Information System Better-iS

ICRAF - Output

Contact details: **World Agroforestry Centre, Anthony Kimaro**

Email address: A.Kimaro@cgiar.org

Phone: +255 22 2700660

Street, zip code, city, country:

ICRAF Tanzania, P. O. Box 6226, Dar es Salaam

Summary:
The Centre (ICRAF) planned and realised in close cooperation with ZALF and IUW four household surveys in Tanzania. Survey sites were located in the regions of Morogoro, Rukwa and Kigoma. Although many of the expected challenges as well as their solutions were explicitly site specific at different villages general lessons learned from the data collection process will be outlined in this factsheet. It can be summarized that it is always important to have a “Plan A” as well as “Plan B” and even a “Plan C” in order to react adequately to changing site conditions.

Title:

Data collection in the field: Experiences and recommendations

Problem and Objective:

Conducting scientific data collection in remote areas of Tanzania have to be prepared adequately to obtain proper results. Research teams especially with mixed cultural backgrounds may face challenges which are often not predicteable. This is even more true if the study area is very remote and scooping studies could not be realised due to time and financial constraints. Availablility of latest knowledge concerning the survey sites might be unexisting due to missing data or limited access. Seeking close contact to and support of persons who are well known within that region is highly recommended. To avoid some of the problems and offer pathways of solutions, fieldwork experiences of the conducting organisations ICRAF and ZALF will be provided for other scientists and practitioneres for an optimal preperation of their own surveys.

Method:

This rough guide of key issues to be aware of during the fieldwork will be structured in challenges and solutions during the planning and implementation processes of the survey. Challenges vary from one site to another, though some situations may appear to be more common across various locations. It has to be highlighted that key issues listed in the following chapter “results” do not pose a claim on completeness. Furthermore they reflect some facts to be best practice of the project Better-iS as well as situations to be solved better in the future.

Results:

Planning: A) Scientific research and B) Official requirements

A) Data collection should be prepared as good as possible and before going to the field to avoid inconveniencies and unnecessary wastage of resources. The aim of your research should always detect the best way to accomplish your survey.

A1. Is the season appropriate? Avoid conducting surveys during rain seasons or at times when communities are intensively engaged in seasonal economic/social activities (planting/harvesting season, religious celebrations (consider islamic traditions and local religions), tradional (political) holidays). In many rural areas the roads are not reliable and not easily accessible particularly during rain seasons, setting your interviews/survey at the time of the year when villagers are engaged in farming activities or any other important social activities could delay or even impair the success of your data collection activity.

A2. Are the enumerators adequatly trained? What is their experience in conducting surveys? Do they need some kind of (short) training to make them more efficient and capable of fulfilling the agreement?

A3. Research in Tanzania is only possible if all participating international researchers (without an East-African residency) do possess a valid research visa (residence permit, research permit etc). This visa will only be issued for specific research areas which will have to be outlined exactly. Research permits are issued after every three months – there are exceptions but the general rule of procedure is this. Therefore, an early start of acquiring the necessary documents is highly advised. They do need to be complete when the research starts! Non-resident researchers should never conduct research outside the areas indicated in their research permits.

B) Informing authorities of your presence in their area of jurisdiction (at the regional and or local authorities) before going to the field will always be a necessity. It is advised to start the following procedure as early as possible to comply the official requirements.

B1. A letter of introduction is necessary (best option: from a renown local partner organisation). The letter will introduce researchers and provide a brief background of the theme of the research/objective etc.

B2. The research team should have a letter from a respective Ministry (Letter of Intention - national level) even though you may not be asked - it is important to have it.

B3. Likewise at the district level you might be asked a letter from the region to check if the regional authorities are aware of your presence, and sometimes you can even be asked for a letter from the respective ministry. Therefore authorities at the regional level have to be visited to issue a letter to introduce the research team at the District level (Letter of Intention -regional level).

B4. Sometimes it could furthermore be recommended that the District authorities may write a letter of introducing the team to the particular research site/village or provide you with district officials to accompany the team in the village. In many villages you should expect to be asked a letter from the district particularly if you are not accompanied by district official.

Implementation: C) Team and D) Logistics.

C) A multi-national team bumping into remote areas should expect some challenges due to cultural and language differences combined with difficult living condition in the African villages such as poor infrastructure (roads, water, health facilities etc).

C1. Managing farmers expectations that the research project is not about them getting access to some financial benefits directly from the implementation of the project: This means that, bring them to understand that the project is inclined to identify some of the challenges facing their community and the existing potentials so as to be able to come up with possible solutions for addressing those challenges for their betterment. Communicating research results to the communities involved in the research project should be a must. This has not been a common practice in many research projects, for example in heavily researched villages(e.g Tandai) farmers are sometimes reluctant unless they are paid to attend a workshop or an interview, probably because-often they do not get feedback and may not have a feeling of ownership of the research.

C2. Payments for compensation of interview partners are required: How much should be paid to each participant attending the interview could vary from one place to another. Presumably in villages that are heavily researched the rates could higher. Rates may also vary depending on the size of the questionnaire and time occupancy.The payments for villagers answering the questionaire differed in the case of Better-iS from TZS 2000 to TZS 5000 in accordance to their status (e.g. governmental officials are payed more) and, of course, time consumption of the interview.

C3. While in the field one should have some thoughts of how best to interact with the communities, experience suggests that people such as extension officers and village leaders have good knowledge about that. Therefore it is advised to find the best way to keep in contact with members of the community who are influencial in the area, that could be useful in case of any problem when conducting the survey .

C4. Team work, transparency and understanding of the cultural differences among the members of the group would always be important for accomplishing the survey.

C5. Data reliability: Enumerators are required to follow (carefully) consistence of the answers given by the interviewee to be able to recognize the situation. Experience has shown that sometimes interviewee would attempt to tell you what he/she thinks you would like to hear from him or her. However, experience has also shown that, such type of candidates would contradict themselves in the next/following questions as you go down the list. Carefully trained and sensitized enumerators should take note of the situation and report to the team leader. Experience is also needed on the side of enumerators to be able to have skills in consistency checking during single interviews.

C6. Reluctance: Researchers should expect to find some difficulties related to reluctance from some leaders to engage in the project implementation or provide the necessary support. This is not a very common situation; however it can happen at various levels (at village level or at the sub-village level and sometimes at the regional or district level). Involve extension officer in the respective area to find a better approach to deal with the situation.

D) Logistics: Careful planning and timing of field activity is required to avoid unnecessary delays or costs.

D1. Cash access. Due to security purposes it is not suggested to carry a lot of money at one time. Financial/banking services in some places within the country are not advanced that much, therefore one should expect some difficulties in accessing some banking services (e.g. ATM services). At the same time it is good to note that changes are happening in the banking industry in Tanzania quire rapidly and the number of ATMs and quality of services in different parts of the country are improving. According to the financial resources and the nature of the study detected size of the team, number of days that are going to be spent in the field, sampling size, etc a lot of cash is needed. Ask for availability of banking services before making a decision on how much money you should carry for field activities.

D2. Transport: Researchers should expect some of the research sites to be in remote areas (for example in Tandai) where some sites were not accessible by car. In some sub-villages the roads were not accessible during rainy season. Therefore enumerators might have to walk at least party which needs to be communicated to the enumerators to avoid misunderstandings.

D3. Local accomodation: In some areas availability of local accommodation is limited or very poor. Survey team may be forced to look for accommodation in the nearby village or town. In such circumstances additional costs for fuel are expected, when planning for field activities such costs should be reflected in the budget.

D4. Fuel access: In most places gas stations are not a problem; they are available. But sometimes you might be conducting survey in areas where the next gas station is far (50-100km). Fuel shortages in the country has also been one of the challenges.Carrying fuel could be an option to avoid wastage of resources. Furthermore you should be aware that “dirty” fuel (mostly with particles in it due to rusty tanks) is common in rural areas. Those can block the engine and lead to long-term disruptions.

D5. Electricity for printing: Due to the fact that in many villages electricity is not reliable or the villages are not connected to national grid/power supply at all is advised to do printing before going to the villages. If there are some adjustments needed after pre-testing the questionnaires, such changes could be noted by the enumerators and the same questionnaire (printed earlier before coming to the field) could be used for interviews only enumerators will be required to be aware of the changes made. Least but not last: If possible carry a printer as they are very useful in areas where electricity is available.

Lessons learnt:

For research:

Selection and training of enummerators is highly necessary! Students could be preferred because they are familiar with science, but they earn comparably high wages (45,000 Shilling per day (consider inflation!)), transport needs to be paid as they are not locally available. If more than one survey takes place guarantee that they are available as connoisseurs of the questionaire. Intensive questionaire training is valuable especially if feedback loops are incorporated and so are open discussion about status quo of questions and their conditions in the local setting. Locally hired staff (e.g. agricultural extension officers, teachers) might not be familiar with scientific research, but they are comparably inexpensive, have no transport costs, very good knowledge about local conditions, and a good local reputation.

Questionaire design: Better-iS experiences with questionaires are, in a very shortened version: a) generally the necessity of every question should be thought over twice as the attention span of farmers is VERY limited – our general recommendation is that 1 – 1,5 hours should hardly be expanded. b) Pre-tests are indispensable. As a matter of fact it was recognized that the enummerators got faster and faster – a very long and very extended first pre-test should therefore not be overestimated. c) Units are crucial in rural Tanzania. Time, weights and volumes should be carefully discussed and weighted by the research team. As standard devices are hardly existing, general remarks should be checked. Units such as “bags”, “tins”, “buckets” etc. need be closer evaluated (Standardizing measurements should always be necessary).

Policy recommendations :

Official requirements and procedures connected to scientific collaborations of Tanzanian Institutions to Non-Profit-Organisations could be streamlined to enable efficient research on the ground.
Ministries could provide a mentor system for appropriate projects.

For many years there has been weak coordination in communicating various research results among governement ministries and other key stakeholders as a result many potential research findings have ended on shelves. There has to be a good mechanism to ensure that research findings are well communicated at various levels for implementation

Participating institutions: International Food and Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Institute for Environmental Economics and World Trade (IUW), World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF e.V.), Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa. Associated partners: SOKOINE University of Agriculture, Ministry of Agriculture, Food security and Cooperatives Tanzania, Ministry of Energy and Minerals, Tanzania.