This method of clearing fields, called "slash and burn" is a method of agriculture primarily used by tribal communities for subsistence farming (farming to survive). Humans have practiced this method for about 12,000 years, ever since the time when humans stopped hunting and gathering and started to stay put and grow crops. Today up to 7% of the world's population uses slash and burn agriculture.

While fire helps enhance crops and grasses for pasture, the fires also produce smoke that degrades air quality. In addition to pollution produced by agricultural fires is the possibility of deforestation, erosion, nutrient loss, and possible extinction of species. If a particular area is the only one that holds a particular species, slashing and burning could result in extinction for that species.

In central Africa, the agricultural burning season usually runs May through August as evidenced in this series of satellite shots of Africa taken in 2005 depicting fires across the continent. MODIS 2005 Africa Fire Season

Provided by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center