Mwanda – the first wife

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Four main land use types

Mwanda is located on the western foothills of the Taita Hills close to Vuria, the highest mountain of Taita Hills (2208 m a.s.l.). The Taita people have lived in the hills and Mwanda for a long time, as the Maasai people occupied the low lands. According to the village chief Samuel M. Chawana the village can be called “the first wife”. The nice name is due to its fertile soils compared to the villages in the lowland areas. The climate in the area is suitable for various agricultural crops. The area rarely suffers from drought; the last famine caused by drought occurred in the 1910s.

The main area of Mwanda locates between 1500 and 1900 m a.s.l. However, Vuria at 2200 meters is a distinct part of the village as it dominates the scenery. The lands of Mwanda also extend to lowlands and nyika down to 1100 m a.s.l. The land use can be separated into four main categories. The most intensive highland agriculture is practised in the upper parts where most of the inhabitants live. Typical crop is maize. In this area part of the fields can be irrigated by a channel system, which receives water from the forests of Vuria. The lowland agriculture is generally extensive, but intensive by the brooks and rivers. For example, mango trees provide fruits in valleys. Forests mainly on Vuria provide medicines, water and prevent soil erosion. On the nyika villagers herd goats, and gather timber and fuel wood.

According to the chief Chawana the average family size is six. This shows that the area is fairly developed and family planning has been practised for some time. The children attend primary school due to the new legislation in Kenya, which allows free primary education for children. On the other hand, the parents complain that the children being at school prevents them from working on the fields. Another problem is HIV. The number of AIDS orphans has increased rapidly during last years. The orphans are often taken care of by the grandparents. Due to HIV there is also a lack of manpower in agriculture and construction work.

A Land control board governs the land ownership issues and land allocation in Mwanda. The issues must be systematically governed since the suitable land area is quite restricted due to the population growth. According to the chief Chawana the land should be allocated in the first place for those who lack land and have a large family. The price of land is negotiated in each case between the landowner and the buyer. The most wanted land is located in the valleys in which the soil is the most fertile.

Figure 1. At the chief’s office (P. Pellikka).
Study

The problems related to land use and living conditions were studied using participatory methods in Mwanda on January 17, 2004. 21 women or men of varying ages were interviewed. Most of the interviewees came from the village core area, but a few of them came from the outskirts.

The interview was carried out in three phases. Firstly, the personal information from each person was collected (Figures 1 and 2). Secondly, all the participants were evaluating the problems listed by themselves in the village using a problem matrix (Table 1). The number of beans indicated the severity of the problem. The change of the problem was also evaluated. If the change had been positive, a number of white beans were given. In the case of negative change, red beans were given. Thirdly, chief Chawana, assisted by a few other villagers, compiled the village map (Figure 3).

The problems in the village

Medical laboratory

The villagers consider the lack of a medical laboratory as the main problem in Mwanda. At the moment the health care system consists of a nurse working in the dispensary. In addition to this the other problems related to health care were ranked fourth in the problem matrix. These problems are lack of medicines, x-ray and a specific room for these. The villagers also face problems in case of an acute illness, such as the lack of transport (ambulance) to the nearest hospital. The change with the medical laboratory has been negative. The reason for this may be that the knowledge in health care and sicknesses has increased.

Human-wildlife conflicts

The second most serious problem is considered to be conflicts between farmers and wildlife. Baboons, monkeys, and wild pigs disturb the crop production by eating and destroying e.g. maize and cassava fields. Children used to harass wild animals by stoning, but since they spend the time at school, there is nobody doing this. Elephants cause problems especially in lowlands when searching for water. Elephants also eat the mangos and disturb the growth and production of the mango tree itself. There is also a risk of the elephants injuring people. Sometimes elephants provide meat. A few years ago an elephant came to the highland, but fell on a steep slope and was stuck by its tuskers on the ground, causing its neck to break. The meat was used for nutrition and the government officers took the tuskers. Based on the matrix, the wildlife problems have got worse. That may be explained by climatic change causing changing environmental conditions to the animals. Another possibility may be that there are no children keeping the animals away.

Water supply

The problem related to water supply was ranked as the third severe problem. Most of the villagers fetch the water, which takes quite a long time. The distance to the water point varies from one to five kilometres. There is a water pipeline, but it brings water from a drift only to the village centre and to the polytechnic school. The water running from Vuria irrigates part of the fields.

Transport and communication

Transport and communication were mentioned as the fifth most serious problem. The roads to Mwanda are fairly poor, and after heavy rains it takes a few days until they are repaired. Based on the matrix there has been some positive change.

Education

Lack of continuity of education was ranked sixth. Only primary school is provided for free by the State of Kenya and after that there is a school fee. Primary school consists of eight classes. According to the villagers, many children fail to continue their education after primary school due to the lack of funding even though in Mwanda there is a secondary school. It was mentioned, for example, that one year at school costs as much as a good three-bedroom house with an iron sheet roof. Those who are able to finish secondary school face another problem: only a polytechnic is found in the village but no other higher-level education is
provided and it is expensive to study elsewhere. The lack of continuity in education seems to be solved to some extent, perhaps by the secondary school or polytechnic, since high positive change values were given.

Lack of land

Lack of land is a serious problem in the village as well. On average, a family has half an acre, although there is more land available. The problem is how to get this land under cultivation without new technology and manpower. In fact, it seems that the lack of labour or machines restricting the clearing of the forest or soil for agriculture is the real problem and not the lack of land. Nevertheless, in the village area there is common land called nyika, which can be used for grazing and firewood collection, but not for cultivation. It is fairly hard to rent or buy land since it is almost impossible to get a loan. In large families there is often a problem in land allocation after the parents have died. Usually the first-born inherits more land than the other siblings. In addition, men are usually privileged. Some positive change has occurred in land issues indicated by high positive change value in the matrix.

Lack of fuel

Fuel wood and charcoal is needed for heating the food. 90 percent of energy consumption consists of the use of fuel wood and 10 percent of charcoal. Charcoal is purchased by suppliers or fetched from the drier lowlands. Fuel wood can be collected from the nyika, but collecting it is time consuming and hard work. The fuel has become a more serious problem during the last few years.

Lack of adequate energy

In the problem matrix lack of adequate energy refers to the fact that only a small area in the central village has access to electricity. Only some 60 people enjoy electricity. For example, the polytechnic school still has no electricity and therefore no electronic tools. There has been some positive change, however. This change is evident by the fact that at least the village centre has electricity. The positive change might be little bit biased, since most of
the interviewees came from the village centre or close by.

**Lack of finance for projects**

Villagers would like to have more financing for their projects. Villagers came up with several good ideas for improving their surroundings. For example the problem of not having a car for taking bricks when building a chief’s house was mentioned. The financing for the projects has improved however, shown by the positive change marks.

**Poor marketing sites**

The market place in the village was mentioned to be quite poor and inadequate. The growth of markets is restricted. Based on the matrix, the market place has become worse during the latest years or the needs have increased.

**Lack of unity**

Mwanda is quite a large village and the village area is quite dispersed too. There are two village centres, the first located close to the chief’s office and dispensary and the second on the other ridge. This evidently contributes to a lack of unity that the villagers feel. This can be seen for example in difficulties in mobilization of people in crisis situations, e.g. human-wildlife situations. The women are considered to be more united. Men face problems due to the unemployment and alcohol abuse, especially among young men.

**Lack of technical facilities**

Lack of polytechnic facilities means lack of adequate technical equipment and electricity in the school. The problem has become more severe.

**Effects of climatic changes**

Effects of climate change are considered as a threat to the village’s future. People have noticed that before it was easier to plan agricultural practices all year round according to the short rains and long rains. Nowadays rainfall is more unpredictable. They fail to come or they are too heavy causing damage to the crops. As expected, the climate change and its consequences have been more severe during the last ten years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Positive change</th>
<th>Negative change</th>
<th>Net</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lack of medical laboratory</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>T/E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-16</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Wildlife animals problem</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Water problems</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Lack of medical facilities</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>T/E</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Transport and communication</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>T/E</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>+13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lack of continuity of education</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>T/E</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Lack of fuel</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>E, T/E</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>-13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Lack of land</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>T/E</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Lack of finance for projects</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>T/E</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
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<td>T/E</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>+9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>-16</td>
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<td>12</td>
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<td>S</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>+2</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>T/E</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Effects of climatic changes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>113</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>-23</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Changes in the village

In the matrix, the positive or negative changes were valued. Among the 15 mentioned problems there has been an even number of negative changes and positive changes. The negative changes have occurred in lack of medical laboratory, wild animals, water, fuel, markets, polytechnic facilities and climatic changes. In total a negative change occurred in seven topics. The positive changes occurred in seven topics as well: transport and communication, education, land availability, project financing, energy, unity and housing. The lack of medical facilities had a change value 0. However, since lack of medical laboratory was the severest problem in the village (ranked as first) and lack of medical facilities was ranked fourth, it can be concluded that medical issues is the greatest worry among interviewees. Evidently HIV and AIDS have increased the concerns on medical issues. Altogether the total sum of positive or negative changes is slightly on the negative side, the negative value being –23.

Based on the small participatory research conducted on villagers’ perception on problems related to land use and living conditions, there seems to be pretty even number of positive and negative changes. The problems are typically more or less technical and economical: medical facilities, transport, energy, lack of land, poor marketing sites and housing, school facilities. Part of the problems can be categorized as sociological like lack of unity and environmental as lack of fuel, climate changes and wild animals.

Acknowledgments

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