *ILO Trade unions and the informal sector: towards a comprehensive strategy*. Geneva.
- Matsebula, M.S. 1996. *The urban informal sector: A historical and structural analysis with special reference to Swaziland*. Harare:SAPES Books.
- Menou, M. 1998. "Does information make a difference?" *Research bulletin of the British Library no.21*.
- The Monitor Business Directory, 2000*. Kampala:Monitor Publications Ltd.
- Okumu, R.R. 1994. *The experience of the youth in the informal sector: a study of traders in Gulu Municipality*. Kampala: Makerere University B.A. dissertation (unpublished).
- Ssemogerere, G. 1996. *Employment and labor market during adjustment in Eastern and Southern Africa*. Kampala: ILO.
- Uganda Districts Information Handbook, 1997*. Kampala: Fountain Publishing House
- University of Sierra Leone 1991 *training opportunities in the informal sector of Freetown in Sierra Leone*. Bonn:DVV.
- Wilson, T.D. 1981. "On the user studies and information needs" *Journal of documentation* 37(1).

Acknowledgement

I wish to acknowledge Makerere University, Uganda, for funding this study and my promoter, Professor Dennis Ocholla, for guidance and encouragement in the study and in publishing my preliminary results.

This document may be circulated freely
with the following statement included in its entirety:

Copyright 2001

This article was originally published in
LIBRES: Library and Information Science
Electronic Journal (ISSN 1058-6768) March 31, 2001
Volume 11 Issue 1.
For any commercial use, or publication
(including electronic journals), you must obtain
the permission of the author.

By Robert Ikoja-Odongo
University of Zululand X1001, KwaDlangezwa 3886, Tel. 27 035 9026484. Fax 27 035 90226082
c/o email docholla@pan.uzulu.ac.za South Africa

To subscribe to LIBRES send e-mail message to
listproc@info.curtin.edu.au
with the text:
subscribe libres [your first name] [your last name]

Return to [Libres 11n1 Contents](#)
Return to [Libres Home Page](#)

^[1] Robert Ikoja Odongo, who is a senior lecturer at Makerere University Uganda, is studying for his Ph.D. at the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Zululand, South Africa.