

Report on the Dispatch to Cameroon

William Kamgaing

JSPS researcher

The Center for African Area Studies

Kyoto University

I traveled to Cameroon from February 14 to March 4, 2025 with my colleague, Mr. Simon Hangula. The purpose was to contribute to a rapid evaluation of land-use patterns and perceptions of forest degradation and agricultural productivity by the Bantu and Baka hunter-gatherers in southeast Cameroon. This work is part of a larger study that combines remote sensing and field surveys to evaluate the dynamics of land degradation and agricultural productivity in Namibia, Botswana and Cameroon.

Specifically, this study aimed at:

- 1- Understanding the socio-economic profile of the Bantu and Baka (main livelihoods, education level, age, etc.),
- 2- Identifying the main agricultural crops, and providing a rough estimate of their productivity (kg/year or number of baskets/year),
- 3- Evaluating the threats to agricultural productivity (land availability, land accessibility, land degradation, decline in biodiversity, natural hazards, etc.), their levels, their trends, and ultimately,
- 4- Comparing the land-use patterns between Cameroon, Namibia and Botswana.

We gathered the data in Gribé and Zokadiba villages. We administered interviews to household heads (Figure 1) with a view to include both men and women in each ethnic group. Although the Baka are known to be “hunter-gatherers”, they also engage in farming, but at a limited scale as compared to their Bantu neighbors. For each respondent, we recorded the age range, gender, academic level, and ethnic group. We also recorded the geographical coordinates of the house of each respondent.



Figure 1: Kamgaing (on the left, with a red jacket) and Hangula (in the middle, with a green shirt) discussing with Baka hunter-gatherers in Gribe.

Farming was the main livelihood activity for almost all the respondents, followed by the harvest and trade of non-timber forest products, and small-scale trade.



Figure 2: Bantu women returning from the farm with baskets of cassava

Only one respondent (a Baka hunter-gatherer in his thirties) reported snare hunting as his main subsistence activity, followed by non-timber forest products gathering, and farming.

Land tenure was private and both household heads managed the farms. Immigrants also involved in farming. Cocoa was the main cash crop. Plantain and cassava were the main food crops and were grown by almost all the respondents (Figures 2 and 3). Banana was mostly used to manufacture whiskey.



Figure 3: A family returning from the farm with firewood, banana, and plantain. The machine on the floor is commercially used for grinding cassava into flour. Cocoa seeds are dried on the background, on the right.

Traditionally, people extend the area of their farm every year by clearing and burning a new portion of the forest next to their farm. Cuttings of cocoa, plantain and banana are therefore grown on the new plot at the same time period. Since plantain and banana mature faster (~ one year), harvests from the younger plots sustain the local diets and trade during the first three to four years. As cocoa trees grow up, the number of stems and productivity of plantain and banana

gradually decrease. Consequently, all respondents expected their total cocoa production (the main cash crop) to increase in the future, since they create new plots every year and maintain the old plots.

In Gribe, most respondents were unaware of the existence of any formal law that regulates forest clearing. However, most respondents in Zokadiba complained about the spatial restriction of their land-use rights within a “tiny forest” (the “agro-forestry area”) around their village by “a certain law”, which no respondent could name. Yet, both Gribe and Zokadiba are relatively densely populated and located at a similar distance from the logging forests (~ five km). Further analysis will, therefore, seek as elucidating the reason for the difference in perception between the two villages. The Baka did not perceive any threat regarding land access for farming, which was not surprising, given their relatively lower reliance on farming for cash income.

Overall, preliminary findings suggest that people in southeast Cameroon do not perceive any threat to agricultural productivity such as loss of fertility, which probably contrasts the findings from Namibia and Botswana. However, land accessibility was the main threat to agriculture in Zokadiba. Given the ongoing immigrant flux and deforestation in southeast Cameroon, conflicts over land access are likely to increase in the near future between local residents, and between local residents, immigrants, logging companies, and administrative authorities. Measures should be taken to reinforcing sustainable land use (improved crop varieties), to reinforcing local awareness of the land classification system, and to securing land tenure rights.