



Information System Better-iS

ICRAF - Output

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Summary:

As member of the Better-iS consortium, ICRAF Tanzania was, apart from other activities, responsible for collection, organisation and distribution of specific data from national and regional authorities in Tanzania to the other partners, namely the Wuppertal Institute. Problems occurring especially in the context of data collection included mainly functional and organisational challenges from official side. The national bureau of statistics does only function to certain limits as gatekeeper – a substantial segment of data can only be collected from the official agencies (mainly ministries) directly. Face to face communication or, if not possible, phone calls should be used to follow-up. Email enquiries were proven as not being adequate in this context.

Title:

Official data collection for research purposes in Tanzania – a field report

Problem and Objective:

To evaluate the biomass as well as bioenergy potentials of Tanzania, a specific segment of Better-iS comprised an in-depth analysis of official data connected with this approach (e.g. live stock existence etc.). An initial data request outline was designed by the Wuppertal Institute and framed by enquiries from other partners. Leading organisation of the ground was ICRAF, which had, due to its long-term presence in the country, a superior knowledge about the structure and organisation of the official

ministries and agencies in charge. Furthermore does ICRAF, due to its excellent reputation in the region, have outstanding personal contacts to key persons within the government.

Although relatively successful did the on-the-ground data collection prove itself as being more complicated than anticipated. Numerous challenges had to be overcome and depended on e.g. type of organisation (e.g. agency, ministry, NGO, etc.), internal procedures and guidelines for this access (there is no common organisation structure among Tanzanian official agencies in this regard), type of data as some data is labeled as confidential, coordination between different departments within an organisation, duration of timelines (as a rule of thumb, older data is much more difficult to access compared to more recent one) as well as the overall functionality of the databases itself. Major obstacles were overall maintenance or even existence of common and accessible databases, clashes between scientific accuracy for Western research on the one hand and data collection reality in rural Tanzania on the other (e.g. grazed biomass or used as feed/fodder including livestock waste produced and consumed) and the overestimated status of Tanzanian Bureau of statistics. Although introduced as official focal point for data collection was the overall accessibility limited and frequently redirections to various ministries occurred.

Method:

A major stepstone in the data collection is the web based research. In general, official Tanzanian websites do seem, on the first glance, not to be well designed and/or maintained. In contrast to this was a substantial amount of data nevertheless accessible via the official online gateways. In this regard, an even more in-depth coordination between the data request partners and the data collection partner (ICRAF) would potentially have lowered the transaction costs. Another advisable option is to develop two sets of data request: An optimum and a minimum one.

If data is, even after substantial enquiries, not accessible online, direct approaches towards the ministries are advisable. This can, following ICRAF's experiences, hardly be done via email contact. The official email addresses of governmental agencies and ministries tend to function inadequately – most of the employees do have semi-official email accounts at other providers. It is not unlikely that official email addresses are not accessible by the person in charge for substantial periods and, if this is the case, they tend to work only slowly – extended email attachments will hinder further steps. ICRAF does therefore clearly prefer phone calls and direct approaches of the key persons in charge. To do this, official letters of introduction are highly recommended within the Tanzanian governmental system. After an initial contact with governmental officials, the key person will be pointed out – this person will most likely only act after receiving an official letter which should introduce the project/organisation and the reason why the data is needed. ICRAF suggests that these letters should be outlined and agreed upon by the leading organisations as early as possible in the data collection process. The likeliness of success will also rely on the accuracy of the enquiry: the more specific enquiries will be made, the faster it will be processed and the easier it is for the key

person to check whether this specific data is available or not. Follow-ups will be necessary, especially when dealing with governmental organisations.

Results:

There are numerous reasons that sometimes make the exercise of data collection difficult and more time consuming than expected. Basically the situation would depend on the type of organization that you want to access data/information, the procedures for accessing information set by the particular organization, the type of data (some data are more or less confidential), the information system, coordination between various units within the organization and between organizations (how the various units within the organization are coordinated), the duration of the data (old data are more difficult to get than recent data), and functionality of the databases

In many cases the most obvious reasons concentrate around the following issues.

1. Most of the government ministries do not have well maintained/established databases
2. Some data are not available at all, for example for the case of Better-iS we could not get data on grazed biomass or used as feed/fodder, livestock wastes produced and consumed, the reason was that, such data are not existing and have never been collected.
3. There is limited information/data one can access from the Tanzania Bureau of Statistics, in most cases one would be asked to go to the respective ministry.

Suggestions:

1. When looking for data/information, the first thing would be to search the data you want from the official websites before start going through the process of formal requisition for data from the respective organization.
2. If the information is not available on the website; of which this has been obvious particularly for Government Ministries, then take another step.
3. It is advised that one should go physically, sometimes it would take very long if one relies on emails and other means of communication
4. To formalize the process you need to write an official letter, you will be told to whom you should address your letter; in the letter you could introduce your organization (say something about your organization-briefly), why you want the data (the purpose of the data) etc.
5. You should specify in the letter the type of data/information you want
6. Then dispatch the letter to the responsible unit



7. Make follow up, could be either by physical visit or phone calls, follow up through emails is not recommended particularly for government institutions.

General lessons learnt:

1. Government agencies (for example TRA, EWURA, TANESCO) and most of the NGOs have databases that are better maintained than Government Ministries and Local Authorities.
2. Bureaucratic procedures (particularly in the Government Ministries) make the process of data collection more time consuming.
3. Data are highly fragmented, it is almost impossible if not impossible to get data on continuous trend for example for a period of twenty to fifty years.
4. In some cases, reliability of the data could be questionable.

Lessons learnt:

For practitioners:

As this data collection was conducted for research, the recommendations are outlined in this section. Generally those steps do apply also for other projects.

For research:

As a rule of thumb it is advised to access as much data as possible from sources such as governmental agencies (e.g. Tanzania Revenue Authority, Tanzania Electricity Supply Company etc.) local, national and international NGOs, as well as, if possible, international agencies (e.g. FAO) as the access is generally much more informal compared to governmental ministries -latter one do tend to lack maintenance in their databases. Bureaucratic processes, especially when accessing data from ministries, do tend to be much more time consuming than assumed. Letters of introduction should therefore be outlined, stamped and signed as early as possible by the consortium partners involved. It seems also advisable to get official signatures from at least head of departments. Even if the data enquiry is shaped in an optimal way, including only the absolute necessary timelines and general trends did, in the case of Better-iS, the data turn out to be highly fragmented – while some regions do keep track and report, others might not and while some years will be recorded in all active regions, other years might potentially be inaccessible (or not existing) at all. Timelines following decades of twenty, thirty or even fifty years are nearly impossible to find. The allocation of time and human resources to get deeper and deeper in the data collection process should be monitored continuously to hinder an overexploitation. At last, every researcher working with this data need to be aware that there are substantial differences in the infrastructure as well as capital configuration of data collection authorities in Tanzania.

For policy implementation:

As this data collection was conducted for research, the recommendations are outlined in this section. Generally those steps do apply also for other projects.

Participating institutions: International Food and Policy Research Institute (IFPRI), Institute for Environmental Economics and World Trade IUW, World Agroforestry Centre ICRAF, Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, Leibniz-Centre for Agricultural Landscape



Research (ZALF e.V.), Association for Strengthening Agricultural Research in Eastern and Central Africa.
Associated partners: SOKOINE University of Agriculture, Ministry of agriculture, food security and cooperatives Tanzania