

Have Development Projects Have Changed the Livelihood in Rural Africa?

—A Case of Basketry in Northeastern Ghana—

2nd year student

Thai Field School

Research Area: Republic of Ghana

USHIKU Haruka

Key words: Rural development, Poverty reduction, Fair trade, Basketry, Social enterprise, Northern Ghana

Background and objectives of the research

The people in the Upper East Region, Ghana, have been engaged in the various craft activities. N village, the author's research village, and its surrounding area are famous for basketry since the late 19th century. Until now, basket weaving is one of the most important livelihood activities for the people in this area.

Recently, basket work in this area has faced a drastic change. Actors, such as weavers, designers, and “middlemen” of baskets have experienced the change of distribution channel, the price, and other things since 1980s, when international companies stepped into basket business. In addition, various development projects targeted for basketry have been launched under such development slogans as “poverty alleviation” and “capacity building”. Moreover, with the current international movement to promote fair-trade and “social enterprise”, the price of baskets weaved by the “rural poor” have increased to unprecedented level.

These changes in basket sector have influenced to reshape livelihood activities of the people in N village. They have not only increased the economic importance of basket weaving, but also transformed livelihood strategies as a whole: decrease of out-migration to the southern Ghana, decline of dry-season irrigation farming, rise of local basket brokers, and so on.

In this study, the author purports to analyze 1) how the basket sector in Northeastern Ghana has been changed in the influence of the international economy and developmental activities, and 2) how the people in this area has transformed their livelihood activities in the midst of such changes. This case study shows that the “rural poor” have flexibly adapted to the macroeconomic change according to the various resources each household has. It also suggests that there will be an alternative way to the current development projects, which seems to have “over-protective” measures. It will also reconsider the role of “social entrepreneurs”.

Picture 1: Everyday, people -women, men, the young, the elder- get together under a big tree and weave baskets.





Picture 2(left): *Genka*, a basket used for the *pito* (local beer) brewing, is the model of fashion baskets that is currently weaved for international market.

Picture 3(right): A donkey cart piled up with baskets. On Bolgatanga(Regional capital of the Upper East) market day, which is held once in three days, middlemen buy beautiful baskets at the entrance of N village.

