

# *A methodology for assessing rural livelihood strategies in West/Central Africa: lessons from the field*



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# Introduction

- Project funded by the Forestry Research Programme of the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) 2000-2004
- Implemented by University College London and Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in collaboration with local partners
- Research component to undertake socially differentiated assessment of the importance of NTFPs to people living in rural areas



# Regions



- Proximity to forest (Western Ghana and Cross River Nigeria are the last forested regions of these two countries)
- People are known to rely on forests and their products
- Regions exhibit contrasting access to forests and markets
- Areas where conservation and development projects are operating



# Survey zones



- Remote, Border & On-road (areas of contrasting market access & proximity to forest)
- Sample size ca. 120 households per zone = ca. 360 per country = 1,178 in total
- Basic unit of research: household (“comprised of individuals eating from the same pot”)

# Survey Instruments



- Participatory Mapping
- Household Census
- Wealth Ranking
- In-depth Surveys

*Multi-round income survey*

*Targeted NTFP surveys*

Methods modified from Ellis (2000) and designed in consultation with the Statistical Services Centre of the University of Reading

# Research implementation

- Hire of social research officers (one for each country)
- Advised and trained by socio-economic consultant from UCL
- Method piloted in each country; subsequently adapted & manual produced
- Assisted by key informants in the field (one of whom always female)



# Participatory Mapping

## Purpose:

Show location of individual houses and the households within them

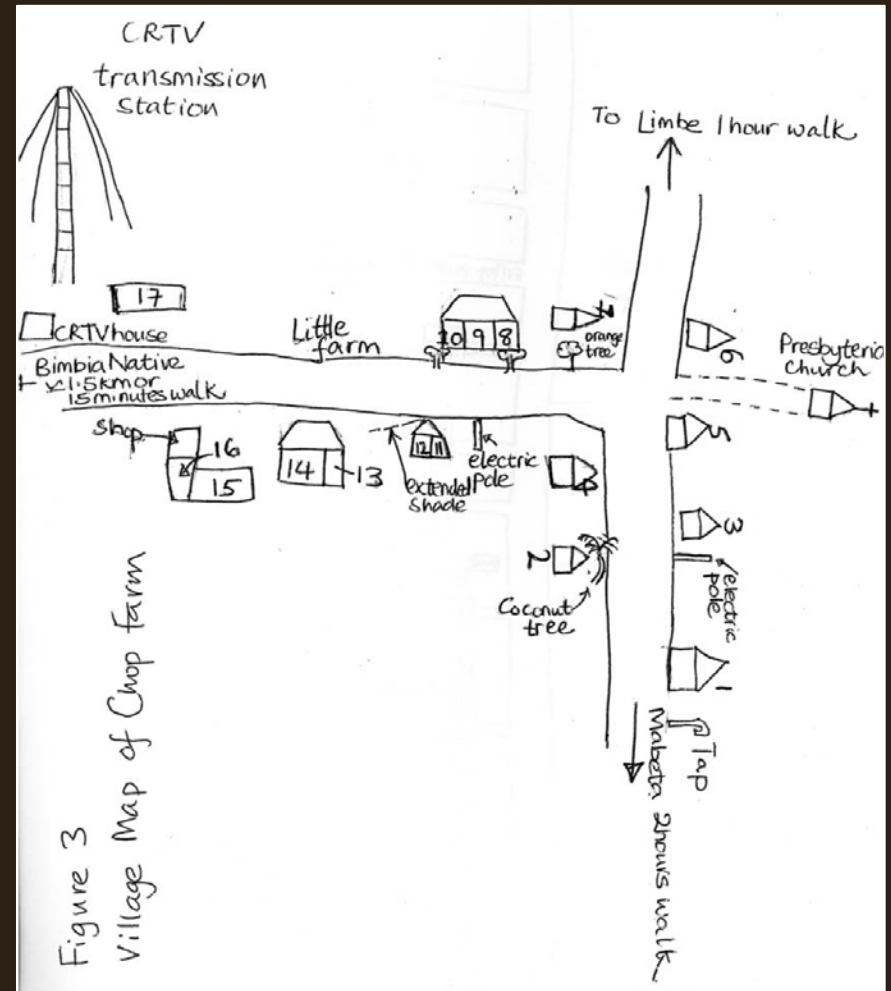
Show other types of public and private buildings, geographical features, etc.

## Provides:

Sampling frame for each study site,

Basic information about households for wealth ranking exercise

Useful reference map for the social research officers and village residents





# Household Census

- Designed to gather detailed data about individual households and provide local demographic information
- Information gathered was used to group households on the basis of gender, ethnicity and wealth and whether they were involved or not in NTFP-related activities.





# Household Census Data

HH Census was used  
in combination with  
Wealth Ranking Exercise  
to differentiate between  
relatively wealthy/poor  
households.

Item	Pts	Item	Pts
<b>Roof:</b>		<b>Household:</b>	
Thatch	0	1-2 rooms	0
Zinc	1	More than 2	1
<b>Walls:</b>		<b>Toilet:</b>	
Mud	0	Open system	0
Wood	1	Enclosed	1
Cement/Mud blocks	1	Pit Latrine	1
Mud Plastered	1		
<b>Household Items:</b>		<b>Farmland Ownership:</b>	
Radio	1	Owns farmland	1
Cassette recorder	1	Rents farmland	0
TV	1	Does not own farmland	0
Wooden/cane	1		
chairs/tables	1		
Upholstery chairs	1		
Wooden/cane cupboard	1		
Wooden/Metal bed			
<b>House ownership:</b>		<b>Hiring farm labour:</b>	
Owns house	1	Hires labour	1
Rents house	0	Does not hire labour	0
<b>Trading:</b>			
Trades	1		
Does not trade	0		

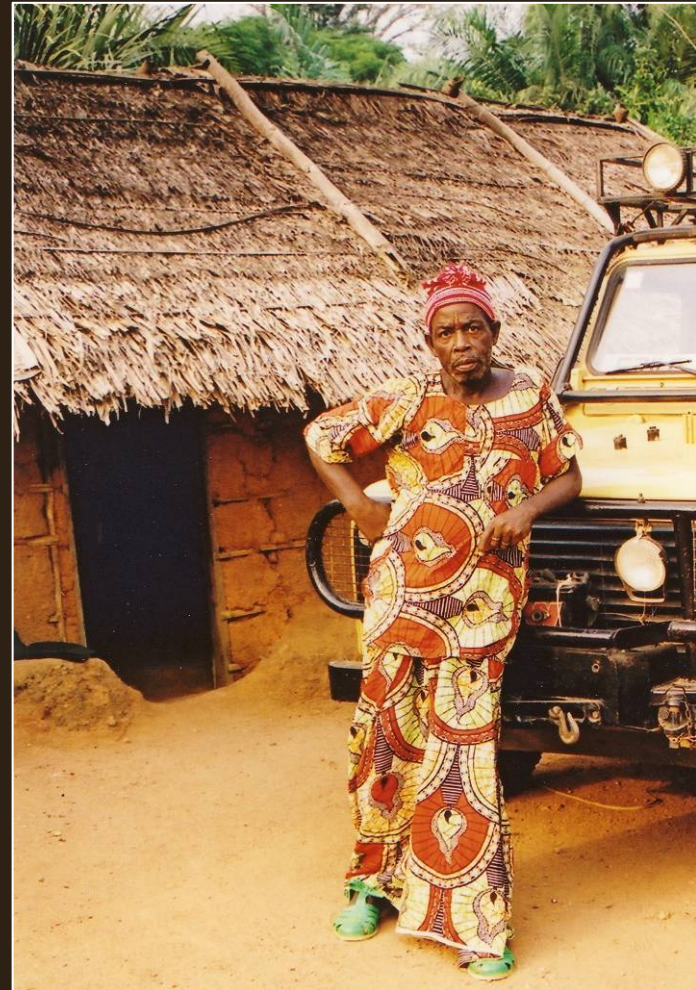
# Wealth Ranking

## Purpose:

To identify locally important criteria used to differentiate households on the basis of wealth and well-being

## Wealth Indicators:

The characteristics given as indicators of wealth and poverty differed to varying degrees between countries and regions, thus changing the definition of 'wealthy' and 'poor' per zone and country



# Wealth Indicators

## Wealth Ranking for Cameroon's On-road Study Settlements, South Bakundu Area

Rich	Fairly Rich	Poor	Poorest
<p>Own perennial cash crops (rubber, palms and cocoa).</p> <p>Own land and have large food crop farms (cassava, plantains).</p> <p>Wage earners (government teachers). Able to sponsor children in both primary and secondary schools.</p> <p>Hire permanent labourers Owns large businesses (e.g. off license)</p> <p>Big concrete house</p> <p>Those involved in the buying and selling of cocoa.</p>	<p>Relatively smaller perennial cash crop farms.</p> <p>Produce and sell food crops. Operate little shops, restaurants and cafeterias.</p> <p>Able to sponsor children in schools.</p> <p>Pensioners</p> <p>Own fairly large wooden houses, with cemented floors.</p>	<p>Live in rented houses and also rent land for cultivation.</p> <p>Produce very little food crops for sale (egusi, cocoyams and vegetables)</p> <p>Not able to sponsor children through secondary school.</p> <p>Farm labourers</p>	<p>Live in family houses</p> <p>Old, handicapped</p> <p>Farm labourers</p> <p>Those who squander money in a very irresponsible manner</p>



# Sampling for in-depth surveys



- Multi-round income surveys (quarterly over 2-3 years)
- Targeted NTFP surveys of households involved in forest-based activities
- Surveys of external harvesters/purchasers

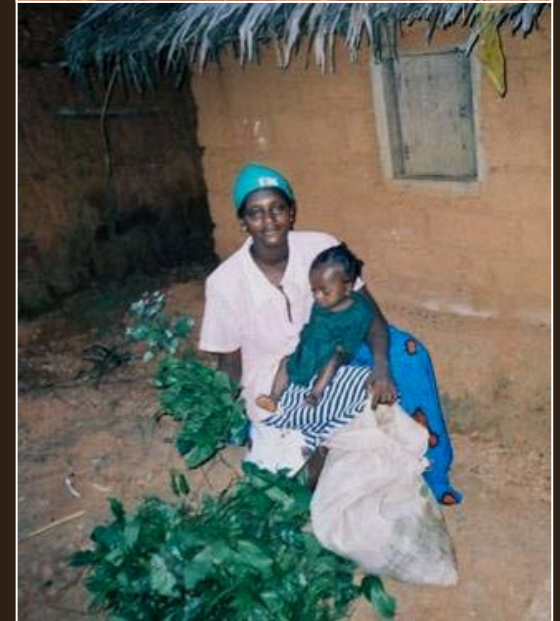
# Strengths of methods

- Combination of methods (participatory surveys, structured questionnaires, formal & informal discussions) allowed comparison of livelihood strategies across regions and zones
- Data collected covered
  - social structure
  - demographic information
  - rural livelihoods, (forest resources & alternative sources of income for rural households)
- Production of field manuals and the translation of the questionnaires facilitated local understanding and avoided ambiguity
- The multi-round survey captured seasonal variations in household incomes over  $\pm 3$  yrs



# Positive experiences

- Consistency of data collection in each country (same person collecting all information)
- Building of trust and local relations (SROs would stay in communities during research period)
- Government permission
- Initial village meetings very important to explain purpose of research
- Giving back (restitution) of research results highly valued at end of research period; allowed better negotiation base for communities





# Some shortcomings...

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- Demographic survey did not capture permanent HH members who were often not present in community (e.g. young men following economic opportunities)
- Limited understanding of what happens beyond community boundaries that affect households; crucial aspect of livelihood research
- Differences in household structure between regions (e.g. Ghana matrilineal HHs)
- Attrition (death, marriage, migration, lack of participation)
- Multi-round surveys: questionnaire fatigue (alleviated through small “rewards” but this is a double-edged sword and can cause bad feeling with non-participating HHs)
- Data cleaning and analysis: Extremely time consuming! Where was Ronnie when we needed him!

# Further problematic field experiences

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- Suspicion of what data is being used for (e.g. government taxation)
- Conflict with conservation and development projects
- Some migrants classified as “poor” actually had considerable assets elsewhere. Hence ability to hire daily labour more reliable measure of wealth than evaluation of local assets
- Seasonality of fieldwork (logistical challenges such as bad roads, impassable rivers) led to longer recall periods on occasion and lengthening research period
- Institutional challenges (changes in partner staff compliment)
- Application of questionnaires on Sundays, public holidays & evenings
- Such in-depth studies are intensive and expensive to implement!!

# Despite these shortcomings...

We were able to collect detailed socio-economic and demographic data, differentiating between contrasting settlement and household typologies in order to clarify who is involved in what income generating activities with a temporal dimension





# So what did we find out?

- Our findings indicate that NTFPs as a source of income are not as important as argued by some, and that farm-related, timber-related, and trade-related income sources are more heavily depended on and likely to be more promising than NTFPs for poverty alleviation
- Rural based households involved in NTFPs stay poor because the NTFP related activities they are involved in generate low returns (and subject to elite capture)
- Our study demonstrates that the importance of NTFPs depends on access to markets and forest resources, difference in economies (e.g. where population is growing faster than per capita incomes vs. where per capita incomes are rising), and individuals' socio-economic category
- Land tenure security is a pivotal conservation and development issue hence policy implication is that land tenure legislation needs to be designed very carefully
- Finally, forest and land resources are at the centre of local to international power plays and most conservation-livelihood outcomes cannot be understood without reference to these power struggles (de Foresta 2005)

# Dissemination of field experiences

While there is considerable published information on methodological approaches to undertaking livelihood surveys, there are very few papers outlining details and challenges of actual implementation. Hence we have submitted a paper on our lessons learned to *Ecological and Environmental Anthropology* (recently accepted)



*‘Honest self-criticism is neither easy,  
rewarded nor popular. There is no  
Journal of Misleading Findings’*

**Robert Chambers (1983) p55:**  
*Rural development: putting the last first*