FIELD REPORT

SOSANT4200:Feltarbeid
Spring 2011

Navn xxx

Words: 3820

FIELD REPORT

INTRODUCTION

Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Oslo, through Professor Signe Howell, have in collaboration with SUM, started researching different aspects of REDD[1]. An important side of this is ethnographic research examining how REDD is experienced in communities in the South. My project is part of this research at the local level, focusing on the challenges of implementation and how the different stakeholders perceive their roles.

In my project description written fall semester 2010, I showed how I wanted to focus mainly on the relationship between the staff of a particular NGO, CARE Zanzibar, and people in a village in the Zanzibarian archipelago, that meet through the REDD project "Hifadhi ya Misitu ya Asili (HIMA) - Piloting REDD in Zanzibar through Community Forest Management". My main research questions were: *In interactions between CARE and the village; who participates, and in what way? Who do not participate and why? What are the actors' interpretations, motivations and goals in relation to REDD?*

For the theoretical framework, I proposed Long's social interface concept (Long 1989, 1992 and 2004) to be the most useful analytical tool, however nuanced some by Tsing's concept of friction (Tsing 2005 and 2008). Following Long's social interface concept, I also wanted to focus on actors.

As part of the course SOSANT4200 and the research project mentioned above, I have conducted a fieldwork in Zanzibar, East Africa from January 7th to July 10th 2011. In this field report my goal is to account for different aspects of the fieldwork as well as propose the main theme of the master's thesis that will be the end product of my project.

I was aware before the fieldwork that the research focus described required face-to-face encounters between CARE and the village, which might not happen during my stay. Eventually, this also turned out to be the case – there was no specific encounter in "my" village. In addition, the REDD component of the HIMA project was not yet introduced at this time. Therefore, as will be elaborated on later, a small change of the initial research focus and questions will be necessary.

THE FIELDWORK

I will in the following section describe the course of the fieldwork and the methods utilized. This will be done in two subsections relating to the different parts of the fieldwork. After this, I will discuss possible limitations of my data and ethical considerations, as well as language challenges.

HIMA staff

For the first part of my fieldwork, from January 7th to February 14th 2011, I stayed in Zanzibar Town. As intended, this first period entailed familiarizing myself with a new location, enrolling in a five week-long language class of Swahili and establishing contact with CARE Zanzibar. The organization is in charge of the HIMA project together with the Department of Forestry and local

---

[1] REDD is an abbreviation for "Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation", and entails that countries in the North pay governments and communities in the South for not cutting trees. The goal is to create financial value of carbon stored in forests. This can happen in multiple ways, such as through the UN or bilaterally, and is itself topic for great discussion internationally.

umbrella NGOs. HIMA is the REDD pilot project that my fieldwork evolved around. I had contacted them before departure, and immediately got in contact with them when I arrived.

As the weeks progressed, I witnessed several meetings held by CARE, the Department and two different local NGOs in several villages on Unguja Island[2]. I had planned to spend some time in CARE's office in order to apply participant-observation as a method here too, but found this to be quite difficult, at least in the beginning. The staff members were very friendly and open to me, but after my first day in the office, further questions were often simply answered by handing me a report to read at home. Just 'hanging out' in the office was hard.

Throughout my entire stay on Zanzibar, I stayed in close contact with HIMA staff, and on numerous occasions visited the offices of CARE, the Department and the local NGO[3]. I also attended several more village meetings, as well as conducted semi-structured interviews with all staff members of HIMA in the different entities[4]. When I met with HIMA staff after living in the village for a while, I found it easier to e.g. 'hang out' in the CARE office as I didn't seem to need a reason for my visits except from greeting the staff members.

The village
On February 15th 2011, I moved to a village in the central part of Unguja, where I was based until the end of my fieldwork. Here I stayed in the house of a local family as I had envisioned. The village consists of about 30 houses, and is part of a bigger entity called *shehia*, in size and administration quite similar to the Norwegian *kommune*, together with several other small villages. Almost all the villagers are involved in agricultural activities, but some also have formal occupations such as teaching. A lot of people engage in small individual businesses or cooperatives to add to their households' income. There are no tourists in this village, as it is not placed directly along the coast and not houses any tourist attractions, and therefore few villagers make their living of tourism.

The people of the village are to a large extent users of the forests[5] that surround it; many are involved in selling firewood and charcoal, and they all utilize forest products as cooking fuel. The village has been exposed to regulations of the use of the forest for some time through for instance the HIMA project (before HIMA became a REDD pilot project) and continues to be. However, I found the knowledge about e.g. CARE to be very low. No one knew what REDD is. People are familiar with the local umbrella NGO that CARE and the Department work with in this area, but relate this local NGO foremost to another activity[6]. There is a special environmental committee in the shehia in charge of regulating the forest. This is a crucial part of the HIMA project's approach. I stayed with a member of this committee and through her gained access to formal and informal meetings of the committee. There is a general consent in the village on the fact that the forest is "further away than before", meaning that the forest is decreasing, and that this in large extent is due to the people's extensive use of the forest for firewood, charcoal, building materials and agricultural land.

In the village, the main method planned for and applied was participant-observation, which entails spending time in the village and participating in daily life as much as possible. For the

---

[2] Unguja island is the main island of Zanzibar, and in the West often referred to as simply Zanzibar.
[3] The local NGO's office was based in a neighboring villages, and one of the two staff members working for the HIMA project was a frequent house guest of the house I was staying in.
[4] For the interviews with the local NGO an interpreter was used.
[5] Areas of tropical forests, and to a smaller extent the mangrove that separates the village from the Indian Ocean,
[6] Village Savings and Loans groups that many people, almost all women and a few men, participate in. In these groups the goal is to encourage people to start new small businesses. This is intended to reduce the use of forests for business, but do in some people's opinions rather encourage use of the forest as the participants are required to provide money for the group every week.

first part of my stay in the village, I chose to focus more on familiarizing the village to my presence as well as familiarizing myself with the village and its people, than on the specific themes of my research. I had also hoped to find a person in the village with ample knowledge of English to help me conduct interviews. This I deemed necessary as my Swahili was limited, even though as weeks progressed in the village there was improvement, and because only a few people understood English and even fewer people was willing to speak it. I was unsuccessful in finding an assistant in the village, but managed through a contact in town to find three women currently enrolled at university to help me. These women came for seven full days every month for four months, and during these days we conducted a large number of semi-structured interviews. For the first few days they also helped me to conduct a household mapping questionnaire, which was a great way to get to know more people of the village and to introduce each household to the objectives of my research. Together with the assistants, I also observed a few meetings in the local NGO. In addition to these women, I received help from another contact to conduct some interviews too.

Possible limitations and ethical considerations
I believe that some of the villagers, at least in the beginning of my stay, were skeptical towards my research as they were uncertain about the consequences this could have for them; many of them involved in activities that they think is contributing to deforestation and which they might have anticipated me to blame them for. It was hard to get across the fact that even though my research evolved around the forest, I was not there because I think badly about their use of the forest, but rather simply to learn. A few villagers stayed skeptical towards me for the whole time when it came to interviews, and for instance denied being involved in selling firewood even though I knew they are. Outside of these interviews, however, I found them to be open and friendly towards me, and I was allowed and welcomed to participate in the daily life of the village. Most people answered relatively openly in interviews, and some seemed to be completely open, disclosing facts like their participation in illegal forest-related activities without hesitation.

In the project description I write about the importance of distancing myself from CARE and the Department. In the field, I found this to be hard, but on the other hand not really a problem per se. The villagers knew I wasn't employed by CARE or the Department, but I think many realized that my findings will be read by these entities. There was no apparent conflict with CARE and the knowledge about the NGO's work was low, so for the villagers I don't think that whether I was tightly connected to CARE or not, was really of importance. The problem of distancing can also be seen as a further sign of "gradual overlapping" as will be elaborated on later.

Larsen writes in connection to fieldwork in Zanzibar Town that being a woman anthropologist in a sex-segregated society has influenced her position and degree of acceptance (Larsen 2008:6). Larsen spent more time with women than men, which was also the case in the part of my fieldwork based in the village. This will influence my material. I however sought to make up for this by always trying to reach as many men as women when conducting interviews. This was at times difficult because men spent a lot of time either at work[7] or cultivating fields further away from the village[8]. When participating in meetings in other villages I didn't feel that my gender influenced the interaction, but I noted the higher prevalence of men than women present from the villages. For my interaction with the NGO and the Department, as well as the local NGO, I believe that gender was not an issue in the same way.

When looking ahead at writing my thesis, I believe that anonymizing people and entities will be a challenge. There is only one major NGO that works closely with a Department regarding forests on Zanzibar, and together these two entities cooperate mainly with only three local

---

[7] In this case, I'm referring to formal occupations, such as teaching.
[8] Women's fields were generally closer to the houses.

NGOs. The staff members are relatively few, and the number of villages involved in HIMA also limited. For the villagers, I will, according to plan, anonymize them by changing particularly names and also in some instances characteristics so as to protect their identities. This might also be done with staff members of CARE and the Department, but I see no point in hiding the names of the entities. For the local NGO, I believe it is sufficient to refer to them as exactly that and not the organization's actual name.

I feel that there are some limitations in my material when it comes to observational data on the interaction between the local NGO, CARE and the Department[9], except from joint meetings in shehias. I'm planning to go back to Zanzibar in November to fill these gaps.

Language challenges
My own limitations when it comes to Swahili might have implications on the data produced, and was the main reason for using assistants in the village and with the local NGO. In the beginning of my stay in the village I think the language barrier might actually have worked in my favor, making people perceive of me as more 'harmless'. The obvious backside is, though, that I was only in a limited sense able to understand or hold conversations on my own that were directly relevant for my research. This did, however, improve with time, which enabled me to collect and produce data also through conversations. Interviews with CARE and the Department were conducted in English without assistants.

Working with assistants necessitated semi-structured interviews with interview guides that were prepared by me beforehand, as even their level of English was not sufficient enough to allow for immediate translation. This might be considered a drawback in my material, but I tried to make up for this by producing extensive interview guides as well as often adding a few questions during the interviews.

RESEARCH FOCUS
In the course of the fieldwork I based my practical and analytical approaches on two main directions; what I will call "the stakeholder approach" and "the social life of firewood approach". In this section I will elaborate on these approaches separately.

The stakeholder approach
The direction I started with and that I worked on for the entire stay was what I label "the stakeholder approach". This entailed getting to know, spending time with, and interviewing all the stakeholders in the HIMA project. Stakeholders in this case means for instance people involved in CARE, the Department, the local NGO, the village environmental committee, and villagers of different social positions[10]. As the fieldwork progressed I constantly discovered more stakeholders, and therefore throughout the stay continued to pursue this track. The stakeholder approach followed quite directly what I had proposed in the project description.

The social life of firewood approach
Eventually I realized that there would not be a meeting held by any of the entities[11] in the shehia I stayed in during my time there[12] and that the REDD component of HIMA was not yet launched.

---

[9] This is data that I feel through the small change of theme of the thesis, as evident in a later section of this field report, is very important.

[10] Age, gender, educational level, occupations/income-generating activities, social and economic status and so on.

[11] Meaning CARE, the Department or the local umbrella NGO, and concerning REDD.

[12] The HIMA staff was initially planning to reach the shehia during my stay, but didn't make it. They stated the reason for this to be a heavy work load especially during the end of the fiscal year. As there was for a

This was the basis of my research questions as outlined in the project description. These circumstances necessitated a small change in research focus, which will be elaborated on in the section concerning focus of the thesis. Based on this I also chose to simultaneously with the stakeholder approach try another direction that might be labeled "the social life of firewood[13]" . This led me to follow firewood from collection by villagers in the forest, through being sold, transported and re-sold again, all the way to one town dweller that utilized some pieces of this exact firewood as cooking fuel. Through this I discovered the biography of some bundles of firewood, in line with what Kopytoff calls "the biography of things" (1986). I also went to each of the different people involved in this particular biography for interviews, and also visited some of them several times. To add to this I also interviewed other gatherers, sellers and buyers of firewood. In a way, this approach allowed me to get to know and interview even more stakeholders. For my thesis, I believe that I will focus more on the first approach, and use data collected through the second approach as a supplement instead of a substitute[14]. The focus of the thesis will be discussed in the next section.

FOCUS OF THE THESIS

As mentioned, the bare facts of the fieldwork – that there was no face to face-encounter between "my" shehia/village and the entities during my stay and no REDD yet, necessitates a small change of course. I feel however that this is merely an alternation of the initial research focus and not a complete change. In this section I will elaborate on what I, based on this small alteration, am envisioning as the main theme of my thesis.

The basis of my project description, the focus on the different stakeholders to each other, will continue. However, this will not be based on one specific meeting in "my" shehia, but rather on a combination of participant-observation and interviews of all the different stakeholders in diverse situations. The insight gained from meetings between the entities and other villages is also useful in this regard[15], even if there was no meeting in the specific shehia I stayed in. What I find to be the most interesting aspect of my findings, in a way contradicts or challenges Long's social interface concept, and this is what I propose to be the main theme of my thesis.

Long defines "social interface" as

> "a critical point of intersection or linkage between different social systems, fields or levels of social order where structural discontinuities, based upon differences of normative and social interest, are most likely to be found (Long 1989:2)".

Evident in this definition is an assumption of differences and discontinuities. This focus on conflict can also be found in Tsing's concept of "friction" (2005 and 2008). What I see for the case of the HIMA project is rather what I call "gradual overlapping" between the different stakeholders; The gatherers from the village I stayed in, know about the importance of the forest and their role in causing deforestation, this knowledge has reached them mainly through the NGOs. They don't seem to disagree with the NGOs' goals, but feel they have no other income-generating alternatives than utilizing the forest. There are also a few villagers that don't engage in these activities, particularly one that stopped as a direct result of CARE's first meeting in the

---

long time talk about that there would be a meeting eventually, and due to the limited time of my fieldwork, I chose not to move to another village.

[13] Inspired for instance by Appadurai (1986) and Kopytoff 1986), but not necessarily far from situational analysis (Van Velsen 1967) as described in my project description.

[14] The insights gained from this approach in particular, I hope to publish in an article regarding how following a thing's social life or biography is not only a way of describing a thing's social relations, but also creates social relations for the researcher.

[15] I will, however, not use this to speculate on how a meeting in the shehia where I stayed would have been.

shehia – this woman is now an important member of the environmental committee. Even as she is so aware of issues concerning the forest, she still engages in buying firewood for selling to town. This I see as a token of gradual overlapping rather than discontinuity between the villagers and the committee. Furthermore, the staff of the local NGO came to the organization from the environmental committees in their local shehias. Two of the volunteers from the local NGO are now paid by CARE through the HIMA project, continuing the overlapping even further. Finally, CARE and the Department work so closely together that when they go to shehia meetings together, it is very hard to distinguish which entity the different people actually represent. To add to this, almost all the staff employed by CARE on the HIMA project have worked for the Department most of their professional careers.

This "overlapping" doesn't mean that there is close contact between for instance the gatherers and the Department, but rather that there isn't necessarily discontinuity; they can be seen as extremes *on the same scale*. In addition, I don't mean to suggest that there are absolutely no conflicts or that there won't be any in the future, simply that this is not what is evident in my material – and that I find Long and Tsing to make assumptions that don't necessarily fit the social reality of my field. This focus on gradual overlapping challenges Long's and Tsing's concepts in what I hope will be a fruitful and knowledge-producing way. My material can also be used to discuss what a NGO is, when as in this case CARE, titled a NGO, is financed by another state's government[16] and works so closely with the national government through the Department of Forestry.

In my project description, following Long, I also emphasized a focus on actors rather than structures. Throughout the fieldwork I wanted to maintain this, and sought to get to know not only "the villagers" or the entities themselves, but the individuals that make up these "structures". However, as might be visible in the rationale for gradual overlapping above, I feel that the field has influenced me to modify the strict focus on actors to a more moderate take on actors versus structure.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS
To conclude this field report, is an outline of the thesis as I'm visualizing it.

1. Presentation of the field and theme of the thesis

2. Methods

3. Social interface
>The concept, how Tsing's concept of friction modifies it, discussion about whether it's beneficial for my and other material

4. Gradual overlapping: an alternative?
>Conflict as assumption, discussion of other alternative concepts, suggesting gradual overlapping as alternative, my material in relation to this suggested alternative

5. What is a NGO?
>CARE as a NGO working closely with governments, discussion of what a NGO is, different theories about NGOs

6. Conclusion

---

[16] The HIMA project is funded by the Norwegian government through the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Dar-es-Salaam.

REFERENCES CITED

Appadurai, Arjun (1986): "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value" in Arjun
        Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (p. 3-63).
        Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Kopytoff, Igor (1986): "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process" in Arjun
        Appadurai (ed.) *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (p. 64-91).
        Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Larsen, Kjersti (2008): *Where Humans and Spirits Meet: The Politics of Rituals and
        Identified Spirits in Zanzibar*. Berghahn Books, New York and Oxford.

Long, Norman (1989): "Introduction: The Raison d'être for Studying Rural Development
        Interface" in Norman Long (ed.) *Encounters at the Interface: A Perspective on Social
        Discontinuities in Rural Development* (p. 1-10). Agricultural University, Wageningen.

Long, Norman (1992): "Introduction" in Norman Long and Ann Long (eds.) *Battlefields of
        Knowledge: The Interlocking of Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*
        (p. 3-15). Routledge, London and New York.

Long, Norman (2004): "Actors, Interfaces and Development Intervention: Meanings,
        Purposes and Powers" in Tiina Kontinen (ed.) *Development Intervention: Actor and
        Activity Perspectives* (p. 14-36).

Tsing, Anna L. (2005*): Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection*. Princeton
        University Press, Princeton and Oxford.

Tsing, Anna L. (2008): "Becoming a Tribal Elder, and Other Green Development
        Fantasies" in Michael R. Dove and Carol Carpenter (eds*.) Environmental
        Anthropology: A Historical Reader* (p. 393-422). Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford and
        Carlton.

Van Velsen, Jaap (1967): "The Extended-Case Method and Situational Analysis" in A.L.
        Epstein (ed.) *The Craft of Social Ethnography* (p. 129-149). Tavistock, London.