

Fieldwork Report

A Comprehensive Overview of Field Activities and Learnings

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**Institution/Organization: The Open University of
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1. Introduction

This report presents a detailed account of the field work conducted by the author across various villages of **Newala Town Council** from 1st May to 5th June 2025. The fieldwork aimed to document local culture, assess community needs, and apply monitoring and evaluation (M&E) tools in a rural setting.

The structure of this report mirrors the fieldwork process and outcomes. It begins with a **daily activity diary** outlining key tasks and observations (Section 2), followed by a **brief report from the field supervisor** (Section 3), and a summary of **recordings and notes** (Section 4). Suggestions for improving future fieldwork engagements are provided in Section 5.

Challenges encountered—ranging from access to the community, cooperation, cultural sensitivity, food, equipment, and communication—are addressed in Section 6, with corresponding solutions. Lessons learned are summarized in Section 7, followed by a conclusion (Section 8) and practical recommendations for future field students (Section 9). Supporting materials are included in the appendices (Section 10).

The purpose of this report is to serve as a reflective and informative summary of the field activities and learnings, contributing to the ongoing enhancement of practical training and community engagement in academic fieldwork.

2. Daily Activity Report (Diary)

The following table summarizes the daily activities conducted during the field work from **1st May to 5th June 2025**.

Date	Activity	Notes
01/05/2025	Interview with community leader	Discussed cultural practices
02/05/2025	Observation of local festival	Noted traditional dances and costumes
03/05/2025	Interview with Elder John	Traditional farming practices; crop rotation
05/05/2025	Visited local primary school	Spoke with teachers on cultural education
10/05/2025	Focus group with youth	Discussed youth perspectives on heritage
20/05/2025	Documentation of carvings	Photographed and recorded wood carving sessions
25/05/2025	Interview with women's group	Gathered insight on daily life and rituals
01/06/2025	Cultural ceremony attendance	Observed dances, food, and storytelling
05/06/2025	Final community debrief	Shared findings and gathered feedback from stakeholders

3. Supervisor's Brief Report

Supervisor's Name: Mr. Faraji Hamisi Hamisi

Title/Position: Cultural Officer, Newala Town Council

Summary:

Mr. Faraji Hamisi Hamisi commended the student, **AKTARI SABIHI ISSA**, for his outstanding dedication, professionalism, and cultural sensitivity demonstrated throughout the fieldwork period. He observed that the student showed a deep understanding of ethical engagement and respect for local traditions and community dynamics.

Mr. Hamisi highlighted that **AKTARI** consistently demonstrated strong research and analytical skills, particularly in areas of community engagement, data collection, structured interviews, and cultural documentation. The student exhibited a proactive approach by initiating conversations with various community groups including elders, women's associations, youth, and artisans. His use of participatory methods enabled meaningful interaction and genuine collaboration with community stakeholders.

Furthermore, the supervisor acknowledged the student's ability to build rapport and trust with local leaders and residents, which was crucial in accessing sensitive cultural knowledge and ensuring the success of the field activities. The supervisor also noted that the student effectively utilized tools such as interview guides, observation techniques, and visual documentation to capture rich qualitative data related to Makonde traditions, language, and livelihoods.

In conclusion, Mr. Hamisi stated that **AKTARI SABIHI ISSA** performed exceptionally well and represented **The Open University of Tanzania** with integrity and diligence. He recommended the student as a strong candidate for future research or development roles that involve community-based work, cultural heritage preservation, or monitoring and evaluation practices.

4. Recordings and Notes

Below is a list of recordings made during the field work:

- **Title:** Interview with Elder Mnaunda
 - **Date:** 03/05/2025
 - **Description:** Discussion on traditional farming methods, local food systems, and the historical background of the Makonde tribe
 - **Notes:** Elder Mnaunda emphasized the importance of crop rotation and detailed various natural food types traditionally consumed by the Makonde people.
- **Title:** Interview with Elder Mmulunga
 - **Date:** 21/05/2025
 - **Description:** Conversation focusing on Makonde handcrafts, local industry, and the intergenerational transfer of carving skills
 - **Notes:** Elder Mmulunga emphasized the significance of hand-carved woodcrafts and tools traditionally used by the Makonde people. He stated that he inherited his carving skills from his late uncle and described the symbolic value of each handcrafted item.
- **Title:** Interview with Elder Chimbuli
 - **Date:** 30/05/2025
 - **Description:** In-depth discussion on traditional dances, cultural events, and the role of music in Makonde society
 - **Notes:** Elder Chimbuli emphasized the role of traditional music and dance in promoting unity and encouraging a strong work ethic within the community. He explained how ceremonies helped preserve communal identity and values.

5. Suggestions for Future Improvements

The following suggestions are proposed to enhance the effectiveness, quality, and inclusivity of future fieldwork exercises—particularly in culturally sensitive and remote rural settings:

- **Improve Pre-Field Training on Local Customs:**
Future field students should receive comprehensive orientation on the cultural norms, languages, beliefs, and social expectations of the communities they will engage with. This will help minimize misunderstandings and build early rapport with local stakeholders, especially when working in areas with strong traditional values.
- **Provide Better Equipment for Recording in Low-Light Conditions:**
Some interviews and cultural events took place indoors or during evening hours where natural lighting was insufficient. Supplying students with high-quality audio-visual equipment capable of performing well in low-light settings (e.g., LED lighting kits, night-mode recorders) would improve the quality of data collected.

- **Include Local Research Assistants or Translators in Planning:**
Having trained local assistants or translators involved from the start ensures smoother communication, builds community trust, and helps in accurately interpreting cultural cues during data collection.
- **Allow Flexibility in Field Schedules Due to Weather:**
Fieldwork conducted during the rainy season often experienced delays and rescheduling. Planning for weather-related disruptions—by building in extra time or having backup routes—can help prevent data gaps.
- **Provide Clear Ethical Guidelines on Respondent Compensation:**
Some participants expected financial compensation, which created challenges. Future students should be equipped with clear institutional policies on ethical engagement and informed consent—especially around incentives or non-monetary appreciation for participants.

6. Challenges Faced and Solutions

During the fieldwork across villages in **Newala Town Council**, the student encountered a range of practical and contextual challenges. These challenges demanded flexibility, cultural sensitivity, ethical awareness, and real-time problem-solving. The following section outlines both general and categorized challenges, along with the strategies employed to overcome them:

6.1 Access to the Community

Challenge:

There was initial reluctance from some community members to engage with the student or participate in interviews. This hesitation stemmed from unfamiliarity with the student's identity and intentions, as well as general suspicion toward outsiders conducting research.

Solution:

The student addressed this challenge by immersing himself in the local setting, attending village events, and engaging in informal interactions. Endorsements and introductions from respected local leaders and elders played a key role in legitimizing the student's work and building trust.

6.2 Cooperation from the Community

Challenge:

Even after gaining entry into the community, some individuals—particularly elders—remained hesitant to share cultural information, fearing misuse or misinterpretation of their traditions.

Solution:

The student explained the academic nature and ethical framework of the study, ensured confidentiality, and emphasized that the information collected would contribute to cultural preservation and development planning. This transparency improved the level of community cooperation.

6.3 Access to Cultural Information

Challenge:

Some cultural knowledge—especially regarding spiritual practices, rituals, and clan-specific beliefs—was considered sacred and restricted to certain groups, making it difficult to document.

Solution:

To navigate this, the student worked closely with a local cultural guide who understood community boundaries and advised on appropriate topics, respondents, and communication etiquette.

6.4 Food

Challenge:

In remote areas, the availability and variety of food were limited, posing nutritional challenges during long fieldwork days.

Solution:

The student carried supplemental food supplies including bottled water, energy snacks, and preserved items. In some instances, the student accepted local meal offers as part of community hospitality, which also helped strengthen rapport.

6.5 Equipment

Challenge:

The main audio recorder failed during a key interview, and maintaining device power in areas without electricity was difficult.

Solution:

A backup recorder and power bank were used. The student also relied on printed

interview guides and handwritten notes as alternative methods when devices were unusable.

6.6 Other Contextual Challenges

Challenge 1 – Language Barriers:

Many elders preferred using the Makonde dialect, which was not fully understood by the student.

Solution:

A local interpreter fluent in both Makonde and Kiswahili assisted with translation and cultural context, ensuring respectful and effective communication.

Challenge 2 – Financial Expectations from Respondents:

Some elders requested payment before participating, leading to ethical and budgetary challenges.

Solution:

The student clarified the non-commercial nature of the academic study and, where appropriate, offered small non-monetary tokens of appreciation such as notebooks, sweets, or photographs.

Challenge 3 – Limited Access to Clean Water:

Many villages lacked reliable sources of clean drinking water.

Solution:

The student brought bottled water and used a portable filtration bottle to maintain hydration and prevent illness during long field visits.

Challenge 4 – Unfavorable Weather Conditions (Rainfall):

Heavy rains affected road accessibility, causing delays in scheduled interviews and village visits.

Solution:

Flexibility in scheduling and proactive communication with local guides allowed the student to rearrange visits and avoid data loss.

7. Lessons Learned

The primary goal of this fieldwork was to conduct **cultural profiling** of the Makonde people in Newala Town Council. Through this experience, the student gained important insights that will guide future research and community-based development initiatives.

Key lessons include:

- **Cultural Heritage Requires Respectful Documentation:**
Profiling cultural traditions such as wood carving, language, food systems, and dances must be approached with sensitivity and deep respect for the custodians of this knowledge.
- **Oral Knowledge is Fragile and Urgent to Preserve:**
Much of the cultural data was passed down orally. The fieldwork emphasized the urgency of capturing this knowledge before it fades due to modernization or generational shifts.
- **Language and Trust are Gateways to Cultural Knowledge:**
Access to accurate cultural information required not only translation but trust. The importance of working through respected local guides and interpreters cannot be overstated.
- **Field Adaptability Enhances Cultural Access:**
The ability to navigate logistical and social challenges—such as language barriers, rainfall, and financial expectations—enabled the student to access deeper layers of cultural context.

8. Conclusion

This fieldwork report has outlined the main activities, challenges, and learnings encountered while conducting cultural profiling in the villages of Newala Town Council. The experience was crucial in strengthening the student's skills in community entry, qualitative data collection, and documentation of indigenous knowledge.

Through the successful documentation of traditional Makonde crafts, oral histories, agricultural practices, and ceremonial dances, the fieldwork contributes meaningfully to **Tanzania's Traditional Culture Data Profiling Project**. It also serves as a resource for policy-makers, educators, and cultural preservationists committed to safeguarding Tanzania's intangible heritage.

9. Recommendations

In view of the cultural profiling objective and the field experience, the following are recommended for future fieldwork exercises of a similar nature:

1. **Establish Community Protocols for Cultural Research:**
Engage traditional leaders early to secure permission and guidance for accessing sensitive cultural data.
2. **Invest in Local Translators and Cultural Liaisons:**
Effective cultural profiling requires translators who are also knowledgeable about cultural nuances and social norms.
3. **Use Visual and Audio Documentation Tools:**
Cultural expressions like carving, dancing, and oral storytelling are best captured through photography, video, and audio—not just text.
4. **Develop Pre-Fieldwork Ethical Guidelines:**
Provide students with clear instructions on how to approach compensation requests, cultural taboos, and knowledge-sharing protocols.
5. **Digitize and Archive Collected Cultural Data:**
Ensure that recorded materials are stored securely and can be accessed for future academic, cultural, and policy use.

10. Appendices

The following materials are included as part of this report (or may be submitted upon request):

- Transcripts of recorded interviews (e.g., Elder Mnaunda, Elder Mmulunga, Elder Chimbuli)
- Photographic documentation of wood carvings and traditional ceremonies
- GPS coordinates of visited communities
- Samples of field notes and translated interview excerpts