

Subsistence strategies of slash-and-burn agriculture among the Bongando in the Equator Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo

Year: 2013

Place of fieldwork: Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Key words: Bongando; trade; endogenous development

• Background

The Democratic Republic of the Congo has experienced many conflicts. About 5,400,000 lives were lost in the Congo War in the 1990s. As a result of the conflict, infrastructure such as roads, hospitals, and power plants were completely destroyed (Fig. 1). Although the Congo War ended more than 10 years ago, people's lives remain uncertain. For example, the slash-and-burn agricultural people, the Bongando, living in the Equator Province, cultivated coffee plants as a cash crop since the 1960s. However, they have lost this income due to the paralysis of their domestic trade, and they had thus to change their subsistence strategies (Kimura, Yasuoka, Furuichi, 2012). Today, the Bongando do not escape from the impact of conflicts; the path of rural development is not clear yet.



Fig. 1

• Purpose

Various attempts have been made to promote economic and social reconstruction in the Equator Province. Rural people have formed local associations and strive to increase their productivity through stockbreeding of pigs and goats and by cultivating common fields. But those attempts to improve their living standard have failed due to a collapse of the distribution network. Selling their goods at the urban markets, they could only make enough for medical expenses and school fees per week (Fig. 2). Although repairing the distribution network is an urgent task for rural development efforts, the central government could not discuss the budget for the reconstruction of roads.



Fig.2



Fig.3

- Results and Achievements of Fieldwork

In this preliminary investigation, I observed social and economic change in this post-conflict society. Upon interviewing the local people, I found that they sometimes took on the burden of distribution. Today, these agricultural people have to carry 100 kg of crops a long way to the market (Fig. 3). This process increases the cost of distribution and these high distribution costs in turn raise the prices of the agricultural products for the urban buyer. That higher cost to the buyer impedes sales and slows rural development. As long as the distribution network is not restored, the development of this rural area cannot be realized.

- Implications and Directions for Future Research

Through this fieldwork, I sketch out the flow of the Bongando's production and distribution. As I mentioned before, there are many obstacles, especially regarding the distribution network—a crucial problem to resolve in the post-conflict situation. Therefore, I would like to focus on the merchants in future research. Reducing conflicts in the trade area, the Balokele and Bagenia, traditional merchant ethnic groups along the Congo River, are seeking to expand their commercial activities (Fig. 4). By focusing on their activities, I hope to find clues to achieve rural development.



Fig. 4

- Reference

Kimura, D., H. Yasuoka and T. Furuichi 2012. "Diachronic change of protein acquisition among the Bongando in the Democratic Republic of the Congo," *African Study Monographs Supplementary Issue 43*: 161-178