News

Understanding the status, importance, access, and management of woody vegetation in the rangelands of East Africa

Published: 08 February 2024

Another student has graduated in collaboration with the SLU-led project Drylands Transform. Anna has finalized both the field work and the report writing for her MSc thesis. But she will always remember a lot from the work in the drylands. The aim of her project was to contribute practical knowledge on the perceived ecosystem services from woody vegetation and associated species. She also wanted to identify current woody vegetation management practices, people's access to ecosystem services from woody vegetation in the area and the status of woody cover. Now she will tell some of what she did.

Around 150 interviews

I did my fieldwork and data collection in two of the four Drylands Transform field sites in the Karamoja cluster. The first site was in Chepareria in West Pokot County in Kenya, and the second was in Rupa in Moroto District in Uganda. My main data collection method was interviews, and I used both focus group discussions and individual interviews.

I visited more than 20 different villages in each site and performed around 150 interviews in total. I used focus group discussions to identify important benefits from woody vegetation, these benefits were then listed and categorized into ecosystem service groups, for example food, fodder, medicine,

building material, improved local climate, cultural practices, erosion control, beauty etc. I then made a questionnaire based on each of the ecosystem service groups that I used during the individual interviews.

Each respondent was asked to rank the importance of each ecosystem service using a Likert scale from 1-5, where 1 represents no importance and 5 represents highly essential. They were also asked to mention up to five important species associated to each ecosystem service when relevant. They were also asked to mention up to five unwanted species. To learn more about management and access to important ecosystem services from woody species I conducted another round of focus group discussions and additional key informant interviews.

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Anna holding a focus group discussion with men about the prevalence, use and management of trees in the area. Photo: Anna Swärd

How did you get in touch with Drylands Transform?

What surprised you?

What were your most interesting results?

Any recommendations for other students?

Interesting and challenging field work

Another part of my work was to find out more about the status of woody cover and how this could be affected by different management practices I used data from the Land Degradation Surveillance Framework. Data on tree species and density was collected in Rupa and Chepareria in 2021. I revisited all the data collection plots to collect additional data on management, for example distance to homesteads and surface water, type of land use (crop land, homestead, or livestock pasture) and whether the land was enclosed or not.

The field work was interesting but also challenging at times. I had many long days in the field, many of the villages I visited were far away and I often visited several villages in one day. I mostly worked in areas where many people did not speak English, so I always had to bring an interpreter. Using an interpreter requires good communication and I had to be very clear and explain my aims and methods well to the interpreter to make sure that I got the right information and that my questions to the interviewees was understood and answered correctly.

Me and my interpreter used a motorbike in the field, and during rainy season it could get stuck in the mud. Other times we got trapped on the wrong side of a river that was dry in the morning but filled with flowing water in the afternoon. Sometimes it was too steep or too dense vegetation to use a motorbike, and we had to walk for hours to reach our destination. But it was always an adventure and we met kind people who did their best to help us. The best thing about the field work was to talk to so many people and to learn about their culture, everyday life, challenges, as well as plans and hopes for the future. I also really loved the nature and to learn about different plants and what benefits they provided.

Facts:

Drylands Transform

Drylands Transform (DT) is a research project led by the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) in partnership with an interdisciplinary team from the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Linnaeus University, Makerere University, Umeå University, University of Gothenburg, University of Nairobi, and World Agroforestry (ICRAF).

Visit the website for Drylands Transform.

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Links:

Find Anna's MSc thesis and other Drylands Transform publications here