Cassava Cultivation in Kalahari Woodland in Western Zambia: With Special Reference to the Response of Immigrants in an Arid Area of the Kalahari Sands

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Cassava is one of the most important crops in Africa. Although it grows in various environments throughout Africa, previous reports on cassava cultivation have been limited to cultivation in humid regions. In this paper, I present an example of cassava cultivation in a dry environment, focusing on western Zambia, a part of the Kalahari sands, which spread over southern Africa. The people who cultivate cassava in western Zambia are immigrants from eastern Angola, including Mbunda, Luchazi, Chokwe, and Luvale. They practice shifting cultivation in Kalahari woodland and cultivate cassava for both subsistence and sale.

The cassava cultivation in this area is characterized by some peculiar forms of management. First, the people grow cassava at various stages of development in different fields. Second, they plant cassava stems using selected cuttings. These cuttings are normally 100 cm long and are of good quality, since they are still young. These practices are based on the farmers’ recognition of the drought-resistance mechanisms of cassava. Furthermore, the people selectively cultivate a bitter type of cassava because it is more drought resistant than the sweet cassava. These characteristics of cassava cultivation can be explained as resulting from the immigrants’ adaptation to their new lives, based on assessing the characteristics of each cassava variety according to the requirements of the new environment they have encountered. This has enabled them to practice continuous cassava cultivation, harvest commercially valuable cassava, and maintain sufficient production despite the severe environment.