

CHILDREN, MOBILITY AND TRANSPORT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

REPORT ON THE MALAWI PILOT, 11th – 18th November 2006

I THE PILOT: AIMS, LOCATION, PROCEDURES

Aims

1. To accomplish a preliminary field test in Malawi of the methods and 'instruments' (checklists, survey questionnaire etc.) which we plan to apply in the project across the three countries.
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. Continue training of the Malawi RAs to ensure their competence in full range of methods to be employed.
4. Review the performance of the RAs employed to weed out any weak performers before the main study begins.

Ideally, we would have liked to include work with child researchers in the pilot, but this was not possible since children were in the final week of term and unavailable for project work until the following week.

Location: The one week Malawi pilot study took place in Zomba district from Saturday 11th November 2006 to Saturday 17th November 2006. This site is within the same agro-ecological zone as Blantyre district, where the first of the two main Malawi studies will take place i.e. the Shire highlands region.

The pilot studies focussed mainly on three settlements:

- a) Thondwe, a substantial trading centre (small town/peri-urban conditions) on the main (paved) Zomba-Blantyre road, about 15 minutes drive from Zomba. It has secondary and primary schools, a large market conducted twice per week, community and private health centres and a bicycle taxi rank.
- b) Chilumpha, a village approximately 2 kms from Thondwe on a laterite road in good condition, with no services within the settlement but relatively easy access to Thondwe.
- c) Chikanguya 2, a remoter village approximately 8 kms from the paved Blantyre-Zomba road, on a laterite road in adequate condition for motor access. It has a primary school but no health centre. Children in secondary school have to walk to a secondary school near Thondwe.
- d) Additionally, a visit was made to the remote village of Kapito, approximately four kilometres by a narrow but direct footpath (crossing five streams) from Chikanguya (c. 6 kms by a more circuitous motor road) and c. 12 kms from the paved road. Only three interviews were undertaken in this village (one with the village head, one an accompanied walk with a young girl, one a group interview/FGD with 4 boys and 4 girls attending school) but three schoolchildren from the village were interviewed on an accompanied walk from the primary school at Chikanguya to their homes in Kapito.

The RAs and lead collaborators were based in Zomba during the pilot. Three of the four RAs were resident in Zomba.

Weather/transport conditions: The pilot took place just as the rains started in this district (i.e. the first substantial period of rains with rain on most days). This helped provide an indication of transport conditions at one of the more difficult periods of the year (i.e. heavy rains), though underlying laterite was still well compacted and thus we did not encounter the quagmires likely later in the year.

Participants: The pilot was undertaken by the Malawi collaborators (Drs Munthali and Robson) and four University of Malawi graduate research assistants (Linny Kachama; Bernie Zakeyo; Matthews Nkosi and Bryan Mkandawire), with support from the UK researchers (Drs Porter and Hampshire). The four RAs (one female, three male) had been present at the first children's workshop in Blantyre and in the week prior to the pilot they were given further training in Zomba by Drs Munthali and Robson.

Procedures

During the pilot the following methods and 'instruments' to be used by adult researchers were employed by RAs, with support from the Malawi and UK lead researchers.

- In-depth interview using checklists
 - key informants checklist
 - parent checklist
 - children checklist
- Survey questionnaire
- Focus groups
- Accompanied walks
- Life histories (a technique the RAs had already practised on each other during their initial training)
- Ethnographic Diaries

Additionally, RAs were asked to write up individual in-depth interviews and life histories, in order to obtain a rough estimate of the length of time required for this component.

Each RA was usually accompanied by one of the lead researchers from Malawi or UK. In some cases [where the respondent spoke English] the technique was first employed by the lead researcher, while the RA observed, then the RA took over the second and subsequent interviews/group discussions. Each day the lead researchers worked with at least two RAs, so that, during the week, all had an opportunity to work with and make some assessment of the competence of every RA.

Language

The majority of interviews were conducted by RAs in Chichewa, but notes were taken mostly in English, which is the RAs preferred written language [written Chichewa apparently presents a number of problems, related to its orthography].

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: Thondwe

Test of key informant interview checklist and procedure with primary and secondary school headteachers, primary teachers.

Group interview with (12) secondary school children [not planned, but the children had been recruited by teachers and were waiting to be interviewed].

Individual interviews with primary school children using checklist [not planned but children were waiting to be interviewed].

Individual interviews with two children (one in school and one irregular attender) in Chilumpha.

Review of day's work and findings (at University Offices, Zomba) with all RAs and collaborators: each pair (RA and collaborator) reviewed their interviews in turn.

Day 2: Thondwe and Chilumpha

[Sunday, so more difficult than normal to find respondents available for interview in the morning as people go to church]

Thondwe:

Group interview with bicycle-taxi operators.

In-depth interview with phone kiosk manager.

In-depth interview with local transport (mini-bus/lorry) owner-operator.

Life history with a man with a disability.

In-depth interviews with child, father and other related adult [uncle] - 3 separate interviews, useful comparison.

In-depth interview with one HSA (health surveillance assistant).

Parent interview with father of a one-year old.

In-depth interviews with 2 secondary school teachers.

Chilumpha:

Key informant interview with [elderly woman] village head and elders

Review in Zomba

Day 3: Chikanguya 2

Key informant interview with [woman] village head.

Key informant interview with primary school head teacher.

Key informant interview with member of village health committee / TBA.

Key informant interview with church leader.

Parent checklist interview [three mothers together].

Children interviews.

Parent interviews.

Review in Zomba

Day 4: Chilumpha

[Arrived in Chikanguya and started to set up focus groups: plans abandoned when body of 14 year old child arrived for burial and village funeral plans commenced: necessary to work elsewhere for next two days.]

Focus group with parents [7 women; RAs each moderated in turn, working with own topic but without checklists]
Focus group with children [12 girls]
Review in Zomba

Day 5: Chilumpha

Test of survey questionnaire
Review in Zomba: focus on questionnaire revision
Review RA ethnographic diaries

Day 6: Chikanguya to Kapito

Accompanied walks with children [3 girls, 4 km from school to home]
Village head interview
Child interview and accompanied walk
FGD with school attending children
Review in Zomba: Questionnaire revision continues

Day 7: Chilumpha, Thondwe, Blantyre

Life histories [2 at Chilumpha, 1 at Thondwe]
Timed write up of life histories
Review of news cuttings file
ER/GP Visit to potential research sites, Blantyre
Pilot review by collaborators (AM, ER, GP)

Day 8: Blantyre region potential research sites

ER/GP Visit to other potential research sites, Blantyre

III FINDINGS FROM THE MALAWI PILOT

a) The checklists and other qualitative work

● *Substantial revision of the checklists required*

The checklists employed in the 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, then d) reviewed again by all collaborators and e) revised again in UK. It became clear during the pilot that further revision of the checklists would be required, in part due to local issues/circumstances which need to be incorporated but also because of the need to rationalise the approach so that individual interviews were not too long. [The revisions were completed in UK in the week following the end of the pilot and have been sent back to Malawi for use in the main phase of the study.]

● *Confirmed that checklists best prepared only in English*

No need to translate because 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 review after day 1 suggested the value of rationalising the approach taken. A decision was made on day 2, after discussion with the RAs, to split the children's and parents' checklist into four

discrete themes (1. education, 2. health, 3. activities [work and play], 4. transport and migration). After Day 1, RAs administered questions only on their own 'theme'. [The children and parent checklists were then each split into 4 in the UK revision of checklists after the pilot].

- *Giving each RA prime responsibility for one of the four themes*

Splitting the work into four major themes led to a further decision to give each RA principal responsibility for one theme across the project: this could then carry through into the project as the whole. Thus, the RA with responsibility for education administers education-focused questions to children, parents, and teachers, the RA with responsibility for health administers health-focused questions to children, parents, health workers etc. and so on. This gives RAs principal responsibility for one theme each through the study and hopefully a sense of ownership of their theme.

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

It is particularly important, given this splitting into themes, that RAs 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.

- *The potential for RAs to develop their theme into an MRes*

Having been allocated a theme, the RA could also then develop their project research further into a larger research topic and study, possibly for a Masters by Research (MRes), if the RA is interested and local conditions allow. [Discussion with RAs in Malawi suggested some would be very keen to develop the project work into an MA: there is a question of research registration fees, but the issue will be pursued by Dr Munthali.]

- *Value of restricting themes covered focus group discussions and working without checklists*

The focus groups conducted later in the week when RAs had gained familiarity with their topic issues were successfully conducted without recourse to check sheets. Within each theme (i.e. education, health, etc.) the RAs chose one or two key questions / topics for the focus group to discuss. This produced more fluent and effective discussions with participants.

- *Value of accompanied walk as a major component of interviews with children.*

Early interviews in pilot with children found that some children, even older children, had difficulties in interview (they 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: this was clearly exemplified by the walk to Kapito conducted by three RAs, accompanying a child each. On this basis, it was decided that, wherever possible, children's interviews be conducted as an accompanied walk or incorporating an accompanied walk.

- *The need to emphasise direct reportage (i.e. in the first person singular)*

RAs tend to report 'he said that'. Where possible it is good for them to get into the habit of noting the words spoken directly. This is more efficient in terms of note

taking but also gives a better feel of the interview. Moreover, we will want 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. needs to be stressed to RAs who are often very good at eliciting factual information but may have had little training in 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 pilot 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 head and main key informant interviews (notably the head teacher) 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.

- *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

- *Substantial revision of the draft survey questionnaire essential.*

The RAs pointed to the need for a substantial revision of the draft survey questionnaire after each testing it on just one or two children. There seemed to be much confusion among the RAs simply because of the orientation of the tables. Following preliminary discussion we decided that the revisions required were so substantial that there was no point in continuing with further testing during this main pilot. A detailed review ensued with RAs and collaborators and a subsequent revision made in UK: the questionnaire has now been returned to Malawi for additional piloting.

- *Preference for English plus Chichewa questionnaire.*

The Chichewa translation was often found to be inadequate, because Chichewa is sometimes insufficiently precise in terms of the terminology required. Consequently, it is advantageous to have both languages available on the survey sheet together so that the RA can administer each question using Chichewa but with the ability to elaborate from the more precise English wording. This may also be the case in other language contexts.

- *Seasonal timing of the questionnaire survey*

Although the survey 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.

- *SPSS data entry*

Given the amount of qualitative work needed to ensure adequate understanding of local conditions, it was agreed in Malawi 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 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.

- *Selection of sites for adult researcher studies*

In Blantyre district the dispersed nature of settlement and some concern over the number of sites led to decision to review site selection. It may be necessary to reduce the number of sites from 12 to 8 sites per country (i.e. urban, p-u, rural and remote rural, instead of distinctive on and off road components in urban, p-u and rural locations). We will have a better idea for Malawi after the Blantyre region work has started.

A review of Blantyre region sites led to the following provisional selection:

Ndirande – urban (high density)

Mpemba- peri-urban/semi-rural

Namende - rural

Padzuwa- remote rural

In the urban and peri-urban sites it will be important to distinguish interviews of residents living in compounds close to a good public transport route with regular services and those further away: we have consequently revised the checksheets to ensure this is noted in in-depth interviews with individuals.

It will be important to visit Lilongwe, if possible, before a final site selection is made there. It will also be important in each country to visit sites during the pilot to ensure above all that the sites are representative of majority groups in that particular zone. (Where possible, we also try to achieve good comparability across countries.)

- *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/ru/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.

d) Some additional points re Malawi

- Use of the term *orphan* in Malawi:

This refers to children who have lost one (single orphan) or both parents (double orphan). The incidence of orphans is widespread in the Malawi pilot context and reference to orphans often seemed to make more sense to people than reference to foster children.

- Entrance to Government *Secondary schools* in Malawi is determined by examination performance at Standard 8. Selection is made nationally: pupils do not have a choice of school. Pupils can however choose the private secondary school they wish to attend, depending on personal funds available.

There are different categories of secondary school:

National secondary schools (the elite schools: all except one are government owned)

District secondary schools (one each in the 28 districts)

Community day secondary schools (owned and managed by communities: pupils have to come early to school to sweep the compound and clean the classrooms).

This has important implications for access. It will be important to consider how many children in rural areas qualify to and actually proceed to secondary school. Some of these secondary schools are boarding while others are day.

- *Examination centres*: Malawi now has Cluster centres for examinations (introduced a few years ago because of cheating at individual schools). This is thus now an important component of educational access.

CONCLUSION

The Malawi pilot raised many issues and has led to substantial revision of the 'instruments'. It also proved extremely valuable in terms of on-site RA training. Perhaps the most substantial issue to arise in Malawi is the length of time required by RAs to write up their results.