

My observations of forest-dwelling communities for their development

Year: 2014
Place of fieldwork: Cameroon
Name: Nyein Chan

Keywords: subsistence agriculture, Baka people, eco-friendly living style, Cameroon

This internship program was developed by the Inter-Graduate School Unit for Sustainable Development and Survivable Societies, for the purpose of training students to take leadership roles in international spheres. Japan International Cooperation Agency's JICA-Cameroon Office invited four students from different graduate schools to participate in field observations at the Forest-Savanna Sustainability (FOSAS) Project field stations. These field stations are managed cooperatively by Japan and Cameroon, for the purpose of conserving the tropical rain forest in southern and eastern Cameroon, through strengthening local people's welfare.

To observe how the local people in Cameroon earn their livelihoods in tropical rain forests, we visited two FOSAS field stations in the southern and eastern parts of Cameroon, in the Bityili and Gribé villages, from August 15 - 31, 2014. The living style of the local people, known as the Baka people, is environmentally friendly. Their houses are often made of red-colored earth, while some are constructed only of leaves and branches. They plant a lot of vegetables, such as tomatoes and chilies, around their homes, as well as fruiting trees such as banana and guava. We also observed beehives just outside some houses (Figure 1). Therefore, their living style is very eco-friendly.

Their agriculture is mainly slash-and-burn, and their major crops are cassava and plantain banana. In some plots, cacao is planted as a cash crop. With limited access to markets, their excess produce is rarely sold, and their crops are largely subsistence. Many major vegetable crops such as potatoes, pumpkins, and yams are interplanted, and these crops are used for their own consumption (Figure 2). The Baka people live in the tropical rain forest, where canopies are closed and the soil is wet. Some believe that all the forests belong to them. They can move around freely inside the forests, and collect various kinds of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) such as bush mango (*Irvingia gabonensis*), djaga (*Tetrapleura tetraptera*), and bush meat.

Some of the major differences between these villages and those I studied in Myanmar and Laos are 1) the crops they cultivated, 2) the cropping period, 3) the average fallow period, and 4) the shifting pattern. The opportunity to visit these field stations will contribute greatly to future studies.



Figure 1. Eco-friendly living style



Figure 2. Mixed cropping in a slash-and-burn farm