

REPORT ON THE GHANA PILOT, 10th to 19th January 2007

I THE PILOT: AIMS, LOCATION, AND PROCEDURES

Aims

1. To accomplish a field test in Ghana of the methods and ‘instruments’ (checklists, survey questionnaire etc.) which we plan to apply in the project across the three countries. (These have already been tested in the Malawi pilot, conducted in November 2006.)
2. To assess the length of time required for particular methods and to devise a broad programme/pattern of research for application in each site.
3. Training of the Ghana RAs to ensure their competence in the full range of methods to be employed. (In Ghana, unlike Malawi, no pre-pilot training for this project was conducted, with the exception of a half-day office review, because experience in Malawi indicated that the training is most effectively conducted during the field pilot itself.)

Ideally, we would have liked to include work with child researchers in the pilot, but this was not possible in Ghana because the first children’s training workshop is yet to be held. The Ghana team had planned to undertake the children’s training in December, but due to a problem in funds transfer from UK to Ghana funds for the workshop were not received in time. (The funds left Durham University’s account before 4th December but the transfer appears to have been held up by new government procedures in Ghana: they were thus not received by Cape Coast University before the university closed for the Christmas vacation. N.B. Nor was it possible to include children in Malawi, since although the children had had their training programme, they were in the final week of term at the time of the pilot and unavailable for project work until the following week.)

Location: The Ghana field study took place in Abura Asebu Kwamankese district of Central Region, north of Cape Coast, from Wednesday January 10th through to the following Friday January 19th. This site is transitional between the two agro-ecological zones where the two main Ghana studies will take place i.e. the coastal savanna region and forest region.

The pilot studies focussed mainly on three settlements:

- a) Abura Dunkwa, a substantial centre and district capital (i.e. small town/peri-urban conditions) on the main (paved) Cape-Coast-Kumasi road, about 25 kms and 20 minutes drive from Cape Coast. It has secondary, JSS and primary schools, community and private health centres but only a petty retail market (the main market is at the nearby roadside settlement of Nyankumasi).
- b) Nyankumasi, an important market centre and small town approximately 5 kms north from Abura Dunkwa, also on the main (paved) Cape-Coast-Kumasi road.
- c) Tsetsekaasum, a remoter cocoa-producing village approximately 9 kms from the paved road, on a laterite road in adequate condition for motor access. It has no formal health or education services.
- d) Additionally, a visit was made to the less remote village of Assin Kumasi, approximately 3.5 kilometres from the paved road. This village is on the route between Nyankumasi and Tsetsekaasum and has a primary school attended by some

Tsetsekaasum children. The only interviews undertaken in this village were with schoolchildren (not from Tsetsekaasum) prior to the 5km accompanied walk to Tsetsekasum and a nearby settlement.

The RAs and lead collaborators were based in Cape Coast during the pilot because the RAs were all resident there and no accommodation could be found in Abura Dunkwa or the surrounding area sufficient for the nine researchers plus driver.

Weather/transport conditions: The pilot took place in the dry season (the last rain was in November), during a period of fairly strong harmattan. The next rains are not expected in this region till March/April (n.b. it has become increasingly difficult to predict their arrival in recent years as variability in rainfall patterns has increased substantially in this region).

Participants: The pilot was undertaken by the lead Ghana collaborator (Professor Abane), other University of Cape Coast staff (Mr Ekow Afful-Wellington and Mr Augustine Tanle), four Masters' students, all close to completion (Regina Obilie Odei, Esia-Donkoh [Broda], Samuel Agblorti and Samuel Asiedu Owusu and one research assistant (Mercy Otsin) with support from the UK lead researcher (Dr Gina Porter)¹. All the researchers employed on the project in Ghana have had research experience in previous externally-funded studies.

Procedures

During the pilot the following methods and 'instruments' to be used by adult researchers were employed by the research team, with support from Professor Abane and Dr Porter:

- In-depth interview using checklists
 - key informants checklist
 - parent checklist
 - children checklist
- Focus groups
- Accompanied walks
- Life histories
- Survey questionnaire

Additionally, RAs were asked to write up individual in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, accompanied walks and life histories to ensure consistent reporting procedures. These were reviewed by GP and discussed with the researchers on a daily basis.

Professor Abane and Dr Porter accompanied different research staff during each session. Each day they thus worked with at least two researchers, so that, during the pilot, each had an opportunity to work with every researcher.

Language

The majority of interviews were conducted by researchers in Fanti (or in Twi, a related language), but notes were taken in English, which is the researchers' preferred written language.

¹ Dr Hampshire was unable to attend the Ghana pilot for medical reasons.

II PILOT TIMETABLE

The aim in the pilot timetable was to proceed from key informant interviews to focus groups, then individual in-depth interviews, accompanied walks and other methods. Given the short period available for the pilot, this preferred pattern had to be adjusted to the availability of respondents for interview.

Day 1 (Wednesday 10th January): Cape Coast

Preliminary meeting: Professor Abane and Dr Porter. Subsequent review of methods and 'instruments' with all participating researchers. Allocation of key themes (health, education, activities, transport/mobility/migration) to researchers (i.e. two researchers to each theme with the exception of activities, covered by one researcher).

Day 2 (Thursday 11th): Abura Dunkwa

Meeting with Queen Mother and other elders (the Chief had travelled out of the region, but was interviewed later in the week).

In-depth interview with key informants:

Queen Mother, her 'linguist' (okyeami) and another elderly woman (i.e. group of three)

Assembly member

Unit committee member

Assistant Head teacher [female] and [male] head of second stream at Methodist primary school (i.e. two teachers together)

Head of JSS

Medical officer, chief administrator and pharmacist, district hospital (group of three, two female)

Chief midwife, district hospital

Retailer pharmacist

In-depth parent interviews: two mothers

In-depth children interviews: foster child

Review of day's work and findings (at University, Cape Coast) with all researchers: each researcher reviewed key findings from their interviews in turn.

Day 3 (Friday 12th): Nyankumasi market and Abura Dunkwa

Meeting with Chief and elders at Nyankumasi

In-depth interviews (mostly in busy market):

Parents (male and female)

Children (male and female, school and non-school going)

[Return to Dunkwa to organise focus group meetings for next day]

Review in Cape Coast

Researchers each to write up one key informant interview and one other interview

Day 4 (Saturday 13th): Abura Dunkwa

Review of interview transcripts

Focus group with female parents [11 women; two themes education and transport/mobility]
Focus group with male parents [two themes health and activities]
Focus group with boy children [health]
Focus group with boy children [education]
Focus group with girl children [education, transport/mobility]
Accompanied walk [one male child]
In-depth interviews: boy children

Review in Cape Coast

Day 5 (Sunday 14th): Cape-Coast/Elmina area potential sites

EAW, AD and GP visit potential sites for the main study in the coastal savanna zone

Day 6 (Monday 15th): Nyankumasi + Sunyani potential research sites

AA, AT and GP to Sunyani in Brong Ahafo region re sites for main study in second agro-ecological zone.

Remainder of researchers at Nyankumasi:

Life histories

Test of survey questionnaire

Day 7 (Tuesday 16th): Abura Dunkwa

Meeting with Dean of Faculty of Social Sciences, Cape Coast

FGDs with school-children (boys and girls separately)

Interview with Chief of Abura Dunkwa

Review in Cape Coast: Sunyani sites, focus groups, life histories, first review of questionnaire; review of transcripts.

Day 8 (Wednesday 17th):Tsetsekaasom and Assin Kumasi

Tsetsekaasom:

Large group discussions with male parents (2) and female parents (1). [Many villagers had assembled so it was not possible to limit numbers for FGDs].

Prior arrangements had been made to work in this village but a minor dispute between the inhabitants (many of whom are settlers) and the Chief/landowner disrupted work in the village since the Chief and his entourage arrived during our visit: group discussions in progress had to be abandoned.

Assin Kumasi:

Moved to this settlement's primary school following disruption of work at Tsetsekaasom, since arrangements had been made to walk with children from here back to Tsetsekaasom.

All school staff were involved in a PTA meeting throughout the day, so interviews limited to school children.

Accompanied walks with school children at end of school day: Assin Kumasi to Tsetsekaasom [2 children only] and to a nearby village [5 children].

Review in Cape Coast, including review of transcripts.

Day 9 (Thursday 18th): Nyankumasi

Survey questionnaire (second session, one per researcher)

Life histories (one per researcher)

Interview with transport owner and GPRTU branch secretary

Key informant interview with Senior Secondary School headteacher

Review in Cape Coast, including review of transcripts.

Day10 (Friday 19th): Cape Coast potential urban research sites

AA/GP Visit to other potential research sites, Cape Coast

Lead researchers (AA, GP) review of Ghana pilot.

Final review with all researchers.

III FINDINGS FROM THE GHANA PILOT

a) The checklists and other qualitative work

- *The revised checklists worked well in Ghana*

The checklists employed in the Ghana pilot had been a) initially prepared in UK, b) reviewed at the inception workshop by the collaborators from all focus countries, c) revised in UK, d) reviewed again by all collaborators, e) revised again in UK, f) revised in UK following the Malawi pilot. Very minor revisions/additions were suggested by the Ghana pilot. These will be sent to all collaborators.

- *Confirmed, as in Malawi, that checklists are best prepared only in English*

No need to translate because the emphasis is on flexibility – developing a conversation.

- *Splitting the children and parent checklist into four themes (i.e. four separate checklists for children, four for parents)*

The original children's checklist was particularly long and a decision was made during the Malawi pilot to split both the children's and parents' checklist into four discrete themes (1. education, 2. health, 3. activities [work and play], 4. transport and migration). This has worked well in Ghana too.

- *Giving researchers prime responsibility for one of the four themes:*

In Ghana, as in Malawi, researchers administered questions only on their own 'theme' [though in Ghana two researchers - as opposed to Malawi's one - worked on three of the themes – education, health, activities - because seven researchers were available for the pilot in Ghana]. This is likely to carry through into the project as the whole. Thus, the researcher with responsibility for education administers education-focused questions to children, parents, and teachers, the researcher with responsibility for health administers health-focused questions to children, parents, health workers etc. and so on. This gives researchers responsibility for one theme through the study and hopefully a sense of ownership of their theme.

- *The advantages of a larger research team i.e. two researchers per theme*

Having seven researchers (two researchers per theme) as we had in the Ghana pilot brings considerable advantages in terms of coverage, covering for absences etc. A team of eight researchers is probably ideal. An eighth (female) researcher is to be recruited in Ghana and trained before the main survey.

- *The importance of an end-of-day meeting of all RAs to review and discuss findings every field day*

It is particularly important, given the splitting into themes, that researchers meet for a review and discussion of findings at the end of each day to ensure adequate cross-fertilization of ideas and issues. Each theme needs to be constantly examined in the light of its relationship to the other themes. This approach proved as helpful in Ghana as it did in Malawi.

- *The value of restricting themes covered in focus group discussions and working without checklists*

The focus groups conducted later in the week in Ghana, when RAs had gained familiarity with their topic issues, were successfully conducted without recourse to check sheets. As in Malawi, this produced more fluent and effective discussions with participants.

- *The value of an accompanied walk as a major component of interviews with children.*

As in Malawi, during early interviews in the pilot with children it was found that some children, even older children, were shy and uncomfortable. An accompanied walk can be more effective in breaking the ice and bringing a full discussion of children's issues to the fore. The accompanied walk with school children worked very well in Ghana, though some researchers found the length of walk difficult in the afternoon heat.

- *The value of direct reportage (i.e. in the first person singular)*

In Ghana researchers quickly adapted to the requirement for direct verbatim reportage, which is more efficient in terms of note taking but also gives a better feel of the interview and allows local voices to come through in our reportage.

- *The importance of probing and reporting beyond the factual in in-depth interviews, focus groups etc.*

The importance of probing and obtaining an understanding of people's feelings about residence in remote places, or being late for school because of transport work, etc. etc. was stressed to the researchers who, as in Malawi, are used to eliciting factual information but in some cases have less familiarity with in-depth qualitative work.

- *The value of flexibility and working without prior appointments*

Fixed appointments can make the work schedule inflexible and reduce the potential for achieving a full day of interviews. During the Ghana pilot, as in Malawi, we achieved a great deal in limited time by being flexible and finding potential interviewees as we moved around the settlements, rather than fixing up lots of appointments in advance. A series of pre-arranged appointments would limit what can be accomplished during a field day. Ideally, it is best if only the village Chief/Queen Mother and main key informant interviews are booked in advance. However, it is possible that RAs, if young and seen as lacking influence, may have

difficulty obtaining interviews without a prior appointment. This was not the case in Ghana.

- *The value of a review of the first qualitative data set from the main survey in each country, before moving to the second and subsequent sites.*

It will be important to review qualitative data collected at the first main site of field research in each country before proceeding to the second site. This will help pick up overlap, any misunderstandings of terminology not picked up in the pilot, and help establish if there is any potentially redundant data component (i.e. excessive triangulation).

b) The questionnaire survey

- *Minor further revision of the draft survey questionnaire required.*

Substantial revisions were made to the survey questionnaire following the first Malawi pilot. There were only minor problems of misinterpretation when this revised questionnaire was piloted in Ghana. Nonetheless, these will need rectifying prior to the South Africa pilot.

- *Preference for English language version only for questionnaire.*

In Ghana the researchers piloted the questionnaire from the English version only, without any significant difficulties. We discussed the question of translation into local languages but the researchers felt that this is only necessary for specific complex words/phrases, especially given the fact that they may be working not only in Fanti in the southern savanna and Twi in the forest zone, but also with Ewe migrants in the savanna and northern migrants (such as Mole-Dagbani) in the forest zone. (Between them, the researchers speak all the major Ghanaian languages.)

- *Seasonal timing of the questionnaire survey*

Although the survey questionnaire is designed to pick up seasonal variations, ideally it should be administered in the wet season [i.e. when transport likely to be at its most difficult] in all countries if possible, to aid statistical comparisons across the three countries. [The qualitative research, however, can continue in all seasons].

Possible date for the Ghana survey: June 2007

- *SPSS data entry*

Given the amount of qualitative work needed to ensure adequate understanding of local conditions, it was agreed in Ghana that SPSS data entry will be done in UK to reduce in-country work load. (Survey sheets to be sent DHL to UK)

c) Other key points

- *The benefits of presenting the study topic as 'children's lives' rather than 'children and transport'*

During the inception workshop, we agreed a standard introduction for use by all researchers (adults and children) that refers to the topic of research as 'children, transport and mobility'. However, in the Malawi pilot we found respondents confused by the very broad nature of many of our questions. Moreover, we concluded that emphasising transport at the start of the interview could suggest to respondents

the need to concentrate on transport issues [especially with the thought that funding for interventions might be available in this area], when there were other, (possibly more pressing) issues of concern to our respondents. In the Ghana pilot the broader topic title was used effectively.

- *Selection of sites for adult researcher studies*

In Ghana site selection was delayed till the pilot. Our aim in site selection in all countries is to ensure, above all, that the sites are representative of majority groups in that particular zone, but also, where possible, to achieve good comparability across countries. Settlement in Ghana's coastal savanna is rather more nucleated than in Malawi.

A review of coastal savanna zone sites led to the following provisional selection:

Cape Coast, Abura neighbourhood – urban (relatively high density)

Simew - peri-urban

Ebukrom - rural

Antim - remote rural (no services)

A review of forest zone sites led to the following provisional selection:

Sunyani: Sunyani 2 neighbourhood – urban (relatively high density)

Odumasi: Sansama station area - peri-urban

Tainso - rural

A hamlet served by Tainso [not yet identified] - remote rural (no services)

**** In all sites it is extremely important to distinguish interviews of residents living in compounds close to a good public transport route with regular services and those further away: the checksheets require that this is noted in each in-depth interview with individuals.

- *A brief characterisation of each potential research site (by in-country project leaders) is useful at an early stage:*

population size

population distribution

principal economic activities

ethnicity

road access and transport services

character (urban/pu/rural/remote rural)

- *The value of including not only rural settlements with services but also remote rural settlement without any services (i.e. no primary school etc.)*

This will be important for picking up primary education access issues, in particular.

- *The value of researcher residence in study settlements during the field component*

Residence in the field can substantially reduce field transport and subsistence costs. If the RAs are all resident in one compound this will also help provide a key contact point for organising focus groups etc.

- *The importance of pursuing portage issues in the health checksheet interviews. Even where people dismiss this factor as insignificant it is important to record that fact and to encourage them to elaborate on the reasons for this view.*

d) Some additional points re Ghana

- In Ghana researcher handwriting appears mostly sufficiently clear to proceed straight from basic field notes to typing up (only one researcher expressed concern about doing this): apparently this is the normal practice for researchers in Department of Geography and Tourism at Cape Coast. This will hopefully cut out most of the writing up of field notes prior to typing which is taking a great deal of time in the Malawi study. Researchers will thus each work with two notebooks so that one can be left with the typist while the other is in use.
- In Ghana there appeared to be somewhat easier access to informants (i.e. without prior appointment) than in Malawi. However, although informants mostly gave permission for interview very readily, some information provided was subsequently identified as inaccurate or a false representation of the informant's views. This emphasises the importance of triangulation in respondents and methods.
- Government education policy in Ghana has produced the following education pattern:
 - Kindergarten – 2 years
 - Primary school from age 6 extends over 6 years(P1 to P6)
 - JSS extends over 3 years (JSS1-3)
 - Senior Secondary School (new policy) extends over 4 years (SSS1-4)

The abolition of fees for primary and JSS occurred only in 2005/6. Before that, only selected deprived communities and districts were exempt. Fees at Senior Secondary School vary substantially according to location and whether boarding or day (the day fee may be as low as 40,000 per term but the boarding fee may up to 800,000 per term). Even if fees per se are small, PTA contributions are often very expensive, especially in Grade A schools. (PTA fees in one Cape Coast school are 80,000 cedis per term).

- Government policy re *Junior Secondary School* is that they are community based and that no pupil should have to travel over 8kms to school. However, some pupils in very remote off-road rural areas still have to travel over 8kms.
- Entrance to *Senior Secondary Schools* in Ghana is determined by examination performance in JSS 3. Pupils select their preferred school (which can be in any region of Ghana), but well-patronised schools cannot take all applicants. The students who do not obtain their choice are allocated by a national body.

There are different categories of senior secondary school in Ghana:

Category A

Category B

Category C =Community secondary schools (owned and managed by communities)

This has important implications for access. It will be necessary to establish how many children in rural areas qualify for and actually proceed to secondary school.

Since 2001 Government policy has been to establish one 'Modern school' (i.e. Senior Secondary School with better facilities such as laboratories and staff accommodation) in each district but in many districts these are still under construction.

CONCLUSION

Issues picked up and addressed through revision of 'instrument's' following the Malawi pilot were helpful in smoothing progress in the Ghana pilot. All necessary researchers training were pursued on site, to considerable advantage.