

## **The approach to field research for the sociology component of LAGSUS - a summary**

This brief note sums up the practical consequences for the sociology component of previous discussions in Windhoek, Esslingen, and Frankfurt. I submit what I believe to be an approach which is complementary to the focus on a conversation analysis approach (*Gesprächsforschung* as described by Deppermann) of the three socio-linguistic components in the respective countries: The common focus of all project components being the use of resources (material resources as well as knowledge resources, local as well as “externally imported” resources) for purposes of development and personal welfare, the sociology component looks at institutions as well as local networks and relationships of power as determinants for the distribution of access to whatever these resources are.

The key questions are:

- how and by whom are decisions made concerning access to resources; and
- who gives which reasons for these decisions (keeping in mind the possibility of the presence of different interest groups)

The field research of subproject sociology therefore has two components:

- determining the local decision-making structure; and
- elucidating local notions about how this structure is enacted by the individuals in positions of leadership or following – focusing on the relationship between how key informants see the present situation and how they think the situation should be (the aspect of accepted rules or legitimacy)

Data for these two components will be gathered with the following methods:

1) ***Mapping relationships of resource use and decision-making.***

This takes the form of *sociograms* of the localities which would allow to grasp the sociological importance of the conversation data collected by the other subprojects. This will yield answers to the question “Who says what”: the positioning of the speakers in the sociogram will allow hypotheses concerning the *strategic* meaning of the “what,” i.e. which interests will be served if the statement or decision is accepted. Concretely, this involves a map of households and who lives there – starting with those in obvious leadership positions, and attempting to trace links to “subordinate” households.

2) ***Interviews with key informants about local notions of resource use and leadership.***

These interviews focus on three aspects:

- \* local notions of sustainability, both with respect to institutions and with respect to natural resources;
- \* local notions of “good leadership;” and
- \* the relationship between leadership and resource use as it actually *is*.

The *complementarity* of these to the data gathered by the socio-linguistic components is this: they will *contribute* to formulate hypotheses on the basis of the conversation data by drawing attention to (Deppermann: *Sensibilisierung*) “positional (=power) effects”. These hypotheses can be fed back into the linguistic research process for *local* validation – or rejection.

This complementarity depends on the co-operation of the long-term researchers: the identification of and introduction to key informants with respect to social networks and local notions.