**Key Informant Interviews**

The most important means of communication is direct dialogue with the actual resource users. As it is literally impossible to speak with all users there is a requirement to identify key informants. These can best be identified by the users themselves (e.g. during group sessions) or by professionals originating from the relevant groups or region. Local experience and familiarity with societal structures and customs (gender aspects, ethnic differences, marginalised groups) is often more important than a specific scientific background for identifying key persons. In the beginning confidence building is the main objective; therefore sufficient time for the process should be allotted. The interviews should avoid any extractive character but should be adapted to the communication culture of the PA region. No communication partner likes to be seen as a living database or reference source only; understanding the social, cultural and political setting can be achieved only if the actors are actively interested and listening to each other.

**Resource use and village development maps**

Many rural development programs base their interventions on documents like village or community based strategies, village conceptual maps or other documents that are designed within the specific (development) project context**[[1]](#footnote-1)**. These are made to facilitate, visualise and document the perception of reality, potential for change and vision of the communities. The risk of this approach in resource management is the often differing priorities of the user groups and the feasibility of visions developed. Therefore it is indispensable that the group is aware of the potential interventions that a new PA would realistically be able to offer.

Resource mapping is probably the most appropriate method to clarify the current resource uses and the intentions that specific user groups have. The main idea of resource mapping is visualising the understanding of resource status and use from different user perspectives. It is important to know the groups you are interacting with in order to receive more than the official picture.

The tools used at the user group level depend on the familiarity of the users concerning maps, photos or other sketches. Ideally the resource mapping is based on orthophotos that allow a bird’s eye view of the area**[[2]](#footnote-2)**. As many protected areas are situated along or adjacent to state boundaries it may not be easy to get aerial photos, even if the resources were available to produce these. Hence satellite imagery or maps may be used. Google Earth or other free satellite images have made these views economic and add attractiveness to the exercise so that even villagers who would not have taken part earlier will be present, even if it partly only for curiosity. If other spatial data (such as protected area, village boundaries, hydrological or cadastre information) are digitally available, even hybrid maps could be prepared before hand, but it has to be kept clear that these are only bases for assessment, not results.

It is important to allow sufficient time for the users to familiarise with the base material in order to enable the users to indicate and finally map the actual uses. Any uses that are not confined to specific areas, but still important shall be recorded as well, either in separate tables or as footnotes to the map produced.

In case images and maps are not appropriate, sketches on blackboards or large papers serve the purpose as well. It is then only more difficult to transfer the contents of the resource map into exact maps or other geographic information systems. Digital cameras have provided to be helpful in conserving the map contents and making these easily available in the office.

The scale of the maps should generally cover the whole intervention area of the group, not only the village and/or protected area boundaries. It is important to mark the third party uses on these maps as well, because neighbours, migrant or seasonal users may not be present in the specific session but still use the area.

Unsurprisingly it is difficult to document unauthorised uses by the actors themselves, but it is possible to record them attributing it to ‘unknown causers’. The discussion with separate groups (men, women, farmers, shepherds, traders, officials…) shall provide divergent opinions and overlapping uses. It has to be clarified, if the users perceive these overlapping uses as conflicts. If so the current mechanisms to resolve/sustain the conflict should be recorded. If the conflicts are currently not resolved it has to be discussed why this is the case and if this causes further negative effects.

The sketch maps will have to be verified in the field. Several transect walks will be required, especially concerning disputed influence spheres, borders of (resource) authority or other management essentials. It is essential that all neighbours jointly verify boundaries, this is mandatory when it comes to village /community/park borders.

At the end of this resource mapping process one topical and agreed resource use map should indicate which management units (individuals, groups, and institutions) are managing the resources of the community/village at present.

Overlaying the synthesized maps with the legal situation may show that the actual land use and the document situation do not always coincide. This does not necessarily constitute a conflict on authority, as traditional uses or original designations of land may have been changed in a consensual manner, but have not been documented accordingly.

Participatory planning can start only after the above mentioned analysis of the situation. Only then the protected area planning can be realistically balancing the costs and benefits of the intended change for the resource users and the distant beneficiaries.**[[3]](#footnote-3)** The incentive and compensation mechanisms to facilitate the changes must be transparent and clear for everyone in order to allow informed decisions of the target group.

**Transect walks, field verification of boundaries and participatory inventories**

Boundary and transect walks are an important opportunity to communicate with all resource users as many questions and issues only arise during the walks. Direct observation allows discussions on good and poor examples of resource management. The walks also provide the opportunity to contact those persons or groups that do not regularly attend meetings or other venues. Try to make sure that all owners/managers of the area are present in the field during the discussion about ‘their’ resources. It has proven helpful to record the documented proprietary situation (border stones...) characteristic waypoints or other landmarks by GPS in order to allow an exact location in geographic reference systems. However, it is important to remember that the GPS is a tool and should be demystified from the very beginning. It has to be clear for everyone that data recorded by the receiver are indicative and not absolute.

The field and user group visits will differ in frequency and duration, depending on the familiarity of the stakeholders with each other. Apart from informal village and transect walks more formalised resource mapping exercises can be applied, e.g. when forest resources and their uses are to be dealt with. Then the users and the planners should jointly inventorise the existing stock of fuel, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), timber and wildlife. Traces of recent and historical use should be documented as well in order to assess intensity and effects of the actual management regime. These joint efforts are also excellent opportunities to find our which local knowledge is still present and where this is used in the management. Rootstock or fodder plant inventories with farmers provide a more concise basis for management discussions than any plant sociological definition or caloric values of fuelwood per ha.

**Venn Diagrams and social maps**

As mentioned earlier the resource managers are mostly organised in groups starting from families to extended kin group, professional temporary teams and any other social composition. A helpful tool for analysing the social landscape within communities are Venn diagrams as they show the linkages between groups and also identify key stakeholder and players of the social network. They can be extended to a complete social map**[[4]](#footnote-4)** in which the interactions between groups and individuals and the roles of key persons are visualised.

In this way these tools help to clarify units of management and conflicting and complying resource uses and visions. Sometimes these diagrams can be compiled in the office and brought for discussion to the meetings.

1. ‘The village conceptual map is a conceptual framework and the primary tool for analysis – an iteratively agreed, partly visual model for identifying and classifying aspects of community life, resources and forces that act upon these’, see <http://www.policy-powertools.org/> a useful compilation of specifically useful tools for participatory work. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A very good MANUAL ON PARTICIPATORY VILLAGE MAPPING USING PHOTOMAPS can be found at: http://www.iapad.org/publications/ppgis/participatory\_mapping\_using\_photomaps\_ver2.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. WWF has just published ‘The Protected Areas Benefits Assessment Tool, A methodology, Nigel Dudley and Sue Stolton, February 2008’, a potentially helpful compilation of benefits to consider during PA management [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. FAO has compiled a library on participation tools where an online search for specific purposes can be made: http://www.fao.org/Participation/resources.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)