

# **HOMEGARDENS AND LANDRACE: THE PROCESS OF MAINTAINING BANANA DIVERSITY IN BUGANDA, CENTRAL UGANDA**

SATO Yasuaki

Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University, Kyoto 606-8501, Japan

E-mail: y-sato@jambo.africa.kyoto-u.ac.jp

Buganda in central Uganda is well known for its highly developed banana-based livelihood systems. People name, cultivate, and use several hundred kinds of landrace for their staple food and beer. This paper examines the process of maintaining banana diversity by focusing on homegardens in this region.

The garden has a relatively closed nature of management. A household of a husband, a wife and their children keeps each garden. Children learn from their parents how to distinguish each banana landrace, while adults continue to accumulate knowledge on the appearance of fruits and leaves, the ecological characteristics of each landrace, and varietal changes in their own gardens. Their recognition of landrace diversity reflects their individual experiences in their gardens. New landraces are introduced to their gardens through inheritance from parents, chance encounters with unknown varieties, and exchanges between friends.

Another characteristic of these gardens is the longevity and continuity of management. Banana is a big vegetative plant and people care for the plants successively over these generations. People can harvest bunches many times without needing to transplant, and are able to identify each plant in their gardens by genealogy as well as by appearance. I made a distribution map of all the banana plants in a garden that were over 35 years old, and asked the head of the household landrace names and his memories of each plant. His answers made it clear that the farmers retain a variety of information on each plant (e.g., landrace name, current position, original position, and year of plantation). They are able to point out spatial positions in their gardens by relating them to their memories of specific plants. Some people even plant bananas with the express purpose of remembering events.

Banana gardens in Buganda are unique places enabling farmers' knowledge and the genetic diversity of plants to interlink and accumulate. Banana diversity is maintained through farmers' long acquaintance with their plants.

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