



Survey Mode Effects on Financial and Livelihood Outcomes: Evidence from a Mode Experiment in Uganda

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Motivation: Cost vs. Quality

Budget Reality: CAPI cost per complete \approx **3X** CATI cost per complete

- **Cost** pressures
 - Declining foreign aid
 - Reduced research funding
- **Quality** concerns
 - Lower response rates
 - Coverage bias affects sample composition
 - Mode effects

How can we responsibly use phone surveys to stretch research \$\$?



Research Questions

Phone vs. In-person survey quality

- How much do response rates differ?
- Who is left behind in phone surveys?
- Do we get different answers when we ask by phone?

Is it worth it? Under what conditions?

How can we optimally combine modes?



Literature

HIC evidence

- Ongena & Haan 2020 – ESS “interaction analysis”
- Beland & St. Pierre 2007 – health, Canada
- Most lit focus on web surveys





Pandemic-era shift → mode effects studies in LMICs:

- Greenleaf et al. 2020 – contraceptive use in Burkina Faso
- Garlick et al. 2020 – microenterprise performance in S. Africa
- Kilic et al. 2021 – ag yields in Malawi (varying recall period too)
- Abate et al. 2023 – consumption, Ethiopia
- Anderson et al. 2024 – ag outcomes, India
- Castaing et al. 2025 – multiple domains, Nigeria



Experimental Design

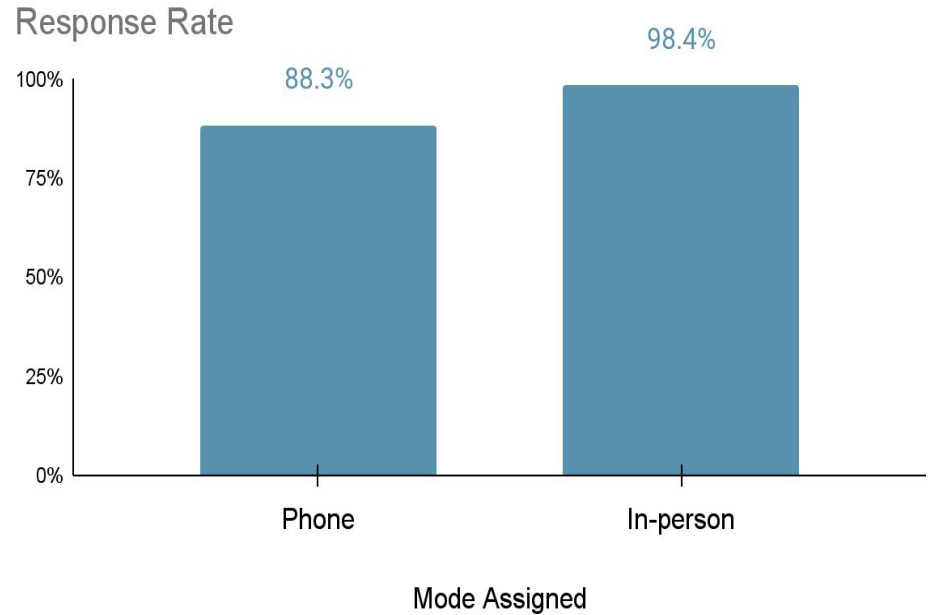
- RCT on village savings groups interventions (digitization) in Uganda
- Mode experiment added on to baseline
- Unbalanced, two-stage randomized design: 90/10
- Imperfect compliance
- ITT and LATE analysis

		Randomly Assigned N=1,333	
		 In person	 Phone
Completed	 In person	122 (9%)	142 (11%)
	 Phone	2 (<1%)	1,067 (80%)
		124	1,209



Response Rates

Response rate 10 pp higher
for in-person mode



Mode Effects: Livelihood and Food Security

In-person respondents report:

- More non-ag work
- Lower food insecurity

Table 1. Effect of In-Person Mode on Survey Responses

Variable	ITT	LATE
A) Livelihood diversification		
Work in Agricultural Sector	-0.037	-0.042
Own Enterprise	0.042	0.049
Work for Someone Else	0.098 *	0.114 *
B) Consumption (food security)		
Difficulty to come up with money	-0.027	-0.031
Relied on less preferred less expensive food	0.008	0.009
Borrowed food or relied on help from friends or relatives	-0.021	-0.025
Reduced the number of meals eaten per day	-0.109 *	-0.126 *
Reduced portion size of meals	-0.096 *	-0.110 *
Restricted consumption by adults in order for small children to eat	-0.042	-0.048

N = 1,333

* p<0.05



Results are preliminary

Mode Effects: Savings Group Participation

In-person respondents report:

- More, longer savings group meetings
- More saving behavior
- More attachment to savings groups

Table 2. Effect of In-person Mode on Savings Group Participation

Variable	ITT	LATE
A) Frequency and Length of Savings Group Meetings		
Meeting frequency (more than 1x/week)	0.285 **	0.329 **
Meeting duration (minutes)	11.26 *	13.00 *
B) Saving behavior		
Used share-out for savings	0.103 **	0.119 **
Comfort with group's account management	-0.036	-0.042
C) Social cohesion		
Number of members' phone numbers R has	0.824	0.951
R ever treated unfairly by the group	-0.008	-0.010
Anyone ever treated unfairly by the group	-0.006	-0.007
Considered leaving the group in prev. year	-0.066 **	-0.077 ***
Will remain member	0.007	0.008
D) Trust and Technological acceptance		
Believes savings group members trust one another	-0.017	-0.019
Has a mobile money account	0.030	0.035
Has account, does not use	-0.007 **	-0.008 **

N=1,333

* p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Results are preliminary



Additional checks

- More outcomes
- Sample composition, relationship with phone ownership patterns
- Model specification (logit vs. LPM)
- Characteristics of non-compliers
- Enumerator reports on respondent understanding, hesitance, discomfort
- Repeat experiment in other contexts, larger samples



What do results say about mode effects?

- Difference in response rates favors in-person, but not by a lot
- In-person respondents may give more socially desirable responses
- ...but differences appear in behavioral q's, not attitudinal
- Stat significant and non-significant results generally go in same direction
- No ground truth
- TBD whether mode affects differences over time across groups, impact estimates, i.e. what is the form of the mode-induced measurement error?



What does it mean for design?

For endline (and similar studies)

1. Phone-first strategy
2. Mop-up by other mode works in both directions
3. Retain randomized in-person for validation/checks





Thank you for your attention!

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