

Project Update: May 2011

Previous work in South Nguru Mountains has shown that unprotected, informally managed secondary forests are important for biodiversity conservation and carbon capture. Paying local communities to sustainably manage secondary forests could enhance these ecosystem services and directly improve local livelihoods but traditional payment programmes are often criticised for being inequitable and inconsequential to poverty alleviation. The aim of this phase of my long-term work in South Nguru Mountains is to explore household and community level readiness to participate in payment for ecosystem service programs that are not yet underway. The ultimate medium-term goal of the project is to develop a PES programme that is locally feasible and has multiple benefits for communities and forests.



Fieldwork so far has consisted of 8 intensive weeks of data collection conducted between September and December 2010 in the same 11 villages for which I already have bio-physical data. Unlike previous years, the 2010 fieldwork focused only on the social-institutional dimensions of forest management and landuse. Using a survey instrument developed with a group of field assistants recently graduated from the University of Dar es Salaam and the Sokoine University of Agriculture in Morogoro, we interviewed more than 300 households representing five economic welfare groups. The survey is being used to assess how access to land, credit and resources may affect the ability of families to participate in PES programmes,

even if such programmes were conducted at community level. I am currently analysing the data while preparing for a short fieldtrip season (July – Aug 2011) that will address institutional readiness.

The 2010 fieldwork was particularly interesting because of the time and effort I put into making the process as participatory as possible in terms of developing the research design with students and community leaders. I spent one week with the field assistants on a short training on the background behind the study, on generating appropriate research questions, and developing a research design. Part of this training consisted of developing and subsequently testing the survey instrument in a non-participating community. We then spent 1 day in each participating village discussing the study and developing the sampling protocol. Consequently, more than 100 community leaders participated in the research process allowing us to identify research questions that are meaningful not just for me but for communities as well. The participatory process has been beneficial to me in terms of understanding the South Nguru communities better and building trust with community leaders and the households we surveyed. For communities, I think they now have a much better idea of who I am, what I am doing, and how it could be beneficial to them. This level of trust and understanding was previously not possible when my study was primarily a biophysical research that had limited interaction with community members.