Methods used in the village meetings

Interviews concerned mostly land use and nature resources in the villages. The aim was to figure out where are the resources of the village located and what are the main problems or issues that affect interviewees lives in the village. An interesting question was also how these issues had changed during the last decade. The RRA (Rural Rapid Appraisal) method was used. It is a common method, which is used in rural areas in Third World countries. The underlying idea of RRA is that the rural people themselves are the most knowledgeable but often the most overlooked source of information on local problems and life conditions.

Interviews were made in four villages at Taita Hills: Mwatate, Dembwa, Werugha and Mwanda. Interviews were taken through in groups according to RRA methods. When working in groups, it is possible to make a general overview on the situation in the village. Village chiefs in every village had chosen approximately 20 people (10 men and 10 women) who participated in the group interviews. These people were different in age, lived in different parts of the village, and had different education and occupations. Interviews were made in four parts; in the first two parts men and women were together, and in the next two men and women were separated. The questionnaire used is presented in Appendix 1.

In the first part of the interviews some basic questions like what was his/her name, age, family size, education, size of farm etc. were asked (Figure 1). The aim was to figure out with whom we were dealing with. It was done with a short questionnaire to every person.

In the second part the aim was to solve where are the resources of the village located. A perception map was used as a method in this part. Interviewers had a sketch map where they asked interviewees to draw their village. All of them drew something on the map, for example their own houses and farms, shambas. After that interviewees were asked to draw the village borders, land use, infrastructure, forests and other natural resources, and the areas of erosion on the village map.

In parts three and four, men and women were divided into separate groups. The aim was to figure out what were the current problems or issues concerning the village. A simple matrix was used here as the method. The division into two groups by gender was made because it was thought that men’s and women’s point of views might be very different and also because some of the issues might be very delicate. After the interviewees had talked for a while about their opinions the most important issues were written down on the matrix. Then a set of beans, e.g. ten, was given to each person. Each issue had its own area in the matrix, and interviewees were asked to distribute the beans freely to issue areas according to how acute the issues were.

In the last part the same themes were used as in the previous section. The aim was to find out what changes there had been with these issues in last ten years and had the changes been positive or negative. To solve this, black and white beans were given to every person. Different colours indicated positive and negative changes. Interviewers also had old aerial photograph prints of village areas and
they were showed to interviewees as a reference. After doing this last part the official interviews were over but discussion concerning the topics might have continued between interviewers and interviewees afterwards. In RRA method it is also important that the inhabitants and local leaders discuss the problems in their community together to help the development of the village, and there was a chance for this kind of discussion on the basis of the interviews.

Village meetings

All the groups in the village interviews were quite similar and well organised beforehand with the village chiefs. In every village there were both men and women participating in the interviews. Age groups were similar in nearly every village: most of the people were middle-aged and there weren’t very many young participants. Almost all had children, and their amount was also very similar, mostly from 4 to 8. Land ownership was also very similar; everyone had some land but mostly less than 8 acres. There were people from different educational backgrounds in every group. Because of these similarities it is reasonable to compare the results of matrices between the villages and summarise the whole situation in Taita villages.

Comparison of matrices

The comparison of the topics that the groups discussed for the matrices is very difficult because given topics are so different in scale. The most common issue affecting people’s lives in the villages was poor health care. It was mentioned in the “top three” important topics in all of the villages, expect Mwatate, and was mentioned by both men and women. The second most common topic in the matrices was related to water. They were mentioned in the “top three” in all the villages expect Werugha. Problems related to water differed in the villages, but mostly they were concerned about pure drinking water, irrigation and the small amount of rainfall. Most of the other issues mentioned in matrices concerned all the villages, but with different importance. Bad roads and other transport issues, erosion and education problems were mentioned in every village.

Despite many similarities in the interviewees’ answers, there were also some small differences between the villages. For example, human-wildlife conflict was a big problem in Dembwa and Mwanda, but not mentioned in the two other villages.

Differences between men and women

Besides the similarities between the answers of people from different villages, there was a difference between the two genders. In all the villages, men mentioned more technical problems, such as transport, water, and power supply problems. Women mentioned these too, but mostly men ranked them a higher level than women. Women, on the other hand, mentioned problems related to family, such as early marriages and many children. Women also mentioned diseases more. Only Dembwa women mentioned HIV/AIDS as its own topic, and they ranked it as the most serious problem in the village. However Dembwa men didn’t mention HIV/AIDS at all. It seems that it was a very good idea that men and women were separated. Women and men had quite different topics and validation. In Mwanda’s matrix there weren’t these “feminine” topics mentioned at all. This may be because men and women worked together; perhaps women didn’t say everything they were thinking of during that situation.

Change from last ten years

When looking at the villagers’ answers for what changes there have been during the last ten years, it is impossible to see any common trends. Again attitudes were very different both between villages and between men and women. For example, some groups said that the roads have become much better during the last ten years while some others thought opposite way. The theme is very subjective and there was much distribution about the answers inside the groups too. All the groups had anyway seen both the positive and the negative changes. I think that the question was very abstract and perhaps everybody didn’t understand the meaning of “positive” and “negative”.