

Resource Use and Sustainable Development among the Baluli in Uganda

**Report of the Field Research from March 5 to April 11,
LAGSUS, sociology component**

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Women making a seedbed for vegetables (Foto: Samuel Fan)

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Introduction

“So you’re going to Uganda? Is that not where Idi Amin was?” The image of a crazy African dictator with a cannibalistic reputation was about all my hairdresser could connect to this country. Someone who had worked for years for an aid organization, then reminded me that Winston Churchill had called it the “Pearl of Africa.”

It is a measure for the preoccupations of the media that Idi Amin can be found on the internet very easily – rating him among the “Killers of the 20th Century” – next to figures such as Adolf Hitler, Josef Stalin, Ne Win, Mohamad Suharto, Augusto Pinochet, to name a few of the 24 listed there with portraits and “kill tallies¹.” Nonetheless, the internet still allows the now deceased dictator to propagate his lies (as the interviewing journalist himself calls the contents of the interview) via the video of an interview at his exile home in Jeddah on the BBC website². The victims are harder to find: the only personal account I could find is on the website of a center for the victims of torture³; else, a website dedicated to Christian ministry has a collection of newspaper reports about Amin, which point to some of the horror⁴ to which the rest of the world remained blind for too long, as an insider’s account⁵ rightfully emphasizes. Written by a former minister in Amin’s cabinet with the intention of playing a role in bringing Amin down, “A State of Blood” became a major influence on the bestselling novel “The Last King of Scotland”⁶, published twenty years after Amin’s government ended in 1979. This novel, in turn, seems to be used in education often enough to warrant selling “e-notes” for teachers⁷ and is presently being turned into a film⁸. While all this is extremely interesting, it seems to me that reading Richard Oketch’s account of his own victimization⁹ – and realizing that the system which developed around Amin treated a significant proportion of its 300 000 victims in this manner – gives a better background for understanding the statements in my interviews in Kinamuanga, Junda, Ruunyo, and Nakataka in the Nakasongola County of Uganda: the main achievement of the present government of Yoweri Museveni is considered to be the “taming” of the army and of allowing the people to sleep in peace again.

This, and the conflict between the prevailing poverty and any attempts at sustainable development, which I will explain in more detail later, are the strongest impressions I carried home from the Ugandan research stay, which had been planned around testing the viability of the research approach summarized in an e-mail to the LAGSUS research team before my departure.¹⁰

¹ <http://www.moreorless.au.com/killers/amin.htm>

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/3156011.stm>

³ <http://www.johnrosengren.net/tohell.htm>

⁴ <http://www.ugandamission.net/aboutug/articles/amin.html#index>

⁵ Henry Kyema /1977/1997): *A State of Blood. The Inside Story of Idi Amin*, Kampala (Fountain Publishers),

⁶ Giles Foden (1999): *The Last King of Scotland* (Faber and Faber Ltd.)

⁷ <http://www.enotes.com/last-king/>

⁸ At http://www.themovieblog.com/archives/2005/05/gillian_anderson_in_last_king_of_scotland.html the summary is given as: “a Scottish doctor (McAvoy) on a Ugandan medical mission becomes irreversibly entangled with one of the world’s most barbaric figures: Idi Amin (Forest Whitaker). Impressed by Dr. Garrigan’s brazen attitude in a moment of crisis, the newly self-appointed Ugandan President Amin hand picks him as his personal physician and closest confidante. Though Garrigan is at first flattered and fascinated by his new position, he soon awakens to Amin’s savagery - and his own complicity in it. Horror and betrayal ensue as Garrigan tries to right his wrongs and get out of Uganda alive.”

⁹ <http://www.johnrosengren.net/tohell.htm>

¹⁰ See Annex 1

For the first time in the research project, I found myself in the middle of the activities and problems of an *ongoing* development project: Samuel Diomande Fan has been working in the two subcounties of Kalongo and Kalunji of the Nakasongola County, focussing on improved methods of rearing pigs and chicken on one side, and introducing the growing of vegetables on the other. Both activities are channelled exclusively through groups, in accordance with the agreements with the sponsoring organization CFI (*Christliche Fachkräfte International*). “Mr. Sam Fan” (as he is called by everyone in the area) inherited a close association with the bishop of Luwero and the parish in Kisenyi from an earlier CFI-project, which had provided hand-operated water-pumps to the district. This peculiar constellation has shaped the communication with the local *Baluli* population, as will become apparent later.

The report will begin with a brief account of the history and situation of the Nakasongola District, and then move immediately to the main results from the key informant interviews, which were complemented by a number of group interviews, the last of which took place with the participation of representatives of all of the groups Fan works with. Apart from asking participants for feedback on the preliminary main results, that meeting also aimed at introducing an action research component into the CFI development project. The development of the research methodology from the outline already distributed is described in the third section of the report. The last section relates the results from Uganda with those from Indonesia and Namibia and draws some conclusions for the field research still to be conducted, and, more importantly, attempts to present a preliminary resumé of the comparative perspective of the sociology component. The Annexes contain this outline, the schedule of questions developed from there with the assistance of Moses Sunday, a Church Elder from the area who agreed to be my assistant and interpreter, and notes from the interviews conducted on the basis of this schedule.

Some background for the Nakasongola district

The Nakasongola district (formerly called Buruli county¹¹) lies just South of Lake Kyoga and is populated by the Buruli people who originated from Congo. The district as an independent administrative unit was created only in 1997, having formed part of Luwero district before. For this reason, the district lay within the infamous “Luwero triangle” which formed the centre of the war waged by Museveni’s NRA (National Resistance Army)¹². As a consequence, this area suffered the highest rate of civilian casualties and torture during the fight against the second Obote government between 1981 and 1985. A recent series in the *Monitor*¹³ contains both Obote’s own recollection of his government, additional interviews with former Presidents of Zambia, where Obote still lives in exile, and of eye witnesses or victims. Some of the archive pictures lend credibility to one of my informant’s claims: “That time, you could cry all the way from Luwero to Kampala: there were skulls everywhere.”

The inhabitants themselves pronounce their name *Baluli* and those to whom I spoke unanimously appreciate this separation from Luwero district and the installment of a separate traditional leader, the *Ssabaruli*: the insecurity of land tenure which they see as their greatest

¹¹ Kakasongola District Local Government: *Three Year Draft Integrated Development Plan 2004/5-2006/7*, p.1

¹² For an inside account see Ondoga Ori Amaza (1998): *Museveni’s long march*. One of the appendices contains a “code of conduct” for NRA combatants which forbids insulting or harrasing “members of the public”, making it mandatory instead to help them (particular with medical treatment) and to abstain from having illegitimate relationships with women. I mention this because it confirms the reports by my own informants and those quoted in the *Monitor*: killings and torture were committed by government soldiers – and not by the insurgents, as Obote still claims in the interview given to Andrew Menda in Lusaka.

¹³ The first of this 33-part story: <http://www.monitor.co.ug/specialincludes/ugprsd/obote/ob04071.php>, the pictures mentioned appear in parts 20 and 21

problem is connected to the history of having been incorporated into the *Baganda* kingdom (to which Luwero belongs) in the course of British creation of the Uganda Protectorate. With the help of *Baganda* troops under the *Kabaka* (King), the Baruli District was conquered and taken away from the authority of the *Kabalega* (*Kabaraga*), the *Banyoro* king, who resisted British encroachment. Thus, Nakasongola district belongs to what the *Banyoro* people in Uganda consider “lost counties.” The reward of the successful *Baganda* soldiers were land titles. Hence, until today, considerable portions of the land legally belong to ethnic *Baganda*.

ETHNOGRAPHIC UGANDA



Based on Minority Rights Group International's 'Ethnic Groups and Tribes of Uganda', Uganda: The Marginalization of Minorities (2001). Boundaries are not definitive but are intended to show traditionally inhabited areas.

(Source: Human Rights Watch – <http://www.relief.web>)

This was the local account. The literature traces the situation back to the 1900 “Uganda Agreement” through which the British Protectorate government gave *mailo* land (reckoned in square miles) to royal and other *Baganda* families as permanent property – in *Buganda* as in other territories¹⁴

While the ethnographic map of *Human Rights Watch*¹⁵ - reproduced above – does not even list the *Baluli/Buruli* as a separate ethnic group, they themselves insist on the originality of their own culture and separateness from the *Baganda* and the *Langi*. *Lango* – the *Langi* country just North of Lake Kyoga, from where the first President of independent Uganda, Milton Obote, originated – was the area to which many *Baluli* migrated who found the incorporation into the Baganda Kingdom as second class citizens to painful: while some reported that this “second class status” was connected to the inability of the *Baluli* to trace their ancestry five generations back (which any *Baganda* is supposed to be able to do), others were opposed to the regulations concerning cultivation¹⁶.

During the 1980s, however, the *Langi* became inimical to *Baluli* settlement and they had to return to the Southern side of Lake Kyoga. As their numbers seem to have been considerable, they had to clear formerly rather extensive forest areas – which contributed to the present lack and unreliability of rainfall, as virtually all of my respondents mentioned.

According to the 2002 population census, the district’s population was 128.126 people, with the Kalongi county – where the projects’s main activities are located – being the most densely populated one¹⁷. The *Three Year Integrated Development Plan 2004/5 – 2006/7* also mentions the high fertility rate of 7 children per woman and cites early marriages, low adoption of family planning practices, polygamy, and land availability as the main reasons.

While land availability in general is mentioned among the factors contributing to the high fertility rate, the planning document supports the views of my informants about land and poverty as the major problems – along with high levels of illiteracy (around 50%), poor quality of education and an official HIV infection rate of 15%. The level of poverty is listed both as a “weakness” and a “threat” in the “SWOT-analysis of the local government¹⁸”. A more precise empirical analysis for measuring poverty and well-being is, however, still in the planning stage. The cutting down of trees for charcoal production is mentioned as an effect of poverty which “is serious and this has left most parts of the district bare, leading to a great climatic change.”

Concerning land, the plan states:

Land is still a very critical issue in Nakasongola district and this has led to daily-uncontrolled land wrangles that have even led to the death of people. The biggest problem lies few landlords who own the biggest chunk of land on the expense of the majority peasants who don’t own the land. The land issue has caused a lot of wrangles among the community.¹⁹

¹⁴ See, for example Ondoga Ori Amaza (1998, p. 198f.), Busingye (2002), Bazaara (2002)

¹⁵ <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/RWB.NSF/db900LargeMaps/SKAR-64GDCA?OpenDocument>

¹⁶ Information from various interviews, particularly from Moses Sunday who acted as my field assistant and interpreter

¹⁷ Nakasongola District Local Government: *Three Year Draft Integrated Development Plan 2004/5-2006/7*, p.2f.

¹⁸ Nakasongola District Local Government: *Three Year Draft Integrated Development Plan 2004/5-2006/7*, p.13

¹⁹ Nakasongola District Local Government: *Three Year Draft Integrated Development Plan 2004/5-2006/7*, p.15

And

The average land holding per household is about 4ha. This means that household cannot produce surplus for sale even enough to eat. Close to 90% of the peasants are squatters in the district, hoping to receive certificates of occupancy and benefit from the land under the land Act 1998 arrangement.

While not mentioned as a problem contributing either to poverty or a weakness at all, the gender imbalance is mentioned among the “Thematic Indicators” of poverty, as the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development has already conducted a Gender analysis, noting “oppression of women by men” and an imbalance in the distribution of work and the use of resources: while women do more work, they have less control over household income and other resources. Several NGOs are mentioned as engaged in “gender mainstreaming” in collaboration with local government. Group formation and loan management are the main activities carried out in support of women, while specific training for women councillors is the speciality of SDU (Strengthening Decentralization in Uganda)²⁰.

The political and administrative organization is mentioned in the District Development Plan under the term *Decentralization*, and considered one of the “Strengths” of the present set-up, along with “strong political and technical leadership.”²¹ The structure has five tiers with a *Local Council Committee* at each level running the daily affairs under the leadership of an *LC Chairman*. Beneath the district level – headed by a Chairman LCV - there are counties, subcounties, parishes, and villages, which are headed by LC IV, LC III, LC II and LCI Chairmen respectively with their Committees. These elected committees comprise a treasurer, a secretary, and secretaries for youth, women, disabilities, information, production, and security. This nationwide system was originally created through the renaming of the *Resistance Councils* which the NRA first installed in the Luwero triangle before its final victory in 1986²². Candidates have to stand for election as individuals, as Uganda has a unique “no-party system” of government, which allows parties to exist as organizations – with offices restricted to the capital city Kampala -, but does not allow them to campaign for offices in elections. First installed with the justification of wanting to avoid the bloody strifes which had accompanied the multi-party system of the early independence period after 1962, the “Movement system” of government was confirmed in a nationwide referendum on 29th June 2001²³. The debate about the re-introduction of a multi-party system is presently going on, and surrounding preparations for another referendum preceding presidential elections in March 2006. Opposition parties have already announced their boycott of the referendum which they see as a move to prolong the effective one-party rule by the “Movement”²⁴.

²⁰ Nakasongola District Local Government: *Three Year Draft Integrated Development Plan 2004/5-2006/7*, p.18f.

²¹ Nakasongola District Local Government: *Three Year Draft Integrated Development Plan 2004/5-2006/7*, p.13

²² Ondoga ori Amaza (1998) p. 58, and p. 159f.

²³ Nyström (undated); the same date is mentioned in the timeline given at the website of the East African Center for Constitutional Development of Makerere University. Curiously, the *Background Note* on Uganda of the Bureau of African Affairs of the US Department of State give the date of the referendum as March 2000 (see <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/2963.htm>)

²⁴ Mugisa (*Vision*, May 6, 2005) at <http://www.newvision.co.ug/D/8/13/433069> and Wallis (*REUTERS*, May 6)

Main Results of Key Informant Interviews

On the basis of altogether 21 key informant and five group interviews which followed the schedule given in annex 2, plus constant discussions with Samuel Diomande Fan, his assistant Fred Bugalalio – who also acted as my assistant and interpreter for some interviews –, Moses Sunday, my main assistant and interpreter, a group discussion with the visiting professor Michael Fremerey, and a final meeting with representatives of all the groups in the CFI project to check on the validity of my findings, a sufficiently consistent picture emerged which is presented in the following paragraphs.

Designed as an exercise to throw some light on the relationship between resource use and local notions of leadership and sustainability, the interviews and observations put the relationship between poverty, land rights and gender relationships - and their combined effect on sustainability - into the foreground instead.

Local Notions of Resources

Land was the only “resource” mentioned in virtually all responses to the first question of the interview schedule which aimed at eliciting local views about the meaning of the concept of “resource”. Lacking a precise translation, the concept was paraphrased as “the things you need to develop” or “to keep alive”²⁵.

Among these things needed to develop, but also to simply keep oneself going, land was mentioned consistently by virtually all respondents – and as the first and foremost requirement. Land needed for agriculture, land needed for animal husbandry, land needed for construction, land needed for special projects such as making bricks, and land needed for beehives (the only beekeeper in the county was among the respondents). It also soon became clear that most people would have liked to have more land than they actually had, though the figures for “being comfortable” varied between five and about 20 acres.

Despite the frequent mention and the historical knowledge provided by Moses - that many people, including his own father, used to pay rent to absentee landlords –, I had not suspected the severity of the problem until people in Junda’s drinking place one afternoon shouted after Moses and me when we passed on the motorcycle. Having understood the word *muzungu* (white man), I became curious about what I interpreted as angry tones. Moses then explained that they had warned him not to help the white man buy their land. Subsequently other people confirmed these fears and substantiated cases of people being driven from the land they lived on, or currently being threatened with eviction. As chairman of the land committee – which has the powers to grant land leases for land which is still gazetted as “government land” – Moses was rightfully considered in a position to help me acquire land, had I really wanted to. Later, in Nakataka, the intention of LC2 to allow me to interview the single big land-owner there was unfortunately spoiled by that man’s absence. The attempts by the government to increase security of landholdings with the acknowledgement of customary land holding rights in the 1995 constitution did not solve the problems in the Nakasongola district: the 1995 constitution also recognizes *mailo* holdings which were thought to be peculiar to Buganda and

²⁵ In most interviews the explication of the concept took much longer than the single phrase suggests. Yet, after these explications, the responses all pointed in the same direction – giving a list of what we would also consider as “resources.”

hence not affecting other parts of Uganda²⁶. Nakasongola, however, had once been transferred to Buganda from Bunyoro and the *mailo* owners there were not the local inhabitants, but the victorious Baganda. Thus, the truly “customary” landholders in this area – the Baluli – had been deprived of their customary tenure almost one hundred years before the 1995 Constitution acknowledged Customary Tenure as a legal title to land.

Without a ranking of the importance of resources, it is difficult what people in the area really see as the most important resources. Acknowledging this oversight, I nevertheless attempt to provide a provisional assessment of the differential importance of the various resources based on the arguments and issues surrounding the mention of resources. The overriding importance of land has been mentioned and is supported by the official assessment of the administration as documented in the District Development Plan.

Second in acknowledged importance, if one goes by the frequency of mention and the order in which resources were mentioned, is water. The increasing shortage of rain as well as its unreliability is reflected here: frequently enough, a crop already germinated after the first rains still withers away completely due to a longer dry spell after the first rains in April. The problem is not new, though: a local adage which refers to activities already started says: “Like seed germinated seed, it cannot return if the sun is too much.” Water is of course also an important resource for animal husbandry, where death of animals due to a prolonged dry season is frequent enough. This sharp awareness of the importance of water – and particularly of the reliability of sufficient rainfall – is reflected in the widespread acknowledgement of the relationship between cutting trees and decreasing rainfall. Curiously enough, trees – both for timber and for fuel – did not figure prominently in the list of resources.

Somewhat surprising to me – but not to Samuel Fan, who had become familiar with the local situation in the past year -, most respondents mentioned *capital* as a resource. Without capital only small portions of land can be cultivated, and no proper care can be taken of these crops: without capital you can buy neither certified seed, nor fertilizer (which is used very rarely anyway) or pesticides to protect your crops against damage²⁷ (which is used frequently for vegetables and also for cotton). At the same time, most people complain of a *lack* of capital. While the introduction of markets is mentioned as one of the achievements of the present government – as compared to the previous ones of Obote and Amin – most people simply do not have enough to sell. Without capital they are not in a position to expand their areas - and lacking land titles, the formal banking system does not provide them with credit. This – and the simple absence of banks in the area²⁸ - may explain the popularity of credit groups.

These follow different systems, some – like that of which one of my respondents was a member - are completely independent from outside support, while others are organized to ensure repayment of loans disbursed by micro-credit institutions such as SOMED (Support Organization for Micro-Enterprises Development)²⁹ and FINCA (Foundation for International

²⁶ Busingye (2002)

²⁷ Because Fan had early on mentioned that the *Baluli* consistently confuse fertilizer and pesticides, believing that without the spraying of pesticides crops will not grow, I asked for the purpose of spraying several times. I consistently got the reply that they are needed to fight insects which damage the crops, particularly cotton. I did not, however, enter into more detailed discussions about alternative options of crop protections, as recommended by supporters of organic cotton growing, for example (see Malins and Nelson, for example)

²⁸ The closest branch of a bank is to be found in Luwero, about 80 km away – where the local credit groups in fact keep accounts once they have collected sufficient amounts of money from their members.

²⁹ Which is part of the Uganda Grameen Network. See

<http://asp.grameen.com/dialogue/dialogue37/bulletin.html#BODY8>

Community Assistance)³⁰. Still others follow a peculiar model intended to assist its members to access some bigger lump sum of start-up capital: its members organize “parties” to which the invited guests who want to belong to the group bring whatever they can part with – which could be household items or animals as well. The receiver of these “gifts” is obliged to return at least the same item when it is the giver’s turn to organize his or her party. Despite the suspicion towards this model exhibited by what felt like the majority of my respondents, one such party still took place during my sojourn there – and provided the woman organizer with enough capital to start a business.

According to the local councillor³¹, there are altogether 48 specifically women CBO (community based organization) in the district. Nobody mentioned “organization” as a resource however. The only “intangible” which was mentioned, and quite frequently, was “knowledge” – as concrete knowledge about how to perform certain tasks in agriculture or animal husbandry, but also as education in general.

Other important resources include certified seeds, implements - with ox-ploughs mentioned only by a few, while hoes and *panga* (long cutting knives) were prevalent -, fertilizer, and pesticides. All the things which one can buy with “*sent*” (money, from “cent”) and which are useful in performing agricultural tasks. Remarkable was only that a number of people specifically mentioned *certified* seeds. When questioned, they added that local seeds, i.e. seeds taken from one’s own field, do not produce the same harvest. Without further inquiry one cannot say whether this difference in yield is a difference between high yielding and local varieties. It could also be the drop in yield which is to be expected when people use second generation hybrid seeds³². Both for cotton and for maize – which are the main cash crops in the area – hybrid seeds are available and sold on the market, while particularly for cotton it is difficult to imagine there could be any non-hybrid seeds for sale. Difficult because the African center of maize lies further in the South, in what is now Mozambique, where local varieties developed independently after the first plants had been imported from South America by the Portuguese and spread quickly into neighbouring areas such as what is now Malawi and Zambia.

Finally, many people mentioned labour as a resource – just like any economist would do. More remarkable than this is the fact that “labour” specifically referred to *family* labour: hired labour needs cash. Therefore the need to pay labourers for agricultural tasks was mentioned in the context of the resource *capital*. Labour as a resource refers to family members, more particularly wives and children, as some of the respondents stated clearly. Concerning children, long-term plans may conflict with short-term plans: while it costs labour to send children to school, their education may contribute to enlarging the farm – if they contribute to buying land with salaries earned as a result of that education³³. Concerning wives, a curious detail which struck Fan in his conversations with *Baluli* men supports the view that women are important mainly for producing children and as a labour supply: the inability of many men to conceive of time spent between a man and a woman else than time used for sex, is expressed in the curious statement: “What can you talk about with a woman? – Nothing!”

³⁰ See <http://www.microcreditsummit.org/press/FINCA.htm>

³¹ In a private discussion during the group meeting with the visiting professor Fremerey; the *Three Year Draft Development Plan* mentions a figure of altogether 264 CBOs, of which 62 are to be found in the two subcounties of Kalongo and Kalungi (p. 176)

³² The high yield of hybrids occurs only in the the first generation of the crossing of specific lines. It is lost when the genes of the two distinct lines mix freely in succeeding generations as a result of open pollination in the field.

³³ This is particularly true for secondary education, which is not free.

This is, however, an interpretation stemming from weaving information about the number of wives and children as an indicator of the wealth – and importance - of a man into the information coming from the interviews directly. As both assistants were strongly involved in the church – Moses as a church elder, Fred as the chairman of the group of men married in church, i.e. having only one wife – and most group discussions were with church members, combined with the fact that virtually all *Baluli* claim adherence to the Christian faith, respondents were probably reluctant to talk about this aspect of their “traditional culture” openly. Yet, a number of men have in fact two or three wives, and some up to twenty children. And all of these are considered important people – such as the head of one of the 129 clans³⁴ who was among the respondents and whose two wives operate different farms in different places to avoid jealousies.

In fact, jealousies between wives, but also between the children of different wives were mentioned again and again, as sources of conflict and obstacles to development. While a considerable number of people seem to reflect on the causes of the widespread jealousy as an obstacle to the cooperation necessary for development, only in one single interview the conversation got to the point of identifying the lack of trust between men and women as a source – and hence trust in the relationship between a man and his wife as a resource for development.

Local notions of sustainability

Virtually all respondents agreed that there is environmental degradation, and also that the rainfall has both decreased and become more erratic. They also all agreed that their own practices in agriculture are contributing to this state of affairs. While at first glance the land looks rather sparsely populated – and it is considered as such in official planning documents – it also soon becomes apparent that there is virtually no “free” land: every bit of bush belongs to somebody as a fallow and a reserve for either cropping or for grazing animals.

Formerly, there were still abundant forests, which were cleared, however, when the migrant population returned from *Lango* on the other side of the lake. They had migrated there to avoid the consequences of the parcelling out of *mailo* land in their own area, following the agreement between the British and the Baganda, presumably taking advantage of the communal system of ownership maintained by the *Langi* tribe. While the precise reasons remained obscure to me, a repeated story insisted on their being driven away in the seventies by angry *Langi*, returning to their former homeland, and cutting down forests – consisting of *big* trees as some mentioned -for settlement and cultivation.

Respondents expressed a high and consistent awareness of the relationship between the cutting down of trees and the reduction in quantity and reliability of rain – which is recognized as a major resource for agriculture -, and they were equally aware that a reduction in cutting trees and the planting of new trees is a solution. And yet, they noted with some kind of resignation that this known solution was not put in practice, because of government inactivity as much as because of poverty - and their own inertia.

Poverty can be considered as the most important reason: people have to farm just to survive – which claims land. For many, their own (or rented) land does not even provide enough for

³⁴ During my stay, the figure mentioned was 128, while above I have quoted the figure from the *Draft Development Plan* (p.183)

survival – and one of the options for poor people is charcoal burning, which was explicitly mentioned again and again. Charcoal not only a major source of income for poor rural people, it is also the main – if not the only – fuel for cooking for the urban poor: it is the cheapest fuel on the market and there is a high demand for it. So a prohibition of charcoal burning is out of the question in the minds of virtually all respondents. Yet many are aware that there is actually a legal obligation to plant at least one tree for every tree cut down. That this does not happen, can be attributed to the government's failure to implement its own stated policies (such as the lack of policing as much as the lack of provision of seedlings³⁵) and to their own inertia. The latter was expressed explicitly only in a single interview by a cotton grower in Nakataka: "When we come home from a workshop, we relax - and do not implement what we have learnt." In a group discussion at a drinking place, the blame was put on the delegation of responsibilities³⁶: "While the obligation exists, the owner of the tree sells it to the charcoal burner and thinks that this man should be responsible for the planting. The charcoal burner, in turn, thinks that this is not his land and that the owner should take care of it – and therefore the planting does not get done."

Another way to earn some cash income is part-time fishing - for those people who experience lack of land but can muster some start-up capital for a boat and fishing gear. This is one of the areas where the provision of micro-credit through SOMED and others is important despite their otherwise disliked practice of insisting on a very early commencement of the repayment schedule – as early as two weeks after disbursing the credit. The increase in the numbers of people engaged in fishing as much as the technical improvement of fishing gear has, however, also led to a degradation of the fish population. One elderly respondent attributed this decline in the number of fish catches to the fact that these "improvements" are unsustainable: "Nowadays they use the *kokota* nets which also catch the small fish – as if they wanted to clean the lake." These nets are in fact forbidden, but the fisheries officers have a reputation for allowing these nets with small mesh sizes for the payment of bribes. One of the reactions of fishermen from the other side of the lake – who feel disadvantaged because they do not have access to markets for these more efficient nets – have formed a kind of militia, which occasionally attacks owners of *kokota* nets and destroys their boats. At least one such case was reported to us during the few weeks of my stay. This can serve as an example for the mechanism which links poverty to environmental degradation which in turn aggravates poverty – thus fuelling increasing competition for resource use to the point of open conflict: poverty leads to increased catches. These lead to a decline of the fish population which, in turn, decreases fish yields and hence income. Competition for the decreasing resource then incites people to rely even more on the *kokota* nets to catch at least *something* – if they can. Those who cannot then sometimes – and in this case partially successfully – organize themselves to fight against the competition with other means – using the fight against unequal and unfair access as a justification.

Poverty again was mentioned with respect to another acknowledged reason for environmental degradation: overgrazing. The dilemma is between the understandable wish to attain to at least a small herd of cattle as the only way – in people's minds – to get out of poverty, and the

³⁵ The *Draft Development Plan* (p. 171) specifically wants to increase the woody biomass by 7% in Nakasongola by 2005 – by increasing tree biomass by 500,000 trees (also by 2005), by promoting the use of fuel saving devices, and by promoting efficient charcoal production. These are the objectives of the Department of Environment, Game and Vermin Control concerning "deforestation", while control of "vermin", "termites" and "bush burning" constitute the other main areas of responsibility of this department.

³⁶ For Fan as the external development specialist, the inertia and the shifting of responsibilities is clearly expressed in the failure to take care of the hundreds of seedlings he provided for free to a number of schools: despite the availability of water the seedlings withered over the dry season is most of the schools concerned – because teachers failed to organize students to take care of watering over the school holidays.

lack of land available for grazing. With the carrying capacity being around five heads of cattle per acre, the few available communal grazing areas are already overstocked, and the only people in possession of sufficient private land are the few *mailo* owners – who have in some cases, as the stories go, already started evicting tenant farmers from their lands for the purpose of ranching.

As far as the sustainability of agriculture itself is concerned, the respondents were divided into one group which emphasized the use of “modern methods” and inputs for farming and animal husbandry, while another group stressed the use of crop rotation and “biological farming” to maintain soil fertility. Whichever method they advocated, a minority explicitly felt that “paying attention” or “caring”, and “skill” were necessary for maintaining successful farming operations in the long run.

One might call it two additional dimensions which were brought in by the subquestion of the sustainability of “culture.” While most were content to refer to “the elders” as a source of knowledge for the maintenance of the culture of the *Baluli*, some ventured to mention specific cultural traits. The mention of the spiritual dimension of culture in the form of spirits which assist those who venerate them only came up in the last interviews which were conducted with the assistance of the LC2 of Nakataka – whose father still works as a herbalist, and who is not noted for his engagement with the Church³⁷. In the presence of the Church Elder Moses Sunday, only his own father mentioned the abandoning of rainmaking rituals as a source for failing rains. In the presence of church members, the spiritual dimension took the form of “having the word of God at heart” for both leaders and followers, disregarding the specifically *Baluli* content of culture.

The social dimension of *Baluli* culture surfaced, surprisingly enough, mainly in the form of prescriptions for male versus female behaviour – from a dress code of decency³⁸ to certain eating taboos³⁹, but mainly prescribing behaviour towards men. Decency was still an important concern, while most of the eating taboos were referred to as characteristic of a bygone age, some behavioural rules immediately strike the outsider’s attention, such as the kneeling down of women in front of men whenever they greet or serve food. The subservient position of women is thus striking in everyday interaction, but also in the interviews, where men did most of the talking. It is a measure of change that women did, however, interfere without apologetic looks whenever they felt they had something to contribute. This aspect of culture, while referred to as characteristic of *Baluli* culture particularly by men, was at the same time explicitly excluded from the items which should be preserved by allowing the knowledge of the elders to be gathered and written down for reference by the younger generation – which a substantial proportion of respondents recommended.

The differences in opinion about which items are considered important for maintaining an identity distinct from that of other tribes⁴⁰, or which items are of practical value – such as

³⁷ For a Church Elder even healing by use of witchcraft can be viewed as “the devil’s work” – and this can be a serious impediment to taking office despite popular wishes for him to stand: one of the duties of a Chairman LC3 is to sign documents certifying that the work of the witchdoctor named therein is purely of the healing kind and therefore to be commended.

³⁸ Thus, in an interview with an older couple, both spouses seriously asked Moses why the police did not apprehend women to wear indecent dresses, such as mini-skirts, in public in Kampala – to the extent of even going to parliament with these kinds of dresses!

³⁹ In older times, women – and children – were not allowed to eat eggs or chicken meat, because of supposed negative consequences.

⁴⁰ The recent concern about the colonial origin of the concept of “tribe” was not shared by the people I talked to – and hence I refrain from signalling the problematique behind the term by the use of quotation marks

herbal medicine – run between the generations, but also between more traditionally oriented people and more church oriented people. As the head of the *Muburo* clan claimed: “It was you white people who have destroyed our culture by bringing your religion and by introducing schools.”

Another aspect of culture was identified as typically *Baluli: bwiya* (“jealousy”). With very few notable exceptions – all of whom were only in their twenties⁴¹ – this was seen as one of the main obstacles to development: whenever a person notices someone else’s good fortune, s/he will wish that person to have bad luck, rather than finding out how to attain similar benefits. And because of this, most people prefer to keep knowledge about such benefits to themselves. Most respondents found this state of affairs virtually “natural”: a group of women even cited the biblical case of Cain slaying Abel as proof that there is no way to avoid this general “lack of love”. Yet all agreed that it prevents the spread of innovations and thus is an obstacle to development.

What appeared curious to me as an outsider, was the acknowledgement that other tribes – particularly the *Banyankole*, the herdsmen from which President Museveni originates – do not have this trait. In fact, some of the improvements brought about by the present government were implicitly attributed to this fact: the government’s restocking distributes cattle to individuals for free, provided they agree to pass on at least one of the offspring to a needy person for free also.

In spite of this knowledge, most people insisted that this trait of “jealousy” is so deeply ingrained that even government education programmes – which some still found useful – or church work could do no more than *reduce* this trait: it was considered “natural” to the extent of being ineradicable. Yet, this did not apply to groups: a group’s success is something to be emulated. In fact, very few of my respondents did not mention at least in interest to participate in groups, but often direct – and positively experienced – involvement. Following the group meeting organized early during my stay for the visiting professor Fremerey, I had expected a repetition of the claims that women find it easier to organize groups, are less “jealous” and more trustworthy – and more successful. This appeared logical in the light of general observations and considerations concerning the solidarity and mutual empathy of dominated groups – and the *Baluli* women clearly belong to this category. Therefore, I was surprised to find within my rather small sample three claims of successful groups with male members only⁴². It is only in retrospect and in the light of these success stories that I am inclined to interpret the claim that the *Baluli* need to learn more about co-operating as a false modesty toward the white visitor – who might bring external resources, just as his black host working for CFI had done. Fan – as the representatives of most other NGOs - insists on working with groups only. Painting themselves as less capable than they actually are, makes them appear more needy to donors. I do not mention this to suggest that they are following a conscious or unconscious strategy of false self-representation, a suspicion which is behind the attempts to avoid the “dependency syndrome” ever since development has been equated with the transfer of resources through projects – i.e. ever since “international development aid” existed. Rather,

⁴¹ One young man claimed that he would certainly help others by forwarding useful information: “I want to develop, and I know they also want to develop. And it may be that later, my son will benefit from his son.”

⁴² In the meeting just mentioned, the only such example was the group of men who met to frequent drinking places together. And while even the male participants in that meeting agreed that women were somehow better in organizing groups, they also held up the drinking group as an example of successful male organizing. The man who related the story, also claimed that mutual trust was present in this group – backed up by rather harsh sanctions: should the treasurer fail to be “trustworthy”, the other members would simply go to his house and sell whatever they found to make up for the loss.

I want to suggest that people have learnt by experience that it “pays” to underline one’s neediness by downplaying one’s abilities.

On the whole, the relationship between poverty as a *cause* of (environmental) non-sustainability which particularly the literature following Hardin’s famous essay “Tragedy of the Commons”⁴³ stressed, is borne out by the *Baluli*’s own conscious considerations of their situation – which they themselves would probably prefer to call *plight*. The additional dimension which their reflections bring in, is the aspect of the gender relationships – which have *begun* to change radically as a result of government policies, but also as a result of the involvement of the Church. This change was brought forward by both men and women in group discussions with participants from both sexes.

Local notions of leadership

This was the area where the greatest uniformity existed between respondents: the image of the *good* leader always asked of him to be respectful towards others, to have good social relationships, to listen to other people’s views and problems, and to represent “his” people at higher levels of the administration, attempting to satisfy the needs expressed to him.

While virtually everybody mentioned “manners” or “good behaviour” as important, intelligence, good speaking abilities, and creativity were mentioned less frequently. Only church members – at the church meeting as well as during the final meeting – said that a good leader has to be “god fearing”. I would expect that this includes the “trustworthiness” (*bwesigwa*) asked by many of a good leader. The example given throws a light on what must be common practice among leaders: “It means that if the community agrees to buy office furniture for say 140 000, and the leader goes and manages to buy for only 120 000, he will come back with the balance.” I see this example in relation to the many complaints about increasing corruption and the story of one particularly creative leader, who had suggested a very good scheme to his community – namely to buy plates and let the treasurer rent them out to individuals for occasions such as funerals or weddings against a flat fee -, and then ran away with a considerable amount of money collected from youth for a program to supply them with motorbikes. I cannot help but link both the insistence on “trustworthiness” in this peculiar financial meaning to the prevailing poverty. As one of the respondents said: “It is poverty which is at the root of corruption: people who are poor try to get as much out of their term of office as they can.”

The expectation towards a good leader is, on the contrary, that s/he will *bring* “development” to the village and show “leadership” in mobilizing local inhabitants for government or NGO programmes for adult literacy⁴⁴, health education, agriculture etc. S/he is expected to be a “bridge” between village people and higher levels of government and administration. Some saw it as the task of a good leader to hear what people’s problems are, communicate with these “higher levels” and then bring back the solution to the people.

Impressed by the consistency with which “listening” was mentioned as a characteristic of a good leader, I sometimes related a story about leadership from Western Africa⁴⁵ which shows

⁴³ For the original article see Hardin (1968 – online at: <http://www.constitution.org/cmt/tragcomm.htm>), for a more recent review see Ostrom et. al (2002 – online at)

⁴⁴ 51% of the adult population are illiterate, according to the *Draft Development Plan*

⁴⁵ See footnote 52

a collaborative style of leadership as superior to an educated, “problem-solving” style. Whenever this story was told, people agreed to the truth of its core message.

While there was a rather uniform image of a *good* leader, people’s opinion were more diverse with respect to the quality of actual leadership – as shown in the following chapter.

The relationship between sustainability (of resource use) and leadership

This question had been intended to elicit information about those types of locally known leadership which have a positive effect on development and sustainability – or even on sustainable development, which is mentioned as an explicit goal in the *Draft Development Plan* for the district⁴⁶. Instead, it became a focus for comparing the present leadership – mostly at the national level – with previous governments. Remembering the general insecurity and fear of those years, the present government appeared - in the responses people gave - as the kind of “saviour” as which members of the “Movement” like to portray it⁴⁷.

Rather than an obstacle to true democracy, the present “movement” type of government is viewed by the majority as a way to balance diverse interests and thus to guarantee a measure of stability – which, in turn, is seen as a precondition for development. “If you have peace, you can have development.” It seems to me that the frequency of statements such as “now we can at least sleep in peace at night” point to the deeply traumatizing experience of the first roughly twenty-five years of Ugandan Independence. Two additional details – which came not from the interviews but appeared in the more casual conversations with my interpreter – support this view: 1) soldiers were generally feared before the present government, because they would claim the right to anything they desired, at any time, and without finding it necessary to pay for it. This explains why some people listed the “civilizing of the army” as one of the great achievement of the present government, adding that now you could even “eat with them as friends”. 2) At least during Amin’s time, there was the additional fear that any car which approached might carry members of the “State Research Bureau” – and that they would order any of the people present to enter the boot of the car, without further explanation. Later people would hear a shot and still later that person’s corpse would be found somewhere in the swam nearby. In the early times of the “Movement” government, newspapers published photographs of the members of the State Research Bureau, taken from their own files – 100 pictures every day for about 30 days.⁴⁸

The – for Africa – exceptional growth rates of Uganda are reflected in the local perceptions that the increased peace and stability, democracy and freedom of speech had created conditions for economic development previously not present. At the same time, they had also become sharply aware of their poverty and seem to become increasingly dissatisfied with the lack of support for *developmental* initiatives. For them, *development* has a primarily economic and infrastructural meaning: schools, roads, markets, transport, electricity, communication. It seems to be an indication of the prevalent level of poverty that the call for general provision of electricity was almost absent – in contrast to the already rather poor rural areas in Indonesia and Namibia where our project is investigating.

⁴⁶ At least the “Directorate for community based services” also sees “empowerment” as a necessary ingredient. Hence, the directorate’s “mission” is said to be to **“empower communities particularly the marginalized groups and harness their potentials for sustainable and gender responsive development”**.

⁴⁷ See, for example Amaza (1998)

⁴⁸ As Moses said: “It showed that during those times you were really afraid to say *anything*: I found three of my classmates among those published pictures – and *anything* could serve as a justification for taking you away.”

Other achievements consistently listed by the respondents - without any further questioning – were:

- The provision of universal free primary education (“UPE”), in contrast to the previous practice of having people construct their own school building in the village and request some kind of contribution to the teacher’s salary – or even the full salary.
- The provision of infrastructure such as health centers, roads, markets – although none of this was considered sufficient as yet.
- The introduction of a system of local government which gave local people a voice in the choice of their leaders, in contrast to previous times, when leaders could be posted here who did not even speak the local language because they came from different and far away tribes. This obviously refers to the system of LC1 up to LC5 described earlier. Some, however, had preferred the more direct access to higher levels of government when the administrative division only knew “parish chiefs” and their assistants, the “sub-parish chiefs”. Another contested item was local budget control: according to legislative rules a certain portion of taxes collected in the previous year should come back to the local level to serve locally determined purposes. One such item was the purchase of plates to be kept by the treasurer to be used – against a fixed fee – for private funerals and weddings, where the provision of enough furniture and dishes is always a problem. In another group discussion, however, people claimed that they had not seen any such money for years. Overall, and despite frequent complaints about corruption, people appreciated the “freedom to say what is in our minds and on our hearts”. That this is a genuine achievement which corresponds with intentions at the highest level is, in my view, supported by the astonishment of some respondents that Museveni does not prevent the publication even of defamatory articles in the media – things some local people feel he *should* not allow.
- The change in the gender balance was clearly attributed to the present government. “Now, women can even become leaders,” or “Women can now even be chairwomen”, while in former times “women were not even allowed to speak up in the presence of men” – and much less be involved in decisions about the use of resources, other than their own labour and possibly of seeds for her own gardening. The strongest plea for the recognition of this achievement came from the groups Samuel fan works with – in both meetings. As this change had not been emphasized in the interviews in which the main respondents were mostly men, the feedback meeting with these groups shortly before my departure rightly insisted on correcting this oversight. While one of the men in the first group discussion emphasized that in the overall picture only a small fraction of women (he talked about 1 per cent) were involved in household (or group) decision-making at an equal footing with men, not a single man complained about the increasing recognition of women at all these levels. Nobody argued that women should be “put into their natural place” (to take a well-known *German* “argument”) in the name of “true *Baluli* culture”. I believe this indicates that this change finds the support of at least some men – while others continue to beat their wives, seek for second and third wives or simply have affairs⁴⁹.

⁴⁹ One particular story told about a man we met on the road by chance, selling jackfruit from his bike, gives an clear indication of the division of opinion in this respect: that man had for a long time been reputed to beat his wife. At one point, she got so fed up with it that she enlisted the help of friends and family members to tie the man to his bed once he came back from the drinking place. Once they were alone and he had woken up, the wife then proceeded to give a sound beating to the tied man. This led to a court case in which some supported the man’s wish to be divorced, while others found that she had been right in “teaching him a lesson.” The ruling of the court was against divorce and included the advice to the man to stop beating his wife. The marriage still continues.

Two points did not surface in the group discussions or the interviews, but are important to mention in this context: population growth and the high incidence of AIDS.

The only local informant who saw a connection between population growth and the increasing scarcity of land was my assistant Moses Sunday. During one of the interviews he took the initiative to ask the respondents – who had talked about the need to sustain the family by producing many children – if, by having many children, they did not also – as an automatic and unavoidable consequence - decrease the land available for them and their future families.

The response to this direct intervention was as vague as the response to my taking up of this topic for discussion later, particularly in the group situations in the church and in the final meeting. While it appears a simple question of logic to connect population growth, land scarcity, and land degradation as *problems* to programmes of population control as *remedies*, this conclusion was not drawn by those people I had a chance to talk to. This despite the occasional mention of government educational programmes for family planning as desirable for future development.

The second point not touched explicitly in the interviews, but present in daily life was HIV/AIDS. Present through the frequent burials, and the many stories told by the main contact persons Fred Bugalalio and Moses Sunday, stories about this or that man having died – possibly from AIDS -, or stories about children orphaned by AIDS, or stories about people afraid of having contracted “the disease” from a partner suspected or know to be infected. While this also obviously affects the “security of planning” for future activities, and hence the sustainability of families and groups, and the labour available to families, and also the competition for resources, the topic was curiously absent in the interviews. Also obviously, the topic is connected to the gender relationships, because the most common cause for a woman’s infection is to have unguarded sex with a husband who had unguarded sex with another wife or another woman. Education programmes by other NGOs, coupled with free distribution of condoms, does not seem to have increased condom use, and women do not seem to be in a position to ask condom use from men who insist on the pleasure of the “real thing”.

Official awareness of the problem exists⁵⁰ and has led to some of the internationally more successful HIV/AIDS awareness programmes in other parts of Uganda, but fear, a general embarrassment to talk about anything related to sex, and constant preoccupation with solving immediate survival problems seem to prevent the needed *local* discourse about the problem and its relation to development and sustainability.

The research methodology in practice

Logistics

The selection of the research areas within the project area had more to do with transport logistics than with selection criteria developed from the research agenda: the project area is located some 80 km away from Luwero, where Fan’s residence is located and where I was

⁵⁰ The *Draft Development Report* for the District mentions an infection rate of roughly one fifth

offered to occupy a guest house. I simply accepted the suggestion not to hire an additional car, and instead to move together for most of the time. Apart from saving the LAGSUS project a considerable amount of funds⁵¹, this would allow me to get a more intimate knowledge of the area by profiting from existing contact: I would always be introduced as his collaborator. The intention was to firmly establish the research as a support to the development project. Following this strategy, I extended my stay to participate in a group meeting scheduled for the introduction of an action research component into the development project. During this meeting, I had a chance to present the preliminary findings described in the previous chapter and to ask for comments and additions.

Accepting this arrangement also meant that the actual time in the research area was limited to Tuesday afternoon. This schedule was owed to the Ugandan peculiarity of organizing market days only on Monday everywhere, meaning that some of the major contacts would be busy with the local market in Kaswama. The day was also needed for purchases in Luwero for the project. On the other hand, the arrangement had the advantage of clarifying the close relationship between the CFI development project and the bishop in Luwero, and also provided for reading and reflection times which proved valuable for the actual field research: David Reid's *Sustainable Development – An Introductory Guide* clarified once again the relevance of this stream of thinking for the situation in Nakasongola District, and Augsburg's *Conflict Mediation Across Cultures* provided a West African story about leadership which confirmed some of the *Baluli* views on leadership, as their appreciation of the story indicated⁵².

In the project area itself, I stayed into the house which had been built by the development project, situated next to Kisenyi church, and a few miles away from the main research and project assistants, i.e. Fred Bugalalio in Kinamwanga and Moses Sunday in Ruunyu. These two had been suggested as allies with sufficient knowledge of English. Moses owned a motorcycle, while Fred owned more than one bicycle for transport. It was therefore decided to

⁵¹ As I did not have any additional costs for transport, this arrangement also made it possible to cover – for the first time – the costs for both research assistants (at 40 000 and 100 000 UGS) from the daily allowances of the research project, as expected when the budget was written.

⁵² Once there were two good friends, Anikandagbon (or He-Who-Meets-Problems-Alone) and Aafogbonlogbon (or He-Who-Seeks-Good-Advice). The first was well educated, literate, and widely read. The second was a man of the village, widely trusted, and much consulted.

When the old *oba* died, the son who was next in line was looking for men to appoint as chiefs. Should he choose independent, educated men, or traditional men of the people?

So he held a feast. He killed an ox, and had it roasted, except for the two hind-quarter legs. When the feast was ended, he called the two friends, and gave them each a leg of beef.

“Take this with you and bring it back in one week in perfect condition,” he commanded.

When he got home, He-Who-Seeks-Good-Advice called all his people and presented them with his problem. They deliberated long, then arrived at a solution. The butcher was called, and the leg of beef given to him. He promised to return one week later with an indential fresh quarter.

He-Who-Faces-Problems-Alone discussed the matter with no one. He cut a tree, built a fire, placed the meat on a drying rack, and roasted it for a day. But meat must be cut in ribbons to dry, and he could not do that to the quarter. In a few days, flies had come, and the meat was full of maggots, and the bone kept slipping out of the spoiling mess.

When the day had come, the one man brought a fresh quarter carried by friends and family. The other carried his leg alone for the stench was so great no one would come near him.

The *oba* looked at each man, then demanded an explanation from the man with the putrid offering. “I attempted to roast it, to dry it, to preserve it the best I could, but it was impossible,” he explained. The second man said, “I accepted the advice of my friends and the help of my community. Here is the beef.”

The *oba* said, “This man shall be the chief, for he solves his problems collectively. He other man is a selfish person, an evil person, a blight, a scourge on the town,” and they drove him from the village, for why should he be in the village if he is not of the village? To seek good advice is best; to try to solve problems by oneself is not good. (after Dorson, 1975, pp. 356-59, quoted from Augsburg, 1992, p.189f.)

take these two villages (Kinamuwanga and Ruunyu) as a starting point and to add on Junda (which, being next to Kinamwanga, was reasonably well known to both Moses and Fred), and Nakataka, where the local LC2 knew enough English to serve as an interpreter. In both Junda and Nakataka there existed project groups.

Because of the time limitations and the opportunity to attend both a local ceremony of baptizing and to also get the views of church goers on the research questions, I stayed on for the weekend of April 2nd / 3rd. If my impression is not mistaken, this additional stay without the presence of “Mr. Sam” sort of “proved” to my local contacts my seriousness in being interested in their *real* situation. It changed both the relationship with people and with the environment as a whole, making me feel “at home” to some extent, which, in turn, boosted my confidence in the research and in the communication processes involved. In retrospect, it seems justified to talk about an increased level of trust. More concretely, the additional interviews both in the church (where people discussed the research questions in groups and delivered written group responses) and with additional individual respondents in Junda and Kinamwanga were as valuable as the opportunity to spend an afternoon in local market in Kaswama, where Fred Bugalio is regularly among the sellers.

Experiences with the methodology – 1: The village maps

In all the villages concerned, the work started with asking a knowledgeable person (Moses for Ruunyu, Fred for Kinamwanga and Junda, and the LC2 for Nakataka) to draw a rough map with the roads and paths, and to add on *all* houses. The next step was to name the owners of the houses, based on which the most important people could be identified. Depending on the knowledge of the first resource person and the time available, additional information for the household could also be collected, particularly concerning possession of land and livestock, and marriage and family relationships. As noted before, the number of wives and children already gave an indication of the position of a man, as both are considered important indicators of wealth by the local people – together with land and animals.

Apart from making it a point to see the local Chairman of LC1 (which failed in Kinamwanga, and which I did not insist on in Nakataka, because that man was involved in a small disagreement with the research project at the time), I accepted the judgement of my first resource persons about the suitability of individuals as key informants. After a number of interviews, I asked the respondents themselves whom they considered important in the village, thus receiving feedback on the choice of my main contact persons. This supported the choice for the village of Junda, where this strategy worked out well. Ruunyu had already been completed without this addition, while the use of drinking places for group interviews in Kinamwanga made it unsuitable. In Nakataka one respondent refused to answer this question, and the group of traders interviewed in the marketplace pretended not to know the “important people” in person, saying that an important man would be “he who will sacrifice the most for a community project – but such a person does not exist.”

Overall, the maps and the list of inhabitants proved of comparatively little value in the course of this field research. As in Indonesia, however, it is expected that it will become more useful during the following – and last – sojourn in the area. Then, the existing record can become the basis for discussing the importance of people with other respondents – and the linkage between the importance and decisions concerning resource use in the village. Both in Indonesia and in Uganda, the experiences are similar: contrary to expectations, the drawing of village

maps and the listing of inhabitants by name does not raise suspicions and can be completed rather quickly, thanks to the often amazing memory of key people about everyone else in the village. If they – occasionally – do not remember the name of a particular person, this in itself is an indication that that person occupies a rather marginal position in the village.

Experiences with the methodology – 2: The schedule of questions about resource use and leadership

Even before the interviews started, it became clear in the discussion with my main assistant and interpreter, that some of the main concepts of the research schedule cannot be translated directly into the local language. While “leadership” and “leader” (*obukulembeze* and *omukulembeze*, respectively) did not present a problem, *Lululi* does not have a one-to-one translation for the words “resources” and “sustainability”. For “resources” Moses therefore suggested to use “the things you need to develop” or “the things you need to live or to do something”, while for “sustainability” he used “how to keep (=sustain) things / activities” (*okwemeryawo* = “you keep”; see Annex 3 with the research questions).

While I had been satisfied after a long a apparently mutually satisfactory discussion that my intended and the translated – and written – questions coincided, I found that each question took a considerable time of explanation in the interviews conducted together with Moses. I regretted that we had agreed that a running minidisk recorder might detract people’s attention and cause them to change their answers: it would certainly be rather interesting for linguists to assess the implications of the formulation of the questions – both in their written form and in their oral presentation.

This became even clearer when I conducted interviews with Fred Bugagalalio and the LC2 of Nakataka⁵³: despite an intensive explanation of the meaning of the questions by their author at least to Fred, simply reading the written formulations hardly ever produced a satisfying answer. In Nakataka, what was intended to be a question for “resources”, produced answers advancing *obstacles* to personal progress – until I intervened and explained the meaning of the question according to my own understanding. To which LC2 responded by saying: “Now I understand the meaning of the question.” It is even more remarkable that despite these problems (at least after the clarification), the responses fit together to allow an interpretation as one more or less coherent system – an interpretation which corresponds to the views expressed in recent literature about sustainable development both within and without the “development establishment”⁵⁴.

Two unplanned changes significantly contributed to this outcome. One was the addition of a question on “communication gaps” suggested by professor Fremerey during his visit, and the second was the peculiar interpretation to the original question about the relationship between leadership and resource use. The addition of the question about communication gaps had been phrased as “who does not talk to whom about what?” In the discussions with Moses he immediately agreed that *Baluli* in general are stingy about alerting others to good

⁵³ I regret this impersonal use of a title, but in the situation I simply followed everyone else’s language use – and even in direct conversation he was addressed by his title, not by his name.

⁵⁴ This was brought home to me on occasion of reading David Reid’s “Sustainable Development – An Introductory Guide” – and comparing it with a recent (March 30, 2005) article from M2 Presswire: *WORLD BANK: Experts warn ecosystem changes will continue to worsen, putting global Development Goals at risk(C)1994-2005*

opportunities⁵⁵. *Bwiya* or “jealousy” was quickly identified as a major cultural trait among the *Baluli* as a *culture* – and this influenced the wording of this question, leading virtually all respondents – with one or two notable exception - immediately into the direction of trying to find the underlying reasons for this psychological trait they accepted as “natural.” The side-effect of this was, of course, to avoid looking for other instances of communication gaps and *their* reasons.

The second unintended change came probably through failing to make my own understanding of the links between leadership and resource use clear to Moses, which is reflected in the wording of the respective question: *Ati okubona obukulembeze obuluwo ati bwemeirere butyai okusonga ezo zetubazireku?*⁵⁶ The question refers to the relation between “present leadership” and “all that we have discussed together”, not specifically to the relation between *leadership* and *resource use*. I suspected something was wrong with the question when the answers started coming in: they all referred to the relief people experienced with the “present leadership” as compared to the previous times of dictatorship and civil war. I understood this a bit better after getting a second person to translate the question schedule word for word (see annex 3). I did not change anything in this respect, however: one reason was to retain at least a small measure of methodological consistency, and the second was that the altered understanding seemed to touch an essential element of people’s experience, which was indispensable as a background for understanding their present relationships to each other and to the environment.

What I found remarkable was the fact that only one single farmer at first expressed some suspicion concerning the intention of the research: a rather “modern” and comparatively well-to-do farmer in Nakataka whom I saw with the local LC2 and who was obviously completely unconnected to Fan’s development project and also to the church. He was, however, quickly convinced that there was no harm in responding, although he still refused to tell who he considered important persons in his village.

This question had been added later to provide a measure of control for the choice of key informants suggested by my initial contacts. The same is true for the question about the role of the church in countering the negative effects of the widespread “jealousy”: it was intended particularly for the groups of church goers who agreed to stay on after the Sunday service of 3rd April on the bidding of the preacher and of the Church Elder Moses Sunday, who acted as my interpreter. I also mention this to emphasize the good luck of being able to work with a respected authority in the area⁵⁷. Wherever we went, my questions were answered also because Moses posed them, allowing me, however, to add additional questions for clarification whenever I felt the need.

Moses involvement as a church elder in the development project – from which his wife also benefits as a member of one of the groups – also helped in the organization of the final meeting: having understood the purpose and knowing “his” people well, he actually guided

⁵⁵ It may be of interest that one of the ingredients to this understanding was the story about a particular Zambian group of people where the fear of witchcraft prevented the mutual visits so important for participatory research approaches and the spreading of innovations: whoever visited someone else’s field without being accompanied by the owner would be suspected of attempting to “steal” part of the harvest by means of witchcraft. As it turned out, this type of witchcraft is known among the *Baluli* as *musyooli*.

⁵⁶ *Ati* (“Now”) *okubona* (“we see”) *obukulembeze* (“the leaders”) *obuluwo* (“we have”) *ati* (“now”) *bwemeirere* (“how can they”) *butyai* (“us”) *okusonga* (“what we talk”) *ezo* (those”) *zetubazireku* (“we have discussed together”)

⁵⁷ In addition to being a Church Elder, Moses was also the main resource person for repairing the local wells, and he was the chairman of the land committee of LC3.

the participants (divided into groups) discuss their feedback to my explanation of the preliminary research results by repeating each one of the essential points (see part B. of the Annex *The feedback meeting with the groups*). In sum: the research greatly benefitted from the trust established between Samuel Diomande Fan and Moses Sunday on one side, and the trust established between Moses Sunday and his “constituency” (of water users and of church members) on the other.

Conclusions for the Comparative Perspective

The third period of field research, and the second with the methodology combining the drawing of village cards with key informant interviews, has confirmed the central importance of an explicit focus on the triangular relationship between poverty, resource use, and the local social structure. The main point of convergence seems to be the competition for scarce resources under conditions of poverty – which appears to be exacerbated if local people have unequal access to external resources, whether these are financial, material, or informational.

The link between the local and the regional or global level appears to introduce an additional element of competition: the competition for inclusion in institutions which have access to external resources. In the case of the TKFA this is obvious, because the urban members themselves bring (knowledge and other) resources to the process of institution building observed. In the case of Toro, the activities of the village elite provide access to at least some resources from NGOs (such as the winning of the Equator Prize in 2004). In the case of the Nakasongola District, various NGOs supply assistance to “communities” – mainly in the form of providing credit, seminars, and material inputs to groups. Here, the formation of groups has become a central aspect for all kinds of development assistance and also for local development efforts. As concrete experiences during my sojourn showed, however, the literature is correct in denouncing the concept of “community” as misleading in the direction of assuming internal equity or at least democracy: there were clear attempts by wealthier members of the community to remain among themselves – to the exclusion of poorer members. Similar processes are reported for the villages surrounding the Lore Lindu National Park. And the deliberations within the TKFA at least hint at similar struggles.

The topic of “jealousy” and its presumed “naturalness” as an obstacle to collaborative and mutually supportive relations *outside* of established groups (which were still sometimes thrown back by treasurers disappearing with collected funds) demonstrates how processes of institution building do not simply provide a climate for a more collaborative communitation, but are in turn shaped by the existing surrounding “climate” of habitual ways of communication. Thus, the direction of influence is in both directions: habitual ways of feeling and conversing shape the – written and particularly the unwritten – rules of the group / institution *and* the relationships in the institution influence the habits of its members. This, in my mind, is the exact place where *power* in the form of conscious *leadership* of such institutions plays a crucial role: if leadership is clearly and transparently used for the advancement of the “whole” (whether this is the institution or the wider community), the group / institution contributes to a developmental change in the personal habits of its members – and by extension to the wider social context via their relationships with other people. What I have heard so far both in Indonesia and in Uganda confirms what I have read in recent texts about managing business organizations: trust contributes to the effective functioning of the organization because individual contributions are both more attuned to realities and given more freely. In this sense, trust depends on transparency. In this sense, a good leader *inspires* trust – and s/he cannot do so if s/he is not trusted him/herself, which in turn is not possible *in*

the long run – i.e. sustainably – unless the leader demonstrates his/her trustworthiness by “walking the talk” (as modern managers say).

Related to our initial hypothesis: *Communicative sustainability requires not only a “fit” between the concepts discussed and the local “communicative universe”, but also sustainable institutions, which, in turn, require trustworthy leadership.*

This is clearly a question of the individual orientation of that particular leader – and suits the concern about the *necessity* to include personal orientations into global considerations of sustainability expressed in the sustainability literature⁵⁸ or the literature about participation, but, as far as I can see, only in pockets of the “mainstream” development discourse.

This focus thus comes as a *result* of empirical observations gained through more traditional methods of observation and interviewing, rather than the explicit focus on recorded conversations conducted in the local language. Methodically, it could therefore serve to assist the choice of conversational fragments for in-depth analysis: is there a fragment of “natural discourse” which reflects the concern about the *quality* of leadership? Does this include reflections about the relationship between leadership, and the functioning of organizations / institutions? Does it include reflections about the relationship between “rules” and “personal attitudes” for both members and leaders? Do at least some of these reflections also refer to a deliberate calculus about the balancing of “trust” and “power” and what does this calculus look like? Do these reflections show a local potential and a local knowledge about organizations?

The background for these questions is an observable trend in the giving of development aid in the direction of a) direct support to government programmes, rather than short-term projects, and b) support to NGOs working in “partnership” with governments and the business sector. The focus indicated by the above questions introduces the quality of leadership as an important variable in the decisions about which particular government programme or NGO to fund. The important point would be to provide evidence for a basic congruence of views about this *quality of leadership* between “modern” – scientific and management – discourse – and “indigenous” discourse. Should this congruence turn out to be likely, the “measurement” of the quality of leadership should at least *include* some direct information “from the grassroots” – straight to the global or at least international level of decision-making. This type of information is in part already envisaged with the institution of “Participatory Poverty Assessments” (PPA) institutionalized by the World Bank as one of the preparatory steps of the “Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers” (PRSP) which at least those governments have to prepare who want to qualify for debt relief. Both of these new instruments have already been criticized from an NGO perspective – a perspective which at least claims to be closer to the grassroots reality than high-level officers at national or international levels⁵⁹.

If the congruence between “local knowledge” about issues of leadership and institutional sustainability could be shown as congruent with “modern knowledge” about the same issues, then the NGO views cited would gain in credibility. It would be more difficult to brush them aside as expressions of dissatisfactions – dissatisfactions which are grounded more in a “world view” than in an objective analysis of social, economic, and political realities. It would

⁵⁸ I refer in particular to the last chapter in Reid (1995)

⁵⁹ As part of this process, the World Bank invited NGO comments in the context of the SAPRIN initiative. Available on the web are both the final report and an NGO letter to then World Bank President Wolfensohn, complaining about the lack of response to the report by World Bank officials.

be more difficult because the dissatisfaction could then be shown to be grounded *also* in a realistic assessment of leadership qualities *across cultures* and *across levels of hierarchies*.

Such an approach could aim at a rehabilitation of ordinary human perception with respect to relationships of power and the role of trust played in them. It would, also, probably lead into supporting the present trend towards “more trust”. A considerable part of this – sociological and economic – discussion argues for or against a positive link between democracy and a “generalized system trust” which, in turn, leads to a more efficient economy, i.e. economic growth and therefore increasing wealth, and therefore reduced levels of poverty. LAGSUS would rather focus on the role of trust in the interactions between players at various and between various levels. In particular, it might lead to the conclusion that a trustworthy leader (*bwesigwa* in *Baluli* terms) can *ask* his followers to do certain things even if they do not presently understand their usefulness and even if that requires an extra effort. I am intrigued by the fact that some of my Herero respondents last year agreed that this is what a trusted leader can request. There is, then, a positive relationship between the trust invested in a leader and the power s/he actually has at her/his disposal.

This is supported by the information of my Herero respondents that people will not be willing to follow the leader as soon as s/he is out of favour. As far as I can see, this corresponds to at least some of the leadership literature in modern management – the topic of “walking the talk”.

While the adage of “walking the talk” suggests that “actions speak louder than words” I believe it can be shown that language is still necessary: in the preparation of actions, as well as in their interpretation. Thus, attention to *local* notions expressed in the *local* language and – possibly – encoding *local* rules of dealing with power and trust may turn out to have a similar transcultural relevance and validity as the rules about “politeness” studied by Brown and Levinson⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Brown, Penelope, and Stephen C. Levinson (1987): *Politeness. Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge and New York (Cambridge University Press)

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