

4 METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH AND OVERVIEW OF FIELDWORK



4.1 Methodological challenges

The present study faced numerous methodological challenges that had to be taken into account in the design of the research approach. In part these were known to the research team by virtue of its own earlier work on this topic, in particular the KwaZulu-Natal study mentioned above. The main challenges anticipated were as follows:

The generalisability of findings

A problem with previous studies was that they tended to use very small samples and relied on purposive sampling with households or individuals that were identified (in various ways) as definitely or likely to be affected by HIV/AIDS. Furthermore, the basis for much of the current wisdom about the effect of HIV/AIDS on tenure in general circulation is anecdotal and draws on the experience of a small number of informants who may or may not be typical. Although this study was also constrained by limitations of time and budget, it has attempted to address the issue of generalisability by:

- Identifying sites that differ in important respects, most notably culture, land tenure traditions, and prevalence of HIV, but excluding sites that are extremely different, for example, pastoralist areas and urban/peri-urban areas which, it was felt, would introduce too many variables for a study of this scale.
- Including non-affected households to provide comparisons to affected households.
- Collecting information (albeit within a limited number of communities) from a large number of households in each study site so as to produce a comprehensive picture of the tenure situation in those communities.

Isolating HIV/AIDS as one variable among many

HIV/AIDS is not working in a vacuum. There are many factors in addition to HIV/AIDS that might conceivably, or do in fact, impact on land tenure practices, each with its own history and dynamics. These include the market and economic changes, poverty trends, population pressure, urbanisation, changing family and gender relationships, and of course, other illnesses. The challenge then is how to isolate the significance of HIV/AIDS in relation to tenure issues and these other factors in the research sites, and how to probe and understand the complex linkages and interactions between these different impacts, including that of HIV/AIDS, over time. Apart from the inclusive focus on both affected and non-affected households, a twofold strategy was adopted to meet this challenge:

- To establish developments over time by examining personal case-histories.
- To pay attention to detail and nuance, especially in the life histories, so as to guard against drawing false or overly simplistic conclusions/associations.

Ethical and methodological considerations due to the social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS

The social stigma associated with HIV/AIDS poses serious ethical and methodological challenges. The ethical consideration is that the research must not compromise people's right to privacy, which at the extreme must be understood to mean that no member of the community should be inferred by others as affected by HIV/AIDS merely by virtue of having been approached by the research team. This would have the effect of making people more vulnerable as a result of our research. Although it was suggested that fieldworkers simply do not tell anyone that HIV/AIDS was a specific concern of the research, this raises another ethical concern, that of conducting the research under false pretences. The methodological challenge is that it is difficult to draw inferences about the

relationship between HIV/AIDS and land when many of those infected or affected are either unaware themselves, or are unwilling to impart that information to the researchers. The research team did not find an ideal solution to these challenges but rather a partially satisfactory one. On the one hand, there was no concealment of the fact that HIV/AIDS was an important part of the team's research brief, but this was presented as part of a more general (and genuine) interest in chronic illness. Second, by virtue of interviewing appreciable numbers of both affected and non-affected households, there was little chance of respondents being labelled 'affected' by inference. And third, throughout the research we are compelled to distinguish between cases where we know that a particular household is affected, and those where we merely think it is probable based on a reading of the symptoms and indications reported to us.

It is necessary to clarify here how we have understood and used the term 'affected'. Although we are aware that, given the scale and social and economic consequences of HIV/AIDS in a society such as Kenya, all members of society can be described as 'affected' to a greater or lesser extent, for our research purposes it has been necessary to distinguish between those households and individuals that are directly affected through the illness or death or presumption of illness or death of primary relations as a consequence of HIV/AIDS, and those that are only indirectly affected through the broader social ramifications of the pandemic. In this study the term 'affected' is used to indicate those who are or have been directly affected.

The relational, socially embedded nature of tenure

Tenure does not involve a purely technical, easily quantifiable set of issues. Even though it relates to a tangible physical asset – land – it is embedded within a range of socially constructed meanings, values and relationships. One cannot then rely purely or even mainly on quantitative survey methods to understand the social processes involved in tenure and changes to the tenure system. Furthermore, gender is identifiable as a major influence on tenure relationships, and is itself a complex, relational construct, which is all the more complex because of its evolving nature. In order to develop a nuanced understanding at the household level, where conflict around land may be most acute, it is therefore important to get a range of perspectives and not valorise only one or assume that the views of a single individual within a household necessarily correspond with the views of other household members, in particular that the presumed 'household head' speaks for all members. A single perspective (for example, men- or women-household heads) is thus insufficient to unpack these relationships, and especially the gendered dynamics and power relationships around land.

The importance of distinguishing direct from indirect evidence

People's general observations and personal experience do not always correspond and at times may even contradict one another; their general perceptions are also shaped and informed by a wide range of influences, including that of the research situation itself, which can lead to the blurring of fact, opinion, rumour and hearsay. While acknowledging the power of focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and other techniques that ask people 'in a position to know' to explain and comment upon social phenomena, these generalisations do not offer robust evidence as to the true state of affairs in respect of individuals. In the context of HIV/AIDS, given the associated stigma and denial and the sometimes erroneous beliefs that surround it, it is especially important that priority is given to first-hand experience as the basis for building up a

comprehensive overview. This experience is sometimes corroborated by the generalisations offered by focus group participants and others; on other occasions these generalisations, especially where they depart from the situation on the ground, become important data in and of themselves in respect of attitudes and knowledge.

4.2 Research tools

Because of the inherent complexity of the research task, the methodology was developed to encompass the following suite of different tools, all of which were applied in each of the research sites:

- *Household 'census'* to collect basic demographic, socio-economic and tenure information for each village as a whole, as well as to provide information that could be used for the more in-depth interviews, including the identification of potential interviewees.
- *In-depth individual interviews*, based on life history and narrative methods, conducted on a sub-sample of members of both affected and non-affected households, and often with more than one member per household interviewed to obtain different perspectives.
- *Focus group interviews* with different social groups, for example, widows, land-poor men, the youth, and so on.
- *Key informant interviews* at national, district and local levels, including government officials at all levels, health officers, and local leaders.
- *A participatory mapping* exercise for the village, at which selected participants map land allocation and use at household and village levels, and also identify changes in land tenure and use over the last ten years.

There are two main rationales for conducting focus group interviews (FGIs). First, FGIs can help corroborate information collected through the household survey, or alternatively may point to weaknesses in the household questionnaire; and second, FGIs can be a potent source of information in their own right, especially in so far as they provide an opportunity to engage community members in their own analysis of the situation or the problem at hand, and to generate debate and discussion among them. There is a huge literature on the art of conducting FGIs. The approach adopted for the present exercise was to assemble a group of eight to 15 community members, generally with the assistance of the traditional authority, and to gently lead the group through a discussion by posing open-ended questions.

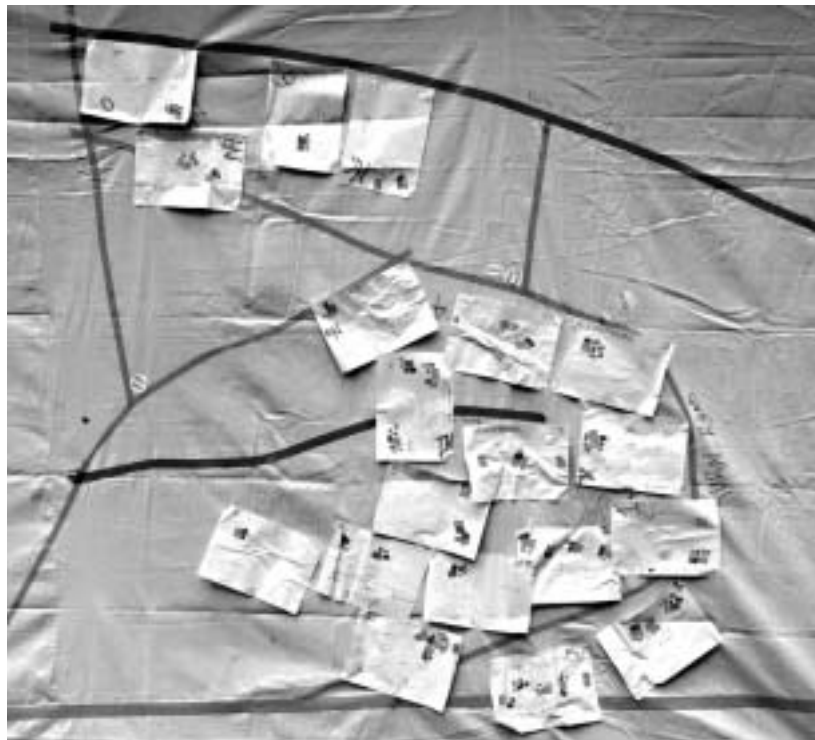
For household surveys it is often useful to be able to distinguish households according to wealth or welfare. However, to do so with any precision – that is, through valuing assets or calculating total household income or expenditure – can be extremely time consuming and difficult. A decision was therefore taken to rely rather on subjective self-rankings, whereby households were asked to categorise themselves as either 'worse-off', 'better-off', or 'about average' relative to 'most households'.¹ In addition, a crude 'wealth score' was calculated by means of asking households whether they own various assets and to rate these assets as being in good, fair, or poor condition.² Although both the welfare self-ranking and the wealth score have obvious weaknesses, it is notable that in each of the three sites there is a strong correspondence between the two.

1 In English, the question reads, 'Is your household better-off, worse-off, or about average in comparison with most households in this area?'

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With regard to the mapping exercise, an approach was developed that drew on various elements of 'participatory rural appraisal' (PRA) methods. Participants were seated around a very large piece of white cloth and asked to mark out major landmarks such as rivers, roads and public buildings using distinctively and appropriately coloured tape and stick-on markers. This process was useful in generating information and discussion about local amenities and infrastructure, but also served as a loosening-up exercise. Thereafter participants were taken through a process of drawing on and marking individual sheets of paper with colour-coded symbols to indicate current household units, household members, types of building structures and fields for both their own households and that of their immediate neighbours. In addition to a senior researcher who acted as facilitator, the process involved a number of fieldworkers who were individually assigned to assist one or two of the participants and to record information and comments. Once the current situation had been mapped, the individual sheets of paper were placed on the larger map and thereafter a similar process was undertaken to map homesteads with regard to household structure, and land allocation and land use, as these were remembered from approximately ten years previously. Once that process had been captured, the facilitator led a general discussion on participants' views about the differences that had emerged between the current and historical situations.

Figure 4.1: Example of map from participatory mapping exercise, Kintbithe; dark lines represent rivers/streams, lighter lines represent roads, and sheets depict household structure and land ownership of individual homesteads



² An asset in good condition was assigned a value of 1, one in fair condition 0.67, and one in poor condition 0.5. The wealth score is then calculated as the weighted sum of the number of assets owned, drawing on a list of 12 assets.

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4.3 Study sites

The three study sites were in Embu, Thika, and Bondo Districts, falling within Eastern, Central, and Nyanza Provinces respectively. For each district, the specific sites were as follows:

- *Embu site* – Kinthithe, Kanthoga, and Masicho villages, which although technically distinct are functionally one settlement (and thus are referred to collectively as ‘Kinthithe’ in this report), falling within Karurumo sub-location, Karurumo location, Kyeni division.
- *Thika site* – Gachugi village in Kairi sub-location, Chania location, Kamwangi division.
- *Bondo site* – Lwak Atemo village in Memba sub-location, within Central Asembo location, within Rarieda division.

The logic of the site selection was to identify communities with varying degrees of land pressure and HIV prevalence that were also culturally heterogeneous, but to exclude pastoralist and urban areas. Constraints of time and budget meant that the selection had to be limited to three sites and that consideration had also to be given to choosing sites that were relatively convenient in terms of access. On this basis, the three districts were chosen through discussions and deliberations among the project team members and with the help of various stakeholders, notably officials within the Ministry of Lands and Settlement. Once the districts were chosen the respective District Commissioners and District Officers (DO1s) were consulted, who then recommended particular divisions. Having chosen a division, the division-level District Officer (DO2) was then consulted, who assisted in identifying a particular location, sub-location, and finally village.

Indicative population densities and HIV prevalence rates for the three sites (or proxies) are reported below:

Table 4.1: Characteristics of selected study sites

	Embu site	Thika site	Bondo site
HIV prevalence rate ^a	27%	21%	31%
Population density ^b (people/km ²), 1999	285	710	334
Population density ^c (people/km ²), 1962	175	234	145
% increase in population density 1962–1999	63%	204%	130%

a Respectively, from Karurumo sentinel surveillance site for 2001; from Thika town sentinel surveillance site for 2000; and from Chulaimbo sentinel surveillance site in Kisumu District for 2000.

b Calculated at the sub-district level from the 1999 census.

c Calculated from most proximate corresponding geographical area from 1962 census. (Morgan & Shaffer 1966).

4.4 Overview of fieldwork conducted and problems encountered

The elements of the research methodology were workshopped within the team and then piloted over the course of three days in Mwea village in Thika District, in the same division and location where the actual Thika study site was later located, thus falling under the same District Officer. On the basis of the piloting, changes were made to the interview schedules and guidelines, as well as to the household census questionnaires.

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Particular concern was raised about the 'dryness' of some of the in-depth interviews. The process for the participatory mapping exercise was also somewhat simplified, as some participants had found it too fatiguing. Finally, the method of recruiting community members to participate in the focus group interviews and mapping exercise was changed so as to prevent excessive numbers of people from showing up with erroneous expectations of receiving government assistance.

Thereafter the research teams spent approximately two weeks in each site, preceded by visits to government officials. Except for some of the key informant interviews during the piloting, interviews were conducted in the language with which the respondent was most comfortable, typically kiEmbu in Embu, kiKikuyu in Thika, and DhoLuo in Bondo. All interviews were recorded on audio-cassette, and later transcribed and translated into English. Refreshments were provided for participants in focus group interviews and the participatory mapping exercises, and transport costs were defrayed for some participants on a case-by-case basis.

The table below summarises the fieldwork activities undertaken per site:

Table 4.2: Summary of fieldwork activities by site

	Embu	Thika	Bondo	Total
Participatory mapping	1	1	1	3
Household 'census' interviews	98	101	107	306
In-depth interviews	27	26	28	81
Focus group interviews	3	3	4	10
Key informant interviews	6	5	6	17

The household interviews covered approximately 90–95% of all households in the site, based on a count of households undertaken by the enumerators.

In addition to the interviews mentioned above, 15 key informant interviews were conducted at national and district level (see Appendix 2). Some of these interviews were halfway between proper key informant interviews and courtesy calls on government officials in which numerous questions were asked but not according to the usual interview schedule.

Various problems were encountered in the course of the fieldwork and follow-up analysis. As anticipated, the most significant problem was the lack of certainty as to who is and who is not affected by HIV/AIDS. The lack of candour about AIDS was striking. For example, in the household census for the Thika site, not one of the 46 community members (about 9%) who reported being in poor health indicated that this had anything to do with AIDS. The lack of candour in the Embu census was even starker: HIV/AIDS was not mentioned once in relation to the 83 people (about 17%) reported as being in poor health. In their brief post-interview comments made after each household census interview, enumerators occasionally noted that the respondent (or someone else observed in the household when the interview was being conducted) looked terribly ill despite no verbal indication from the respondent that this was so.

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Not surprisingly, respondents were typically more apt to reveal sensitive information in the course of in-depth interviews than during household census interviews. However, even here the information was patchy or inconsistent. For example, in the course of an in-depth interview a respondent revealed that his sister had died of AIDS, but he only stated this after insisting that the cassette recorder be turned off. On other occasions, members of the same household would differ in how they would present the illness of someone who had passed away, with one household member confiding that it was AIDS but in a separate interview another household member stating that the person died of something else. Faced with such situations, and also with the fact that even among those who confided that they were ill with AIDS very few had actually been tested, an attempt was made after the fact to distinguish those who were 'highly likely' to be infected, from those who were 'probably' infected. In practice however this distinction is necessarily a subjective one.

Certain weaknesses with the overall methodology were known in advance, while a number of others were discovered after the fact. Chief among those that had been anticipated was the problem of learning about those, most commonly women, who had already left or been chased away from the study sites. In the first place, those who had left would simply no longer be present and thus could not be interviewed; they were not necessarily recorded through the household census either. Second, the fact that a member had been chased away would not necessarily be revealed by those remaining behind, least of all by those who might have been involved. In some instances, however, chasing away was revealed as a matter of almost direct experience, either by those who had actively resisted it, or by those who had returned anyway, or by close family members who were sympathetic to the person who had been chased away.

The questionnaire for the household survey had three additional shortcomings that were not picked up during the piloting. The first shortcoming was that the questions about land access did not prompt the respondent sufficiently to speak about all land that each household member accessed, that is, including those plots that were the individual property of a household member as opposed to the household's property. It became clear through comparisons between the household information collected during the household census and the in-depth interviews that some land of this sort was omitted; hence the information on household fields obtained through the census under-enumerates the total amount of land holdings within the study site and the actual amount in certain households. However, the under-enumeration appears to have been much more the exception than the rule.

The second shortcoming in the household questionnaire was a failure to accommodate polygynous situations adequately in the sense that it was not always clear whether each co-wife constituted a separate household or, rather, whether all co-wives and their children belonged to the same household. If the former, then it was not clear to which household the husband belonged. This was particularly a problem for the Bondo site. The third main shortcoming of the household questionnaire is that the 'household table' did not clearly distinguish in-laws from blood relatives. As an example, it was not possible, except in some cases through context and inference, to distinguish daughters from daughters-in-law, thus complicating the interpretation of certain important issues in terms of family relationships and dynamics. The questionnaire also did not establish clearly all lines of relationship between household members but focused on the relationship between the respondent and the various individual members of the household.

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Further difficulties were encountered in the selection of informants for in-depth interviews. In principle it was intended to conduct interviews with more than one party to land or other relevant conflicts that became identified during the course of the fieldwork. However, although generally two in-depth interviews were conducted with members of the same household, in practice there were few instances in which these interviews encompassed different sides to a conflict. This was due to a variety of reasons, not least the fact that many of the conflicts revealed at a site involved a party who had passed away or who no longer lived in the village. Linked to this, too few of the in-depth interviews were conducted with men. In the Embu site, for example, in the end only three of the 27 in-depth interviews were with men, which blunted the research commitment to probing for nuance in gender relationships around land. This skewing towards women in the in-depth interviews related to various field dynamics, including the greater willingness and availability of women to be interviewed.

In addition to the above, there were a number of practical/organisational problems worth noting:

- Although an effort was made to identify a suitably private place in which to conduct the focus group interviews, and although the recruitment of participants was tightly controlled, on a few occasions passersby and other community members insisted on being included.
- Three tapes for in-depth interviews were spoilt or lost – one in Embu and two in Thika – so that the number of usable interviews for these two sites fell short of the target of 28.
- Due to the complexity of the fieldwork and the short time in which it was conducted, on occasion there was a lapse of record keeping, such that it was not always possible to match respondents of in-depth interviews with the household census respondents.

Finally, there were a number of problems associated with the fact that most of the analysis and writing up was undertaken by members of the team who were not resident in Kenya once the initial fieldwork had been completed. Although problems could be sorted out via e-mail and by telephone, this did mean that communication between team members was slower and more fractured than was ideal and would have been the case had everybody been located in one place. It also made corrective follow up around data very difficult during the analysis stage. The two workshops at which the draft findings were presented to stakeholders in April 2003 provided a useful opportunity to resolve some outstanding issues around the data, in addition to the commentary they provided on the broader findings.

However, perhaps the main problem that beset the follow-up analysis was the sheer volume of information that was generated, which had first to be cleaned, checked, and assimilated before it could be processed. The English translations of the transcripts of the in-depth, focus group, and key informant interviews alone amounted to around 1 300 pages, in addition to which there was a large amount of information derived from the household surveys and the participatory mapping exercises. An enormous richness of voice and narrative and experience is contained in this material, which we hope has not been entirely lost in the distillation that follows.