ECONOMIC HISTORY
OF WEST AFRICA

Edited by

PROF G.O. OGUNREMI
Department of History, Lagos State University

DR E.K. FALUYI
Department of History, University Of Lagos

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PREFACE
Certainly, this is a long-awaited book. When Professor Tony Hopkins published his monumental study, *An Economic History of West Africa* in 1973, he regretted that only a few scholars had responded quickly to Allan. McPhee’s call in his *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa*, published as early as 1926, for a more detailed study of the economy of West Africa. Although some works had been done, it was not until after almost half a century that Hopkins responded to McPhee’s call. Neither did Ekundare publish his work, *An Economic History of Nigeria*, until that same year, 1973.

Since 1973, no serious single book on the economic history of West Africa has been published. Indeed, nobody can think of that type of solo effort today without running into problems. Nor is it all that easy to find a responsible publisher to take interest in publishing tertiary education textbooks. The quick return on their investment is the major consideration, of the publisher in accepting to finance any publication.

Hence many of them prefer publishing Primary and Secondary books, if their attention is not attracted by well-to-do speech-makers and affluent autobiographical writers. Thus, there is virtually no interest shown by Publishers in well researched special works.

In other words, a potential author faces numerous obstacles. One remedy to the problem is to work together on a book in order to ensure its high scholarship and authority. The other solution is to be undaunted in one’s effort to look for a creditable publisher. All in all, one lesson that this book has taught is that scholars must not-relent in their efforts to get books published for the present and future generation of students in our higher educational institutions.

When the chapters of this book were given to the contributors; the course outline in Economic History of West Africa in our universities were carefully examined and well covered. This is because unlike the earlier books, the aim was to make the book directly relevant to our students. So right from the pre-colonial era, there is no major theme that is not fully exhausted.

More importantly, the contributors have been carefully selected not only because they are brilliant scholars in their own right, they are also teachers who depend on their experience in handling their chapters. There are few over lappings here and there. This cannot be completely
eliminated in a work of this nature which covers long period and different themes. This in itself demonstrates the continuity in West African Economic History. Where such occur, these have been used for
different purposes, to make the work comprehensive and achieve unity. This has in no small way enhanced the high quality of the book.

As far as we know, this is the most authoritative single book on the Economic History of West Africa today. Even before Hopkins books has the problem of being imported into the country, it has become less relevant to our universities new syllabus on the course. In terms of wide coverage and detailed exposition, this book has come to satisfy our academic needs.

We therefore recommend with confidence this book not only to our students of economic history in the universities but to all historians and indeed, to general readers ign the whole of the enlightened world. In modern days, economic history has become the focus of our study. It is a window through which we can pip into and reflect on our economic past. Students of history, economic and business departments who study the subject find it very analytical intriguing and most academically rewarding.

The subject has become compulsory for many students and a `must1 for all educated people. It is only by studying economic history that an economic planner, an economic policy maker, a company director can make adequate decisions predicated on the experience of the past.

Although each .chapter is a complete treatise, the chapters must be read by linking one with the other. It must also be noted that although each contributor takes responsibility for his chapter, there has been an effort to make cross references for a better understanding. Lastly, we want to stress that notes and references are limited to few important ones and are deliberately kept at the end .of each chapter to facilitate a smooth reading of each chapter. The notes and references are, however necessary for a better understanding of and further reading. Finally, by this publication a challenge is posed. It is hoped that another edition of this book.will be out soon. Then it must still be updated in line with the syllabus andJn pursuit of academics according to the orientation, aspiration and expectation of future readers.

G.O. Ogunremi, E.K. Faluyi

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Whereas by the first half of the 18th century all the countries of the world relied on agricultural pursuits for bread winning, towards the end of that century the transformation of human activities from farming endeavours to progressive industrial output had achieved striking success in Britain and the wind of change subsequently blew over Europe, North America and Japan in the far east. The West African Economy, just like the economies of the other sections of the under-developed world remained agricultural and traditional. This was the situation throughout the 19th century down to the 20th.1

Of the factors of production, land was the only one that seemed to be in abundance. It was unimaginable that a prospective farmer would have any difficulty obtaining land for his use.2 While he did not have outright ownership of it, the farmer was entitled to whatever family land was available in his place of birth. If he migrated to some other area, he could assume temporary tenancy over such land that he needed or he could at least function as a share-cropper. Although there was hardly any technological knowledge with which to redeem waterlogged or otherwise unsuitable land resources, farmland was plentiful enough not to create a constraint on development in pre-colonial West Africa. A major explanation for this was that population growth had not come to such a high dimension as it subsequently did after early decades of the 20th century. The pressure on land was therefore manageable and even though land fertility could not be replenished because of inadequate knowledge of attainable manure, virgin areas or scantily exhausted zones existed for people to use.

Intensive agriculture featuring definite rotational order for crops could not be adopted because knowledge of scientific agriculture was lacking. With diminishing yields from a parcel of land under concentrated cultivation, the farmer captured the signal that it was time to move elsewhere. But this was no shifting cultivation as such. The next area of activity was almost invariably contiguous to the former area and quite often what happened was spatial extension of cultivation rather than shifting cultivation which presupposes a break from the existing frontier of farmland.

But if land was not a constraint on development, labour was.3 It was indeed because the supply of labour was inadequate that land did not constitute a problem. For if the labour situation has been more elastic, the injection of more hands into the farming arena would in all probability have over stretched the available land resources, especially as technological competence was too low to enable the redemption of useless land and the enrichment of worn-out fields and estates. Labour shortage was probably a reflection of the prevalent low life expectancy. For one thing, infant mortality rate was high and life span generally short. Another reason is that health care was so poor that labour productivity in general could not be high. Although there was nothing to suggest that the birth rate was low, the fact of high death rate could substantially negate the possible gains from rising birth rate. Indeed, a major factor that sustained people’s interest in prolonged human procreation was the uncertainty as to whether children would survive their parents. Perhaps the enduring effects of such fear explain the reluctance of some local people to accept birth control devices in these days of modernization.4
It must really have been both fashionable and desirable, for keep large families to increase the chances for a fair number beating death to it until a ripe age would be attained. Apart from the need to keep women longer in child bearing, or in fact, the practice by women and their husbands to continue child rearing till it would be impossible for them to produce, there was the vogue, among men, for polygamy apparently to have as many children as possible and indeed to use both the labour of the wives and their children particularly in the busy periods of planting and harvesting. That seemed to be their solution to the problem of labour shortage which featured prominently in the traditional West African economy and even till now. Although the greater need these days is for middle level and highly skilled manpower, employers have also been heard complaining about inadequate labour supply even at the unskilled level of personnel.

Family labour was convenient, not only because it was relatively readily available, but also because it was easily disciplined. For one thing, the extended family system had inherent sanction which compelled co-operation with the family head if not obedience to him. For another, it was the responsibility of each of the wives of the farmer to ensure that her children worked enthusiastically for their father to earn her as well as them his favour for which the other wives were deemed to be competing for. Besides, since the old man’s legacy would, in the end, be shared by his children according to their maternal groupings, children’s labour could also be administered and controlled through their mothers. Unlike a modern labour force quite often bedeviled by constant industrial relation crisis, family-based labour tended to operate with relative harmony.

Similar industrial tranquility seemed to feature both with the mutually transacted labour and the communally recruited workmen in the traditional economy. For the former, people in the same age grade organized themselves to clear one another’s farm together by rotation until the circle was completed when each member’s job would have been done. The latter case of communal labour arrangement often involve the whole community in public service like sinking a well or erecting a structure such as the temple for housing the village shrine. The chief’s town crier would summon able bodied men to such duty while the women and the children might be busy preparing the food with which to feed the returning workers.

Outside the above mentioned categories of labour transaction, involuntary service was used. Young fellows who would have been pawned by their parent’s to guardian’s creditors served their masters for an agreed period of time, others were domestic slaves who must minister unto the needs of their overlords until such a time that they could pay off their ransom. They were used both as farm workers and as carriers of trade goods in an economy in which wage labour was hardly known.

The need for labour in the traditional West African economy of the 19th century seemed to have been particularly great, perhaps much greater than the 20th century situation. Whereas some labour saving devices were introduced in the 20th century with the coming of imported machinery, such opportunities did not exist earlier on. All productive activities that had to be effected were only done by men and women with oody and blood. But the supply of men and women as labour for economic endeavours substantially depended on the size of the population. However, population growth in absolute terms does not necessarily mean an immediate rise in labour supply. Since it takes some thirteen to fifteen years for the newly born to participate in
economic efforts, chat gestation period had direct impact on labour supply and manpower development.

This was specially relevant for the West African economy of the 19th century. For the slave trading activities of the 17th and 18th centuries had robbed the different West African communities of the 19th century of the bulk of their able bodied men and women of productive age. The older people and the children that were left for the most part were more of dependents than bread winners. Just as this situation imposed serious limitations on labour supply it also adversely affected the growth of markets since those shipped away would have been both producers and consumers. The loss would have been total if some liberated slaves had not returned towards the middle of the 19th century to enrich socio-economic activities in places like Abeokuta and Lagos. The liberated slaves did not however, return to all those areas that had lost them.

Unlike labour which was badly needed although it was in short supply, capital which was also scarce was not nearly as critical a need. While it was true that the farmer had to keep some seed for future planting instead of selling or consuming everything, and it was also true that the craftsmen and the traders had to set aside some wealth for the creation of further wealth, the states of economic production in the traditional West African economy were hardly heavily capitalized. The processes were invariably somewhat rudimentary and the cost simple and cheap for the most part.

Some of the utilities that were created did not even enter monetary reckoning. Consider, for example, the case of a woman who reared her friend’s she-goat in order to share with her the young goats that the mother goat would subsequently produce after sustained care. Or the case of another who pounded yam for her neighbour so that she could take a part of it home for herself and family. Especially, as standard currency did not exist, substitute currency like iron rod, rolls of cloth, bottles of gin and other forms of commodity currency did present complex problems of conversion and divisibility. While cowries and the manilla were more definite and consequently more convenient for reckoning, the fact that they represented small units of value made them almost equally as cumbersome.

It was because the known means of exchange in the traditional economy represented small units of value that slaves were sometimes used as currency for sumptuous payments. If men of wealth engaged in long distance journeys, a convenient way of repaying the hospitality of their hosts at major points along the route was to give away one or two slaves from the huge retinue. The work they would do for their new masters must be more than adequate compensation for the resources that might have been expended on the feeding and entertainment, of the travelling royal or noble party. Similarly, bridal payments among aristocrats were sometimes made in slaves, their number being determined by the wealth and fame of the bridegroom or his family and the prestige associated with the bride or her family.

Such wealth that existed in the family was easily passed down from generation to generation provided economic calamity did not befall the family. Those who were fortunate to be born into wealthy families thus had a vantage position from which to start the race of life. At the aggregate level, communities which succeeded in accumulating wealth reflected opulence in the
appearance of their dwelling houses and their temples for the shrines that represented the various divinities they worshiped. In the coastal areas, commercial relationship with European merchants introduced the local dignitaries to foreign furniture and household utensils. As the 19th century progressed, imported textiles and liquor became the other indicators of affluence among aristocratic families.

The enviable distinctions of better placed families in the northern communities, on other hand, were the possession of horses and the accumulation of ornaments. The latter was worn around the body in place of cloth, modest people making do with scanty layers while the highly placed ones were covered in thick rounds of costly choice. Prosperous people provided for the feeding of the less fortunate ones who in turn stayed around the former and ran their errands so as to deserve further provisioning. They functioned more or less like capital since they could be utilized by their mentors for the creation additional wealth.

Similar retainers were to be found around valiant, victorious and fortunate soldiers in 19th century Yorubaland for the internecine warfare that featured there. Ibadan probably had the greatest single concentration of such people who fought the master’s wars, farmed for them in-between wars and carried their merchandise for sale in the markets. Such services earned them their keeps and when war booties occasionally came, there would be even more benefits to share. Here again, these retainers served virtually as capital for they created utilities which also brought forth productive resources. In other West African communities where war retainers did not exist in the 19th century, the domestic slaves which most wealthy men kept functioned also more or less like capital. They were slotted into production efforts or confined to household duties depending on the wealth of their masters at any point in time. Unlike their counterparts employed in mines and plantations in the New World by racially arrogant and unsentimental task masters, the domestic slaves who served in local communities sometimes rose to positions of prominence taking charge of subordinate provinces and administering justice for and on behalf of the potentate.

All told, inadequate capital supply did not appear to constitute a constraint on the development of the traditional economy of West Africa in the first half of the 19th century. However, with the escalation of European commercial relationship with West Africa in the second half of the 19th century, specifically in the era of commodity commerce that eventually superseded the slave trade, the demand for capital heightened. Local merchants who wished to serve as middlemen between the European traders and their West African counterparts had to depend on grants, of credit from their foreign es. It was indeed this credit advance device of the so-called trust system that ed for the survival of indigenous commercial enterprises of the late 19th century.

The giving and taking of trust however tended to tie an African middlemen to a particular European merchant creditor who, if unscrupulous, might cheat by offering low payment for traded goods from his debtor who must supply him to honour the agreement. Even though there were courts of equity established to settle attendant and disputes between the European merchants and the African middlemen, the latter could defend their own cause by taking double
trusts. This was the practice by which an African middleman took trust from more than one creditor, once concealed from the other so that trade goods could be sent to the giver of higher price while the other could be disappointed until the situation changed.

Because the middlemen played the role of bringing the hinterland commerce to meet the Europeans on the coast, they were vital to the production and exchanged processes which featured. Because much of the inferior remained uncharted for most of the pre-colonial period, the European traders could not confidently hope to penetrate what was still regarded as the white mans grave. Even though the 1854 Niger Mission was a success and Dayspring sailed in 1857 with the intention of commercializing the Niger water ways, the African middlemen could still not be dislodged from playing their traditional role of linking inland commerce with the coastal market.18 They shared the local peculiarities. of the communities they were dealing with and also endeavoured to understand the ways of their foreign partners either because some of them were mulattes or because prolonged fraternization had made them familiar with cultural duality. Therefore, they became well placed to perform the role that really earned them whatever profits that accrued to them from their trading activities.

Even then, the European partners and their metropolitan economy benefited far more in the commercial relationship. Right from the era of the slave trade when they took away productive labour resources in the form of able bodied men and women in exchange for perishable and ephemeral goods like looking glasses, rum and tobacco to the subsequent epoch of commodity commerce, their profit margin was high perhaps exceeding the 50 per cent mark, thus making such overseas ventures more attractive than home enterprises. The one factor that seemed to limit their propensity to profiteering was competition among themselves. This sometimes reached cut-throat proportions and it was to check the destructive tendency that made George Taubman Goldie effected the amalgamation of the four major British trading companies in the Niger area in 1879.

In spite of the monopolistic practices of the Royal Niger Company, the gains accruing to them from their commercial activities fell short of the profit margin that the merchants had enjoyed in the era of the slave trade when men had been exchanged for goods. rose main attraction to the African consumers had been more of novelty incentive an actual need.20 Indeed, slave trading activities tended to disturb the practice of local crafts which had produced durable and fashionable textile materials among other trade goods. Whereas the stoppage of the slave trade brought about relative stability of social and economic life in the local communities, it brought a period of acute anxiety to dealers and investors in slave ventures who had to adjust to changing economic possibilities in the region.

It was not as if the abolition of the slave trade produced an economic revolution in pre-colonial West Africa as such. In reality, the abolition process was more gradual than drastic. Although the British parliament had by 1807 passed an act abolishing the slave trade in the British empire and went ahead in 1833 to pass another act stopping slavery in the British empire these were more or less paper declarations. The African middlemen who had noted the British as the major European participant in slave commerce did not believe that the British sponsored abolition could be a permanent exercise. Some probably felt that the British only wanted to control slave importation to the New World their current stock would dwindle after which active importation would be
resumed.

Both the African middlemen and the slave dealers from other European countries needed to be seriously persuaded to accept abolition. The latter probably felt that the British were at that point in time against slave trade because the nascent industrialisation in that country required overseas markets for manufactured goods which could not be realised if the disrupting tendencies of human exportation remained. These other countries still needed the plantation economy which could only be sustained by slave labour. Even though the British positioned the naval squadron along the Guinea coast to tract down persistent slavers and liberate their victims, only minimal impact could be achieved as long as the African middlemen had clandestine buyers to deal with. They kept watch on the movements of the anti-slavers and guided their clients along safe paths of escape with their cargoes.

As late as 1861 and beyond, complaints were still rife on the persistence of slave traching activities in Lagos and other parts of the Guinea Coast. When towards the end of the 19th century abolition really took off and local economic activities produced commodities for export rather than human beings, some economic adaptation had to take place. Whereas in the era of the slave trade only a few African traders had benefitted economically while the rest were either actual or potential candidates for sale or feared to be so, commodity commerce involved far more popular participation. Even though barrels of palm oil were eventually shipped from the coast, the real production at the local level was in small units by individual families of farmers.

In other respects, however, continuity rather than discontinuity featured. The coast remained the arena of commerce, African middlemen met the Europeans there with commodity commerce just as they had done in the era of the slave trade when the articles of trade were human beings. Commercial organisation was virtually unchanged with a relay of agencies and inter-community links and connections. Convenient currency in the form of notes and coins was yet to come and so the old and cumbersome means of exchange like cowries, manilla and commodity currency which had been used in the slave trade era’ continued to feature. Transportation facilities remained rudimentary, human porterage predominantly featuring with pack animals and canoes assisting in savannah and riverine areas respectively.

Unlike the coming of the cocoa industry to the economy of late 19th century Gold Coast in which structural changes were noticeable in that economy down to the 20th century, the changes that the Nigerian economy witnessed in the second half of the 19th century with the stoppage of the slave trade seemed to have been more evolutionary than revolutionary. Despite the huge sensation around the slave trade, some amount of commodity commerce took place along with it. This in itself was not strange. Afterall, commodity commerce predated the trade in slaves and logically survived it. Even though the basis of commodity commerce was by and large dislodged by the unsettling exportation of human beings, the latter did not take place with the same tempo in all the regions all the time.

Properly considered, economic activities in pre-colonial West Africa should be seen as a continuum and not in terms of definitive watersheds which will be really arbitrary. Although crafts and commerce engaged the attention of some people, by far the greatest single
concentration of human activities centred on agriculture. Just as there were hill and valley farmers, the plains and the swamps also supported agriculture in their own way. There were both nearby and distant farms. For the former, garden-like farms would be kept around the settlements for the cultivation of more immediate food crops like maize, yams, cassava and vegetables. The latter could be four or more kilometres away from the village while extended farms could be quite some distance away, sometimes around another village or another town altogether. Such farms would be for both food and cash crops but more particularly for the latter.

The farther the/ arm the greater the need for establishing a temporary home in its neighbourhood so that the farmer and his working family could work for several days away from home and the attendant social demands. Particularly during planting and harvesting seasons a lot of effort would be needed on the farms and considerable urgency would be required. For instance, all planting should be completed before the rains stopped for a while just as all harvesting should be effected before insects and rodents eroded the basis of the farmers’ hope.

Apart from cultivation, the farmers of the different West African communities engaged in the domestication of animals and birds while those in the savannah zones raised livestock and those in the riverine areas practised fishing. Generally, the pattern was to respond to the environmental challenges within which the people found themselves. Whereas women only assisted their husbands in farm work in most areas of Northern Nigeria and the south west, their counterparts in the south east kept farms of their own and competed with their men somewhat. This distinction did not, however, mean that certain women were more hard-working than some others. It very likely indicated that where commercial and other opportunities became readily available to women, they were too busy over them to concentrate on farming.

The entrepreneurship required for production in the traditional economy of West Africa was individually based for the most part. Collective farms did not exist. Every farmer managed his own cultivation. He smiled when the harvest was good and grumbled when the yields brought discouragement. If the rains delayed beyond the planting season, the seed and seedlings would be ruined and yet there was no insurance against any loss. If heavy rains spoiled otherwise good harvest, the farmer had to bear the brunt of it unaided. It could even be locust invasion devastating both the shrub and its fruit, everything passed as the farmer’s problem.

If the farmer in the traditional West African economy had organised his productive resources together with those of one or more others to form a formidable agricultural enterprise, it would have been realistic to expect some protection against total destruction. At least, it could have been possible for the group to diversify their farming activities, with the result that if accident befell one sector, the other sectors would have earned enough to tide the members over the period of economic emergency. Just as co-operation would have enhanced production, it would also have aided the marketing and distribution of farm products.

This is not to say, however, that the mechanics of such collectivization would have been easy to work out. The legal issues involved would have presented enormous problems just as the accounting implications might have over stretched the mental capacity of illiterate communities. It is known for instance, that the contemporary attempts at co-operative farming have not been a simple operation. But there can be no doubt that if such an organisation became a reality the
traditional economy would have benefitted positively. If for example, the fishermen in a locality could combine or co-operate, it should be feasible for them to increase their production in good weather and thus provide for the rainy day through well organized methods of fish preservation. If the blacksmiths of the vicinity could pool their talents together, they might be able to innovate and thus vary their production processes for the enrichment of the markets they served. Such vocational co-operation that existed among craftsmen in the traditional West African economy appeared secret and prestigious through attempts to standardize the training of apprentices and the insistence on certain levels of competence and dexterity before the newcomers could be certified fit to practise the particular trade or vocation.

It would appear that there were no sharp difference in the levels of economic growth attained by the various communities making up pre-colonial West Africa. Since they were neither isolated nor self-sufficient, cultural and economic ties existed between them and within each group it would seem that the gap between the poor and the rich was not conspicuous. The face-to-face relationship associated with village communal living would seem to be evident rather than the subsequent individualism of cosmopolitan habitation. Even in the more urbanised Yoruba areas, the idea of being the keeper of one’s neighbour had foundation in the notion of common blood, common birth and common brotherhood enshrined in the Oduduwa legend. The open nature of Hausaland was itself a factor that afforded common association and intermingling of people in the northern zone of the region while the presence of Muslim preachers and itinerant traders facilitated inter-community links and connections.

Market centres promoted free movements of people east of the Niger and across to other West African communities. These were fanning communities for the most part and so inter-group relations proceeded on the basis of identical responses to similar environmental challenges. Although it is not being argued that contrasts did not exist here and there from time to time, the main features seemed to be generally less varied than were subsequently noticeable when the traditional economy started to react to modernizing influences like wheeled transportation, portable currency, wage employment and western education.

All the same, a static notion of the traditional economy is certainly not apt. Nor is it right to see the traditional economy merely as subsistence economy. Granted that all forms of productive activities would be geared towards the satisfaction of basic and intimate needs initially, no matter what culture area or level of civilization is involved, the horizon would not be so limited ultimately. The demand from the outside for locally produced goods and services still needed to be met if only to have something in exchange for other goods and services that would be required locally but were only produced elsewhere.

Human activities in pre-colonial West Africa must have been virile or the rising population would have perished from starvation. For it must have required quite a dynamic economy to support the pre-colonial kingdoms and empires of the sub-region. Indeed, the early travellers to West Africa reported on flourishing commercial enterprises within and without the territory and how certain goods produced in West Africa found their way across the Sahara to the Mediterranean region and even beyond. Rather than acting as a barrier, the Sahara functioned more or less as a bridge between the west and north of the African continent, making it possible for trading centres like Kumasi and Kano to assume the characteristics of Arab markets while
still retaining the semblance of their milieu. On the other hand, kolanuts, ivory and other forest products featured up north thus confirming the prevalence of inter-community commercial transaction in pre-colonial West Africa.

Each spatially limited activity circle or community not only ministered unto the needs of its citizens, it also took care of related external interests both of contiguous areas and much beyond. Just as commodities moved, men and ideas accompanied them. The Diula and Hausa were particularly well known for their itinerancy in the savannah zone while men and women from other ethnic groups down south were in varying degrees similarly exposed. Since the concept of rigid national boundaries only came with colonialism, such frontiers that there were hardly hindered the free movement of people in the pre-colonial days. Although certain wars were fought and disturbing insecurity would have accompanied them, the periods between these wars must have afforded peace-time inter-group commercial relations. It was even possible for some amount of commercial links and connections to exist between communities on the one hand while warfare might also feature on the other hands at the same time. There can be no doubt that the bread-and-butter aspect of life would demand attention whatever the situation.

Saying that the traditional economy went beyond subsistence to accommodate exchange does not however mean that proper exchange economy featured in the pre-colonial period. Exchange transactions had to be limited by such factors like cumbersome currency, the menacing problem of inadequate transportation and communication facilities and some other obstacles. Although it is true that some of these problems have since received attention, economic policy makers still have quite a task on hand even in this generation. The point to note, however is that the traditional economy of pre-colonial West Africa was in reality not as rudimentary as to be described as subsistence economy.

The communities which made up pre-colonial West Africa by and large diversified their economic activities. Apart from occupational differentiation on the basis of age and sex, various vocations existed here and there while some zones were centres of excellence for particular crafts and industries like dyeing, leather arts, iron works, pottery arid calabash carving. Indeed, it was because occupational roles were differentiated that apprenticeship was formally served to gain mastery of particular skills in the practice of certain crafts until competence and certified. Apart from apprentices who still needed to gain dexterity by passing graded exercises, there were journeymen who had to work under more seasoned and better equipped craftsmen until they too became properly established. Full fledged practitioners were expected to collaborate and co-operate with their vocational colleagues through membership of craft-guilds which were organisations designed to promote the professional and social interest of their folk and folk and protect the public from the exploitation of charlatans.

The point being made, however, is not that the history of human activities in pre-colonial West Africa was one of neat glory and efficient performance. If that had been true, colonialism would probably have no chance at all. It is equally absurd to present the picture of the singing, drumming and dancing of indolent indigenous people of pre-colonial West Africa who were elevated from their lethargy and slumber through the external factor of European contact and the imposition of taxation by foreign rule. Considered rightly, it was for the turgidity of the traditional economy of West Africa that the region attracted European visitors and sustained their
interest.

Human activities in pre-colonial West Africa should be studied from a realistic point of view seeing the efforts of the people towards bread winning in the context of the environment within which they operated and analysing the salient challenges to which they were responding with an assessment of their success or failure as the case may be. While it is useful to examine the various aspects of human endeavours in the traditional economy, some of these can only receive scanty treatment because of the state of the sources. For instance, the historical reconstruction of craft practice in 19th century West Africa is an uphill task because prolonged neglect has adversely affected its survival while the recent attempts at modernization and industrialization have completely changed the emphasis. But the agricultural sector is different, and this makes an interesting study. Much of the old form of agricultural practice has survived and the ecological conditions which are still visible provide some insight into how the fields have become what they are.

More than anything else the factor that sustained agricultural practice in West Africa has been the initiative of the farmer. Although unlettered, the traditional West African farmer had observed the changing seasons over the years and from his investigation he could reasonably predict the pouring of the rains and the coming of sunshine. He thus determined the start and end of planting seasons and harvested the fruit of his labour when it was time to do so. Unless he had service obligation to some creditor through one or the other known systems of pawning or actual enslavement, he was 'either self-employed or he worked for his parents till he would come of age. The issue of idleness at work must really be foreign since his input was positively related to his output and he naturally wanted the latter sumptuously increased.

It was for this that he regarded the sun and the rain being givers of life to plants and animals as distinct divinities in the pantheon. It was important to gain their blessing so that farm efforts would be rewarding and the family adequately fed and clothed with additional provision made against emergencies like famine and locust invasion. He therefore had to work very hard using the cutlass and the hoe to prepare the ground for cultivation. Although he could afford to take things easy outside the planting and harvesting seasons when bumper activities would not be required on the farms, he must race for time to see that his crops took advantage of the rains from one season to another. Even in the so-called period of light activities on the farm he might be busy in the market selling some of the crops he would have stored.

Before the days of agricultural schools and experimental stations in West Africa, the traditional farmer did learn through trial and error and succeeded in solving farm problems as they arose and thus increased the yield from his labour. He had learnt to allow worn out parcels of land some time to get replenished while adjacent under-used areas or otherwise suitable land would be utilized. Although he did not consciously apply manure to his farm, he got some result in this direction by laying out weeds in the furrows where they would rot and give back their material to the earth. He saved some of his harvest as seed for another season and took care to give every crop the special treatment it required like mulching yam heaps or training the yam vines or thinning maize, or trimming the oil palm tree or putting sand ceiling on groundnut creepers.

It was because the traditional West African economy was virile and turgid that tangible
responses were made to the challenges of modernization from the late 19th century to the 20th. Indigenous potentates who in their efforts at state formation and consolidation had engaged in local alliances and alignments sought to side with in-coming European interests for their own advantage. Although it would seem that they were collaborating with the invading authorities, they were in reality **rationally following what** they considered to be in their best interest. Trade and politics had to go hand in gloves since an impoverished state was known to toe a weak power. links and connections had to be established with as many neighbours as possible while diplomatic commercial relationships were maintained with communities across the immediate frontier.

The traditional economy was dynamic enough to accommodate positively nascent structural changes. When for instance the coming of cocoa cultivation and the re-activation of kolanut production late in the 19th century placed a higher value on land, in that such tangible trees became legacies which could pass from father to son, the old concept of communal ownership of land gradually altered in favour of a more progressive land tenure arrangement that recognized the need to preserve land for generations yet unborn while at the same time allowing lawyers, and in the absence, letter writers to prepare documents purporting to convey parcels of land from hand to hand.32

In reality, the traditional economy in West Africa served its purpose. Whereas modern transportation was yet to come, the volume of transactions in the period seemed to have been effectively managed by such means that were available. Whereas the traditional monetary system imposed serious limitations on people, the scope of economic activities was not as wide as to heighten the impact of the constraints. Even though wage labour opportunities hardly existed, production and distribution efforts were pursued vigorously within the context of self-employment and in relation to voluntary and involuntary labour transactions. All told, the late 19th century stage in West Africa was set for the coming of the railway which ushered in wheeled transportation in the sub-region, introduced a wage and credit culture and stimulated economic activities in general.

Notes
1. See, for example, R Robson DA. Lury, (eds.) The Economies of Africa, Evanston, 1969.
3. G.K. Helleiner, op. cit. p. 55
4. Apart from **the Roman Catholics who opposed birth control** on religious grounds, some people see it as a political device to peg population growth in the so-called Third World to prevent a possible rising of the disadvantaged peoples.
5. Unlike the Christian preference for monogamy, traditional religionists and Muslim openly counsel polygamy.
6. There is the additional problem that such labour that exists seems to be over-priced.


11. Compare with the now proverbial visit of Mansa Musa to Mecca during which his free spending caused inflation in the host country.

12. E. Bolaji Idowu has argued that the various Nigerian communities worshipped one God, the deity called different names but that he was approached through intermediaries called divinities providing the base for the pyramidal diffused monotheism. See his October lectures.


18. K.O. Dike, _op. cit._ pp. 61-64; 169-172.


20. Compare, for example, the fragile nature of unported textiles with the far more lasting locally woven materials.

21. Eric Williams in _Capitalism and Slavery_, London, 1964 was perhaps the first to reveal that the British anti-slave trade campaign was well timed to a period when slave dealing ceased to be necessary for the British economy.

22. It was not as if these African slavers were wicked to their kinsmen as such. For one thing, slave dealing was not a moral issue, it was an economic reality, and it had been so with them for
a long time. For another, whereas the British abolitionist tried to persuade European slave traders to give it up, the attempt was to force African slave traders to abandon the covational practice.

23. The claim by Britain that the slave trade persisted around Lagos by 1861 was the official justification for the cession of Lagos.
24. This was only introduced in British West Africa by 1912 with the institution of the West African Currency Board. See J. B. Lyons *The West African Currency Board*, London, 1912.


32. More of this development featured with the coming of the 20th century.

The Structure of Pre-Colonial Economy
Introduction

For a thorough understanding of the present economy of West Africa there is a need to study the past economy. The present mode of cultivation, production of agricultural and non-agricultural commodities and distribution of all types of products are all entrenched in the past economy. For example, the basis of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) can be traced to the West African inter-regional trade that had existed hundreds of years before the advent of ECOWAS. That inter-regional trade was even more soundly based than the era of ECOWAS was because some of the economic apparatuses such as the currency were more widely spread. The same cowry shell that was used in Kano could also be spent in Salaga. Since there were no distinct international boundaries as there are today, traders moved freely within West Africa although there were also many local restrictions regarding payment of tolls. Itinerant fishermen, canoe-builders and cultivators were common and were accepted by their hosts.

The structure of the economy in the pre-colonial period comprised in the main agricultural and non-agricultural productions and distributions of various commodities. It also consisted of services. Indeed, each of these themes is so large that a book can be written on it. But here only a chapter has been devoted to it so that it can serve as a basis to the book.

It is pertinent to mention that although West Africa is a large region the themes that are being treated are, by and large, similar in nature and in function. Although there were situational peculiarities which are carefully examined, some generalizations can also be made about the economic activities of the period.

There is a need to explain the pre-colonial period we are dealing with. This dates back to thousands of years before the advent of the colonial administration in West Africa. The period therefore excludes modern countries of West Africa as they were in the colonial era or as they are today. We are dealing with the various peoples of West Africa — the Wolof, Songhay, Hausa, Asante, Mande, Igbo, Yoruba and a host of others. They were the communities who produced commodities in their localities and who did the distribution and consumption. To do this, they relied on traditional techniques and equipment.

We are going to discuss productions under two sub-sections: agricultural and non-agricultural. This categorization should not mean two distinct/unrelated themes. In fact, there was no real specialization of job as known in the more advanced economy. What existed was semi-specialization in which case was either the predominance of supplementary occupation.

Agricultural Products
All over the world agriculture provides assured supplies of food, stimulates a high degree of urbanization and specialization and encourages an increase in population. According to Evans-Pritchards, ”the first revolution that transformed human economy gave man control over his own food supply. Man began to plant, cultivate, and improve by selection of edible grasses, roots, and trees.” This transformation has been aptly described ”neolithic revolution”.

In modern times a community which cannot produce its own food could import as much as necessary making use of modern efficient transportation system. However, among the pre-industrial societies production of food was crucial to the survival of a community. In such a case farming was localized and an incidence of famine could lead to migrations and even death. Indeed, an essential factor for selecting a settlement was availability of rainfall and fertile land suitable for cultivation or grazing. Whenever the soil failed to yield good crops, people resorted to migrations to wherever virgin land was available. In fact, this was a good reason for shifting cultivation.

However, productions of non-edible crops such as cotton was also of great importance. This is because in many parts of West Africa cloth-making was an essential occupation. Indeed, almost all occupations were agro-allied. It meant that all economic activities hung on agriculture: It was hardly necessary to give up agriculture for other economic activities. Apart from long distance trades which took traders far away from their homes, non-agricultural jobs were often undertaken on part-time basis during periods that farmers could relax.

Every agriculture was either developed by a people independently or was introduced by some immigrants. The diffusionist theory and the hamitic hypotheses have been so dominant in the minds of some Africanists that they tend to regard all developments in Africa as foreign. The case of agriculture is not an exception, especially because quite a number of food crops have been introduced into the continent from some other continents. In the case of West Africa, it would appear that agriculture has developed independently in the region. Whatever was borrowed from other areas was an addition to the existing system. This independent growth of agriculture has been strongly supported by some economic historians of Africa. Among them are Murdock, Wrigley and Coursey. In addition, they also argued for its high antiquity.

For example, Murdock, an ethnographer, has argued that agriculture began in the Upper Niger area among the Mande-speaking peoples. He further says that the agriculture must have begun in about 5000 B.C., basing his argument on the cultivation of yam in that area and at that period.7 Wrigley, an economic historians has also argued that certain kinds of agricultural practices originated in West Africa and that the forest was probably an independent centre of its origin.8

Murdock’s assertion is instructive in that he has used the existence of yam as the basis of his argument. Although many food crops were introduced into Africa from other parts of the world, yam is undisputedly an indigenous crop to West Africa. In his article, ”The cultivation and use of yams in West Africa”, Coursey has also noted that ”yam cultivation doubtless evolved independently, probably on essential similar lines in the other main areas of origin”.9

The antiquity of agriculture in West Africa is therefore in no doubt. This is not to say, however, that the period of its development was uniform. If our argument relies heavily on the cultivation of yams it shows that agriculture developed- earlier in places where yams were cultivated than where they were not.

Agricultural production relied totally on availability of suitable land and labour. As these factors have been discussed in chapter one, only their specific significance to agriculture is discussed
here. One important point to note is the land-labour ratio. The land was vast but the people were few. One of the explanations for this was the trans-saharan trade and, on a much greater scale, the trans-atlantic slave trade in which, millions of West Africans were forced out of the region. The result is that land became more abundant in relation to population than it would normally have been.

The abundance of land had an important consequence. It allowed a system of cultivation such that did not encourage restrictive use of land. That system is the shifting cultivation which meant a shift from an already cultivated land that was becoming less productive to a virgin piece of land or a land that had been left fallow for years to regain its nutritive value. This system has been criticised for being wasteful of land, labour and timber. The argument for a wastage of land is not tenable in a situation where it was not a scarce commodity and which hardly had any value. It can only be argued that land was used extensively and not necessarily wasted. Neither was the system wasteful of labour. The clearing of a new piece or land was effected only in the dry season by burning. Even some trees did not have to be felled, they were merely burnt down. The system worked well in the savanna which dominated West Africa because burning was much easier.

No doubt, the system involved a wastage of timber and other forest resources. This statement was, however, not intelligible to the West Africans of the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries because their demand for timber was almost nil; and before the colonial era, European merchants in West Africa hardly demanded timber. Again, the argument of wastage for a valueless commodity does not hold.

Given the situation as it existed in the pre-colonial era, shifting cultivation was perhaps the most effective method that was devised for the maintenance of soil fertility and the eventual regularity of good supply. The system was not necessarily due to conservatism but perhaps to what was regarded as the correct assessment of the prevailing economic situation.

For as long as land was greater in proportion to the population there was no incentive to changes in the cultivation system because of the risk element involved. The system supported the people for centuries; and many civilizations such as the Maya, the Asante and the Yoruba, to mention a few, attained high levels of special organisations through the technique.

The foregoing should not, however, be construed to mean that the West African farmer was averse to changes. It only means that the risk factor involved in the agricultural system was so great that they could not afford the failure of a new technique. Indeed, changes took place as population grew larger. The system had worked perfectly well in low population density areas of less than ten persons per square kilometres. When and where population density became higher, the system was modified. It gave way to rotational bush fallowing in which case the farmer created a regular system of fallows. Unlike the shifting cultivation system where the fallow could last up to thirty years, fallow periods were much shorter - - of the order of about five years — in the rotational bush fallowing.

Another change that occurred was the permanent cultivation. In this system the farmer used his land more intensively resulting in crop rotation. This change was due to two factors: higher
density of population and cash crop cultivation. For social and security reasons people tended to congregate in large numbers in a settlement. That meant a pressure on the available land in the area and that, in turn, meant intensive use of land. The incidence of slave trade further accentuated the need for a large number of people to live in small settlements. Although land pressure occurred among some people, many other areas were empty of people. Therefore when we examine land-man, ratio for the whole of West Africa we discover a low density population. It was then possible for shifting cultivation to continue among some communities while others had land pressure problem to contend with.

The other factor that brought about a change was the cultivation of cash crops; some of which were, in fact, permanent crops. The cultivation of kolanuts, cocoa, coffee and oil palm required permanent occupation of land. That meant a large reduction in the amount of land required for food production. Yet, some other cash crops such as groundnuts, cotton and tobacco were grown on the available land. There was a definite amount of land owned by a community because frontiers existed between one group and another.

The foregoing demonstrates the important point that the West African farmer was responsive to changes. His behaviour in adopting the shifting cultivation might look stupid at first, but it is not difficult to see his rationale and cleverness in adopting or devising this technique. He only seems to have clung to the traditional saying that "necessity is the mother of invention". It would appear that the above dictum was also adopted in the use of implements by the West African farmer. No doubt, the West African agriculture was characterised by low technological levels when compared with agriculture in more advanced countries today. But this comparison is rather tenuous because technological development is usually an answer to a human need. It is futile to talk of an advanced technological development in agriculture in a situation where output was highly limited by the extent of the market which, in turn, was restricted by low purchasing power of the people, transportation system, currency and waste.

Given the situation as it was, the West African farmer relied on simple implements such as the digging stick, the hoe, cutlass and sickle. There were, of course, numerous varieties of each of the implements devised to meet local soils and crops. Morgan and Pugh, for example, have identified nine types of the hoe alone.13 Certainly, they could even be more.

The plough, which played a crucial role in the development of European agriculture from the sixth century onwards and also widely used by the peoples to the west and south of Egypt up to Ethiopia, was not used in West Africa.14 It is possible that the north west Africans knew about the plough through the trans-saharan trade but did not apply it to agriculture for economic reasons. In the savanna areas where the draught beasts were available and where there were no tsetse flies to inhibit the use of beasts, the plough was not used. The main reason that can be adduced for this was in connection with the cost-benefit analysis of the system. The capital and running costs of the plough was probably too high for the economic development.

Any farmer who attempted to use the plough in the forest areas of West Africa might run into serious problems. For effective use of the plough thick bushes had to be cleared and stumps uprooted. But there were no strong iron implements to uproot stumps, even bushes were often cleared by burning. The other problem is the incidence of tsetse flies which inhibit the long use
of beasts. Among other problems connected with the use of the plough were the land tenure system and large-scale productions.

As indicated (see Chapter 3), in West Africa, land was not owned by an individual but by the community. Although land was abundant, anyone who invested heavily on the plough would like to be sure of the ownership of the land. He must also be sure of an extensive area for his permanent use. This takes us to the next problem, large-scale production. For the plough to be economically used, production must be on a large scale. That means a large market for the output. But this market was not there owing to localised production of food crops and problems of the existing transport for long distance trade.

Apart from the production of cotton, kolanuts and palm oil, agriculture in most part of West Africa meant food crop production. Food crops produced depended on rainfall, which in turn, determines vegetation and types of soil. Thus, in the savanna north where rainfall is high and for about three to five months in the year cereals and grains predominated. Sorghum, maize, rice and especially millet were among the most common food crops. In addition, cotton was widely cultivated. In the forest south, however, where rainfall is heavier, root crops such as yam, cocoyam and cassava were widespread. In addition, plantains, bananas, kolanuts and oil palm also thrived luxuriantly.

These territorial specializations bring to mind two related issues. First, the arrangement allowed for intra-regional exchanges. Crops that were grown in one area could be exchanged for those that were not cultivated in another but were needed. However, constraints such as cheap transportation and storage facilities and portable monies considerably reduced trade in food crops. Second, the arrangement also allowed for self-sufficiency in food items. Each part of the region cultivated what the soil and climate allowed, and the people confined themselves to consuming whatever was readily available.

We do not intend to enter into the argument of which crops were imported into West Africa.14 While the independent origin of some yam species cannot be doubted, it has been argued that crops such as maize, cocoyam, and cassava were exotic to West Africa. What seems important, however, is not only that they added to the variety of the West African diet but mainly that compared with yam cultivation, crops such as maize and cassava were more easily and quickly produced. Maize could be produced at least twice a year as long as there was adequate water and sunshine. Cultivation of cassava requires less attention than that of yam. Once the stem (not the edible tuber as in the case of yam) was deepened into the soil, its tuber would be uprooted within nine months or so. Likewise, the production of plantains and bananas were almost effortless. Once the sucker was erected into the soil the fruition took place without further cultivation. Better still, unlike other food crops, more suckers sprout on their own, making replanting unnecessary.

Besides, the food crops either from America or Asia tended to reduce the incidence of famine and also made it possible to support a much larger population in a single settlement. This multi-production and ease of production of these crops gradually reduced the yam production efforts. Finally, it can be said that the acceptance and cultivation of the additional crop was another evidence of the West African farmers’ responsiveness to changes. Although the point
must also be made that these changes did not mean much changes in the technique of cultivation or in the use of implements.

As further developments in agricultural pursuits, especially in the production of export crops have shown, the West African farmer was hard-working. It is true however, that the size cultivated was much smaller than that of his counterpart in Europe. He did not practise mixed farming. He used simple implements for cultivation. He did not apply manure directly and his productions were largely for subsistence. But all these were dictated by various factors — the land tenure system, transportation and storage facilities, the purchasing power of consumers and especially the extent of market. A testimony to this is provided by Mungo Park who passed through the Upper Niger area at the end of the eighteenth century. According to him:

Few people work harder, when occasion requires, than the Mandigoes; but not having many opportunities of turning to advantage the super-firms produce of , their labour, they are content with cultivating as much ground as is necessary for their own support.16

Although this does not mean that there were no exchanges of agricultural products, there was a limit to which food products could be exchanged partly because of their local production and partly because of their perishability. Many agricultural products such as cotton and kolanuts were carried on long distances for trade.

Non-Agricultural Productions
It is not necessary to spend as much time as has been spent on the agricultural productions because, by and large, the aspect of the economy being discussed here was peripheral to agriculture which was the matrix in which all other indigenous economic activity is set”.17 Almost all those who focused their main attention on non-agricultural occupations also cultivated the land for food provision.

Gathering, Hunting, Fishing and Pastoralism
Among the earliest occupations of the West Africans are gathering, hunting, fishing and pastoralism. Indeed, one regards gathering and hunting as economic activities mainly because at a stage of development some people subsisted on them. But with time they became only supplementary to agriculture. Gathering of edible leaves and fruits was widespread in the Sahel where agriculture was often interrupted by a very long dry season. For example, the Songhay used to gather roots, seeds and leaves between February and August.18

Although hunting too, was an important supplement to agriculture, there were guilds especially in the forest areas who possessed monopoly rights to hunting, using their bows and arrows. Later on, with muzzle-loading guns they killed many animals.19 These guilds probably were not formed until when population density became high and Cultivated land reduced hunting grounds. However, in the savanna hunting needed not be a specialised job. Any group of people merely set bushes on fire in the dry season and games would be flushed.

Then, arrows, clubs and other weapons were used to kill animals. Apart from providing- protein as food and animal skin as cloth, hunters were known to be path creators and settlement founders. Many of such paths were later made roads and their settlements developed into villages
and towns. Besides, hunters served as guardsmen in protecting people from attacks of dangerous animals. They, thus, provided security without which economic activities could not go on.

A very important aspect of the economic importance of a hunter was in killing elephants whose tusks were ivory. Exportation of ivory certainly preceded the notorious exportation of human beings across the Atlantic. Writing in the early sixteenth century, Pereira noted that he and his party bought elephants’ tusks in Benin. He also referred to the abundance of ivory in Igboland.20 During the slave trade era, ivory was an important supplement. Indeed, the area known as Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire) bears testimony to this.

Like hunting, fishing could be a main occupation or a supplementary activity to farming. Also like hunting, it provided an important source of animal protein. In the riverine area fishing played a much more important part in the diet than meat. Just as savanna and forest hunting existed so also were the sea and lagoon fishing on the one hand and fresh-water fishing on the other. About two hundred edible species of fish have been identified in West African coastal waters which were engaged in by specialist fishermen.21 But fresh-water fishing was always on part-time basis because of the seasonality of the existence of water in the small rivers and lakes.

In all cases, fishermen used more or less the same methods in catching fish. Nets, traps of various kinds and sizes, spears, harpoons and poisoning were used. All these instruments of catching fish provided additional economic activities, usually for the fishermen themselves. But canoes which were essential capital for fishing were built by canoe-builders such as the Ijo on the Niger Delta and the Kede on the Niger. Smoking and selling of fish and its distribution were yet another economic activities connected with fishing.

An interesting feature of fishing was in connection with migrations. First, there were itinerant fishermen such as the Hausa and Nupe who obtained temporary fishing rights from local heads for payment in fish. In Yola district, around the River Benue, itinerant fishermen were charged about fifty per cent of their catch.22 Second, the Sorkawa who had their base along the Niger often migrated in search of fish for over 1,500 miles from Timbuktu to the coastal delta.23

Pastoralism is yet another type of non-agricultural occupation in west Africa. Although both hunting and pastoralism are related in the sense that both dealt with lower animals, pastoralism was, indeed, more closely related to farming. Mixed farming was not widespread but some form of symbiosis existed between the farmer and the pastoralist. This type of symbiosis existed on a much larger scale in Southern Africa, especially in the last millennium between the Bantu and the Koisan than it did in West Africa.

But the symbiotic life could be both positive and negative. It was positive when the pastoralists herds’ droppings manured the farmers’ land which had been left fallow for future cultivation; and when he supplied the farmer with meat, milk and animal skin. Conversely, the duality would be negative when the farmers’ crops were being tampered with by the pastoralists herd. This could be so if the farmer occupied so much land that the pastoralist had difficulty in obtaining grazing land.

Owing to the infestation of the forest areas by the tsetse flies and problem of available large
grazing land, pastoralism was confined to the savanna areas of West Africa. Among the great pastoralists were the Serer of Senegal who in fact, practised mixed farming, the Fulani in the Futa Djallon and other northern areas and the Shuwa areas around south of Lake Chad. Perhaps their greatest economic importance lay in the production of cattle on which the forest dwellers relied for their beef. Also, the leather Workers in Hausaland relied heavily on their livestock. For transportation purposes, the Tuareg and the Mossi produced donkeys which were invaluable for transportation in the savanna areas.

Mineral Working
Two other types of non-agricultural productions that will be discussed are the mineral working and craftsmanship. Of the mineral working, more attention will be focused on iron, gold and salt, while textiles, pottery, glass and jewellery and leather working will receive attention in the manufacturing sector. Some of the major contributions made to the general economy of pre-colonial West Africa will be discussed.

It can be strongly suggested that of all mineral working that took place in West Africa and, indeed in Africa iron working was the most important to the overall economy of the region. There was a close link between iron working, agriculture, and political power. With iron smelting, iron tools gradually replaced wooden and stone implements for cultivation, carving and mining. There is no doubt that iron technology revolutionised productions whenever it existed. The amount of food that was produced and the number of people who congregated in a single settlement must have been highly limited by the available technology. Therefore, with iron tools such as hoes, cutlasses and knives, production was bound to increase. This, in turn would likely encourage specialization and urbanization.

Iron metallurgy not only brought economic revolution it also put political power into the hands of those who knew and used it over those who did not. Iron war weapons such as iron-pointed spears helped empires such as the ancient Ghana to subjugate its neighbours. With iron smelting, political and military concentration became possible and desirable for those who would rule. But just as warfare could direct or even kill economic activities, it could also help create trade and other economic pursuits as a result of creating a larger political unit under a strong military protection.

It is possible that "Like agriculture, iron smelting may have been invented in a number of centres independently, the Nok culture among them."24 Serious studies that had been done in this field demonstrated that the earliest evidence of iron-smelting in West Africa came from Nok, a small village, in central Nigeria, north-east of the confluence of the Niger and the Benue rivers and south-west of the Jos Plateau.25

It is also likely that the knowledge of iron smelting reached Nok and so the whole of West Africa, via the Phoenician settlements in North Africa.26 The Phoenicians were using iron as early as ninth century B.C. it was possible that the technology was introduced to Nok almost at the same time. But it is certain that iron smelting had been carried on by the men of the Nok culture as early as the fifth century B.C.27 It is important to note that with these new archaeological finds, it is no longer tenable to postulate that iron technology spread from Meroe to West Africa in the fourth century A.D.28 By that time, iron smelting in the Nok centre was
more than a millennium in existence.

Iron smelting was carried on in as many parts of West Africa as iron-ore was available. Information on iron-working abounds in the records of European explorers, missionaries, officials and visitors. It is striking that many communities appreciated the crucial use of iron especially for agricultural work. It involved not only the mining and smelting but also the forging into useful implements. It was used for blacksmiths to live close to iron smelters. Blacksmiths were indeed, ubiquitous in West Africa. In Yorubaland, in the Western part of Nigeria, for example, blacksmithing was a monopolised occupation by groups or guilds or lineages.

Farmers, warriors and craftsmen depended on the smiths for their scythes, swords, scissors, hoes, cutlasses, hammers, knives, spear heads, arrow heads and axes. They sometimes requested smiths to make certain implements that they needed. But there were also migrant blacksmiths who moved about to areas where iron-ore was plentiful. For example, smiths from Awka, the old capital of Zamfara, used to travel to Tureta, near Sokoto, spending two or three months there and returning home with donkeys loaded with smelted iron before the rainy season when there was high demand for agricultural tools.

With the importation of iron into West Africa since the seventeenth century, iron smelting was stifled but blacksmithing increased. Apart from iron rods and other iron goods which European merchants brought to Nigeria, smiths used any available metals including iron parts of a lorry or even stolen iron removed from the railway. The cheapness of the European iron accounted for the great number of smiths. For example, Ibadan is reported to be a city of seventy blacksmiths’ shop.

Much less will be said on gold because, unlike iron, it was less widespread and less in demand for West African use. It was essentially an article of international trade. Unlike iron which was extensively used for agriculture, industry and warfare, gold was too soft and plastic to be used in the simple technology. It was used only for coining, gold plate and ornaments in a more sophisticated technology.

Gold was mined and exported. Areas of availability included Bambuk, between the Senegal and Falaza rivers, Bure on the upper Niger, Lobi in the valley of the Black Volta and the Akan goldfields in modern Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire. Compared with the other parts of Africa, such as Mwene-Mutapa and Southern Africa it was not large but it was of a high antiquity. It is likely that it has been mined for local use before it entered into the external trade across the Sahara with the Barbers in the Maghrib.

Indeed, it is difficult to date the trade between the Western Sudan and the Maghrib because it might well have started before the desication of the Sahara which began in about 3,000 B.C. By the time that the ancient empire of Ghana began to flourish in about third century A.D., gold trade must have developed intensively because the gold fields of Bambuk were already being exploited. Bambuk which was enclosed by the Senegal and Falaza rivers was an “island of gold” which the Arabs referred to as Wangara. In order to satisfy the great demand made by the Barbers and Arabs as from the eighth century A.D., the Sudanese traders made contact with Bure which was a more productive goldfield. In the fourteenth century, they went southwards, opening
routes to the still richer goldfields around the Akan forest. As from the fifteenth century when the Europeans began to appear at the coast of West Africa, the Akan goldfields had become important for the supply of gold which was traded both northwards to reach the Berbers and Arabs and southwards to reach the Europeans.

The mining and trading of gold was a highly organised job which rested, by and large, on slave labour. Both at Bure and in the forest, mining was carried out to great depths, reaching thirty metres or even more. Gold was then extracted from the ore by crushing and washing. It was carried by a combination of transport facilities — human posterage, canoe and pack animals to the waiting caravans of Berbers at the trading depots especially along the Niger, where it was exchanged for salt.

Salt like iron was of crucial importance in everyday life of the peoples of West Africa; but iron was produced on a larger scale and over a wider area. Therefore, demand for salt was keener. As a product that was exchanged for gold, it can be surmised that production of mined salt was also an age-long one. It was, indeed, the main product that the Western Sudanese wanted in exchange for their gold. As it was directly consumed as part of food, its demand was high since both the rich and the poor, the freeman and the slave required it.

Although the excavated salt which was rocky was supplied by the Berbers and Arabs from North Africa, the excavation was done at the Sahara desert in the northern parts of West Africa. Deposits were at Bilma, Taghaza, Idjil and Taodeni. One of the main reasons why the trans-sahara Berber/Arab traders got involved in slave trade was for mining the rock salt in the desert. That this salt production continued till the twentieth century is indicative of the reliance placed on it. In the fifteenth century the Asbenawa carried it to Gobir. In the eighteenth century the main southern terminus of salt trade was Katsina and later on Kano. In the 1820s, Clapperton saw about five hundred camels carrying salt to Sokoto. In 1980, when one would have thought that salt imported across the Atlantic would have stifled the Saharan salt, about 20,000 camels carried com and cloth from Hausaland to exchange for salt.

The other two types of minerals that are discussed are copper and tin. Neither of them seemed to have been of any considerable significance to the West Africans. For making bronze there must be a combination of copper and tin. This was done in Egypt and Libya. It was done also at Ile-Ife and Benin which were reputed for bronze casts. An important question is where were copper and tin got from? Although both were available in West Africa, given the transport facilities that existed, the fewness of long-distance traders and the usual localisation of industries one would not expect easy availability of the minerals to the bronze makers. This, of course, explains the great variety of bronze cast in West Africa.

However, both copper and tin were mined in a few places. There were copper deposits at Akjongt if) Mauritania which were mined in the first half of the first millennium B.C. perhaps by the Berbers. Copper was also mined and smelted at Takedda near Air in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries A.D. Certainly, the amount of copper that wasj mined in West Africa was nothing compared to the one in Southern Africa around! Katanga, Zambia and south of the Limpopo.
Tin deposit was even more restricted and its smelting highly localised. The smelting was done around north of Jos, at Lirmein Doima. But tin ore was collected in local streams by some Fulani slaves who carried it to secret places for smelting. It is possible that tin smelting had been going on well before 1813 when it was first mentioned. But when the European merchants demanded tin-wire in the early twentieth century, it was easily supplied. The smelters, however, kept the mining areas and the art of smelting secret. When the secret was broken in 1902, the merchants were surprised to find about ten of tin-smelting furnaces which produced about fifty tons of metallic tin in a year.34

There is no doubt that the pre-colonial West Africans were able to mine and smelt a considerable amount of minerals despite the simple and low state of technology open to them. For thousands of years, gold was mined for external exchange, iron was excavated, smelted and forged into agricultural, industrial and warfare implements and to a lesser extents, salt, copper and tin were also mined. That the exploitation of those minerals was not properly developed was partly due to the undeveloped technology and partly to the cheapness of the imported products, making competition virtually impossible.

Another important point to note is that the wealth that accrued from the mineral products went mainly to the rulers, leading warriors and a few potentates. The common man and the slaves who bore the brunt of mining, smelting and transporting enjoyed virtually nothing of the proceeds. The exploitation of the minerals was strictly controlled by the rulers. It is widely known that in the empire of Ghana, the ruler did not permit unlimited exploitation of gold so as to prevent glutting the market and cheapening the gold. This should not be surprising, it should only appreciate given that the ruler in fact owned the craftsman.

Craftsmanship

It is certainly difficult if not impossible to discuss fully the multifarious works of art and crafts which West Africans engaged in, in the pre-colonial era. Among the most conspicuous ones are cloth weaving, pottery, glass and jewellery and leather working. In this section, more attention will be given to textiles mainly because it was the most widespread in the whole of West Africa and partly because many economic activities were strongly connected with it.

Textile production involved cotton growing, spinning, weaving, sewing, dyeing and embroidery, although the last two items were optional. Cultivation of cotton and dyeing leaves were part and parcel of farming. The main difference in their cultivation is that whereas dyeing leaves, usually the indigo (Indigofera SPP) grew luxuriantly on its own in places and was only allowed to grow undisturbed, cotton had to be cultivated.

However, by the early twentieth century indigo cultivation had become an important occupation. It was grown nearer the dyeing pits as possible; and with time, special land was devoted to it. It has been calculated that an acre of land devoted to indigo often produced twice the income devoted to cotton. This was reflected in a great number of people engaged in dyeing in 1912, in Kano. Of 10,348 people devoted ts cloth manufacturing in a small Kano district, 5,499 were weavers, 650 were beaters while as many as 4,199 were dyers.35
Availability of woven cloths in a place does not necessarily mean that cloths were woven there; they might have simply been imported from another place. But unless records clearly show that cloths were not woven in a place where it was found, one’s assumption that it was woven there might not be an over-stretched imagination. It was possible, however, that cotton or cotton threads had been imported if the land was incapable of growing cotton.

As far north as Timbuktu, and since about the 13th century, weaving and dyeing of linen and cotton fabrics had been going on. Cotton could be cultivated near Timbuktu on the Niger but as a major trade centre, the southern terminus of the trans-saharan trade quite a considerable amount of cotton and even woven cloths could be there from Jenne and Kano which were more southerly and which were celebrated areas of woven cloths. Perhaps, Kano was the most important centre of cloth, weaving, dyeing and distribution up to the nineteenth century. Kano cloth was such of a high quality that there was demand for it as far away as Morocco.

Cloth manufacturing was also common in Igboland, Nupeland, Yorubaland and in Benin. Many nineteenth century travellers recorded copiously the considerable amount of woven cloths and dyeing pots or pits they came across. For example, the Landers who passed through Nupeland in 1930 noted:

The cloth which they (the Nupe of Zagoshi) manufactured, in common with their countrymen, and the robes and trousers which they wove are most excellent and would not disgrace an European manufacturer; they are worn and valued by kings, chiefs, and great men, and are the admiration of the neighbouring nation.

The use of woven cloth in Yorubaland is of considerable antiquity. This is indicated by the terracotta figures in Ife which have been dated to the twelfth century. It is also known that the Ijebus were not only among the earliest Yoruba cloth weavers but were also great exporters of cloth. In the seventeenth century, European merchants carried Ijebu cloths to Benin, the Gold Coast, Gabon and Angola; and by the eighteenth century Ijebu cloths were being exported to Brazil. Because Ijebu cloths were relatively cheap and durable, they were sought for from far and wide.

Apart from cotton cloth, there were also raffia, bark of tree and grass cloths woven in various parts of West Africa, especially at the early times. For example, raffia and palm frond costumes used to be worn by Ogun (god of iron) adherents during their festival. It has also been noted that among the Igbo the first textile used was bark cloth. Similarly, silk cloth which was even more refined than cotton cloth was produced by some people. For example, the Asante who were also popular cloth weavers used to unravel silk cloth and mix the threads with cotton yam for the production of kente cloth.

Cotton cloth seemed to have dominated all forms of cloths by the nineteenth century. Cotton spinning was done mainly by women in Nupeland and Yorubaland. In both places, the first duty of a newly married lady was to spin enough cotton to make her husband a robe. But weaving was done by both men and women. Men’s looms among both the Yoruba and Nupe were horizontal while women’s were vertical. These types of looms also dictated the width of cloth woven.
Whereas on the horizontal looms men wove cloth of three to six inches wide, women could weave cloth of twenty-one inches to five feet wide. In each case a weaver could produce 40 to 60 yards of cloth in a day.

Weaving technology changed from time to time as a result of the mobility of migrant weavers. It has been noted, for example, that the type of vertical, wider loom used by women in Yorubaland was later used in Nupeland and also in Kano. Indeed, Nupe weavers also introduced certain techniques which improved the quality and beauty of their cloths. Similarly, with more cloths to dye, dyeing pits replaced dyeing pots which could not contain many cloths at a time.

Pottery is another important craft industry of a considerable antiquity in West Africa. It was even probably more widespread than iron metallurgy because pots were made at any place where clay was obtainable. But what probably made pottery more widespread was its importance as everyday utensils, indispensable to the household. Besides, the skills involved in pottery were rather rudimentary especially in West Africa where the porter’s wheel was unknown.

Although the pottery of Western Sudan displayed a strong influence of the Maghrib, it cannot be said that pottery was not a spontaneous development in West Africa. Archaeologists have fixed the beginning of pottery in a part of modern Nigeria in the first half of the fourth millennium B.C. Pottery of age-long standing has been discovered virtually in all parts of West Africa. Because of its fragility it was not a commodity for long-distance trade, its production was therefore highly localised. Although it was difficult to generalise about sex specialisation of crafts, it would appear that pottery was the preserve of women in West Africa.

Jewellery was probably of less importance in West Africa in comparison with pottery. But it was an ancient craft which had been carried on for thousands of years and which had reached a very high standard of artistic achievement. The most notable centres for casting masks, heads and statues from copper, bronze and brass were Igbo-Ukwu, Ife and Benin. Excavations at Igbo-Ukwu, which had been radio-carboned, dated to the ninth century, showed a considerable amount of beads and some glasses. Both Ife terracotta and the Nok sculptures portrayed lovely jewellery and ornament. Bead production was another localised industry because glossy stones were also localized. The Nupe were and still are the most popular producers. Bead making was such a laborious work that the average output per worker was three beads boads a day. It meant that it was not a commodity for everybody; but only for the rulers who used to commission production.

Ife, Igbo-Ukwu and Nupe were notable for glass manufacturing; but before the nineteenth century the Ife glass industry had died. The industry not only continued till the nineteenth century in Nupeland, but still continues till now. In Nupeland, there was a strong glass workers’ guild. Before the colonial period the Nupe smelted glass from their own glossy glass and forged it into utensils. But with importation of European glasses, they merely smelt down the factory-made bottles.

Among other craft industries that existed in West Africa were calabash making, basketry, leather work, woodwork, and rope and mat making. The same technique, a type of weaving was used for making baskets, mats, hats and ropes. Mats were used in West Africa as beds and for sitting. But
baskets were more useful for economic purposes. They were used for containing portable crops — yams, beans, cocoa, kolanuts, coffee and such other materials. Similarly, calabashes which were made out of gourds were used to carry liquids or tiny objects which would drop from the basket.

Leather work relied solely on animal skins. After tanning, leather was used to manufacture buckets, mallets, bags, cushions, clothing, footwear, tents, furniture, and arrow quivers. In some cases it was a substitute for basket, pot, woven cloths, calabash or woodwork. Although the Nupes, Yorubas and some others engaged in leather work, the Hausas of Kano, Gobir and Dahomey and the Kanuri of Borno were noted for excellent leather works. Gobir produced not just for local consumption but also for export. Gobir’s sandals reached Timbuktu in the sixteenth century. The sandals were carried to north Africa and probably to Europe. Katsina was, eminently known for excellent leather. Writing in the 1850, Barth noted that ”no place in the whole negroland is so famous for excellent leather and the art of tanning as Katsina”. Hides made in Katsina were exported to Fezzan and Tripoli. Similarly, Kano was highly reputed for leather industry. Barth, who, in the 1850a also passed through Kano estimated that it exported about five million tanned and dyed skins, ten million palm of sandals, leather straps and bags annually to Tripoli and other parts of North Africa.

Borno too, produced excellent leather part of which it exported in addition to slaves to North Africa in exchange for horses in particular. This had flourished even before the reign of the popular Mai Idris Aloma.

Production of leather was specially geared towards the Asante market. The Hausas in modern Nigeria and probably those in modern Dahomey together with the Kanuris carried on an extensive trade in leather works and natron. They used their donkeys to transport these products to Gonja, a kolanut producing area where they obtained kolanuts which they carried back home.

Woodwork involved making vessels, dishes-stools, mortars and pestles, trays, bowls, spoons, bottles, jars and lids, combs, sandals, musical instruments and beds, doors and windows and so on for home use; axe, matcliet and hoe handles, hoes and spades for agricultural use, weapons for warfare, canoes for fishing and transportation, and idols and statues for religion. Indeed, the outputs of wood workers are inexhausible. They ranged in sizes from small spoons to giant canoes which were dug out of logs. The canoes made by the Kede in Nupeland and the Ijo in the Niger Delta were of prodigious dimensions which were paddled by, as many as forty men at a time.

Craft industry often required full-time attention. Even when the craftsman had to participate in farming he still had to engage in making his object. The migrant ones, like long-distance traders had to devote their time to production. When a ruler commissioned production of any craft, the craftsman moved to his court or nearby to get the work done in good time. In other words, the production depended on the demand. Much is not known about the remuneration; but since labour was not directly paid for when slaves were employed in the traditional economy, most crafts had to be exchanged by barter.

The technology involved in crafts production did not seem to have changed irrespective of
foreign influence. For example, the blacksmiths merely changed from forging smelted iron to forging imported iron. Likewise, the Nupe merely changed from using traditional glossy glass to imported bottles. The potters did not adopt the Egyptian potters’ wheel; neither could the wood-workers produce on a mass scale because they did not change their rudimentary tools. It would appear that these changes did not take place because there was no necessity for them. Technological developments after all, has always been based on the need of the people.

Conclusion
This chapter has been concerned only with production as an important aspect of the structure of the traditional economy of West Africa. It has examined the agricultural and non-agricultural productions with particular emphasis on agriculture because of its supreme position in the economy. It has also focused attention on iron smelting and smithing, weaving, pottery leather work and woodwork. Certainly, all that has been done is to highlight essential occupations engaged in by the West African peoples.

Deliberately, the distribution of the productions has been omitted in this chapter because it is felt that the distribution was as important as the production since most of the outputs were meant for the consumers other than the producers, the actual methods of producing commodities have also been left out because that will make the work extremely descriptive and boring. Scattered information abound for those interested in the actual productions.

It would be noted that most productions, relied heavily on locally available raw materials, thereby localising productions. Thus, production of grains was most prevalent in the savanna areas while wood was done mainly in the forest areas. However, there were migrant workers who, having exhausted raw materials in their homes, moved to wherever they could obtain abundant material for their output. Neither land nor labour actually inhibited productions. Although there was neither land nor labour market, each was exploited in the best interest of the situation. Slave labour, supplemented by the household one, was used to produce both the agricultural and non-agricultural products. There was also no capital market per se, but, as said in chapter one, the various implements used to cultivate the land, carve the wood, tan the leather and smelt the iron were capitals employed efficiently. Neither was entrepreneurship lacking. Indeed, without the entrepreneur’s organisation either as a ruler or head of a guild, no production would take place. It was he who took risk and organised the existing labour either on individual or group basis.

Finally, the point that the farmer did not employ the plough or the potter the potters’ wheel did not necessarily hinder effective outputs. This is not to say that changes in technology was undesirable, but the issue at stake is the economic importance of such changes. Changes have to occur when there are needs for them just as farmers changed from shifting cultivation to fallow cropping.

Imported products stifled indigenous ones because they were found cheaper, less laborious to adopt, and encouraged diversion of interest to other occupations. It is interesting, however, that even in the 1980s traditional and imported productions competed side by side.

It is also noteworthy that although the indigenous technology involved in the production was
simple, it was effective. So also were the skill and organisation involved. They should not be underrated. It appears that El-Mansur of Morocco underrated the technology, skill and organisation involved in excavating gold in Western Sudan and thought that once the Sudanese were militarily conquered, it would be easy to obtain gold and that would call off the bluff of the ruler of Songhay who was rationing it. That made him invade the Western Sudan in 1590. He later discovered that the expected gold as not forthcoming because he had disrupted the system of obtaining it.

Notes
The author is working on this title.


Nurick, *Africa*, p. 64.


OUR

White and Gleave, *Economic Geography of West Africa*, p. 73.


Hopkins, *Economic History*.


G.O. Ogunremi, *Counting the Camels: The Economics of Transportation in Nigeria,*
Nok,


*Ibid*


29. Isichei cites local references regarding place names, names of persons, religious connections etc. to mirror the smelting of iron in Nigeria. Wickens (cited above) also quotes copiously from journals of European explorers such as Mungo Park and David Livingstone to show techniques of iron smelting in various parts of Africa.

30. Incidentally, the writer hails in a blacksmith lineage, hence Iris names Ogundeji Ogungremi denoting adherence to the god of iron. Coincidentally, Ogunremi Village, in Ibadan district (not author’s village) was a major iron smelting centre in the pre-colonial era.


33. Ibid, p. 73.


41. lid.


Traditional Factors of Production in the Pre-Colonial Economy

G.O. Ogunremi

No aspect of the economic history of West Africa can be properly understood without a grasp of the traditional economy in the pre-colonial era. In this chapter, attention is focused on the foundation of the economy. To both production and distribution, the involvements of land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship or organisation as basic factors of production are crucial. They therefore deserve a treatment right from the outset of this book.

In treating this topic it is necessary to clarify some essential points. First, since this chapter is dealing with the domestic economy of West Africa in the period before the region was balkanised into small entities by European powers, we are dealing not with countries as they are today but with communities and ethnic groups as they existed in the pre-colonial period. In other words, we shall, for example, be concerned not with modern Senegal but with the Wolof, Serer, Malinke and those around the Senegambia area. We shall also refer to the various peoples of Volta region, of the Niger Delta as well as the Hausa, the Yoruba, the Igbo, the Bambara, the Nupe and many others.

Second, although we are concerned here mainly with the domestic economy in the pre-colonial era the factors of production and distribution can still be seen going side by side with modern techniques. Thus, traditional techniques in farming and production of commodities such as palm oil, cocoa and pots still continue as before. Donkeys and porters still compete with mechanical transport in carrying trade goods to market places in many parts of West Africa today as they did in the pre-colonial era. This is not to say that traditional means of production and distribution are static but it is to show their continuity amidst various changes.

Third, it is pertinent to point out that the chapter makes use of economic terms as used by economists. It has become necessary for economic historians to classify some of the terms as applicable to their context. Thus, distinction has to be made between market when used to mean demand — supply — price mechanism and when used to mean the market place. There is an on-going controversy as to whether or not economic historians should apply economic terms used to analyse modern economies for the pre-industrial economies. In this chapter, the contention of the writer is that although distinctions should be made where necessary, economic terms used for advanced economies should also be applied to the simple ones. What is important is functionalism; that is, if pre-industrial currency performed the basic functions of modern currency it will be confusing to describe it in a different way. For this reason the factors of production discussed in this chapter — land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship are used as modern economic terms.

**LAND**

The entire productions and distributions in pre-colonial West Africa relied heavily on the available natural and human resources in West Africa. This section focuses attention on land. In
discussing land as an important natural resource one can examine its value in terms of the fertility of the soil and the extent to which it was capable of supporting its inhabitants. One can also look at the policies of various communities with regard to its holding; a corollary to this is the availability or otherwise of land market.

Agriculture and agro-allied productions depend on the quality of land that is available in a particular place. In the south of West Africa where rainfall is heavy and vegetation thick, farming thrives well. In these areas root crops which are capable of supporting large populations flourish. It is, therefore, not a mere coincidence that the south-eastern parts of Nigeria inhabited by the Igbo, the Efik, the Ibibio among others still have large populations. Likewise, the western parts and northern parts of West Africa have good soil nutrients. Although they have light rainfall and thin vegetation, large centres of high concentration of people can be found in Asanteland and Hausaland.

However, the general assumption that African land is so fertile that fruits, root crops and other foodstuffs grow so luxuriantly that the inhabitants did not need to till the ground before harvesting food crops is a mere assumption because it is false and baseless. This assumption connotes the idea that the African was too lazy to cultivate the land properly so as to deal in systematic farming. The African was neither lazy nor the land so rich as to render cultivation unnecessary. The production of agricultural products was consistent, widespread and systematic in the domestic economy of West Africa.

The other aspect of our discussion on land as a factor of production concerns the land tenure system. In this section, the system in some parts of West Africa is discussed; and this is followed by discussing the argument on whether or not the tenure system inhibited traditional agriculture. It is important to realize that no single system prevailed at any time in the whole of West Africa. Various communities adopted the system most suitable to them, depending on land population ratio and cultural attitudes. However, it would appear that the common pattern was the community ownership of land not individual ownership.

Among both the Yoruba and the Tiv of modern Nigeria, for example, the land belonged to various lineages or small communities. The members of each lineage did not own specific pieces of land but could use any piece of land as long as it was left fallow and did not contain perennial crops. They could also move about within the communities’ land so as to take advantage of the best soils. However, the right of an individual to farm was inalienable. If there Was conflict regarding the use of a particular piece of land the head of the lineage would settle the matter.

The system in Senegambia, however is different. The basic right over land belonged to the man who first cleared it. The land is often cleared by fire; and holding of land in this way is known as jomjengol, that is master of land by right of fire. He could farm the land himself or rent it out on his own terms. A second kind of tenure was created by the state. This was superimposed on the first system and was known as jom leeidi. In this system, the land was held by court favourites, important officials and others who had earned the gratitude of the ruler. Their estates were usually larger than those of theyom jengol system.

In all cases, changes occurred from time to time. One important factor of change was Islam. For
example, in Futa Toro, northern parts of Senegal, Islamic law changed the earlier system by establishing the quality of all male heirs to land inheritance. That system is also found in some parts of Yorubaland. The effect of this was the fragmentation of holdings. This system also encouraged a greater degree of individual exploitation of land. In areas of dense population, this in turn encouraged migration of the heirs whose land was too small to provide for their subsistence. Also in Senegambia, up to the eighteenth century *jomjengel* was the system whereby a larger proportion of the land was owned by the peasants. But at the end of the eighteenth century, during the period of religious warfare, rulers honoured warriors and a lot of people with land.

It now remains to examine the argument of the adequacy or otherwise of the land system to the traditional economy of West Africa. Like other factors of production in pre-colonial West Africa the land law was applied to suit the economy. The law reflected the conditions that governed agricultural tools and the involvement of the traditional labour. The agricultural system called for production on small scales by each producer. Small holdings were therefore enough for effective production. Those who play down the African land tenure system do so mainly because they are used to seeing large plantations. While it is true that large holdings allow for effective use of the plough and modern farming techniques, small holdings, if intensively cultivated, may be equally effective. An example of small holdings that readily comes to mind is in Japan. Owing to scarcity of land, Japanese farmers cannot afford large plantations especially or growing rice. Yet Japanese productions are among the highest per hectare in the world.

Besides, generally in the whole of West Africa, land was plentiful in relation to population. Therefore, the main argument used to discredit African land tenure system — that land had no market value is not crucial. What seemed important was for the farmer to secure a right to cultivate land within a given area. Since the system allowed the farmer to continue using the land for as long as he wanted, usufructuary right, which was more crucial, was established. Where population was dense and the period of fallow short or even non-existent, as in the case with permanent cultivation, the claims on individual use became stronger.

Lastly, it should be emphasized that the land law was never static. Like other forms of West African culture it was dynamic. The rapid and widespread expansion of I production of export crops towards the end of the nineteenth century is indicative of this. In the late nineteenth century there was introduction of cocoa and higher demand for “legitimate” Crops in Europe. This large market necessitated large production and movement of labour for exploitation of more land. The land law was modified to meet such changes. This dynamism of the land tenure system made it suit the changing patterns of the economy.

LABOUR
Another aspect of resources utilised in the traditional economy of West Africa were the human resources or the labour force. In this section we concern ourselves with just the essential aspects of the labour force. We shall treat the different types of labour, its remuneration, criticisms levelled against it in West Africa and the adequacy or otherwise of the system.

The most important labour unit in West Africa was the household which comprised the man, his wife and children and all those who were living with him. This might even include slaves if they
were not many and they were close to his. Other forms of labour forces included friendly — organised or age-group type, migrants and slaves.

The size of the household labour force depended on the type of occupation engaged in. For example, a farming society needed a larger household labour than a weaving one. In order to expand the household labour, polygamy was often resorted to. More wives meant more children, and that meant more hands on the land. In this case, it can be seen that accumulation of wives was not a wasting asset because they were married not only to have children but also to work. High rate of infant mortality also necessitated having many children so that whatever survived could still form a large labour force.

Although child labour is criticized today as a social evil, it was not seen that way in the eighteenth or even nineteenth century in either Africa or Europe. Writing in 1777, Adam Smith in his *Wealth of Nations,* says, ”a numerous amily of children, instead of being a burden was a source of opulence and prosperity to the parents.”8 Child labour was a common feature. Children were particularly useful in West Africa during the peak periods of planting and harvesting.

It is difficult to talk of specialization of job by sex because this varied from society to society. For example, among the Bamenda of Cameroons and the Igbo of Nigeria, women participated in farming. But in many parts of Yorubaland it was mainly men’s job while women dominated the trading sector. Both men and women engaged in weaving in Yorubaland but while men used the horizontal looms women used mainly the vertical ones.

Again, with the introduction of Islam in various parts of West Africa, women’s role somehow changed. Devoted moslems seclude their wives by confining them to the harem. It is often thought that such women waste off economically. However, studies on women in the harem in Hausaland have demonstrated that rather than being a waste they contribute their quotas to the economic development of their areas. In her ”Hidden Trade in Hausaland”, Polly Hill clearly shows that the women were very busy in their harems. They were responsible, *inter alia,* for selling their husbands’ grains and other agricultural outputs.9 It is also known that in Yorubaland the women in the harem occupied themselves making patterns on cloths to be dyed blue or black.

For large-scale and even medium-scale productions slave labour was heavily relied upon. It seems quite pertinent here to make a few explanations on slavery and slave trade in West Africa. Nothing new or different from what Professor Fage has already said is being expressed here. According to his definition of slavery in the past,

’a slave was man or woman who was owned by some otherperson, whose labour was regarded as having economic value, and whose person had a commercial value.110

This definition fits well into our discussion- of a slave as a factor of production in the pre-colonial era.

Even before the trans-atlantic slave trade from the sixteenth to nineteenth century, labour was scarce in West Africa. Large-scale production of agricultural and non-agricultural outputs was impossible in the absence of a concentration of a fairly large labour force. It was difficult, for example, for so much leather works and textiles to be produced in Sokoto or Kano without slave
labour in a society that found no direct wage labour.

Unlike the trans-saharan and the trans-atlantic slave trades in which human beings were forcibly moved from one place to another and where they were treated like ordinary commodities, slaves in many parts of West Africa were in some cases riot forced and in many cases not treated differently from the freeborn. For example, in Yorubaland, some people willingly subordinated themselves to those who were known to be strong enough to protect them from the oppression of other powerful people in the society.11 This, to some extent, looks like feudal system in the medieval Europe.

Slave labour force was also made possible by captives from wars. In fact, in many cases the captives or war prisoners formed the bulk of slaves. Although wars were not fought for the sake of captives, but for political, fundamental reasons as revealed by both King Kpengla of Dahomey (1774-89) and King Osei Bonsu of Ashanti (c. 1801-24)12 or for religious reasons as in the case of Asikia Mohammed Ture of Songhay (1493-1528)13 or Idris Aloma of Borno (1570-1602)14 and for other reasons. War captives were, however, an important consequence of the wars. Before the heydays of the trans-atlantic slave trade, war captives were profitably employed by chiefs and powerful people for all types of productions and also for distributions. When the slave trade first began some rulers, for example, the rulers of Dahomey and Benin forbade the sale of their males because they valued them for their ability to produce. However, when they realised that they were losing wealth and power they joined their colleagues in the active sales of their captives.15

It would appear that the argument that ”slave economy” had existed in parts of West Africa ever before the trans-atlantic slave trade started cannot be faulted. It had been well-established in the Western and Central Sudan by the fourteenth century and it had spread to the Senegal and Lower Guinea (from Liberia to Cameroon) by the fifteenth century. To describe the economy of this period as ”slave economy” is to strongly emphasize the role of slaves in the overall economy.

Slave labour became more intensified after the legal abolition of the trans-atlantic islave trade. European countries had by the nineteenth century become well industrialized. African labour was no longer required for production because the factory machineries had taken over. What was needed was the African raw material to feed or lubricate the machines and also Africa as a market for the finished products. It was rightly argued that if slaves were not exported from Africa the Africans would have purchasing powers and constitute a market, however small. It was therefore a sound economic rationale to abolish the slave trade. This was perhaps the basis for the activities of philanthropists and church organisations which campaigned for the abolition of the notorious trade. Slave trade was then abolished and agricultural outputs became more popular.

In order to enhance the ”legitimate” trade, slave labour was required on a large scale. The production of palm oil, groundnuts, coffee, cocoa and minerals; and their porterage to large centres of evacuation meant the use of slave labour. To acquire sufficient labour force, internal slave trade replaced external slave trade. In the nineteenth century market places were full of slaves openly sold to large-scale producers. One therefore tends to agree that ”commercial slavery and slave trading developed, along with the growth of states, as a form of labour
mobilization to meet the needs of a growing system of foreign trade. In which, initially, the demand for slaves as trade goods was relative!; insignificant.”16

In addition to the household and slave labour forces, there were other ways by which economic activities were carried out in the pre-colonial West Africa. One of these was the age-group or labour societies which organised reciprocal systems of getting things done.17 Details of the operation varied from society to society. But basically, it was an arrangement, known in Yorubaland as *owe* or *am*, by adolescents who had the psychological feeling that a job could be more quickly and perhaps better done if two or three friends joined hands to work as a group. This was applied not only to farm but also to many other types of work. It was, indeed the only means by which houses were erected.

For public works such as path construction or clearing, construction of town walls and public houses, society labour was relied on. Each lineage was requested to contribute a number of workers and all met to do the work within a short time. For example, the Ibadan city walls and even the Mapo Hall in Ibadan were built in this way. Before the monetisation of the economy, labour was not directly paid for daily or monthly. In other words, it can be said that there was no wage labour as known today. Labour was then indirectly paid for in two ways. First, all forms of labour were remunerated in form of feeding, housing, clothing and protection. If it is appreciated that even today wages are spent on these essentials, one can reasonably conclude that there was a sort of wage labour. So, whether it was household or slave labour in as much as he was fed, housed, clothed and protected the labour was paid for. Second, the slave who constituted a large labour force were bought. Only a few potentates could acquire enough capital to buy many slaves. In this context, the capital outlay on slaves was in sense a payment for the labour rendered.

An important point of discussion regarding the labour force of any economy is its productivity. It is difficult to determine or measure the productivity of the labour force in the pre-colonial era. This is because it all depended on the type of the economic sector in which the labour was involved. For example, in farming, labour was very intensive during the preparation for planting and during harvesting. These were peak seasons, when farmers worked from dawn to dusk. But after harvesting especially in the dry season there was a less period. Casual observers might easily conclude that productivity was low or that there was a general lethargy and idleness by farmers if they were visited at the less period.

On many occasions, farmers and even non-agricultural workers tended to start the jobs early in the morning so that by the time the sun became biting causing excessive perspiration and eventual fatigue. The main work for the day had come to an end. Usually, workers return to their jobs in the evening when the sun had subsided. What was important is that the workers had to work hard enough to ascertain proper output to meet the needs of the society.

**CAPITAL**

Unlike the first two factors of production discussed earlier — land and labour — there is much less to discuss in the other two factors of production: capital and entrepreneurship. This is not due to the fact that these two were less important or less effective but because there is much less research done into them. The economists who have no patience to undergo such a research have therefore concluded that Africans lacked the ability to save and invest.18
Be that it may, there is no doubt that there were capital investments which enabled other factors of production to function. According to Seidman, capital can be defined as "the mass of raw material, machinery, tools, buildings, and other equipment used in the production process."19 Although in this definition, Seidman is referring to modem capital, the definition holds true for pre-colonial West Africa to an extent. The main difference between the industrial and pre-industrial capital is mainly in the application of machinery. But in both cases raw materials, tools, buildings and other equipment were required for production to take place. As Seidman has further explained, in Africa, "the individual farmer's capital consists of his own tools: a saw and hammer ... or bellows and tongs".20 In other words, a weaver’s loom, a transporter’s canoe, a fisherman’s net and canoe, a dyer’s pot, a trader’s porters, a mat-maker’s grasses and potter’s clay were part of his raw materials and tools for production. In some cases the producer had to give something in return for the raw material. Even where it was taken freely, he had to spend his time and energy to procure the raw materials.

In the case of iron producers, time would be spent in identifying iron-ore deposits. Firewood had to be got ready in great quantity and furnaces must be set. He would then spend days to get iron from the process. In the process, capitals have been involved — firewood, iron-ore, furnaces and, of course, time expended. Similarly, a canoe-maker had to look for logs of wood to dig out and then use either iron axes to chop out the log or use fire to burn the middle of the log to get a hollow. He had, in this process made use of his capitals.

There were credit institutions which gave out credits to producers to obtain some of their tools. One such credit institution is known in Yorubaland of modern Nigeria as ESUSU — a form of credit association.21 It was often organised by friends, age groups, and kinsman. There was a regulation as to how much each person should contribute and at what interests should the contributions be made. At fixed periods, a subscriber will collect what all had contributed until it was everyone’s turn to collect his share. It is interesting to note that the system which had existed during the pre-colonial era has persisted till now. However, a general criticism levelled against the ESUSU is that the proceeds were more often than not devoted to social purposes such as funerals and marriages. It is also likely that some subscribers spent part of their shares in procuring tools and raw materials for their production.

Another form of credit institution was the commercial capital market. This was purely for economic needs at both local and inter-regional levels.22 At the local level, traders often took loans from the local financiers at a high interest. This was not as common as the indebtedness of the long-distance traders who operated on larger scales. According to Hopkins who agrees that research is necessary in this regard,

The large entrepots had bankers who invested money on behalf of depositors and operated a system whereby credits could be transferred to third parties; exchange brokers, who also speculated in currency values; and a future market in the main staples of long distance traded.3

This type of monetary transactions was organised in some parts of Yorubaland by an economic institution known as Parakoyi. They ensured that long distance traders were properly settled and that they obeyed market regulations.24 There were also financial transactions on
inter-regional basis in which journeys and trades were financed. A classical example was the case of Clapperton, an explorer in pursuit of the mouth of the River Niger in the 1820s. Clapperton, who travelled from Badagry to Sokoto deposited some money, in form of cowries, with an Arab friend because he could not carry the whole lot to the north. His friend gave him a bill with which to recover the money later in the north; and this arrangement went well without a hitch.25 Although Clapperton’s objective was to avoid carrying the bulky money, his action also went a long way to demonstrate the existing financial arrangements that had been going on before.

The commercial capital market was properly utilised by the long-distance traders such as the Dyula, a Malinke, Malian Muslim group of traders who operated around the Black Volta and the Upper Niger in gold and kolanut trades. Also the Hausa Fatake, the Nupe and the Arochukwu long-distance traders enjoyed in one way or the other the capital market to finance their activities by securing credit. Bankers and brokers existed in large trade centres such as Timbuktu, Jenne and Kano.

These bankers and brokers charged very high interest rates which could be as high as 100 per cent. This is partly because repayment took a long time to effect and the risks involved. Security was based, first, on goodwill and personal connections. It was also based on property such as livestock, houses and land with witnesses attesting to the arrangements. Those who were too poor to have collateral could pawn themselves or their children or any close relative as a means of guaranteeing repayment. The pawn left the creditor only after the debt had been settled. During the period of pawning, the debtor or his representative worked for the creditor without payment until the debt was paid. The pawn was tolerably well treated like slaves but he could not be sold like a slave. If the original creditor died the pawn was inherited by the creditor’s children or relatives.

Another important form of guaranteeing loans was the sanction of rulers. There could be some regulations binding creditors and debtors. Such laid down regulations helped in the recovery of loans. If a debtor found it impossible to pay his debt, he could be sold into slavery or he may take refuge in a remote place.

The extent to which capital market existed and the extent to which it was utilised by producers and traders is not known yet. It was probably more widespread both at local and inter-regional levels than we assume. A research into it might reveal the existence or otherwise of capital market in the pre-colonial economy of West Africa.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP
Entrepreneurship or organisation is a vital factor of production in any economy and at any time. That it is essential in industrial economies is without any doubt. However, whether or not it was important or to what extent it was important in a pre-industrial economy is controversial. This is so because as mentioned earlier, some economists do not accept using economic terminologies used to describe modern or machine economy for simple economies.26 But, as argued in the case of labour, what seems important is the functional use of the term. In other words, we should look into what an entrepreneur is and see if anyone fitted into the definition in the pre-colonial West
Africa.

According to Hoselitz:

some think of entrepreneurs primarily as innovators, others think of them chiefly as managers of enterprises, others again place major emphasis on their function as mobilizers and allocators of capital.

He further argued that entrepreneurship is not necessarily confined to innovation in the sense that Schumpeter used it.28 Hoselitz believes that:

anyone who is a business-leader, who guides the action of a private productive enterprise and who makes the crucial decisions on the use of productive factors, on their remuneration, on the nature and style of commodities or services to be produced, and on the timing and other aspects of the production and marketing process; is an entrepreneur.9

It is certain that what entrepreneurship implies is an exercise of leadership aided by maturity of character, a sense of security and willingness to undertake risk. It is also backed by the desire to experiment and to be achievement-oriented. An entrepreneur sets a goal for himself and works towards achieving that goal. He may imitate as long as that imitation is practised in a different situation. Indeed, an imitator of an idea must bring in his own ideas and adapt, otherwise he cannot succeed as an entrepreneur.

Judging from the foregoing, one can hardly doubt that entrepreneurship or some sort of organisation existed in West Africa during the pre-colonial era. That productions and distributions were widespread in West Africa during the pre-colonial period is undoubted. As mentioned earlier, other factors of production, viz., land, labour and capital were effectively used to carry out productions. It therefore follows that, entrepreneurship a factor of production existed. Without it, all other factors of production could, in fact, not be used.

The question that comes next to one’s mind is who the entrepreneurs were. Simply, they were the rulers, chiefs, potentates, war chiefs and other influential men and women who had enough wealth and power to mobilise other factors of production. They had control over land, labour and capital, and took decision over the employment of the factors optimally.

Examples of such control was found in many parts of West Africa perhaps before the third century A.D. when the Ghana empire was probably established. The Ghana empire engaged in production of gold and in exporting it to North Africa. This trans-saharan trade had probably begun before the empire became large or even before it existed. It is possible that the trade in gold had been going on before the desiccation of the Sahara which began in c.3000 B.C. It then follows that since this period some entrepreneurship had existed in the western Sudan. The failure of Moroccans to obtain as much gold as they had anticipated before their Occupation of Songhay was partly due to their inability to organise the mining of gold and execute its trade. This partly demonstrates the importance of the rulers of the Western Sudan as entrepreneurs. It is known, for example, that in the empire of Ghana, the ruler controlled the excavation of gold to avoid over-production, believing, as it were, that the more scarce the product was, the more valuable it was likely to be.
Similarly, the Kanuri rulers organised the production of natron, the Kano potentates organised the production of leather works, the Asante rulers provided kolanuts and the Ijebu chiefs organised the production of textiles. Among all the communities we found rulers showing interest directly or indirectly in production. This was so especially in farming in which slaves were employed extensively in large-scale cultivation. Among those who engaged their slaves in farming were the rulers of Benin and Dahomey, Madam Tinubu of Egbaland and Madam Efunsetan of Ibadan. The rulers mentioned initially refused to export their slaves because they were being employed in their cotton plantations.

Entrepreneurship also included those who organised distributions of outputs. The, dyula of Western Sudan, for example, took the initiative of collecting gold and later on kolanuts to trade depots in many parts of West Africa. With effective use of labour and capital they enhanced trade in gold. Without this organisation, gold produced would not enter international market.

Finally, it is essential to note that the factors of production discussed in this chapter had their own peculiarities in the sense that their application should not be confused with the modern use of the terms. The contention, here, is that land, labour, capital and entrepreneurship existed in the pre-colonial West Africa because without them productions and distributions that took place would be impossible. In the next chapter we shall examine the use to which the factors were put in the structure of the economy.

Notes


2. For example, see Introduction to Markets in Africa, eds. Paul Bohannan and George Dalton, Evanston, 1962.

3. For details of this controversy readers are referred to Bohannan and Dalton, Markets in Africa.


5. Philip Curtin, Economic Change in Pre-Colonial Africa: Senegambia in the era of Slaves.


Book I, p. 29.


For more detailed discussion of some of the issues raised in the chapter see G.O. Ogunremi, *Counting the Camels: The Economics of Transportation in the Pre-Industrial Nigeria*. NOK, New York, 1982.
Pre-Colonial Transport

G.O. Ogunremi

Introduction

When Lord Lugard said, "The material development of Africa may be summed up in one word-transport" he was certainly not referring to the traditional modes of transport as they existed in the pre-colonial era in Africa. He was making a case for the construction of the railway. In other words, colonial writers, Europeans or Africans never showed any interest in the pre-colonial transport as if it never existed or as if the pre-colonial economy performed in the absence of some form of transport modes. The second reason for the neglect of the theme until recently must have to do with the idea that the pre-colonial transport is a commonplace thing it is in operation today almost as it was in the past. Therefore, it is not seen as worthy of being studied seriously.2 The third reason may have to do with its condemnation by virtually all writers as being expensive slow and exploitative. Fourthly, unlike the modern forms of transport the railway, the motor and the air which have been well documented and statistically illustrated, the j traditional forms of transport lack all these, and qualitative rather than quantitative analysis has to be applied.

This chapter is therefore a pertinent one to complement this book. Since there has been a growing literature in the study only essential items need be treated. We shall therefore focus on the functions of routes, modes of transport, complementarity and the adequacy or otherwise of the transport system to the economy as it existed.

Function

For any type of economy simple or complex, subsistence or market, rudimentary or advanced there must be a form of transport that serves it. In any form, transport is an I industry that does not exist purely on its own, it exists to serve an economy. Transport economists such as Westemyer Bonavia Norton, Hesley and Sharp to mention a few have in their different expositions discussed into the economic needs of transport. Norton, for example, says, "transportation enables society to enjoy advantages specialization, of resources, and the benefits of division of labour by making it possible , for products to be brought distances thus avoiding the necessity for local production of needs.” If we thoroughly examine Norton’s assertion we should see the benefit of transportation a means of bridging the gap-short or long between places of production and places of consumption as well as places of raw materials and areas where industries are located.

However, transport transcends only economic functions, it covers other aspects of life - social, political and religious. All these require movement of man and material from one place to
another. No matter where a human habitation is, transport by one mode or another must be there, and this is without prejudice to a particular period, it is from this viewpoint, that we have to discuss the remaining part of this chapter.

Land Routes
Routes and vehicles are essential to all forms of transport. Boats and ships have water ways, trains have rail roads, motors have roads and aircrafts have airways. In the same way porters and pack animals have their routes or footpaths. It is therefore quite pertinent to discuss the nature of the route - both land and water that criss-crossed many parts of West Africa in the pre-colonial era. We shall concern ourselves only with the construction and maintenance of the land and water ways.

Traditions in various parts of Yorubaland of modern Nigeria ascribe the first footpaths to hunters. In their search for grooves especially during the dry season, they made trips from their settlement to the other parts of their environment. In such a way they linked one settlement to another. Indeed, they also founded settlements which developed into hamlets, villages and towns. However, it must also have happened that deliberate efforts were made to link settlements to farmlands, water sources, market places and other settlements.

Early writers often describe these routes as trade routes as if only the traders used them. But there is a sense in describing them as trade routes; it is that more people in their economic pursuits rather than for social obligations used the routes most. These were farmers, craftsmen and traders.

Five characteristics of the routes can be briefly described. Firstly, they were more often than not circuitous. This is mainly because road users tended to avoid high hills and low valleys, where the route crossed a stream, they tend to look for a shallow part that could easily be forded. Where a tree fell across the route they tended to avoid its total length. All these avoidances made many routes snaky.

Secondly, the routes were replete with toll-collection centres. It would appear that the purpose of the toll-collection from the road users was partly to maintain the routes and partly to collect revenue for the local authorities. However, the latter appears the more important. This is why only trusted people were made toll-collectors so that a substantial part of the tolls would get to the treasurer. For example, a trusted slave was made to collect tolls at Ijanna which was located between Ilaro and Oyo. The Alaafin enhanced his position higher than that of the Olu of Ilaro in the nineteenth century. Hugh I Clapperton who saw him operate found him more powerful and richer than the Olu of I Ilaro. The third characteristic was the neglect of the routes. It was the responsibility of each local ruler to take responsibility for the maintenance of the routes within his area of jurisdiction. He was to call on all able-bodied men to repair and cut bushes on both sides of the route, in addition, anyone whose farmland was adjacent to the route must also maintain the route. All this was like the maintenance of roads in England under the parish system. Like in the case of England, many routes in Nigeria were more often than not totally neglected.

The fourth characteristic of the routes was that on many occasions large caravans used the routes.
This was particularly so during civil wars or unrests, as well as during the slave trade era. Marauders were common on the routes, molesting travelers especially traders. In order to avert their menace, traders often pulled together on their journeys. This reduced incidence of highway robbery to a few lively traders who traversed the routes.

Fifthly, many routes crossed streams in the wet season; and travelers had to pass through so many streams. In some cases ferries had to be used to cross rivers. These ferries could be in form of calabashes or gourds and small canoes. In any case, ferry crossing also attracted extra costs.

Water Routes
The water routes we describe here are the natural water ways, in form of Rivers, Streams, Lakes and Lagoons. Whereas, Lakes and Lagoons are rare in West Africa rivers abound, criss-crossing the whole region. The major river ways are the Niger, Benue, Volta, Senegal, Gambia, Sokoto, Gongola, Yelwa, Ogun, Osun, Oni, Oluwa and many short and less important one. Like the land routes, these water ways also have certain characteristics.

Firstly, most of them can be navigated only during the wet season when they are in full-fledge, full to their banks. In other words, the majority of the inland waterways dry up in the dry season and are useless as water routes. This is certainly the greatest defect of the West Africa rivers.

Secondly, most rivers got silt up making it difficult for boats that have to draw on deep waters to be grounded.

The third point is the question of snags, fallen trees, rocks and sometimes falls which combine to make easy flow of canoes difficult if not impossible.

Fourthly, there were man-made obstacles such as the one created by the fishermen In pursuit of their occupation they obstruct water ways. They sometimes direct the flow of waters to suit their purpose. In such a way, they inhibit river navigation.

However, most of the problems mentioned above are absent on the lagoon. The main tagoon which went from beyond Warn to Lagos to Ghana is a long one which had been used over the years. It was more useful in the pre-colonial era when there were no mechanical means of transport. Even today, it is still navigated locally.

Modes
Three main modes of transport used both the land and the water ways described above. These are human porterage and pack animals which used the land routes; and canoes which used the water routes of the three, human porterage was the most widespread. It was the means by which man carried both himself and his freight. This carriage of goods could be on the head or at the back or even by hand. It could be on both short and long distances. In many parts of West Africa where waterways and pack animals could not be used, it remained the only means of transportation; and this is why it is often referred to as the pillar of the economy.

Compared with the other two modes of transport it was considered the most costly even in the pre-colonial era. One single factor that was responsible for this was its low carrying capacity. Usually a porte carried 65 to 80 lbs of load at a time. It could even be less when on a long
distance. Neither was the speed high, doing about five kilometres an hour and for about six to eight hours a day. The maintenance of a porter was also high, his complaints constant and his troubles incessant. All these contribute to making his services expensive.

However, this cost could not be over emphasized in the places where there were no alternatives. Besides, when used by an African, the best could be obtained from a porter because the African trader also carried load and appreciated the porters predicament. It was also more used on short distances from the farmland to market place and from one market place to another. In that case reliance is on the household rather than on the slave labour.

The second user of the land route was the pack or draft animal. Among such animals were the donkey, ass, camel, and horse. The common ones were the ninny which is an offspring of a horse and a donkey. Hinnys were uncommon because of the problems of breeding. But horses which were used extensively in Europe were rarely used because of their high cost of maintenance at least compared with the donkey. Horses discriminate a lot in respect of their feeding and their carrying capacity was not commensurate to their maintenance. They were used mainly as cavalry and for prestigious purposes.

Camels were highly used especially across the desert. They had the highest carrying capacity of about five cwt; i.e. about 560 lbs; i.e. about nine times what a porter would carry at a time. More importantly, the camel was easily maintained, depending mainly on grasses. As long as it was rested properly it would walk for a good part of the day. Besides, it was able to do a long journey in the desert because of its adequate feet and ability to do without water for up to fifteen days, being able to store water in its reservoir.

The donkey was by far the mostly employed of the pack animals. Its greatest advantages were its easy and cheap maintenance. It was the beast of burden of both the savanna and the desert. In fact, it was used across the desert before the camel, but then many water wells dried up and it had to go many days without water, it had to be replaced by the camel. The donkey would do without water for not more than five days.

However, as a pack animal of the savanna, the donkey was extremely useful. What the porters did in the forest kingdom, the donkey did in the savanna area. It was used to carry both man and his trade or domestic wares to market places and to urban centres. Althin the settlements, it carried firewood, manure and various other articles.

However, there are certain problems that are related to the pack animals. The greatest of the problems was the infestation of tee-tee flies in the forest areas. These flies are vectors of trypanosomiasis, which are deadly to animals of all categories when bitten. In other words, the draft animals were useful only in the savanna, Sahel and desert areas of West Africa. That was why porters were relied on almost entirely in the forest areas.

Another problem was the rain. During the wet season, pack animals became almost entirely useless. They could not pass through routes that were crossed by streams. Neither could they move about in the rains. Once beaten, they become as soft as brown papers. The colonial government of Northern Nigeria made incessant complaints about the use of pack animals. They
maintained them throughout the year but used them for just about half the year. That made them abandon their route. Local users also had this problem but to a lesser extent since each person owned just a few.

One other problem associated with pack animals was their general health maintenance. Many of them died owing to lack of health care in the absence of veterinary doctors. However, there were local people who knew the right treatment for them.

The canoe was the vehicle of the water ways. It was constructed by experts, using local available material. The dugout, however, was the most original and commonest in the forest and riverine areas. This type of canoe was found in many other parts of Africa. It was widely known in East Africa and used on most of the navigable rivers in the savanna. Canoes were also built but with grasses. This type was commonly used on the Lake Chad.

Along the Lagoon, the Ijo were known to be great builder of canoes, depending on trees for the dugouts. They were also known to be great canoe transporters at the Niger Delta and on Lagoons. Along the River Niger were the Kade canoe builders. Their canoes were used along the Niger and Benue.

The greatest advantages of canoe transport was its cheapness; and this was due to its high carrying capacity. Small canoes would carry as much as half a ton of freight at a time and the biggest ones could carry up to thirty tons. Among the biggest were those which plied the River Niger. Besides, a well-built canoe would last for as long as fifteen years even if it was used everyday.

Complementarity
It must be emphasized that all the modes of transport were complementary. It was not unusual for a trader to carry his trade wares to the market place by canoe and return home by foot when he had less to carry. In the case of the trans-saharan trade, the gold diggers along the Black Volta head loaded their material up to a place where donkeys took over. When they got to the River Niger, the canoe took over up to Timbuktu; and from there camel carried it to Morocco. In other words, all the forms of transport work in unison.

Adequacy
Whether the pre-colonial transport system was adequate to the pre-colonial economy is difficult to ascertain. Generally, one would think that the transport, by and large, met the demands of the economy. There was hardly anything that needed to be carried that was not carried. This is due to a number of reasons.

Firstly, many economic and social functions were locally carried out. Food was locally produced; and there was no need to carry it on long distances. Houses too, were built using local material items. This also happened in the other parts of the world up to the eighteenth century.

Secondly, although there were long-distance traders, most trade was in short distance. It was therefore easy for the porters or donkey or even canoes to do local trips in which case they would
return home on a daily basis. In that case a sort of relay trade whereby the baton of trade was exchanged at central market places was effected. That made a product from Badagry reach Sokoto not carried there by a single trader but through the relay trade.

Thirdly, the adage says, ”necessity is the mother of invention” holds true in the case of transportation vis-a-vis the economy. It must be the economy that dictates the transportation not the other way round. For example, the Industrial Revolution was quite under way before the railway emerged in great Britain. The camels were, in fact, put into use in the location of the early industries. Owing to economic factors such as demand for agricultural products, the economy was pedestrian, in that case, the transport system too had to be on the same level. It is a general economic dictum that the extent of market determines an economy. This market in turn is determined by a wealthy and large population. Neither of the two was prevalent in the pre-colonial economy.

Another factor that dragged down the economy and also the transport system was the incidence of slavery. Even before the era of slave trade, slavery’ had been an institution in Africa, just as feudalism was in Europe and Serfdom in Russia. Slaves worked to produce wealth but they had no purchasing power. Neither could they be taxed for eventual investment. This ultimately hampered the economic growth and delayed an emergence of a rapid, fast, cheap and safe transport system.

However, the nineteenth century ushered in a change in the economy of West Africa. With the abolition of the slave trade and the introduction of “legitimate” commerce the economy become brighter. There were demands in Europe for Africa mineral and agricultural products. It can be said that this economy democratised the society a bit. This is so because very many small scale producer of cotton or palm oil or groundnut oil and every ex-slaves could earn the same coins that big producers earned. The ruler and his subjects earned money, albeit different in size.

This large demand for agricultural products increasingly rendered pre-colonial transport inadequate. But even with the emergence of the railway at the end of the nineteenth century, the traditional transport continued to be used although it was coming under stress.

Conclusion
In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the pre-colonial transport served the pre-colonial economy. The transport system tried to the extent that the economy permitted it. Even today, the traditional transport is still serving the economy. Human porterage abounds not only in rural areas but also in large cities of Lagos or Ibadan, Accra, Adijan and Dakr. Pack animals compete with motor vehicles in the city of Kano and canoes can still be found plying the towns along the Lagoon and the riverine areas. In short, they are still a pillar to the post-colonial economy as they were to the pre-colonial economy.

Notes

2. For example, see G.O. Ogunremi, Counting the Camels : The Economics of Transportation in pre-industrial Nigeria, NOK, International, New York, 1982.
Mining and Extractive Industries: 19th Century

Toyin Falola and A.G. Adebayo

Introduction
A major aspect of the economic policy of the colonial government was to encourage the production of primary goods in the colonies and to export such goods directly to the metropole. But in explaining this economic policy, most writers and commentators tend to define ‘primary goods’ in narrow terms, often limiting the application of the term to agricultural goods. For
instance, Michael Crowder defines the cardinal principles of the colonial economic relationship as the production and importation of cash crops consumption and importation of cash crops, consumption and importation of European manufactured goods and trade between the colonies and the metropolis, thus excluding mineral production and exports from his discussion. In order to provide a more comprehensive view of the colonial economy, this chapter focuses on the mining and the extractive industries in colonial West Africa.

Like agriculture, mining had been practised in West Africa long before the coming of the Europeans and their so-called expeditions and geological surveys. For instance, gold had been mined in West African hundreds of years before the 19th century. The three successive empires of the Western Sudan, Ghana, Mali and Songhai, which flourished in the period between A.D. 1000 and 1600, were known for their production of and trade in gold, kola and slaves in that order. In fact, it was the fame of these empires, and the overblown reports of the availability of gold in West Africa, that brought the Europeans to the region. Salt was mined in the Sahara and by the coastal inhabitants of present day Ghana, while tin was worked by the indigenous people of Jos. Everywhere in West Africa, the knowledge of iron and steel work was common place.

West African is rich in mineral deposits. Gold could be found in Ghana, Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea; tin abounds in Nigeria; iron and steel are also found in commercial quantities in Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire, Mauritania, Guinea and Nigeria; aluminium in Ghana, Guinea and Togo; coal in Nigeria; diamonds in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Guinea, and Cote d’Ivoire; manganese in Ghana; and phosphates in Togo. Oil, a mineral as well as a source of power, occurs in commercial quantity and high quality in Nigeria, and there have been discoveries in Ghana of oil deposits.

Features of Mining and The Extractive Industries
There were about five important features of the mining and the extractive industries: in colonial West Africa. These centred on the ownership and control of the mines, the provision of labour and transport, power supply and the marketing of the products. Each of these features is discussed in turn.

Ownership and Control of the Mines
Unlike agriculture, the production of minerals did not receive adequate encouragement from the colonial government; and only a few of the minerals were worked on sufficiently in large-scale during the colonial era. The French, for example, did not invest tenably in any mining enterprise until the second world war. They began active and large scale mining in 1949 with the formation of the Bureau Minier de la France d’ Outre-Mer, a corporation charged with the specific responsibility of promoting the prospecting of all minerals found in commercial quantities. The primary reason for lukewarmness on the part of the colonial government was because they did not want to take any risk in mining, except if they were sure that the returns were high. While the colonial administration evolved policies that encouraged the production of cash crops, the development of the extractive industries was left in the hands of firms which they did not directly control. Except in Nigeria where coal was mined by a department of the colonial administration (the Railway), the colonial government maintained a laissez-faire attitude toward the mining industry, leaving it entirely in the hands of companies who paid concession fees and taxes. The
explorations regarding occurrence and quantities of minerals were however carried out by the various colonial Geological Surveys Departments.

Though colonial mining had its root in the 19th century, it was not until the first decade of the 20th century before mineral production began to take a significant place in the colonial balance sheet. Private European commercial establishments were the first to establish a foothold in the mining industries. As infold production in Ghana, individual prospectors pioneered the initial success in mining. In other places, pioneering work was done by companies, most often not established or experienced in mining, but whose area of operation gave them the advantage of speculating on the profitability of such ventures. This is especially true of tin mining in Nigeria where the Royal Niger Company started production in 1905.

European mining operation in West Africa was dominated by small firms, although there were fairly large ones such as the Ashanti Gold fields Corporation founded in 1897, and the Amalgamated Tin Mines of Nigeria Limited formed in 1939. The prominence of the small expatriate firms was because of two main reasons. First, the minerals could be worked on a small scale and with less massive financial resources. For instance, for a long time the Royal Niger Company did not really produce the tin mined in the Plateau Rather, it only created the atmosphere for the mining and appropriated the tin produced by local distributors. The second reason was the problem of transporting heavy machinery from the coast to the mines. Whilst the small firms could transport their small or medium-sized machines, the big firms found it difficult to do so for their huge machines. For instance, all firms prospecting for gold in Southern Ghana and the Ashanti regions had to limit the weight of their machines to 3cwt, as they were carried by human porterage. The mutual jealousy that existed among these companies prevented the building of good and serviceable roads to the coast; each mining company in turn cleared a temporary road from its concessions to the coast.

Labour
Generally, little skill was needed in the extractive industries at the beginning. For a long time, machinery was not introduced and all that was needed was the skill the traditional miners had before the coming of the Europeans. Thus, the gold miners of Ghana and Cote d’Ivoire employed the local Asante, Fante and Kru population who were knowledgeable in gold mining. In the same way, the*local Hausa immigrants and Plateau inhabitants in Jos and Bauchi areas were engaged in the tin operations. However, with the introduction of machinery, these categories of workers were employed as unskilled labourers who worked on the digging and the carrying sections of the mining operations.

When machinery was introduced it became essential that skilled labour be acquired. At first, the highly skilled parts of the work were done by the European expatriate employers of the firms, most often the shareholders. The semi-skilled and clerical works were done by the educated people form coastal cities whose major qualification was the ability to speak English or French. When these educated people acquired enough on-the-job experience, they sometimes replaced the expatriate workers because they drew lesser pay.

The mine workers were about the first group of people in West Africa who drew wages and salaries. Generally, the pay was low. For instance, an unskilled tin miner in Nigeria in 1938 was
earning merely 23k per week. In a survey by Bower, mine workers in Nigeria drew the lowest pay compared with their counterparts in other parts of the world; and they worked under the most severe conditions. In spite” of this, except the Enugu coal miners who embarked upon industrial action right from the inception of the coal industry, there were no organised and collective rising against such exploitative pay and conditions.

Mine workers were housed in Village-type communities and were provided with such amenities and necessities as housing, food, electricity and cinema. Most of them were however unstable, like the unskilled workers employed in tin mining in Nigeria who left the mines as soon as the first rains fell, for they originally were fanners.

Transport
It is the consensus of opinion among experts on colonial economic structures as Samir Amin that infrastructures like railway, access roads and electricity were provided in colonial West Africa to service the colonial economy. Such stands could be substantiated by a careful examination of the needs of the mines and how they were met. We have hinted that until 1900, the firms engaged in gold production in Ghana were small because of lack of good and serviceable roads. A similar situation was encountered in Nigeria where until 1928, Nigeria’s tin was not competitive on the market because of high transport costs. The need of the mining industry for easy and economical means of transport resulted in the building or the extension of railways and roads in many parts in West Africa. For instance, the Eastern railway in Nigeria would probably not have been built when it was built but for the need to transport coal form Enugu to the coast and to the tin mines is Jos. In like manner, a light railway was constructed linking Bukuru with the major Lagos-Kano trunk. The electricity needed in the tin mines indirectly contributed to the electrification of Jos and the surrounding mine towns.

Power
The power needed in the mining industry in West African was provided through four sources: water, electricity, coal and petroleum. The first two needs no elaboration — water and the hydro-electric power supply was used in many other spheres. Coal and petroleum are much more related to the subject at hand because they are also mined. Coal in Nigeria is one of our case studies which is discussed below. Petroleum exploration started during the colonial period, though its exploration on a commercial scale in West Africa was limited to Nigeria. Petroleum exploration in Nigeria was started by a German company, the Nigerian Bitumen Corporation which drilled 14 wells around Lagos in 1908. Though this initial success was terminated by the first World War, it at least established the fact;that Nigeria is potentially an oil rich country. It was the success that gave birth to renewed interest for exploration after the war when the Shell D’Arcy Exploration Parties (a consortium jointly owned by Royal Dutch Shell and British Petroleum now known as Shell-BP Petroleum Development Company of Nigeria) started geological work in 1937. The Parties’ exploration activities were affected by the second World War. After the war, when exploration resumed, the Parties succeeded ir. reducing the oil-rich areas of Nigeria to the coastal strip, averaging 40,000 square miles. In 1956, the company struck Nigeria’s first major crude finds from the Oloibiri well. Exportation of petroleum started in 1958 when Nigeria’s production had averaged 6,00C barrels per day. Unlike the other minerals that would be studied in our case studies petroleum production in Nigeria did not decline after 1958. In fact, it constituted in later years the country’s major source of income, its production increased
while its importance in the country’s economy rose phenomenally. The reasons for this are local as well as global, for petroleum as a major and most economical source of energy to producers after 1960 when the Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC” was formed, the country encouraged the development of the petroleum industry and did little, by way of any enactment of laws, to interfere with the activities of the oil companies in Nigeria. There were people who thought that the colonial administration in Nigeria probably did not know the extent of the petroleum deposit in Nigeria, else they would not have granted the country its independence in 1960 without violent struggle. Of course, the British knew how oil-rich Nigeria was, they did not however foresee a situation in which the producing countries, and not the companies, would be controlling the prices and the production of oil, thus making it scarce and expensive.

Marketing
Because on the average it costs more to produce gold or tin or coal in West Africa than in other producing countries, the region’s minerals were less competitive on the market. Until transport problems were alleviated by the construction of railway and feeder roads, and until labour problems of skill and cheapness were overcome after the second World War, the extractive industries in West Africa did not substantially develop.

As is true of agriculture, the market for the mineral products of West Africa were the metropolitan countries concerned. The prices were determined by the market situation there, and the volume of production was conditioned by the demand there. This meant that any crisis in the metropole would affect the economy of the colony concerned. International crises such as the World Wars I and II and the depression between them that engulfed Europe during the first half of the 20th century therefore affected the production and the prices of these minerals. While the wars raised the demand for tin, the depression nearly smashed the tin industry in West Africa, as many firms had to fold up. Generally, the mining industry in West Africa experienced fluctuations in prices and at extremely bad periods workers’ pay declined and this brewed dissensions.

Case Studies of Major Mining and the Extractive Industries
Among the minerals worked in colonial West Africa were columbite, tantalite, zinc, lead, iron, copper, manganese, phosphates, coal and gold. Nearly all the countries had one or more minerals which were exploited by European firms or the colonial government. For instance, diamonds were worked in Ghana, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone and iron ore were obtained in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone. Three minerals — tin, coal and gold — were however worked in large scales and they have all been used in this chapter as case studies to illustrate the general features of mining and the extractive industries.

Tin Mining
Nigeria is the major area in West Africa where tin deposit occurs in sufficient commercial quantities. Here, colonial tin mining was pioneered by the Royal Niger Company which from 1900 sponsored expeditions to explore and determine the size of the deposit in Bauchi province. By 1906, with the success of the expeditions, the company started its tin mining operations. Initially, the Company’s operations were however modest. Tin boom began in 1909 by the Champion Tin fields Company (Nigeria) which abandoned its unsuccessful gold prospecting
operations in Ghana to start extracting tin in Nigeria. The success of this company within a year attracted into the tin fields over fifty other companies.

For a long time, however, Nigeria ranked lowest among the tin producing counties of the world. The world major tin producing countries in 1936 in order of importance were Malaya, Netherland, East Indies, Bolivia, Siam, China and Nigeria. These countries together produced over 86 per cent of the then world’s total output of 180,100 tons. With the exception of Bolivia, where the tin occurs in lodes thus demanding costly underground mining, the methods of working were approximately the same for all producers.

In Nigeria, the tin occurs in shallow, terrace deposits, usually covered by varying depth of barren ground referred to as the "overburden"! This overburden is removed manually or by mechanical means such as the drag-line excavators and team shovels. Thus opened up, the tin-bearing wash is lifted by various methods. According to Bower, the tin-mining operation can be divided into three stages. There are breaking or excavating the tin-bearing ground, (2) elevating such broken ground to the surface; and separating the tin concentrate form the gangue or earthly residue near the actual place of work.”10 Of course, all these operations can be done by hand labour. The traditional Nigeria tributor or semi-independent tin-miner with alluvium with pick or hoe, carries it on his head to where water is available where it is washed by means of rocking m calabashes or running though shine boxes.11 Larger concerns also employed hand labour usually organised into gangs using picks, shovels and headpans.

When machinery was introduced into the operation, the deposits were mined by jets of water which, under natural or artificial pressure, washed away the soil. Steam and diesel shovels were also used for excavating, while teams and trucks were used for transporting the tin-bearing wash to a treatment plant. The drag-line which was “the latest innovation in tin-mining machinery combines the operations of excavating and elevating and (was) consequently very cheap to operate”. 12 Another economical machine was the dredge.13

Though the methods of extracting the tin were similar in many producing countries, the cost of production varied widely. This was due to such factors as the nature of the deposits, types of plants needed on the production, cost of storing and rail freights, salaries and wages of labour and policies of producers or colonial governments. For instance, the production cost of Nigeria’s tin was higher than that of Malaya because “although wares are lower in Nigeria, transport costs are lower in Malaya, and many spare parts which must be imported to Nigeria are produced in Malaya by low-cost Chinese foundries”.14

We have just hinted that wages were low in Nigeria. Quite so, for in 1928 at the height of the tin boom, the Nigerian miner was earning averagely only 65k per week. This slumped to 25k in 1933 and further to 23k in 1938.K In terms of composition, the labour force in the tin mines consisted of skilled and unskilled workers. The latter, employed pick, shovel and headpans. They were the Hausa and Plateau people who engaged in hunting and farming but who only came to the mines for a short period after the harvests. The supervisory and semi-skilled jobs were done by Yoruba or Igbo southern immigrants who worked as fitters, electricians and clerks.

The greater part of the pick, shovel and headpan work were done by contract, meaning that the
labourer so enabled was paid so much per cubic yard of ground excavated or carried away to a dump. Only a few unskilled and most of the skilled workers were paid on time basis. These workers were usually housed in village-type huts provided by the companies. Sometimes, food was rationed. All pick, shovel and headpan workers were under a headman employed by a company; and a worker was free to change from one headman or company to another.

The high cost of transport was soon reduced by the Construction of a network of roads and railway to link the major Lagos-Kano line. At first, the construction was carried out by the companies. For instance, the Ropp Tin Mines constructed the Bukuru-Ropp road at a cost N36.00016 Later, the government moved in, and by 1914 a light railway had been constructed linking the Bukuru mines with Zaria on the main line. In 1928, with the completion of the Eastern railway from Port Harcourt to the Plateau, transport cost came down from 1459 per ton in 1928 (when tin was being carried to the coast by human porterage and river craft) to #16. With decreasing transport and labour costs, Nigeria’s tin became more competitive, and export increased from 545 tons in 1908 to 13,000 tons in 1928.

We have noted above that the markets of mineral products in Africa were affected by developments in the metropolitan countries. This was also true of tin in Nigeria as its production and export were affected by the European wars and the economic depression in Europe. Because of the inelasticity of the demand for tin; and because only a low percentage of tin is used in combination with other metals to produce say collapsible tubes or car radiators, the number and area of operation of firms and labourers either increased or decreased with market conditions. For instance, in 1918 there were 82 tin mining companies in Nigeria with a working capital of about N4 million. This decreased to 31 companies with a working capital of M5.8 million in 1938 due to the depression. Also, the companies which were engaging 28,904 Nigerians in 1928 could not employ more than 14.911 Nigerian in 1933.17

The fluctuation in prices and the uncertainties of the market were matters of concern to many companies and producer governments. An attempt was made in 1929 by the Tin Producers Association, an association of British and Dutch producers, to raise price by imposing voluntary cutbacks in production. But this failed. In 1931 however, the International Tin Control Scheme was born and this succeeded in imposing a compulsory cutback, supervised by the International Tin Committee representing the signatory governments of Malaya, Netherland, East Indies, Bolivia and Great Britain (on behalf of Nigeria).18 The restriction granted annual average quotas and annual output of j pure tin to each producer country. With the adoption of the scheme in Nigeria, many small firms folded up, having been eaten up by the bigger ones. Some pooled their resources together rather than be forced out of the competition. Such was the story of the two companies that formed the Amalgamated Tin mines of Nigeria Limited in 1939 with an initial working capital of #3.9 million.19

Though the tin industry succeeded in providing infrastructures like roads, railway and electricity around the mines, the development of a subsidiary industry like the smelter was not encouraged. It was the claim of the colonial administration trumpeted by their apologists that though tin smelts at low temperature the amount of electricity generated from the installations around the mines would not be sufficient for smelting purpose. They even argued that there would be little
saving in transport costs if coal were brought to the Plateau or if tin tone were taken to Enugu. In any case, they continued, Nigerian coal is non-coking and therefore inadequate for smelting purposes. Of course, we now know that these claims do not give all the explanations, even if scientifically and economically true. We know that the colonial administration’s major concern was not the development of manufacturing or processing industries but of lifting raw materials to the metropolitan countries.

Coal Mining

The largest deposit of coal in West Africa occurs in Nigeria.20 As a result of the pioneering efforts of officers of the mineral survey of southern Nigeria, coal was discovered at Udi as early as 1905. Coal mining was however begun by the Railway Department in 1915. The administration of the colliery was undertaken by the Railway from 1915 to 1950; though in 1937 a separate Colliery Department was established. In 1950, the responsibility for the mines was taken over by a management board and thereafter the Nigerian Coal Corporation was established by ordinance.21 Throughout the colonial period, the coal industry in Nigeria was government-sponsored.

The reason why the colonial government sponsored coal mining in Nigeria is not farfetched. Coal was needed by the Railway Department and it is interesting to note that by far the largest quantity of the coal produced was bought by the Railway Department in Nigeria as well as in other British colonies in West Africa. For its operations, the Nigeria Railway used some 17,000 tons monthly to such other users as the Electricity Corporation of Nigeria, the Marine Department and other commercial concerns. Coal was also exported to Ghana and Sierra Leone. For instance, between 1930 and 1937 Nigeria exported an annual average of about 34,687 tons of coal to Ghana. Also in 1954, government obtained two orders each for 10,000 tons of coal for the Ghana Railways.23

The foregoing shows that the developments of the Nigerian coal industry and the railway were intertwined. Quite so, for with the opening of the first colliery at Udi, the port of Port Harcourt and the railway linking it with Enugu were built. To facilitate the transportation of coal to key areas in Nigeria, the Eastern Railway was extended to Jos and Kaduna Junction in the 1920’s. On another level, the prosperity of the Nigerian coal industry began to wane as a result of the introduction from 1955 of diesel engines to the Nigerian railway. By 1959, the demand for coal had drastically declined, and coal mining operations soon became uneconomical as a result of the loss of market.24

An account of the coal industry in 1954 shows that there were three mines at Enugu. They were Obwetti with daily output of about 12,00 tons, Iva with 750 tons and Hayes producing 250 tons per day. A rope-way of about 4km that ran from Hayes to Obwetti mines carried the mine output from Hayes to the Obwetti bunkers by means of buckets that travelled down the steel ropes. This took care of a long haul by road.

An important aspect of the Nigeria coal industry was the employment and organisation of the force. In its early years, the industry faced a short supply of labour. The attraction of a steady wage soon became manifest and workers began to flood the mine fields. The majority of the workers came from nearby villages and were largely illiterates. Compared with the tin industry, the average wage at the colliery was relatively high and steady. This had been attributed to the
fact that, being run by a government department, profit was not the paramount objective and that the Igbo coal miners were as pugnacious as the Hausa tin miners were docile.25 At the very early stages, they had resorted to combined action, including the strikes of 1920 caused by the unpopularity of paper money, and that of March 1937 resulting in the restoration of the wage rate reduced during the depression.26

The condition of service of the Enugu coal miners has been regarded as most favourable.27 Far instance, it is claimed that the 7,000 people employed at the mines were given annual leave with pay, provided with welfare shops and free cinema performances in their housing estates. It is also claimed that unlike in England where coal miners had to descend thousands of feet into the earth, the Enugu coal miners worked in tunnels five feet high driven into the side of the hills. Hence, instead of crawling to his work and having coal while lying on his side, the Nigerian coal miner could reach his work without much discomfort. As Nigerian coal mines possessed no dangerous gas, the miners ran no risk of explosions and the accident rate in the Nigerian mines was the lowest in the world. The pillar and stall method was used in most of the mines, though the Hayes mines employed mechanical cutters and conveyer belts.

It is not our task here to refute the foregoing claims; that has been done elsewhere.28 Suffice it to say however that the condition of service of Enugu coal miners left much to be desired and this caused coal miners’ strike which caused the colonial government a major embarrassment.

Gold Mining
Although Africa is the chief gold producer of the world, the major area where gold was mined during the colonial period was Ghana whose colonial in Africa and the history of gold production in the area is a long one indeed. Other areas where gold is produced, albeit not in such exportable quantities as in Ghana, were Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Leone, and French West Africa. In the latter gold was mined in Kayes in Senegal, Bowrea and Tukisso River in Guinea, Akrizi and comes in Cote in Cote d’Ivoire.29 Gold is present in West Africa in the form of alluvial deposits and from conglomerate reefs. An account of gold production in Ghana is provided here.

Alluvial gold is found in great quantities in many places in Ghana. The Ashanti area possesses one of the richest gold mines in the world. The mines here were owned by the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation and reserves could be found at Obuasi, BirimAkim), Abekobra and Tarkwa districts.30

Up to the 1870s, gold production continued to be in the hands of Ghanaians who mined the minerals within a general technical and organisational framework similar to what existed in the early Sudanese empires. In the 1870s, however, educated Ghanaians from the coast started acquiring mining concessions in the interior. The migrants did a pioneering work not only in acting as middlemen between pioneering miners and the Europeans but also in organising the miners along the lines of modern extractive industries.31 Among the African concessionaires of the 1880s were Mr. Darson of Cape Coast and Dk Hoiton who individually acquired a large number of land concessions in the -mining areas of Wasaw. To increase the sale value of his concessions, Dr. Horton backed the Dixcove-Tarkwa Railway Scheme. These African concessionaries were later sold to the larger European firms.32
The rest of the 19th century saw the arrival of European capitalists and the reorganisation of the gold mining. Already, in 1875, four Europeans had engaged in gold mining without the aid of machinery and found that large scale production was not possible. Thereafter, Bonnat a French trader and adventurer, ventured into the Tarkwa region and gave reports to France of prospects for gold mining. This led to the formation of the African Gold Coast Company which acquired land concessions in 1878. This was followed by the three new companies and by 1881 machines of different kinds had been erected.

The success of these companies started off a mad gold rush, especially when the London newspapers blew the reports out of proportion. Adventurers came and some fraudulent and genuine companies were found, prospecting for gold. By 1882 however, when the reality dawned on some people, only six companies were left.

At this time, some major problems reduced the prospect of gold mining as a whole. They included the seasonal nature of labour supply and the inadequacy of the existing means of transport from the mines to the coast. The labour problem was compounded by the fact that the companies preferred Kru labourers to local Ghanaians and had to import, at considerable expense, this group of people from Liberia. The Kru, however, did not always stay in Ghana for a long period.

Meanwhile, the British administration entered the gold rush. It sent out officers to prospect for gold especially in the Winneba district. But the administration was not as enthusiastic as the private firms, especially the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation which was established by Mr. Gade in 1897. This company installed the latest mining gear and permanent houses for their engineer and other personnel officers. In addition, the company built large reservoirs for workers and for other mining purposes. The company was so successful that in 1898 it offered government a sum of £5,000 towards the cost of extending the Sekondi-Tarkwa railway to Kumasi to pass through the company’s Obuasi concessions.

The 20th century opened with a renewed gold rush created by the success of the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation and within two years, over 3,500 concessions were taken in the country. Within a year, it was discovered that only 114 concessions were really viable. The chiefs who granted these concessions had only a vague notion of the boundaries of the concessions they were granting. They, therefore, sometimes granted overlapping concessions which involved companies in expensive litigations.

This continued until 1912. A clearer and more definite direction was given to the gold industry in Ghana with the formidable work of the first Geological Survey Department under the directorship of E. Kitson. He toured the country and within a few years reported on the variety of minerals in the country.

The industry was however affected by the World War I and the depression that followed. Export decreased from over 400,000 in 1914 to less than 200,000 in 1928. Soon after, there was recovery in the industry with export soaring to 600,000 in 1938. Between the Second World War and 1951, production varied between 500,000 and 700,000 and
800,000, from 1952 to 1957, and except for the poor year of 1955, output oscillated between 700,000 and 800,000 from 1952-1957.

Conclusion
The economic objective of the colonial government was not limited to cash crop production for export but also to mining and the extractive industries. Fortunately for them West Africa had a long history of mining. The region is also rich in minerals. The colonial government and many private European firms worked on a number of these minerals. Prospecting in respect of minerals like gold and iron ore began in the 19th century; but mineral exploitation began on a large scale in the 20th century, especially during the second World War when there was a tremendous need to get raw materials to manufacture weapons. To facilitate exploitation and marketing, West Africans were recruited as unskilled labour, clerks and technicians in the mines, transportation was improved and many sources of power were developed. The products from the mines were taken to Europe and were never substantially used to develop West Africa.

Notes


ill. Ibid.

12. Ibid
13. Bower provides a table showing the comparative cost of and area treated by various methods in Nigeria in 1939 as follows:

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ekundare, R.O. *An Economic History of Nigeria*, op cit, p. 177


U8. Bower, "The Mining Industry".

20. World distribution of coal deposit is found to be highly biased against the southern hemisphere which has less than 4 per cent of the world’s known reserve.


Bower, ”The mining industry”, pp. 30-31.

24. All records point to the fact that no organised combination of workers occurred in any mining industries of the northern provinces.

25. Bower, ”The mining industry” p. 29.


Trade and Markets in Pre-Colonial Economy

Toyin Falola

Introduction
One remarkable feature of the West African agricultural and industrial systems was that they operated far above the subsistence level. All the sections of the economy were capable of generating surpluses. These had to be disposed of; and partly explains why trading and markets formed integral parts of the West African indigenous economy. There were other obvious reasons for the existence of markets. No West African community was self-sufficient in its economy. The people in the savannah region needed coastal products such as salt and fish; and those in the coast also needed goods such as shea butter, hides and skin produced in the savannah region. Even within the same region, locational and geographical differences led to market variations in the goods produced, thus encouraging and promoting trade. Within the same society, be it a town, a village or a clan, division of labour and specialization in economic functions encouraged the need for markets and trading. The farmers, tool makers and other professionals had to enter into symbiotic relationship. The farmers needed the tools and tool makers needed food. The indispensability of trading and markets encouraged the need to develop the institutions which could facilitate commerce.

The Infrastructures of Commerce: Currency and Transportation
It is impossible to have a distribution system without efficient currency and transportation. Both the currency and transportation systems of West African were well developed.

Currency
Whilst it is true that goods were exchanged by barter in many societies, the use of money for transactions was the most common. Barter, as a system of exchange, was not as dominant as many anthropologists would want us to believe, and the so-called dumb trade whereby traders exchanged goods without any verbal consultation was strange in many parts of West Africa. West African commercial transactions were multilateral and widespread for barter to cope with, the only solution being the use of currencies.
There were all kinds of currencies in West Africa. Within a region, there could be as many as four. In Nigeria, for example, cowries, brass, iron and copper objects were commonly used. Three varieties of currencies were, however, widespread in West Africa. The first was cloth money. The use of cotton strips was reported among the Borno in Nigeria and the Wolof in the Senegambia. The second was metal currency. Gold, copper and iron rods were used in different parts of West Africa. Mannillas, currencies made of brass and copper, were widely used in the Niger Delta and a variety of iron wires was in circulation in the Upper Guinea coast. Gold was the most common currency in Ashante and many parts of the central forest region and also in the Western Sudan. The Arab scholars who visited West Africa reported the use of gold as far back as the eleventh century A.D. There were two forms of gold currencies. The first was gold dust normally kept in bags. The second was mithgals or dinars which were minted in large quantities at Nikki in northern Dahomey. These two forms of gold currencies circulated widely in West and North Africa.

The third variety of currency was cowry shells. They were used in virtually the whole of West Africa. The use of cowry had a long antecedent and it probably spread, at different times, from one area to another until it became popular throughout West Africa. It had a number of advantages. It made exchange possible over a wide territory since it was used in many places. Its small size made it easy to carry, though it was bulky for large transactions. The cowry served as an effective measure of value and a unit of account which made it convenient to know the value of each good in relation to another and to fix prices to all kinds of products. Finally, the cowry could not be forged.

All the above currencies facilitated exchange of goods and services. Transactions could be made by making use of the currencies in places where they were legal tenders. The currencies also made it possible to establish a capital market where people could borrow money. There were small-scale credit institutions like the esusu among the Yoruba and large-scale ones organised among long-distance traders. There were bankers, money-lenders and exchange brokers who helped traders secure credit. None of these services would have been possible without currencies.

Transportation
Like the currency, transport was also important if traders were to move their goods from one place to another. There were two forms of transportation; by water and by land. The first, water transport, was restricted to places where there were rivers, big streams, lagoon and ocean. Water transport had two advantages; it was cheaper than communications by land and it was easier to transport bulky goods on water than land. There were, however, many obstacles to water transport in West Africa. Many rivers lacked water during the dry seasons while many were over flooded in the rainy seasons. There were other problems of navigation such as snags and dangerous rapids.

Many methods and crafts were used to travel on water. A number of ways were used to cross swamps, streams, small rivers and rivers with shallow water. They could wade through them or walk on a trunk put across the water. Both were, at times, dangerous and often resulted in a loss of balance, with the consequence of falling and losing loads to the water. Traders were also ferried across water by professional ferrymen who were stationed on the banks of rivers. They could also use pottery bowls and big calabashes. James Johnson, a C.M.S. missionary who
travelled in Yorubaland in the 1870s described his experience in crossing a stream with a calabash in the following words:

A passenger either sits on it, with his feet on another, or in the water, or doubles them around it, his body being in the water, whilst he carried his arms also around it to meet those of the ferryman, who takes hold of them, and, swimming with his face towards the ferry, propels it. The ferry is made of two halves of a large gourd, fastened together with wax and tar. It is a rather ticklish concern; the risk of a capsize is great, and much time is lost in waiting when there are many to be crossed.’

The best method of river transportation was by using canoes. The canoe took more loads and especially bulky ones than human beings or pack animals; it was capable of carrying up to thirty tons of goods at a time. It was also a more convenient mode of communication as traders could sit down in the bow with their merchandise. Passengers could also sleep and prepare their meals on board. The use of canoe in large numbers and for commercial purposes was predominant in the estuaries and lagoons along the coast, on the Senegal, the Niger and the Benue rivers and on Lake Chad.

Water transport was not without its problems. The passengers were exposed to cold, mosquitoes, sun and rain. In addition, there were occasional dangers to life caused by tide, stakes, weirs and other traps set by fishermen. The activities of pirates too, posed a great threat to lives and property.

Transportation by land was by head porterage and pack animals. The traders either carried the goods themselves or employed the services of porters, slaves or their family labour, a person was able to carry between eighty and one hundred and twenty pounds of load and walk a distance of about three kilometres an hour.

Pack animals were widely used in the savannah. Among the commonly used animals were the camel, donkey, mule, butlock and oxen. Unlike human power, the animals were capable of carrying more loads and travelling longer distances with ease. The animals could not however, be used in the forest region because of scarcity of pasture and because they were susceptible to trypanosomiasis prevalent in this region. Traders in the savannah made considerable use of the animals. The camel, an animal which could withstand sun, water shortage, carry heavy loads and travel long distances was relied on in the desert and semi-desert areas. The donkey took the camel’s place in the Sudan. The donkey could travel easily on rough terrains, and could survive with little food. It was bred and trained by specialists (e.g., the Mossi), and this made it easier for traders to use.

Both the water and land communications systems were efficient, in spite of criticisms made by scholars who believe that an economy needed the wheel to thrive. Large quantities of goods were transferred from one place to another, and over large distances by making use of human porterage, pack animals or canoes. There is no evidence to argue that the transport system inhibited the growth of West African markets.

While still on the transport system, it is pertinent to discuss the trade routes used by traders in the course of their businesses.
**Trade Routes**

West Africa had many highways which fell into three categories. In the first place, there were the local routes linking the villages and towns in the same area together. Second, there were regional or inter-state routes which served to unite two or more states. Third, there were international highways which linked many states and different ecological regions together. Thus, West Africa was criss-crossed by a complex network of routes. Many highways took off in the coastal region, passed through the vast hinterland and went northwards. There were many of these south-north routes. One highway started in Lagos, passed through Abeokuta, Florin, Bida, Zaria and Kano, all in Nigeria. Another began in Accra and tranversed Kumasi, Salaga, Yendi, Mango up to Say on the Niger bend, yet, another began in Monrovia and passed through Mussardu, Keruan, Kankan, Siguri, Bamako, San, Djenne, to Timbuktu. There were also the east:west routes, cutting across many West African states. One of such routes began in St. Louis, Senegal, and ran through Bakel, Kita, Bamako, San, Quagadouo, Say, Sokoto and Kano.

What is important is not only to know the routes but to note their distinguishing characteristics. First, the routes connected the whole of West Africa together. Those places which were not located on the major highways were linked by extensive feeder roads.

Second, the routes were wide enough for people who travelled on foot or on animal. They were also well kept. Most of the European travellers who made use of these routes, especially in the 19th century, remarked that they were "good", "fine" and "adequate". However, the routes were sometimes bad due to neglect and hostilities among states.

Finally, the routes were, by and large, safe and secure except in periods of wars. It was the primary responsibility of the rulers through which the routes passed to make them safe. It was not unusual for states to patrol the routes and to appoint soldiers or hunters to accompany the traders. Other institutions such as the bonds of marriage, of religion and of friendship enabled traders to travel freely on the routes since they were passing through friendly states.

The trade routes were a means to an end, the end being to get to the market. The market was, therefore, a major aspect of the West African economy.

**Markets**

A market, in the West African sense, is a demarcated site where traders and consumers met to exchange products. Transactions could, however, be made in places which were not, strictly speaking, markets. For instance, there were "road side markets" where goods were spread on the ground. Food sellers also had their different stalls located in different places while hawking was done by children and women who carried and advertised the goods about. Polly Hill has written on "house trade", a practice which enabled women kept in purdah to trade in their private houses.

The market place was however the most developed. It had a number of features. First, the market was multi-functional; it performed socio-political functions besides the commercial. The market was a place of entertainment as well as an amusement park which enabled drummers, singers and poets to practise their arts. In addition, it was a place to disseminate information and spread news and rumours about the current events in the society. Nevertheless, the commercial
function of the market remained the most significant.

Second, the markets were properly organised. The form of market organisation differed from place to place though they tended to share many things in common. One, they were well laid out; some had trees to provide shade while some had tents or stalls built of thatched roofs. Two, there were trade guilds organised along commodities of trade. For example, there could be guilds of livestock dealers, foreign traders and liquor traders, in a market. Members of the same trade guild sat close to one another. This arrangement had, at least, three merits: it made it convenient for buyers to locate the section of every item in the market; it reduced the possibility of making excessive profit because consumers could easily compare prices of many traders; and it enabled consumers to choose the best from a large number of the same good. But the system was not without its demerits; it made it easier for traders to fix and control prices, and as long as they sat close to one another, no trader could sell below the agreed price. Finally, trading went on in an atmosphere of peace. The trade guilds already referred to promoted friendliness and settled quarrels among members. More importantly, the political authorities in all West African states took interest in the orderliness of the market, partly because the dues and tolls paid by traders went a long way in financing their bureaucracies. Officials with wide powers were usually placed in the markets to monitor the activities of both traders and consumers. On the whole, all West African markets were orderly, and in the words of a foreign observer:

That such immense crowds should meet day after day in perfect harmony and order, and transact their affairs like one great family without fighting and bloodshed is the more wonderful because it stands out in such bold contrast to what is seen in lands boasted for civilization and good government

The third and most important feature was that the markets were held either daily or periodically. Daily markets were held in virtually all the urban centres where they served the immediate needs of the people living in the towns and their environs. All the requirements of the consumers could be found in these markets.

The periodic markets, on the other hand, were held at intervals of two or more days. The periodic days for holding markets varied from state to state. For example, among the Bete of southern Cote d’Ivoire and the Kukuruku of Nigeria, market meetings were held at every ninth day. among the Yoruba, Ibo and Ibibio, all in Nigeria, market periodicity was on every eighth day. Seven-day markets were more widespread in southern Ghana, northern Nigeria, among the Wolof of Senegal and the Minianka of Cote d’Ivoire. Six-day markets were the practice among the Dyuia of Senegal, and the Dagomba and Konkomba of Ghana.14

While the periodic markets did perform the functions of the daily markets, their most dominant economic function “is the collection, bulking, and distribution of local food products, the products of local food processing, and local craft industrial products.’5 Most of the periodic markets in every region were linked together in sequence of operation, or put differently, most markets belonged to the same ring.16 People living in contiguous parts of a region might have their periodic market on different days of the week to avoid clashes and make for maximum participation. Where market days overlapped, traders and consumers had the choice of attending those that were spatially closest, those that had the commodities in which
they were interested or those where they had trusted friends and customers. By giving allowance for the operation of periodic markets in different places, a repetitive market cycle came into existence whereby traders could trade in most days of the week in different markets.

Both the organisation of the market and the periodicity of the markets in different parts of west Africa attested to a well-organised trading system. This trading system was carried out at three basic levels: local internal, regional and international.

Local or Internal Trade
This trade involved the exchange of goods between the people of a town on the one hand, and the people of a town and its immediate environs, on the other, the daily markets earlier referred to catered for local trade. Local trade went on everyday in all communities. In many communities, trading was restricted to the mornings, from dawn till around noon. In many others, it was in the evenings, between 6.00p.m. and 10.30p.m Yet in others, trade went on throughout the day in the markets.

Merchandise were brought into the markets in many ways. First, traders went into the farms or factories to buy goods directly from producers. These goods were later taken to the markets. Second, middlemen intercepted producers going to the markets. The middlemen would, in turn, sell the goods to traders or directly to consumers. Third the producers could take their goods to the markets to sell directly to consumers.

The process of becoming a local trader was simple. The first step was to secure fund to buy goods. Those who had no fund could start by selling items which they themselves had produced. By and large, participation in local trade was not restricted though there were different customs in every state which tended to exclude some people on the basis of their age, sex or religion.

Regional or External Trade
All West Africa states participated in external trade, both regional and international. Geographical differences had far-reaching impact on what could be manufactured or grown in every state. For instance, the savannah region was good for rearing cattle but bad for cultivating kola nuts or palm trees. Similarly, the forest region was suitable for the cultivation of kolanuts but could not support livestock rearing because of the menace of tse-tse flies. In effect, a community had to establish trade relations with others in order to obtain the goods that it could not produce.

There were, broadly speaking, three tiers of regional trading. The first was provincial with trading activities being concentrated in the provincial periodic markets. The trade involved people who belonged to the same state or kingdom. They normally met in the capitals or in the major markets of the kingdoms.

The second tier was inter-regional, involving people from more than two states. Inter-regional markets were unique because of the large number of people and the wide varieties of goods that were involved. A number of the inter-regional markets were held on neutral grounds or in frontier towns, and they were jointly administered by two or more states.
There were many of these inter-regional markets in West Africa. Among those that were well attended up to the 19th century were Gao in the country of the Songhai, Kaya femong the Mossi, Salaga in Ghana, Dendi in northern Dahomey and Kano in Nigeria. Sala’ga, for instance, was a major commercial town. Numerous traders attended the market from Sokoto, Timbuktu, Hombori, Sansanne, Mango, Salfara, Kan and many other parts of the Western Sudan.

The third tier of regional trade was the metropolitan centres and commercial terminals where several trade routes converged. Among these were the leading commercial centres in West Africa such as Timbuktu, Jenne, Kukawa, and Kano. For instance, Kano received hundreds of traders everyday. These traders were from diverse places. Barth, an European traveller attested to this when he observed in the 1850s that:

Here a caravan from Gonja arriving with the desired kolanut... or a caravan laden with natron, starting from Nupe, or a troop of Asbenawa going-off with their salt for the neighbouring towns, or some Arabs leading their camels, heavily laden with the luxuries of the North and East.

Elliot P. Skinner, making use of the information provided by Barth, has compiled a list of the goods found in mid-19th century Kano market and their origins. Skinner’s list is reproduced below to show the complexity of West African external or inter-regional trade in terms of the volume, values, types and sources of the articles involved.

The organisation of the external trade was more complex than the internal. Trade was exclusively in the hands of long-distance traders. These were highly specialized traders with considerable trading skills and capital. These traders usually organised themselves into caravans. They all met in the same place, for instance at the town’s gate, to start off their journey at the same time. The caravans were usually big, ranging from about twenty to more than one thousand traders. The time to take off was based on a calculation of the distance to be covered to reach the markets of their choice. The caravans were joined by others in the caravansaries located along the routes.

The caravans moved slowly, resting and sleeping at intervals. They also stopped at the toll gates along the routes to pay the compulsory tolls on their goods. The amount paid depended on the goods e.g. horses attracted more tolls than foodstuffs), the taxation policy of the state which controlled the toll gate and, sometimes, the whims and caprices of the toll collectors.

The traders faced a number of problems along the routes. In the first place, the journey was always slow, a lot of time was wasted in paying tolls. Since they had to move in a single file, the journey was leisurely. When two caravans met, one had to wait for the other to pass. Second, the journey could also be uncomfortable because of hostile weather; in the dry season the heat could be unbearable and in the rain season, down-pour and swollen streams constituted serious dangers. Finally, the caravans could be attacked in periods of insecurity.

The caravan dissolved when it reached its destination. Every trader would display his merchandise in different sections of the market. The traders’ interests were protected by their various states in a number of ways. First, it was a common practice for states to exchange trade representatives who monitored the activities of traders. Second, some states sent powerful
officials to accompany the caravans.

While all the West African state had their long-distance traders, there were a few groups who were well organised and whose activities were more intricate than others. Examples include the Dyula, the Hausa and the Diakhanke. Hausa long-distance traders could be found in many west African states. They went to Yoruba, Tiv, Nupe, Edo and Igbo land and other places in Nigeria, Baghirmi in the Lake Chad basin, Dendi in northern Dahomey, Salaga in Ghana, Zinder, Dori and Gao in the lands of the Songhai. Through the Hausa, Kola nuts from the forest region were taken to the savannah and northern products such as livestock and cloths were taken to the south.

Like the Hausa, the Diakhanks of Senegambia were itinerant long distance traders between the areas of the Upper Niger and the Gambia rivers. They had hundreds of trading colonies in this area. In addition, they had a trading network which made it possible for a Diakhanke trading group to exchange goods with another in order to monopolise trade. They dealt in slaves and gold which they obtained in the Sahel and in other products.

Thanks to the activities of the various West African traders, goods produced in one state could be found in another no matter the distance separating the two. For example, forest and coastal products such as fish, kolanuts and palm oil were taken to the savannah region while horses, rock salt and natron, all Savannah products found their way to the forest region. As A.G. Hopkins rightly noted:

the pastoralists of the Sahara-Savannah borders traded livestock, dairy produce and salt with the cultivators of the Savannah in return for millet and doth. In turn, the savannah region traded livestock, salt, dried fish, potash and cloth with the peoples of the forest, from whom they received slaves, kola nuts, ivory, iron ware and cloth. Finally, producers in the forest sold various foodstuffs and manufactures to coastal settlements in exchange for fish and sea salt.22

While trade served to unite West African people, it also linked them with the other parts of the world through the international trade.

Notes


5. Johnson, M., ”The Nineteenth-century Gold Mithgal in West and North Africa,” *Journal of*


7. C.M.S. Intelligencer, April, 1878, p. 225.


Impact of External Trade on Traditional Economy

RO. Elegalam

Introduction
External trade was the out-growth of internal exchange in West African societies. Before external contact, considerable internal exchange took place with such items as foodstuffs, raw materials, livestock and manufactured goods.

The trans-Saharan trade and the Atlantic commerce were the two major external contacts which affected the West African sub-region in positive as well as negative ways. According to the predictions of the theory of international trade, one would have expected that the trans-Saharan trade could have paved the way for the rapid economic development of the sub-region. The fact that to date, the region remains one of the world’s less developed areas economically casts doubt on the universal validity of the theory. Although both the trans-Saharan trade and the trade across the Atlantic had much in common: the motive being to amass wealth which was believed to exist in abundance in the land south of the Sahara. For purpose of clarity the two would be discussed separately.

The Trans-Saharan Trade
The first regular contact between West Africa and the outside world was through North Africa. This was made possible by the use of donkeys and camels and the development of caravan routes across the Sahara. The beginning of the trans-Saharan trade dates back to antiquity. It was in existence for at least a thousand years before the Arab conquests which began in the seventh century A.D.1 It has been suggested that the Carthaginians crossed the desert and discovered West Africa centuries before Christ and that they established commercial contacts with West African coast.2 The rise of Arab power contributed to the growth of the trans-Saharan commerce which reached its peak in the 16th century.3 Though the development of sea-borne trade did provide a rival, it did not supplant it entirely. However, the trans-Saharan trade entered an era of relative decline in the last quarter of the 16th century.
The commodities of the trade were constrained by two major considerations. First, the journey across the desert took approximately three months. It follows from this that highly perishable commodities were not suitable for such a trade and had to be left out. Second, value in relation to weight was of considerable importance. All other things being equal, commodities with high value in relation to weight were preferred. Hopkins holds that freight changed across the desert and added about 100-150 per cent to the cost of most items.

The exports of West Africa to North Africa and Europe were gold, slaves, dyed cloths, prody, pepper, ostrich feathers, hides, kolanuts, and gum. These were exchanged for salt, torres, metal goods including swords, guns and gun powder, cowries, Arab dresses and a number of European goods such as Manchester cotton, French silks, glass beads, mirror and other fancy goods.

Quantitative estimates of the volume and value of the trans-Saharan commerce are hard to come by and the available ones should be taken with caution. At the height of the trade, both the volume and value were believed to be great. About nine tons of gold were exported from West African to North Africa and Europe. Some idea of the magnitude of the trans-Saharan trade could be gleaned from the size of caravans. Some caravans numbered over 1,000 people.

Gold and slaves were the most important commodities of the trans-Saharan commerce. Their importance derived from the fact that they were state necessities. We do not know precisely when the gold trade began in West Africa. Probably it dates back to the Carthaginian times. The adoption of the gold coinage in the Muslim world and they have Replacement of silver with gold as Europe’s main currency contributed to the growth West African gold export between 11th and 17th centuries. In this period, West Africa was the leading supplier of gold to the international economy, accounting for about 66 per cent of the world production. African gold not only contributed to the smooth and efficient functioning of the domestic economy of Europe but also speeded up the settlement of international indebtedness. Within Africa itself, the importance of the gold trade was evident. It contributed to the wealth and the political power of the great states of the Western Sudan and the rise of some North African ports. For instance, the strategic position of Morocco on the Northern terminus of the Western caravan route enabled it to get ample supplies of gold from West Africa. Apparently, the gold trade was the basis of its prosperity. The fall of some of the empires of the Western Sudan, especially, the lent Songhai, could be traced to the collapse of law and order which gravely disrupted the lack of trade between the gold-producing areas and the gold marts.

It is believed that a trans-Saharan trade in Negro slaves must have existed though pans M, perhaps in little volume, as early as about the second century A.D. However, the expansion of Arab power in the 7th century led to vast increase in demand for slaves to serve as soldiers, labourers and servants. To meet this demand, West Africa had to increase its exports of slaves to North Africa and the Middle East. Various estimates have been given of the scale of the trans-Saharan slave trade.

Mauny estimated that about two million slaves were involved in the trade in each century during the late middle ages. According to Lewicki, between twelve and fifteen million slaves passed
through Cairo in the 16th century.’2 This estimate is considered to be high. For the early 19th century, Boahen suggests that about 10,000 slaves per annum were exported across the Sahara desert.13 Figures or estimates may vary but the number of slaves carried across the desert was not by the stretch of the imagination inconsiderable. Whether the number of slaves involved in the trans-Saharan trade was as great as the number involved in the trade across the Atlantic is a different question.

Another commodity of the trans-Saharan commerce which requires some comment is salt. Salt was one of the unavailable dietary necessities in most areas of West Africa. The desperate need for salt by West Africans made it possible for a North African merchant to exchange his salt for an equivalent weight in gold.’4 The salt was not brought from North Africa but was rather purchased from the salt mines in the desert especial at Taghaza.

The trans-Saharan trade was conducted by Arab and European merchants, Berbers Jews and Negroes as they provided the entrepreneurship. The trade called for considerable organisational arrangements to reduce the dangers and difficulties inevitable in such long distance commerce. It became imperative in the interest of safe to develop a network of routes across the desert (see map on the next page). On each route there were stopping places, usually, Oases, where camels, food, water and other requirements could be obtained. The most important of these included Agades, Ghana in Salah, Teghaza, Ghadames and Sijilmasa. I

At both the northern and southern termini of the Saharan routes, entreports were developed. The important northern termini were Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers and Fez. For these centres goods for West African were despatched, while those for Europe and middle East were stored pending sales and shipments. Important southern termini were Kani Kukawa and Timbuktu. At these centres, goods for North African and European marked were packed and loaded; while the goods for consumption within West African were distributed.

Some of the caravan routes were abandoned when it became too difficult to procur provisions or when sandstorms, plunder, failure of pasture became more endemic. Constant warfares among the desert kingdoms were one of the major factors leading to the decline of trading contacts and activities especially along the western route. In contrast, the central and eastern routes which passed through relatively peaceful kingdoms grew in importance.15

Since the trans-Saharan trade was fraught with dangers and risks, it was necessary for the traders to travel together in caravans including guards, porters, drivers and guides. Some idea of the situation could be got from this remark, ”nothing illustrates the dangers and ravages of the trans-Saharan traffic more than the hundreds of skeletons that littered the routes.”16 Undoubtedly, considerable organisation must have been necessary to ensure that merchants met at the departure points at the right time. Departure dates were usually at the end of the rainy season when the danger of sandstorms was minima.

Like any other long distance trade, the trans-Saharan trade called for considerable capital requirements. The huge capital required was necessitated by the fact that in addition to the money for the purchase of commodities and payment of duties, the merchant had to hire guides and pay protection money to the desert peoples. The capita, was provided by wealthy North
African merchants who owned large numbers of camels and had the resources to purchase the goods required in West Africa.17

Credit system featured prominently in the trans-Saharan trade. Some great commercial houses of North Africa appointed resident agents who held stocks of goods on credit with which to trade on their master’s behalf until the caravans returned.18 Bills of exchange provided substantial sums required by the trade. Indications are that the trans-Saharan merchants conducted their business in a manner that is not inferior to the present day practice. This is vividly brought out in the observation of Laing, in 1825, of the merchants of Ghadames who “calculate with profound nicety the expense of carriage to distant countries, duties, custom, risk, trouble, the percentage that their goods will bear and even do business by means of bills and unwritten agreements or promises”.19 The entire system of the trans-Saharan trade depended on mutual trust which happily was respected by the West Africans as well as the North African merchants.

We do not know how profitable the trade was. But there are some indirect pointers to its profitability. We noted above that desert crossing involved considerable dangers and risks. If actually the trade had not been profitable, it would have been hard to find a rational explanation for why the merchants would have exposed themselves to such hazards for centuries. Second, the prosperity of Morocco noted above, attested to the profitability of the commerce then.

Undoubtedly, the trans-Saharan trade had great impacts on the economy of West Africa. Some of these were positive and some negative. Prior to the trade, West Africa was isolated from the rest of the world; so it goes without saying that the creation of the overland trade broke or partially removed the isolation. The growth of the desert ports such as Kano and Timbuktu was the result of the development of the trans-Saharan commerce. The importance of these centres derived from their being producers of clothing materials especially cotton goods which were in great demand in Europe and the Arab world. Barth estimated the sales of Kano cloth at the equivalent of M80,000 per annum in the 1850s. The commercial prosperity of both Kano and Timbuktu in the 15th and 16th centuries could hardly be disassociated from their active and prominent involvement in the trans-Saharan trade.

The development of the North African entreports: Morocco, Algiers, Tunis and Tripoli, was due largely to the trans-Saharan commerce. As noted above, they became the gateways through which West African goods destined for European and Middle East markets had to pass. The needs of the trade generated other commercial and economic activities in these entreports, the cumulative effects of which stimulated development.

The trade offered limited encouragement for the production of the goods within West African sub region. The production of gold, leather goods and dyed cloths increased in response to increased external demand.

The trans-Saharan trade involved a few people. In West Africa, the trade was in the hands of royalty, nobles and rich citizens. There could be no doubt that the participators realized large income. Since as we noted above, the trade involved relatively few people, it accentuated the problem of inequality of income distribution in the sub-region. The poorer sections of the population were effectively barred from participating in the middleman trade. This is
understandable because they could not afford the heavy capital outlay and this perpetuated the vicious circle.

The most reprehensible aspect of the trans-Saharan trade was its involvement in Negro slaves. It requires no stretching of the imagination to realize that trade in slaves defies the sacredness of the human race. Perhaps it is stating the obvious to say that the trans-Saharan slave trade depopulated West Africa. It caused other social and economic dislocations in the region. Later in this chapter we shall comment on some of the extenuating statements frequently made by the apologists of the slave trade on the impact of the trade in Africa.

As from about 1875 the trans-Saharan trade began to decline. Political and economic factors were responsible for this. In both the western Sudan and North Africa there was political instability. The defeat of Songhai by Morocco in 1591 pushed Songhai into dynastic rivalries, independence movements and attacks from external aggressors. The Moroccan occupation of Timbuktu and Gao not only shattered the imperial unity of the Western Sudan but also diminished the economic importance of these cities. There unsettled conditions made the revival of large-scale trade along the Western route difficult if not impossible. There were in the state of Morocco internal quarrels which culminated in political weakness and disunity.

The rivalry of the trans-atlantic trade was the most significant factor which undermined the trans-Saharan trade. The Portuguese exploration of the Gulf of Guinea was followed by a growing trade with Europeans on the coast. Between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it had grown to considerable proportions. As the trade across the Atlantic waxed stronger the trans-Saharan commerce waned.

**The Trade Across the Atlantic**

The trade across the Atlantic began in the Fifteenth century as the direct result of the pioneering exploration of Africa financed by Henry the Navigator of Portugal. Naturally, the Portuguese had an early lead in the trade on the coast of Africa; the first shipment of African slaves landed in Portugal in 1441.

The commodities of this trade were similar to those of the trans-Saharan commerce, the difference was only on the scale (volume and value). The exports of West Africa consisted of gold, ivory, slaves, dye-woods, gum, pepper, sugar, leather, beeswax, coffee and a few minor commodities like palm oil. In return, West Africans received from European merchants cloth, guns and gunpowder, hardware, salt, gin, brandy, rum, beads, cowries, iron bars, copper bars, and manillas.

As in the trans-Saharan commerce, gold and slaves were the most important commodities. Gold was obtained from Senegal, Sierra Leone and Ghana. Blake estimated that about 170,000 dobras of pure gold were carried annually to Portugal after 1481.20 Though the trade in gold declined after 1530, it was not serious until the end of sixteenth century. The government of Lisbon played a significant role in the supervision and regulation of the trade. Pepper traffic was of considerable importance to Europeans. After the Muslims had taken control of the Asian sources of spices, an attempt was made to substitute West African products, especially pepper,
for those from Asia. Between 1470 and 1506, important trade in pepper developed between Portugal and West Africa. It was got mainly from Sierra Leone and Benin (Nigeria). In the period 1498-1505, it is estimated that about 2,000 quintals of pepper were exported; the average figure for the years 1509-1514, was 454 quintals. Among the traded commodities, pepper was highly lucrative, third only to slaves and gold. Estimate of the value is hard to come by but it is believed to have been considerable. After early boom, profits from malagueta trade (pepper trade) seemed to have declined.

Sierra Leone’s exports of ivory, beeswax and camwood were worth more than the shipments of slaves until at least the 1750s. Some other agricultural products, especially, gum, were of great importance in the trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The importance of gum derived from its use in the manufacture of textiles. Quantitative estimates of the volume and value of other West African exports are not available. Possibly, they were not insignificant. It is estimated that about two-fifths of the income of the Royal African Company at the end of the seventeenth century came from sales of goods other than slaves.

Slave trade was by far the most important traffic of West Africa. As noted earlier, it began in 1441 when the first shipment of human cargoes landed in Portugal. The earliest West African slaves destined for domestic slavery in Europe were well treated and this, perhaps, induced the papacy to regard slave trade as a way of converting Africans into Christianity. Since the Portuguese were the first Europeans to come to West Africa, naturally, they were foremost in establishing trade contacts along the coasts of West Africa; and trade in slaves was given priority.

In the sixteenth century the Spaniards joined in the trade. There was a demand for labour to work on the Portuguese sugar plantations off the coast of West Africa and on the Spanish gold and silver mines in South America. The local labour force, the West Indians, could not withstand the strain of hardwork in the mines and as a consequence they were dying in great numbers. It was then decided to import West African labour. In 1510, fifty slaves were transported from Spain to Hispanola, thus the trans-atlantic slave trade began. By about 1576, there were about 40,000 African slaves on the Spanish American territories.

A regular English slave trade began with the grant of monopoly to The Company of Royal Adventurers of England trading with Africa in 1663. The other European countries which joined the Spaniards in the slave trade had no direct economic interests on the mainland of America, as their main commercial interests ended in supplying slaves. The rapid expansion of the atlantic trade from the 1650s was due in part to the development of sugar plantations in the West Indies. Production of sugar expanded as the direct result of increased consumption of the product in Europe. The Caribbean Islands, especially Jamaica and St. Domingo, which had become the principal suppliers of sugar to Europe, were the major recipients of slaves in the eighteenth century. Sheridan estimated that about two-thirds of all slaves shipped to the Caribbean worked on sugar plantations in the 1770s.

Despite her relatively late start, Britain took the effective lead in slave trade in the eighteenth century. Portugal lost its lead. The relative importance of European powers involved in the West African trade is reflected by the number of slaves handled by each at the height of the atlantic trade.
The undisputed supremacy of England is clear; she alone accounted for about 66 per cent of all the slaves shipped by the three leading powers. England’s dominance of slave trade in the eighteenth century is only a facet of the growth of her foreign trade which was made possible by her superior naval power.

There is general agreement that slave trade expanded rapidly in the period 15th-19th centuries but there is no agreement as to the number of slaves exported. Estimates vary considerably. Ekundare maintains that there are no accurate export figures of slaves available. In 1798 the British Foreign Office reckoned that 100,000 slaves were crossing the Atlantic annually. After evaluation of available evidence, Curtin concludes that the number of slaves reaching the Americas cannot have been more than about nine million, and may well have been rather less. Fage is of the view that the total number of men and women exported from Africa during the whole period of slave trade is unlikely to have been much more than about 11 million. He argues that a considerable and growing proportion came from south of the Cameroons, and so from outside West Africa as commonly understood. The West African contribution to the Atlantic Slave Trade is in fact unlikely to have been much more than about six million.

For the period 1701-1810, Fage suggests that total loss of population to West Africa was about four-and-a-half million, averaging 41,000 a year. Clearly, this figure does not tally with Curtin’s figure for the same period. Hopkins estimates, roughly that for the period 1790-1807, between 33,350 and 66,700 slaves were transported across the Atlantic annually.

Some scholars are of the view that the loss to West Africa was much higher in the nineteenth century. According to them, it was only about 11,000 a year on average. Available data do not support this view. Even though by 1825 Britain and Denmark had stopped trade in slave, it is estimated that 125,000 slaves were removed from Africa in the same year, and this rose to 135,000 in 1835. Estimates may vary but it is definitely certain that a significant portion of the West African population was forcefully removed to America and the Atlantic islands during the many centuries of the trans-Atlantic trade. At this juncture, perhaps, it might simplify our exposition if we first discuss who took part in the trans-Atlantic commerce and then the organisation of the trade. The leading European powers were keenly interested in establishing trading contacts in West Africa. They were represented by chartered companies and private traders. Charters granted to companies gave them monopolies of trade in certain sections of African coast and such companies were prominent in the seventeenth century. By 1631, the British government had granted charters to three companies. The company of Royal Adventurers of England, trading in Africa was one of the most important companies to trade in West Africa. As a chartered company, it had the sole trading right from the Straits of Gibraltar to the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa.

Also, the state-sponsored Dutch West India Company, established in 1621, took active part in the trade along the west coast of Africa as well as in the Caribbean. It used its huge capital to enable planters to purchase slaves on credit so that they could buy more slaves than they could immediately afford. Officially sponsored French firms were the Compagnie des Indes Occidentales which was established in 1664, the Compagnie du Senegal (1673) and the
Compagnie du Guine (1684). Joint-stock companies played a significant role in the trans-atlantic trade. Their presence was necessitated partly by the desire to provide the huge capital required by such long distance trade and partly to minimize or eliminate competition.

Private traders also played an important part in West African trade. They had certain advantages which made their progress possible. These included among others small overhead cost and the ability to respond quickly to changing trading conditions. In West Africa, the rulers and private merchants were among those who participated actively in the trans-Atlantic trade.

The performance of chartered companies was far from impressive. Hopkins enumerates a number of factors responsible for this. The companies had large overheads in the number of officials and forts, and at times they had to carry the burden of defence. Second, they could not secure the services of sufficiently qualified staff, and their employees did not identify their interests with those of the firm, so that mismanagement and other malpractices of company servants grossly impaired efficient conduct of business. Third, they were not able to raise sufficient capital. Lastly, the companies were required to meet specific obligations such as supplying a fixed number each year, so they had to continue trading irrespective of the conditions prevailing at the time. It was this problem which led the Compagnie du Senegal into difficulties after 1679.37

Although the chartered companies were financial failures, they performed some functions which later aided the achievement of imperial ambition, especially the British. For Britain, on the West Africa coast, the contention that flag followed trade was borne out. For instance, Britain’s success in claiming the Niger Delta and its hinterland at the Berlin Conference in 1884 was due to the activities of Sir George Taubman Goldie. In many territories the existing trading organisation was used as an administrative system. However, in Nigeria, the Royal Niger company set up a rudimentary administration over its territories and had a high court at Asaba.38

In terms of scale and geographical expansion, the trans-Atlantic trade was much larger than the trans-Saharan commerce, so it would be no surprise that the former had more elaborate organisation than the latter. European merchants stocked their ships with such items as guns, ammunitions, spirits, metal bars, cloths and left for the West Coast of Africa. The representatives of indigenous and African merchants brought slaves from the hinterlands and marched them to the coast or forts. The slaves were exchanged for European goods.

With their human cargoes, European merchants proceeded to the Americas for the sale of the slaves. The customers were plantation and mine owner and dealers trading in remote markets. Having disposed of slaves the merchants purchased those commodities that were much in demand by European consumers especially sugar and then left for Europe. There they resold them. This is what is usually referred to as the "triangular trade". In recent years, the accuracy of the description of the triangular trade has been challenged. It is maintained now that the triangular trade existed only in the early years of the trans-Atlantic trade when the quantity of sugar exported from the West Indies to Europe was relatively small, and that in the eighteenth century sugar and slaves became two distinct trades.39

European slave traders did not engage in slave raids in the interior of West Coast of Africa as
was the case in East Africa. However, they established regular contacts along Guinea Coast and such slave ports as Elmina, Cape Coast, Accra, Whydah, Porto Novo and Benin became prominent.

It has been pointed out by some historians that the most hazardous aspect of the trade was the actual production of slaves themselves. Though little is known about the geographical and social origins of slaves, it was probable that a majority of them were from the hinterland of the ports of shipment and sparsely populated regions or areas (far away from the centres of the trade. As regard the social origin of slaves, Rodney clearly showed that there was no service class in West Africa simply waiting to be exported.40 I Slaves were the victims of kidnapping, captives of slave raids and/or inter group wars land criminals. Powerful rulers received as of right annual quotas of slaves from their r subject peoples. Raiding and warfare were the most effective methods of securing I slaves.

Apparently, only powerful rulers and wealthy Africans could afford the considerable resources which were required for slave raiding or warfare. This view is supported by the remark made in the late seventeenth century by Barbot: "Slaving was the business of kings, rich men, and prime merchants, exclusive of the inferior sort of blacks."41

In places like the Gold Coast (now Ghana), financially strong European companies had forts which housed their trading agents and acted as warehouse for "trade goods”. Barracoons were also constructed to hold the stock of slaves purchased locally by the agents, pending the arrival of the company’s ships. Small companies and individual ship-owners who could not afford the expense of setting up their own establishments could buy slaves from private West African slave merchants at any point along the entire length of the Guinea Coast.

The organisation of the trans-atlantic trade included the provision of credit ("Trust”). European merchants advanced trade goods to African traders and with these goods African traders bought slaves. The credit system had dual advantages: European merchants were sure of supply of slaves on their arrival; the time they spent on West African ports was greatly reduced, thus minimizing their risk of infection of tropical diseases. Obviously the system was a significant factor in the growth of the trade.

There was a curious characteristic of the trans-atlantic trade which deserves noting. European merchants bought commodities in one part of West Africa and sold them in another part. In the fifteenth century the Portuguese sold in the Gold Coast the slaves they bought in Benin (Nigeria): and in the seventeenth century they used kolanuts from Sierra Leone to buy slaves in Senegambia. The Dutch too shipped cloth and beads from Benin to the Gold Coast, and in the eighteenth century Bristol slavers bought and sold rice, guinea corn, millet and yams as they made their way along the coast.42 Apparently, this was a middleman role in inter-regional trade, but West African rulers and traders were vehemently opposed to European merchants penetrating into the interior. This was rational, to protect their middleman profits.

The trans-atlantic trade required large capital. Some factors were responsible for this. To a large extent, there was no internationally acceptable currency on the West Coast of Africa, it was necessary for European merchants to stock their ships with considerable variety of goods to be
bartered for slaves. In the seventeenth century, it was estimated that about 150 items were required for trade on the West Coast. Since it was not possible to predict with a high degree of accuracy the demand of Africans, it was commercially prudent for ships entering West Coast ports to resemble floating supermarkets.43

There is no doubt that a merchant who had a big load of one item alone, say, rum, would find it difficult to bargain with advantage for slaves; since he could not vary the goods he offered, he would have to increase the number of goods. The second factor responsible for the high capital requirement was the need for erecting certain structures such as forts and barricades at the West African ports and the provision of specific equipment of slave trade such as iron shackles and chains.

It would not be correct to conclude that the exchange was entirely by barter. As noted above, the imports of West Africa included a number of currencies, such as cowries, iron bars, copper bars and manillas. Most of these currencies were nominal units for estimating comparative values.

The capital of European slave merchants came from various sources, including private savings, profits from other business activities and credits granted by banks and manufacturers. The willingness of Manchester manufacturers to grant to Liverpool slave dealers credit of up to eighteen months was helpful in the mobilization of large capital required for the ventures. There was another factor which was particularly valuable to Liverpool slave dealers in their effort to mobilize capital, and that was the concentration among slave trading firms. At the beginning, there were many firms in the trade but after the third quarter of the eighteenth century, about ten firms dominated it. For such large firms, it was relatively easy to raise capital.

There is no doubt whatsoever that the trans-atlantic commerce was highly profitable. Between 1600 and 1750, a European merchant paid an African slave dealer an equivalent of N8.00-£50.00 for a male slave. But the net sale price of a male slave in the West Indies varied between £26 and £80. For the period 1751-1850, the net sale price increased between £80 and £120.44

Other available data indicate that European merchants made considerable profits in the trans-atlantic trade. For instance, in the 1550s, William Towerson sold a brass basin valued in shillings in England for thirty pounds worth of gold.45 Gold, silver, tobacco, rice, ginger, cotton, precious stones, and above all, sugar, rum and molasses were loaded into the slave holds for export at prices well below their marketable value in Europe; and there the merchants took in cash their total profits on the several distinct transactions.46 The prosperity of the cities of Liverpool and Nantes was the result of the trans-atlantic trade, especially in slaves. Some idea of the magnitude of the profit can be got from the reported success of the merchants of the city of Liverpool in the years 1783-1793. Their total net profit on the purchase and resale of about 303,000 slaves was no less than £4,720,000 in contemporary value.47

The trans-atlantic trade had impact in West Africa, some positive and others negative. The expansion of some state such as Oyo and Dahomey is attributed to their involvement in the trade. This is open to challenge because before contact was established with Europeans, numerous states existed in West Africa, including Ghana, Mali, Songhai; and there were outstanding
kingdoms in Hausaland, in Mossi, in Senegal, and in the basin of the Benue tributary of the River Niger. More importantly, there were many areas that took active part in slave trade but did not develop centralized states.

West African traders who took part in the trade had greatly enhanced income. This of course increased inequality of income distribution. Coastal rulers benefited from the taxes imposed on European merchants and from the purchase of guns to defend and extend their frontiers. In 1750, for instance, the king of Dahomey had a gross revenue of the equivalent of $500,000 from slave trade across the seas. Powerful rulers in the interior were able to demand tolls and impose taxes on indigenous traders. A few West Africans acquired or improved their entrepreneurial skills through participation in slave trade; and these skills were utilized when the obnoxious trade was eventually abolished.

Hopkins argues that the prosperity of the large entreports on the coast and on the desert margin created some additional employment opportunities for traders and transporters, and so also for farmer, who supplied foodstuffs to towns, caravans and slave ships. However, two points need to be made on this. First, both trading and transportation are service industries; and it is doubtful how such industries could have accelerated the development of West Africa. Second, the farmers who supplied foodstuffs were those who lived near towns, caravans or coast; and they represented only a negligible portion of the total farmers in West Africa then.

The negative impact of slave trade across the seas on the traditional economy of West Africa needs no stressing. It was the most disruptive influence in the social and economic conditions in the region during its currency. It depopulated West Africa. There was sudden separation of father, mother or children. The peace and tranquility of the region was totally shattered.

The changeover to warlike activities and kidnapping affected all branches of economic activities, and agriculture in particular. There were large tracts of uncultivated land due to the forceful removal of many able-bodied young men and women. Agricultural production declined. Areas such as Dahomey that used to export food to neighbouring countries like Togo in the sixteenth century experienced famine in the nineteenth century.

The prevalence of slave trade for so many centuries effectively prevented the growth of large scale trade in commodities, especially agricultural whose production would have accelerated the development of West Africa. It was not until slave trade was abolished that “legitimate” commerce began. Its expansion (in volume and value) was a good indication of the arresting influence of the obnoxious trade in human cargoes on the development of West Africa from the fifteenth to nineteenth centuries.

**A Critique of External Trade**

Perhaps, it might be better to conclude this chapter with a brief assessment of the economic impact of external trade on West Africa. For this exercise, the trans-Saharan commerce and the trans-Atlantic trade are considered jointly. As already indicated above, external trade had both positive and negative effects on West Africa, but on balance, the negative impact outweighs the positive.
It is evident from our discussion that international trade was not an engine of growth in the region then. It is firmly believed by Africans and foreign liberal scholars that foreign trade, particularly the slave trade retarded the economic development of Africa. A number of factors was responsible for this. First, European exports to West Africa consisted of only consumer goods which were often shoddy. This of course could not have led to building up of productive capital assets. Second, West Africa exports, except slaves, were mainly primary products. Since they were exported in raw form, there was no scope for initiating cottage industries in West Africa which could have provided the base for the industrial transformation later.

One of the most effective ways by which the development of the region was retarded was through the export of slaves. Many foreign historians seem to believe that the loss of about twenty-five to thirty million people through slave trade could not have affected the economy adversely. This type of argument is not sustainable because it overlooks some important considerations: the age composition of the slaves; the sex ratio of men and women among the slaves; the number of slaves who died en route; those killed or maimed in the slave raids; and in the local wars some of which were probably instigated by the slave merchants.

Slaves were able-bodied young men and women between the ages of 15 and 35, and this age group is the best for human reproduction. The sex ratio was about two men to one woman and this of course had repercussions on the growth of population in West Africa. As already pointed out, reliable statistics are not available, it was estimated by Rodney that about 20 per cent of the slaves died in the Atlantic crossing or "Middle Passage", as it was called by European slavers. The death rate in the trans-Sahara trade crossing was equally high, averaging about 16 per cent. The cumulative effect of these was not only the depopulation but also the abnormal stagnation of the population of West African throughout the entire period of slave trade.

It is pertinent to note that from the fifteenth century, all other continents except African had natural population increases which were sometimes spectacular. World population estimates (in millions) was given by one European scholar for the period 17th-20th centuries thus:

Undoubtedly, these figures are not precise, but they indicate a consensus among researchers on population that the huge continent of Africa had an abnormal record of stagnation, and there was no other explanatory variable except the trade in slaves.

If the experience of other parts of the world is something to go by, it must be admitted that population plays an important role by providing labour and markets. Economic development of Europe and Japan was accelerated by population growth. One of the major causes of the low rate of development of France was her low population.

An essential condition for the achievement of economic development is the utilization of a country’s labour and natural resources. The massive removal of West African labour force through slaving resulted in high land-labour ratio; and in the absence of improved technology, it is hard to envisage how this could have accelerated development. In the face of these, it is difficult to accept Fage’s conclusion ” in West Africa it (slave trade) was part of sustained
process of economic and political development”. Some people are inclined to regard the enforced removal of West African labour as international factor mobility. Those who maintain such a mental postulate are, perhaps, deliberately, attempting to provide extenuating circumstances for the rape on West African society.

The main beneficiaries of the external trade, especially the trade in slaves, were planters in America and European merchants. The American planters were able to secure ”Cheap Labour” which made it possible for them to farm enormous acreages and to derive great wealth. Their great wealth enabled them adopt a lifestyle which would not have been attainable in the absence of cheap slave labour from West Africa.

European merchants made huge profits from the trans-Atlantic trade. The prosperity of Liverpool and Nantes in the eighteenth century, was the direct result of their involvement in slave trade. These two cities were the greatest European centres of the slave trade. None of the West African slave ports derived even one-fourth as much as either Liverpool or Nantes. The great wealth made by these cities was invested in other activities, for example, in England, the wealthy planters arid merchants were able to buy considerable representation in Parliament. Apparently, West Africa was not the main beneficiary of the external trade.

Notes


4. Ibid., p. 81.


8. A.G. Hopkins, op. cit., p. 82.

9. Stride and Ifeka regard the predatory attitude of the Moors which rapidly drained the Songhai cities of their available gold supplies as a contributory factor to the fall., Stride and Ifeka, op. cit., pp. 80A

11. Quoted in Hopkins, op. cit, p. 83.


15. A.A. Boahen, Britain, the Sahara and the Western Sudan, 1788-1861, Oxford 1964, p. 120.


17. Ibid.


19. Quoted in Hopkins, op. cit, 86.


21. Ibid, p. 84.

22. Ibid,p- 85.


25. Ekundare, op. cit., p. 29.

26. Ibid. p. 29. j


29. P.D. Curtin, The Atlantic Slave Trade: a Census, Madison, 1969, p. 211. Joe Inikori has reconsidered Curtin’s figures and found them an underestimation J


1971, p. 20.


44. Bandinel, quoted in Ekundare *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.


Economic Implications of the Islamic Revolutions of the 19th Century

K. Faluyi

Islamic uprising dominated the early decades of West African history in the 19th century. Three of these resulted in the overthrow of traditional authorities and the establishment of Islamic theocracies in which Muslim laws and ideals became the matrix of government. They were the Jihad in Hausaland led by Uthman Dan Fodio, the Masina rising of Ahmed Bari among the Bambara and the movement led by Alhaj Umar among the Tuculor. The Jihads had certain similar characteristics, though each also had its own peculiarities. All three succeeded in establishing a new order based on religion in place of the former age old tradition.

The causes of these uprisings are varied and complex. Historians will debate for a long time, the reasons, mbtives and intentions of the Jihadists for launching war against their respective societies. Generally, historians tend to give considerable attention to religious and political causes while little effort is ever made to examine the economic grievances and implications of these religious upheavals. The Ahmadu Bello History School of thought has directed considerable attention to examining various aspects of the Sokoto Jihad in Hausaland, but other areas have remained neglected.

Moreover, the focus has been on specific aspects of the movement, while little effort has been directed towards an examination of the economic consequences all over the West African region. Such an effort is desirable to enable readers draw meaningful comparisons from the three risings and further our understanding of the movements which virtually shaped the course of the West African history. The purpose of this essay therefore, is to examine the economic consequences of the uprisings. The essay comprises two sections. The first is a review of the causes while the second focus on the economic implications.

The three movements have been justified on religious grounds. Islamic revival was the fundamental objective as this was clearly evident in the manifesto of the Jihadists. The purpose was to bring back Islam to its original orthodoxy and restore the faith to its original purity as passed down to worshippers in the time of the first four caliphs. In order to achieve this objective, muslims were enjoined to adhere strictly and perfectly to the Sharia.

The decadence in the state of Islam and its pervasion triggered off the crusade against the lax muslims or unbelievers all over the Western Sudan. For instance, Alhaji’Umar who became frustrated at the precipitous decline in the fortunes of Islam among his people and vowed to change the Muslims from the dominant Quadiriyya order to the Tijaniyya, and would not countenance anything short of the latter order as right. Similarly and with greater vehemence,
Seku Ahmadu vowed to evolve a state of true and pure Muslims to be guided by Islamic precepts. From the above, one can see that Islamic revival was primal in the mind of the leaders on the eve of the Jihads.

However, as they were determined to revive Islam and bring order into the religion, they also demonstrated considerable concern about the societal ills which pervaded the Western Sudan during their time. Perhaps, to enlist the support of the masses and give legitimacy to their actions, for what could be regarded today as a treasonable act against the traditional authority, the sympathy of the peasants and their support became inevitable. Dan Fodio and other Jihad leaders had more than enough grievances to cite to enlist the peasants' support. To this end, their grievances ranged from ill-treatment to reckless use of women, excessive taxation, and confiscation or illegal acquisition of property, by those in authority.

For instance, Dan Fodio condemned the neglect and maltreatment of women, for according to him, most educated men had abandoned their duties and responsibilities to their women, thereby leaving them ignorant of the rules of fasting, prayer, business dealings and other duties which they ought to fulfill. The leaders generally expressed dismay at the manner in which men exploited their women. “Men treat them like household implements which become broken after long use and which are then thrown out on the dung heap.” whereas they were supposed to be apparel to their husbands. He went on, the services of the husband and wife are to be reciprocal, but men had failed in the fulfilment of their part of the bargain and their failure was attributed to the neglect of religious observances.

While the women lived under a condition of servitude, the people groaned under heavy extortions, taxation, and exploitation. Rulers exploited their subjects and enriched themselves at the expense of the masses. Despite this fact, they abandoned the obligations and payments expected of them by the Koran which enjoins rulers and believers to render to their kindred due rights to those in want and to wayfarers to the limit that is considered reasonable. Thus, the Koran enjoins equitable distribution of wealth such that it would not circulate solely among the rich.

The Jihad leaders condemned in very strong terms the decadent condition in the West African communities, as the society was viewed as a most imperfect replica of what constitutes an ideal state. They scorned alcoholic drinks, drunkenness, songs and dances, bribing judges and those in positions of trust and privilege, and above all, condemned the use of black magic. Muslim brothers were, therefore, warned against invoking magic powers such as talisman, incantations or letters and inscriptions, the meaning of which are unknown. True Muslims were, therefore forbidden the use of extra-ordinary powers such as amulet as such practices were not supported by the Holy Koran.

However, this was in theory as evidence abound where Jihadist leaders resorted to incantations and use of talisman if only to boost the fighting morale of their followers and to frustrate the enemy. The fundamental causes of the religious risings as put forward by the Jihadists underscored an attempt on the part of the leaders to regenerate the religious beliefs of the Islamic adherents in the West African sub-region, and put them on the path of probity and righteousness. Essentially, they sought to correct societal ills and all forms of injustice which formed the rubrics
of the West African society in the 19th century. But while the leaders were primarily concerned with the salvation of the soul and a life of bliss in the world beyond, they never lost sight of the need to ensure economic well-being of the people as well.

Indeed, their unequivocal opposition to the oppressive rule of traditional authority emanated from their frustration and disillusion with the sufferings of the common people under corrupt and irreligious regimes. To the Jihadists, the imposition and collection of the Jangali on the herdsmen and payment of some other levies were unauthorised, irreligious and therefore, illegal, because they were not justified by the Koran. Although opposition against taxation might not have been an important factor in the outbreak of the jihad among the Tuculor, economic warfare against the Fulani aggravated the outbreak of war. Prior to the outbreak of fighting, reports of raids on the cattle of the Tuculor were frequent, and heavy losses often resulted from the piratical activities of their neighbours. Being much attached to cattle, as the source of wealth and livelihood, the Tuculor found that such raids threatened their livelihood and security, and reacted to prevent complete annihilation.”

In the words of Professor Oloruntimehin, a raid on the cattle was like sending the Jamag in Tuculor out of Dinquiray, in the fashion of Prophet Mohammed who was forced out of Mecca to Medina. The wars in Tuculor were partly aimed at recovering their cattle from their opponents, and more importantly as in other areas to effect social reform and ensure justice, as the rulers indulged in corrupt practices and imposed uncanonical taxation in the violation of God’s law by oppressing the weak.

From the above, the views of scholars on the causes of the movement particularly the one in Hausaland are conflicting, but one area of consensus is the intention of the leaders to build an ideal society of right thinking Muslims. How this task was to be accomplished may not be clear in the early stages of the movement. However, their perception of the ideal state of their dream was one led by a rightly guided caliph. The objective was not attainable without necessarily effecting a change in leadership which involved the disruption and the removal of the traditional leadership to give way for new authorities who derived their power and legitimacy from the Koran.

Thus, the emergence of theocratic states became the major outcome of the risings all over West Africa in the early part of the 19th century. Generally, the new arrangements incorporated the small and disunited political entities into large administrative units for the realisation of the ideas and ideals of the revolution. The central theme of the new administration was the establishment of Islamic laws and precepts as the canon of government in place of a system where non-Islamic laws, observances and practices predominated. The mode and style of administration and the emphasis on religion may vary from one area to the other, but the essential characteristics of an Islamic theocracy were maintained.

Essentially, an Islamic state is a monocratic entity governed by the Sharia or the divine rule of the Lord. The Commander of the faithful is the Caliph and he combines spiritual and secular functions in the administration of state. The appointment of the Shaikh as the Almir-al-Muminin in the words of Adeleye, is the central act in the foundation of the caliphate. He was to uphold the sanctions prescribed for Muslims by the Koran and the rights of citizens within the
community since he wields both religious and political power. While he led the Jamaa in the Jumat, and in other prayers, his secular duties included the collection of canonical taxes and just dispensation of laws and disbursement of revenue.

These duties were performed on his behalf by officials of the emirates. Whether in Sokoto, Masina or Segu, the pattern of administration was virtually the same except for minor variations to suit local conditions. It was an administrative experiment in which the leadership and the masses were linked together through the oath of allegiance to the leaders of the faithful. The socio-political consequences of Islamic movements in West Africa in the 19th century were fundamental in the political evolution of West Africa and in her development. However, this aspect is outside the scope of this essay, as this has received considerable attention from other scholars. Just as important as the political consequences of these jihads, their economic implications perhaps have greater relevance to the large section of the West African societies, not only in the 19th century, but also in modern times. After all, to the generality of the peasants, a ruler, whether a spiritual demagogue or a mere traditionalist was acceptable as long as the security, economic welfare and well-being of the citizens were guaranteed.

The quest for economic welfare under a just ruler, was fundamental cause in the support given by many to the Jihadists not only at the early stakes of fighting, but throughout the period of the revolution. The lust for booty and other rewards provided the added incentives which boosted the ranks and file of the fighting forces of the Jihadists rather than the love for Islamic religion as such. To many scholars, particularly the socialist historians, economic implications of the movements are equally important if not more so than the socio-political consequences.

**Economic Implications**

The Jihads were fought with such ferocity unprecedented in the annals of warfare in West Africa. The lure of the world of bliss and the assurance of judgment on the last day if a Muslim died in battle in the pursuit of religious ideals encouraged many Muslims to fight on, even to the point of total annihilation. Consequently, the wars did not only disrupt lives and property, but also destroyed economic activities and caused insecurity in all the areas affected by the war. In the general melee, erstwhile commercial centres in West Africa in the pre-Jihad period were either burnt or completely destroyed. Alkalawa, Ngazagamu, Kastina, Kano and other settlements were destroyed and their population killed, enslaved or forced to evacuate.

The activities of Alhaji Umar coupled with his militarism and harsh regimentation of his followers, threw Segu and its neighbours into anarchy and disrupted the social life due to his constant raids and enslavement. This depopulated the area and turned it into a desolate and arid land. Similarly, the series of wars against the Jihadists, the instability and economic depression which plagued Borno in the second half of the 19th century affected the demographic pattern of the empire and rendered it desolate.

As the wars raged, insecurity prevailed thereby disrupting economic activities. Agriculture was neglected as peasant farmers evacuated the villages and cities before the arrival of the invading armies. Famine broke out and people died in hundreds as farmlands were devastated. For instance, Kastina was completely blockaded and the inhabitants starved so they were forced to depend on lizards and dead vultures which they bought at prohibitive prices. In most cases, the
Jihadists put aside sentiments and religious considerations, effectively employing starvation as a legitimate weapon of war to ensure surrender and enforce compliance.

While agricultural life stagnated, and domestic commerce plummeted, insecurity disrupted the trans-saharan trade as traders from North Africa feared the loss of their capital investment under an atmosphere of general instability and uncertainty. Consequently, the trade routes were diverted from Hausaland and Borno which for centuries were the commercial emporia of Central Africa. Paradoxically, the wars had inhibitive and adverse consequences on the fortunes of the Jihadists were halted by the French activities. Whereas Alhaj Umar had a thriving trade with the British and the French merchants in the Senegambia before the outbreak of the Jihad, the wars and hostilities arising from the French opposition to Shaikh Umar’s adventures destroyed or disrupted the export trade in gum, groundnuts and gold.22

The disruption of the trans-saharan trade adversely affected north Africa bound commerce. Territories which commanded large vassals before the wars lost substantial parts of these territories, their tributes and commerce. In effect, loss of territories and vassals coupled with diversion of routes resulted in loss of revenue. Before the war, the provinces of Hadeija, and Katagum were vassals to Borno, and acknowledged her sovereignty by annual payment of tributes, but were lost to the Fulani warriors who incorporated the territories into the Sokoto Empire.23

Territorial aggrandisement among the Jihadists was not limited to Hausaland. Alhaji Umar not only attempted to incorporate the pagan territory of the Bambara states, but also attacked the Islamic states of Segu and Masina partly on the pretext that the rulers were lukewarm about reform and expansion of Islam, and because the rulers of the two states opposed his techniques of reforms.24 The loss of these areas by Umar dislocated trade and adversely affected his fortunes. His military manoeuvres produced military counter-offensive which cost him most of his forces and even his life in the end. In effect, as the wars affected the commercial centres in Hausaland and Borno, so also were Jenne, Timbuktu, Nyamba, Sansanding, Bamako and Bure, whose communications with other areas were disrupted due to constant military actions and counter offensives.25

If military encounters dislocated trade and commerce, deliberate activities of military adventurers and soldiers of fortune further impoverished the economy of the war zones as looting, brigandage and pillage for booty prolonged and escalated the wars. Since looting and pillaging for booty was sanctioned by the Koran, slave raiding and other nefarious activities dominated the military aspects of the Jihads. With the success of the Jihads, slave trade became a thriving business in Sokoto Caliphate as a major source of labour recruits.26 The large number of Hausa slaves exported through the port of Lagos, and recruited into Sokoto’s army was as a result of increased military activities of the Jihadists and the lust for slave raiding in general.27

The raids were also facilitated by the ready markets for slaves in North Africa and America. The development in turn, just as in East Africa, further led to increase in demand for domestic slaves who served as porters, canoe men, craftsmen, farmers, soldiers, government officials and in other aspects of the economy.28 To a large extent therefore the Islamic movements of the 19th century
accentuated the slave trade as a substantial number of those involved in the clandestine exports across the Atlantic in the 1820s through the forties were either from Hausaland or the Senegambia.29

Although the immediate consequences of the movements had negative impact on the affected areas, there were important gains in respect of tax administration, distribution of wealth, pursuit of economic well-being and in the acquisition of wealth. In Islam, adequate provisions had been made for the followers for the pursuit of economic well-being in a way that would not jeopardise their religious duties and obligations. The Koran explicitly directs the followers not to neglect their own portion of material world, because Allah left man to profit from his creation provided it is done in a rational way with due regard to the future.

In recognition of the materialism of man, the Koran said, “God has surbodinated all things on earth to the service of mankind, and as such, not to the service of any particular individuals”.30 From the above it is clear that God allows individuals to acquire wealth and property, but this is not supposed to be absolute as real ownership belongs to Allah. In effect, while Allah enjoins believers to strive in pursuit of economic well-being, it should not surbodinate everything else to the pursuit of wealth. This perhaps, is the reason why he prescribed the manner in which materialism could be pursued.

To ensure honesty, therefore, man has been enjoined to do things which are pure and righteous and obtain their riches through honest means. In this respect, evil practices such as hoarding to create scarcity and raise prices, speculation, profiteering, monopoly of essential goods and means of production by individuals or groups which may lead to deprivation of the majority are all forbidden in Islam.31

Most of the vices and abuses common today, were already evident in the 19th century West African communities. The primary objective of the leaders of the movement was, among other things, to eradicate some of the unislamic practices. The leaders aimed at eradicating corruption within the community as the people under theocratic government were expected to conform strictly to the cardinal principles of Islamic economic ideology based on the following:

1. that wealth must go round for he who hoards is committing a crime against the society and must be punished here and beyond. Simply put therefore, any one who obstructs the operation of economic forces would face the wrath of the authorities on earth and would not go unpunished on the day of judgement;

2. believers were enjoined not to accumulate wealth beyond what was required for a decent living, and as such all forms of exploitation were unlawful and therefore forbidden;

3. impediments in the way of economic equality should be eliminated so as to eradicate class conflict; and

4. payment of certain taxes were compulsory for the muslim as this was a religious obligation of which non-observance deprives him of being treated as a member of the brotherhood of the faith.32
As all these abuses dominated the scene, the Jihads, apart from purifying religion, attempted to correct some of the practices so as to put the believers on the path of truth such as to enable them practise and preach Islam as laid down by Prophet Mohammed in the Holy Koran. The emergent theocracies, therefore pursued vigorously some of these principles. Nowhere was this more evident than in the administration of revenue and in the collecting of taxes where they tried to conform strictly to the prescriptions of the holy book.

As funds were essential for the administration of the far-flung empires, and to keep the military in form, measures were introduced not only to improve the financial position of the government but also to check corruption. To this end, taxes were grouped into two categories; those that were canonical and those not sanctioned by the Koran. In Hausaland, for instance, the Emirs were expected to collect and remit certain taxes to Sokoto. Such taxes included the Zakat, Kharaj and Jizya levied on inheritance, and the Khumus, which constituted a fifth of the booty won in military operations against enemies of the emirates. Similarly, property whose owner could not be traced or identified was forfeited to caliphate for it constituted a legitimate source of revenue for the state.

In the Tuculor Empire, there were such taxes as Diaka which was an equivalent or corruption of the Zakat. The Mondu, levies on grains are remitted to the district heads, Oussourou paid by caravan traders, the Kharaj which was a land tax payable by the non-indigenes of the state particularly the non-muslims. To ensure efficiency and prompt payment, the administration informed the district heads of the amount of revenue expected from them. The share of a fifth of what was collected by the provincial chiefs not only provided the incentive for regular collection, but also made the system of collection efficient.

Similarly, different taxes were collected in Masina, while new ones were introduced probably to boost the government revenue. The traditional Zakat was an annual levy on basic crops and herds of the nomads. There were taxes on such items as cowries, salt and bars paid by the wealthy class. Others were the Muddu, the Pake Ushuru, a purchase tax on merchandise, etc.

The disbursement of the revenue in the three theocracies were basically similar. The general pattern was to remit a specific percentage of the revenue collected by the district or provincial heads to the administration, while a part was paid to the local heads partly for their administration and to reward them for their stewardship. However, in Masina, the caliph took only a fifth and was shared out among the clerics and the poor. In all cases, the collector was entitled to a certain percentage while the spoils and booty were disposed off in accordance with Islamic law. Unfortunately, however, arbitrary method of assessments and ruthlessness of the collectors did not only rob it of its religious consideration but impeded economic development.

Even though Islamic injunctions enjoined the believers to abolish non-canonical taxes, and the Jihadists preached against their collection, and even promised to abolish them, but some of them survived the revolution. An example was the Jangali. The collection of taxes considered as non-canonical by the Muslim leaders was perhaps not surprising. Apart from the fact that it was a common practice for reform leaders to make promises and political statements in the desperate
attempt to solicit mass support, it was also true that some of such promises were often politically unrealistic. To abolish some of the taxes which constituted the bulk of the revenue for mere conformity with the Koran would have stifled the states of funds.

In attempts to avoid committing economic suicide by denying the state of funds in the blind and unrealistic fulfilment of Koranic injunctions, the ruling class inevitably condoned the collection of taxes not sanctioned by the constitution so as to ensure the welfare of the state and its citizens. After all, the administration could only sustain the healthy growth and rapid development of the religion which brought the caliphate into existence, if enough funds were available for the pursuit of fundamental objectives. To this end, therefore, the collection of uncanonical taxes did not only become necessary, but indeed was an instrument for the pursuit of state welfare.

Perhaps, one of the most permanent and long run effects of the 19th century Jihad movements was the expansion of trade and commerce. In spite of the ravages of war and the wanton destruction of lives following the resumption of war, economic ties among the different groups in the sub-region were not broken completely even during the wars. Intra and inter-state trade continued, for the Moors and Arabs frequented the caliphates and kept commerce and trade alive. One commodity whose production and trade was boosted was kolanut which witnessed an inestimable prosperity and brought into prominence Salaga as an important centre for kola cultivation and production. Traders imported kola from Asante to Borno, and Hausa markets where they were in high demand.

The creation of the Almamate in the Senegambia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries which eliminated petty states, enhanced the trade in kola between Senegambia and Sierra Leone. The Hausa were prominent in the distribution of kola in West Africa, where they established along trade routes and formed inter-state networks upon which their merchants depended for access to local markets. Indeed, the wave of Islamic reforms, which swept all over the West African region starting with a call for a Jihad by Uthman dan Fodio in 1804 denied the Muslims of the resort to alcoholic drinks, hence increase in the demand for kola as an alternative stimulant.

In order to foster trade the Hausas established settlements along the routes. Due to the nature of the composition of these centres, they did not only become thriving commercial centres but even melting pots of the West African cultures as communities all over Western Sudan converged in these centres. The articles commonly found in these centres were textiles, potash, leather goods, slaves and livestock and these were made available all over the Western Sudan as a result of the Hausa traders. In most of these centres, the Hausas acted as suppliers of trade commodities. Generally, the Islamic movements enhanced "migration all over West Africa.

Similarly, the Islamic movement altered the pattern of relationship between the Hausas and the Fulanis. The conquest of the Hausa aristocracy converted the Fulani from a subject people to a governing one. As they abandoned their camps as a result of warfare, they settled in walled villages where their herds were tended by slaves. Some of the Fulanis employed their services on their farms, while some of aristocrats relied on the Hausas for the supply of their needs. They also acted as informants, scouts and as advisers where the need was felt. In towns, the chiefs were heavily indebted to them, as they sold on credit. In most cases, the Fulani relied on the Hausa for setting up new markets in newly settled and cultivated areas in Northern Nigeria. As a
result of their enterprise, all markets of the newly created emirates came under their control.

Whereas, the erstwhile relationship between the Fulanis and Hausas in the pre-Jihad days was minimal, the movement brought them into economic interactions bordering on inevitable co-operation where the Hausas became an essential accessory to Fulanis prosperity. They were bound together, according to Robert July, in similar inter-dependence their relationship poised between the mutual dislike of two antithetical cultures and the mutual reliance of economically complementary societies.

The creation of large Islamic empires where petty, hitherto non-viable states merged into a single caliphate, boosted the commerce as large markets were evolved in the process. The establishment of a large empire by incorporating former independent states in Hausaland led to the abolition of tolls, custom duties and other artificial barriers among the states. The new development favoured free movement of people and merchandise all over the caliphate. As people could move and operate freely within and outside the caliphate, trade expanded tremendously and had a multiplier effect on commerce in general. Consequently, the Hausas were in the centre of this commercial expansion as they migrated beyond the Sokoto Caliphate to Mali, the Gold Coast, Yorubaland, and the Senegambia.

Whereas, the ravages of war were disruptive to commerce initially, the establishment of large theocrats not only ensured peace and stability, but ensured the safety of the routes and thus led to the revival of trade. For instance, the establishment of a stable administration in Borno under Shehu-El-Kanemi coupled with the emergence of Tripoli as a powerful force in the Maghrib under Pasha Qaramanli, brought about the revival of the prosperous trade along the Fezzan Borno route which provided a major source of revenue to the empire.

One of the cities whose commerce and population benefited from by the rising in Hausaland was Kano. In the pre-Jihad period, Katsina was the main terminus of the Sudan route and a thriving commercial centre. But she suffered destruction during the wars. However, while cities such as Kano and other centres revived, Katsina was on a gradual decline. On the other hand, the Jihad brought a phenomenal expansion and rapid growth to Kano such that by 1824 it had become the most important commercial centre in Hausaland. Both Barth and Clapperton reported that its market was crowded from morning till dawn with traders and merchants coming from distant area such as Tripoli, Salaga, Salah in Tuat and Masena in Bargirmi.

Although Kano’s importance was due to commerce, it was also an industrial city as it was also well endowed with fertile land which supported abundant food for the population and its teeming merchants. Its greatest industrial output was cotton cloth woven by the indigenous people of the city from locally grown cotton. Indeed Kano produced half the textile needs of the central Sudan and even beyond in the mid 19th century. Kano cloth export in the 19th century was valued at about 525,000 per annum. She also manufactured sandals, shoes, bags and others. Indeed, just as the Jihad led to the creation of larger markets, the movement expanded the scope, value, volume and dimension of the commerce of Kano. The trade routes from the north and south as well radiated around Kano as a result of its industrial and commercial potentialities. Borno cities witnessed similar commercial prosperity under the able leadership of El-Kanemi before decline set in by the mid 19th century.
Notes


2. Perhaps, the most detailed work on this aspect is Mahdi Adamu’s *Hausa Factor in West Africa History*, whose emphasis is on the spread of Hausa culture. Others concentrated on the examination of Hausa economy in the 19th century.


5. B.O. Oloruntimehin, *Tuculor Empire of Segu*, p. 64.


17. RA. Adeleye, *op. cit.* pp. 44-47.


25. B.O. Oloruntimishir.


Pierse Verger, *Bahia, Bight of Benin and the Guinea Coast, 17th-18th Century*, Uni. Ibadan,
M.A. Mannan, *Islamic Economic Theory and Practice*, Islamic Public, pp. 88-97. The same view was expressed earlier in, Kehinde Faluyi, ”The Economics of the Sokoto Jihad.”


Trimingham, *op. cit.* p. 147.

R.A. Adeleye, pp. 49-50.


B.O. Soderstein *International Economics*, Macmillan 1970, chp. II. In the same way most of the emirates acted as independent and antagonistic states before the Jihad. Hence, instability and

Mahdi Adam, *op. cit.* 179-186.


Trade with the Europeans in the 19th Century

Toyin Falola

The abolition of the nefarious traffic in human beings created the need for alternative product, and this involved a process of transition in West African trade relations with Europe from supplying human beings to producing raw materials. This transition was not without its consequences on the West African social, economic and political institutions. The transition also brought the Europeans closer to West Africa and in the process they began to exert political control at the ports and later in the hinterland.

Abolition of the Slave Trade and Transition to Commodity Trade

The history of the circumstances leading to, and the processes of abolition has been told in details in numerous literature, and only a brief outline is necessary here. Britain, the leading slave-trading nation, abolished the trade in 1807. Thanks to her diplomatic and naval pressures, other nations, notably Spain, Portugal, France, Sweden, the Netherlands and the United States followed suit at different times in the first half of the century. By the late 1860s that is about fifty years when Britain passed the act of abolition, the slave trade had virtually been suppressed.

The reasons for abolition are controversial, one view argues that the pressure from humanitarians who were appalled by the moral injustice of the trade and the sufferings of the slaves, forced the British government and others to put an end to the trade.1 The second view emphasises economic changes associated with with industrial revolution in Europe which made the use of slaves unnecessary. In the words of Eric Williams, a leading proponent of the economic factor, the contributions of the humanitarians to abolition have ”grossly been exaggerated by men who have sacrificed scholarship to sentimentality and, like the scholastics of old, placed faith before reason and evidence”.2

Whilst it is true that humanitarians such as Sharp, Wilberforce and Clarkson did agitate for abolition, the weight of evidence supports the second view. Without the economic developments which de-emphasised the use of slaves, the anti-slavery propaganda would riot have succeeded. In Britain, for example, notable economic changes in the 18th century combined to weaken the search for, and the use of slaves. In the British West Indies where the slaves were employed in the sugar industries, the post-1750 era witnessed economic decline which was compounded by slave rebellions, drastic falls in profits and competition from other industries in St. Domingo, Brazil and Cuba. The West Indies could not also absorb large quantities of imported goods from Britain, owing to its bad economy. In the face of this crisis, the importation of slaves had to be considerably reduced to the barest minimum lest the slaves became liabilities to their owners.

In Britain itself, Liverpool which had long been the major slave port had by 1800 become less
dependent on the slave trade in preference for cotton and other goods. Profits from the slave trade declined and shrewd businessmen began to invest their money in other lucrative enterprises. The industrialists who needed raw materials were also to support abolition. The economic reason that Africans should be left in their land to produce for, and buy from, Europe had gained sufficient ground.3 By the first decade of the 19th century British businessmen were willing to support the anti-slavery crusaders, apparently because they had little to lose by the abolition of the slave trade. This paved the way for the British Abolition Act of 25 March, 1807.

The suppression of the trade was, however, made difficult by a combination of factors. In the first place, other European nations and the United States did not readily cooperate with Britain because of the need to protect their economies which were still partly based on slavery and to prevent, as much as possible, British interference in their national affairs. Second, the African states which supplied the slaves were still willing to continue because suppression could ruin their economies which relied, to a large extent, on the trade. The African middlemen who had made fortunes from the trade also wanted the trade to continue for their own selfish economic reasons. The cooperation between European slave dealers notably the Spanish and the Portuguese and their African counterparts constituted great obstacles to abolition.

Further it was not easy for the British squadron, an arm of the Royal Navy, to arrest slave dealers on the Atlantic Ocean and the courts of mixed commission made up of British, Spanish and Portuguese judges to try offenders. By the mid-19th century when the impact of the industrial revolution (mass production of goods based on the use of machines) was being felt in all the European countries and in the United States, the need for slaves gradually diminished and the slave trade became unnecessary.

Nevertheless, there still arose the need for Europeans to come to Africa, again as a consequence of the industrial revolution. More than ever before, Europe needed raw materials to feed her growing industries. At the same time, she needed markets to dispose of the products of the industries. It was strongly believed that Africa could fulfil these two needs if she could replace the trade in human beings with the trade in commodities.

Other factors reinforced the economic desire for trade. It was believed, by the humanitarians in particular, that the vacuum created by abolition should be filled by commerce in agricultural products in order to stamp out the slave trade completely and develop Africa. Sir T.F. Buxton, a leading British anti-slavery crusader, was perhaps the most forceful in calling for "Civilization, Commerce and Christianity" in Africa. In 1839, he suggested how plantation settlements and legitimate trade could destroy slavery and lead to the economic emancipation of Africa.4 In the following year, he requested from the British government financial aid and a charter to establish the Niger Plantations.5

The campaign for trade in commodities spread throughout Europe and the response was positive. West Africa was not anew place to the European merchants who were ready to invest their money as long as they were sure of making profits. West African potentials in terms of its natural products and its markets were also not unknown, though they were often exaggerated. Voluntary associations and the governments became eager to explore West African territories in order to discover its abundant wealth.
In Britain, for example, the government began to support, from 1804 onwards, the efforts of the African Association, a society committed “for promoting the discovery of the interior regions of Africa”.6 Almost all the explorers were charged to employ their “leisure time in collecting and preserving specimens of such materials, manufacturers, and other products of Sudan, as they may deem to be valuable, in a commercial point of view.”7 They should also campaign for Africa cooperation in promoting legitimate trade which would promote their “welfare and prosperity”.8 European traders in West Africa who had enough foresight to see that the end of the slave trade was in sight also took measures to know the resources of Africa and to attempt contacts with a number of African chiefs.9

Besides the explorations, there were a few attempts to set up plantations in West Africa, the reasoning behind most of them being that Africans should be able to produce large quantities of goods along the line of Euro-American farming system. The French, for example, spent a lot of money and wasted a lot of time on the unsuccessful Senegal agricultural project between the 1820s and 1831.10 The plantation schemes soon gave way to active trade.

In West Africa, the gradual abolition of the slave trade meant also a gradual decline in the wealth of slave dealers and rulers who had relied on the trade. To recover from the economic depression, they had to cooperate with those who preached or promoted the trade. The stage was thus set for “legitimate commerce”. The transition to “legitimate” commerce was not difficult partly because “many areas were able to export legitimate goods and slaves side by side down to about the middle of the 19th century” and the fact that these goods “already grow in West Africa, where they were tended and consumed as foodstuffs”.11

The various West African states adjusted differently to the transition. Some states such as Dahomey and the Yoruba tried to cooperate with the dealers while at the same time laying the basis for rapid production of palm oil.12 Some other states intensified their trade with other African communities. The Asante, for example, began a large scale trade in kolanuts with the Hausas.13 Finally, there were a number of states, particularly those along the coast of Senegal and Ivory Coast, which quickly responded to the “legitimate” commerce by selling their raw products.

The traditional rulers who had participated and profited in the slave trade were also forced to adjust to the new demands of “legitimate” commerce. For some time, these chiefs continued to sell slaves since it was still profitable to do so. Those who had been supporting their bureaucracies with the proceeds from the slave trade found it very difficult to change to the new trade.14 By the 1860s, however, it had become difficult, if not impossible, to sell slaves; and the rulers were forced to take alternative course of actions. The first and one which brought about series of conflicts in West Africa was that they resorted to plundering and collecting tributes, if necessary by force, from their neighbours. Second, the rulers employed their slaves in large number to grow crops for export and this became the most permanent form of adjustment to the abolition.

**Organisation and Features of ”Legitimate” Trader**
**Articles of Trade**

Among the commodities brought by European traders were guns and gunpowder, hard ware, beads, tobacco, salt, iron textiles, spirit and some food items. Iron, salt, spirit and textiles were the chief imports, accounting for about three-quarters of the total value. Textiles of different kinds (woolen and cotton goods) were the leading commodities. All the goods were mass-produced in the Euro-American industries. By the second half of the 19th century, the quality of most of the goods had gone down in an attempt to increase the profit margin of European traders who exchanged the shoddy or second-hand goods with West African products.

In return for European goods, West Africa sold a variety of articles which included those that were formerly subsidiaries to slaves: ivory; gun; gold; timber; rubber; coffee; pepper; and indigo. Others which gained tremendous importance during the century were palm oil from the 1830s onward, cotton in the mid-century, groundnuts and palm kernel in the second half and cocoa in the last quarter of the century. The most demanded of the goods were palm oil, palm kernel and groundnut.

Palm oil was the "pioneer staple" and the leading commodity for export in the first half of the 19th century. Europe’s industrial revolution created the need for oil and fat. Palm oil was used as a lubricant to oil the machinery, to manufacture candles needed for lighting and to make soap. Europe turned to West Africa for oil. Production centres were concentrated in areas from Guinea to the Cameroons and these included Sierra Leone, the Gambia, Ghana, Republic of Benin and Nigeria. The greatest centre of production was the Niger Delta in Nigeria known to the Europeans as the Oil Rivers. Calabar, Brass and Bonny in the Delta were the "home of oil". Production in the Delta rose from 4,700 tons in 1827 to 13,945 tons in 1834 and 25,000 tons in 1845.15

The trade continued to increase after 1842. Britain took the lead mainly because she was the first industrial nation. France was second to Britain. Germany joined in the second half of the 19th century, and by the 1880s was able to handle a third of the total West Africa overseas trade. Germany’s rise and rapid trade expansion have been attributed to three main reasons: "the rise of the palm kernel market, which was dominated by Hamburg because German farmers were the main buyers of cattle cake, and because the Dutch were the largest manufacturers of margarine; the ability of Hamburg to supply cheap liquor; and the development of steamship services between Germany and West Africa." Other participants such as the Danes, the Dutch and the Americans lagged behind the British, French and the Germans. The Danes and the Dutch sold their forts in the Gold Coast to the British in 1850 and 1872 respectively and the Portuguese were restricted to the tiny Portuguese Guinea (now Guinea Bissau).

The European merchants came with their articles of trade mostly to the West African water edge. The ports along the coasts from St. Louis in the west to Libreville in the east were the major entreports of exchange. The mode of trading took three forms during the century. The first was the floating trade in which vessels stayed along the coast while the Europeans bartered their goods with West Africans. Because of the hardships involved in the trade the merchants never embarked on the voyage except they were sure of making a profit of about 60 per cent. The floating trade declined in importance after the 1850s.
The second was the castle trade in which merchants stayed in the entreports where they had their stores, though this did not prevent them from taking part in the floating trade as well. Many of these merchants received goods on credits from merchant houses in Europe (from, e.g. Messrs Forger and Smith, Messrs W.B. Hutton, Sewell Rose & Company, W King of Bristol, F. and A. Swanzy and Banner Brothers, all of Britain). The third mode of trade was the establishment of trading posts and stores in the hinterland. Though this became a major feature of European trade in the last quarter of the century, a number of European firms had penetrated the hinterland by the middle of the century.

Because of the substantial profit from the trade, Europeans usually competed with each other for the control of West African trade. Up to the 1850s, when the floating trade was flourishing, there was intense rivalry between those who engaged in the floating and the castle trade. The resident merchants were against those who sailed along the sea and often combined to form a cartel against them. The merchants in the entreports also struggled with one another for trade. For instance, up to the 1850s, the Danes, Dutch and the British engaged in intense conflict, on the coast of Ghana.

The use of steamships in the second half of the century intensified the rivalries among European traders. Before then the slow-moving sailing ships were in use. By 1852, the African Steam Ship Company had begun a regular service, to carry goods and mail to West Africa. It was later joined by others such as the French-based Fabre-Fraissinet line and German’s Woermann-Line. The use of steamships made freights cheaper, thus lowering the costs of business trips, and made the crossing of the Atlantic easier and faster. More importantly, the steamship made it possible for many European trading groups which could not afford private ships to pay for the use of the mail steamers in transporting their goods to and from West Africa.

These small trading firms seized the opportunity to come to West Africa in large numbers and by 1856 they were up to two hundred. Before the use of the mail steamers, big firms with the advantages of huge investments in ships and goods had dominated the trade (e.g., Messrs Tobin and Horsfall in the Delta, Messrs T. Hulton, Messrs Forster in Ghana). Among the new comers to West Africa who later became prominent were the firms of Cheri Peyrissac in Senegal begun in 1862, G.L. Gaiser from Hamburg which joined in 1869, the Manchester firm of Jon Walkden, 1868 and finally, John Holt who began in the Delta in the 1870s.

The competition for trade caused bitterness among the established trading houses, the small and new ones, and the African merchants. In the search for more trade and profits many of the European merchants penetrated West Africa’s hinterland in the last quarter of the century. Indeed, European merchants were eager to revive the idea of chartered companies with monopoly over trade. One British company in fact succeeded in this and its activities are worth delineating in brief. This was the Royal Niger Company (RNC) a chartered company which became the prototypes for other chartered companies in Africa and revived “the chartered company as a method of acquiring and ruling territory”.

The architect of the RNC was Sir Taubman Goldie. Goldie’s trading interest took him to the lower Niger, the most flourishing centre for the trade in palm produce, in 1877. This was a time
of cut-throat competition for trade by many European merchants.27 The Delta chiefs also collected levies from traders making use of the waterways and there were constant rivalries among the African chiefs over the control of the river Niger. The competition for trade and the duplication in the payments of duties increased the overhead costs on trading, reduced profit and made the palm produce more expensive in the market.

Sir Goldie came out with a plan to solve the problems of trade for British merchants. He organised all the important trading interests into a single company, the United African Company (UAC) in 1879. The competition from two French companies the Compagnie Francaise de l’Afrique Equatoriale and the Compagnie de Senegal, the quest of the French to establish a colonial empire in West Africa and the advance of Germany from the Cameroons to northern Nigeria forced Goldie to improve the organisation and activities of the UAC. In 1882, Goldie increased the subscribed capital of the UAC from £200,000 to £1m and offered shares to the public.

He also changed the name of the company to the National African company (NAC). His problem was how to deal with the two French rival companies. Having failed to persuade them to join the NAC, Goldie used his skill and money to undercut their prices by almost 25 per cent; and by 1884 they had been forced out of business.28

Faced with the threat of the colonial expansion of the French and Germans into the Niger, Goldie applied for a royal charter from the British government to enable his company not only to control trade but also the Niger territory. He obtained the charter in 1886 and the company was re-named the Royal Niger Company. The charter empowered the RNC to govern those territories with which it had signed treaties of protection, to acquire new territories, abolish slavery and slave trade and to collect taxes and duties in order to defray the cost of its administration. The RNC must not, however, interfere with the peoples’ customs and religion, prevent other firms from trading or transfer any part of the Niger territory to any person or organisation without the consent of the Secretary of State.

The RNC made use of its charter to govern and more importantly to establish a firm control over trade. It imposed high duties on exported and imported goods and requested all firms wishing to trade in the area to obtain licences at very high charges. The company continued to tap the trade of eastern Nigeria until its charter was revoked in 1899 when the British proclaimed a protectorate.29

**African Merchants**

African merchants based in the trading centres along the coast and those from the hinterland dealt with European traders. The African traders acted as brokers and mostly as middlemen; they took the European goods to the areas, especially in the hinterland where they could exchange them for African products.

Since the trade was profitable for most of the time in the 19th century, many Africans with the necessary capital outlay struggled to participate in it. The quest to take part caused numerous conflicts among the coastal states who strove to monopolise the trade directly with the Europeans. The efforts to break the monopoly of the coastal states as well as the political
implications of direct access to the coast lay at the root of many of the incessant wars between the Asante and Fante in Ghana and among the Yorubas and the people of the Niger Delta in Nigeria.30

A good number of the African traders were wealthy. Some of them were also powerful, having made use of the profit from trade to acquire power, or their positions as ”traditional” chiefs to participate in trade.

One significant development in the organisation of trade following the use of steamships was the emergence, from about the 1850 onwards, of a new class of merchants usually referred to as ”educated Africans” in the urban centres. In the words of Linnart Limberg, the educated Africans were ”a group of Africans, mostly literate, who led life more or less outside the old tribal society, and often devoted themselves to trade”.31 A number of this group were liberated slaves and products of mission schools. Many of them were not at all educated though they imitated theHe-style of the educated ones. They were mostly concentrated in the centres in places such as Freetown, Monrovia, Cape Coast, Accra, Lagos, St. Louis, Dakar and Rufisque.

The ambition of the new African merchants was to own a firm which would operate like the European’s. They wanted huge profits which some of them thought they could come by bypassing European merchants and taking their goods directly to Europe on their own. Others were contented with obtaining credits from the European Merchant Houses in Britain or France with which they had contacts.32 Many of them became wholesalers and agents of European firms. A good number of the African merchants succeeded to such an extent that their firms became as large as those of the Europeans. In Ghana, for instance, the African merchant class lived mostly in the Gold Coast.33

As far as education and western culture were concerned they compared favourably with the Europeans. Among the most influential of the African merchants were James Bannerman, George Kuntu Blankson, Robert Johnson Ghartey, James Robert Thompson, Frank Cleland, Robert Hutchinson, Francis Chapman Grant, John Sarbah, Thomas Hughes and John Smith. James Bannerman, for example, received his education in England. He dealt in the exportation of corns in the Gold Coast from the second decade of the 19th century and by 1828, his trade had grown to such an extent that:

Bannerman House at Accra consumed 1,100 puncheons of rum during the last 17 months. 34,000 oz of gold has been collected during the same period and in the last six months, 10 tons of ivory and £7,000 worth of palm oil have been sent to England.34*

His business continued to flourish after 1828; and he was able to use his wealth and influence to attain position of authority. He was the Lieutenant-General of the Gold Coast from December 1850 to September 1851 and also a member of the Gold Coast Legislative Council from 1850 to 1856.

System of Exchange
The system of exchange between the Europeans and the coast traders on the one and the coastal traders and those in the hinterland on the other was based on the use of currency and mostly on
the trust or barter system. The use of currency was not strange in West Africa. The various forms of currency continued to be in use for domestic transactions. New forms were, however, added by the Europeans. For example, Spanish dollars and doubloons imported from Spain, Americas and Portugal were widely used by European and African traders on the coast. British and French silver coins were also in circulation. These new money gradually displaced the pre-19th century currencies.

The trust system was, however, the most popular form of exchange between European merchants and their African counterparts. The trust system was an arrangement whereby manufactured goods were exchanged with African raw materials through the barter system. The European traders would give their goods to their African agents on credit. The African agents would sell the goods and use the money to buy African products or, in some cases, the agents would exchange the European goods with African products. Later (from a month to a few years), the African agents would repay the European traders with African goods equivalent to the amount of goods which they had received.

A number of steps were taken to guide against traders duping one another. The European merchants often collaborated with the local chiefs or any other well known person who acted as guarantors to African agents. There were, in a few cases as in the Delta, the courts of equity to try debtors and recover debts. In some other cases, bankruptcy laws were passed and offenders were punished. That of Ghana, for example, was passed in 1858 and debtors could forfeit their assets and also go to jail.

The trust system enabled Africans with small capital to participate in the export trade. It also enabled the European merchants to monopolise trade and force African traders to sell their goods to them. An African agent who received credit from an European merchant was indebted to him and must supply him with the African products at the appropriate time. In effect, the African agent could not quickly change trading partners even when it was profitable to do so. Indeed, there were many temptations not to honour the credit. There were usually new European merchants called ”interlopers” by the established one on the coast. These interlopers also wanted trade and were usually willing to offer credit, sell their goods at prices lower than that of the established traders and buy African products at higher prices. Many African traders evaded their debts and sold their goods to the interlopers in the bid to make more profit. There were many who also received credits from two or more merchants, a practice known as ”double trust”. The inability to fulfil the trading obligations led to series of crises between European merchants on the one hand and European and African traders on the other. The disadvantages of the trust system were of such magnitude that the African educated elites repeatedly and sincerely called for its abolition in preference for the use of money. For instance, The Lagos Times and the Gold Cost Colony Advertiser of August 10,1881, discussed at length the origin and disadvantages of the trust system. It traced its history to the time of the slave trade when European slave dealers exchanged goods for men. The newspaper pointed out that the system had continued to be in force ever since with the effect that African traders strongly believed in the ”miserable idea that trade must be done on credit, and traffic must be pursued, not with one’s own independent capital, but with that of another.” The paper went on to catalogue the disadvantages of the system. In the first place, it was not a convenient method of trading: ”many groan almost helplessly under the system, especially when there are heavy liabilities against them pressing for
immediate settlement”.

Second, Africans could not sell their goods to the highest bidders: "the system often places a receiver of credit at a great disadvantage in the market and makes it particularly difficult, for him to compete with the man who owes no debt for what he offers to sell”. Third, the system made goods more expensive and reduced the profit of the African traders: "the creditor rightly reckoning upon the length of time he has to wait for his money, the possible, risks attending the advance he makes, and the possibility of his not being paid back in full, increases his charge upon it and this consumes at once a portion of the profits that might have fallen to the lot of the debtor and throws him back, for besides losing the double cash and trade discounts usually made on ready payment which might have added to his profits, he has to pay higher prices for his goods and interest in addition”.

Finally, the system encouraged conspicuous consumption and false living among African traders: ”often upon the receipt of large credits new modes of living are at once adopted; artificial wants rapidly increase; the luxuries, the expensive and perhaps not innocuous pleasures of European life, and the extravagance of foreign fashions became at once indispensable; large houses are built and furnished perhaps in every expensive style... In some cases, harems grow rapidly in size, and are well furnished with inmates, and beyond jurisdiction, often slaves are quickly multiplied in addition. These people abused the power of credit and eventually brought themselves and others into a complication of miseries. Mushroom gentlemen, going down as quickly as they came up!” The paper concluded thus: ”The system then, such as it is here, oppresses trade, robs it of much of its productiveness, and establishes by the side of it a miserable serfdom.”36

Impact of Trade
The trade in commodities stimulated a massive production of goods in West Africa, unlike the previous trade in slaves which failed to establish such a linkage with the economy. All the articles of trade earlier referred to were cultivated and sometimes processed before they were sold. For instance, a lot of energy and time had to be expended in processing palm oil and in removing kernels from the shells.

The massive production of the goods owed to at least four reasons. The first was that the West African climate and vegetation were suitable for the production of the crops. Second, and more importantly, the prices paid for the crops helped to stimulate production. Compared with food crops, the export crops attracted higher prices, thus offering the attractions to farmers. Third, the European missionaries and officials employed all their propaganda machinery to encourage the production of cash crops. The officials wanted African farmers to plant those goods needed in the metropolis while the missionaries were interested in creating a crop of ”rich farmers” whose minds would be receptive to their message.37

Finally, farming was not a new occupation in West Africa; the farmers simply continued with their age-long practices of cultivating different crops. As Professor J.E. Flint rightly pointed out, the trade with the Europeans was ”but a very minor part of the normal economic activities of the mass of west Africa’s population during the nineteenth century.38
Many people were also engaged in processing raw materials (e.g., palm oil) for export and in trading. Unlike the trade in slaves which called for a few entrepreneurs with the capital outlay to secure and sell slaves, the "legitimate" trade involved many people who needed little financial outlay to be engaged as producers or petty traders.

The massive involvement in the trade increased tremendously the commercialization of labour and land, both of which were now actively involved in production. Large expanses of land were tilled for production while many people found employment in many of the diverse occupations connected with the trade. Indeed, hundreds of people migrated to areas where they could produce or trade, as was the case with farmers who went to Senegal to produce groundnuts or to Eastern Nigeria to process palm oil. Wealthy citizens also employed slaves, who would formerly have been sold on their farms and trading enterprises. Indeed, the abolition of the slave trade helped to intensify the use of slaves as domestic labour.

Since the commodities for export brought immediate cash and profits, the orientation of the West African economy shifted from an inward looking one that produced for internal consumption to an outward looking one that produced for foreign markets. This had many implications for the West African economy and society. In the first place, the West Africans subordinated their domestic needs to production for European needs. Instead of producing the food crops and the raw materials which they needed for internal consumption, they produced cash crops because they brought more financial gains. Consequently, most of the states experienced increases in the cost of foodstuffs; and in the urban centres, the teeming population had to cope with high cost of living.

Second, by subordinating their economies to that of Europe, the West African states exposed themselves to exploitation. The products of their laborious activities, and the most important of their resources were taken to Europe. In return, they obtained essentially luxuries which they could only consume. They in fact obtained commodities such as liquor and tobacco to satisfy transient desires and guns and gunpowder to liquidate precious lives. These were products which had very little impact on West African economic development but which were in steady demand because of the contacts with Europe.

The prices which West Africans received for their products were dictated by the Europeans since they could not control the volume of goods and since their major consumers (the Europeans) often had either alternative substitutes or markets. Generally, the prices of African products varied with the changes in business and industrial activities in Europe. And as Emmanuel has convincingly argued, the exchange between a developed industrialised nation, and an under-developed producer nation, cannot but be unequal.

West Africa experienced adverse price fluctuations throughout the century. Prices in the first half were relatively stable. The price of palm oil, for example, continued to be on the increase up to 1861 (except for 1844-46 and 1851/52) when it reached its highest peak of £45 per ton in Liverpool. Prices of West African products fell from 1861 onwards and they never rose until the 20th century. The prices of palm oil fell from £45 per/ton to £32 from 1862 onwards and fell to a considerably low amount of £20 from 1886 to 1890. The price of palm kernel also fell from £15 per ton in the 1860s to £10 from 1886 onwards. Similarly, the price of groundnut fell from its...
271 francs per 100 kilos in 1857 to 15 francs from 1877 to 1900.

Hopkins gave two reasons for this fall, both of which show clearly that West African’s reliance on Europe was risky and that its economy was vulnerable: "First, there, was an increase in the supply of mineral and vegetable oils following the discovery of petroleum resources in the United states in the 1860s, and the entry into the market of Indian groundnuts and, Australian tallow after the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869. Second, European demand for a wide range of raw materials, including oil and fat, was checked in the last quarter of the 19th century with the advent of the so-called Great Depression."41

The importation of goods also had a disruptive effect on local manufacturers. For instance, the smithing industries in the coastal parts experienced decline because of the competition with the mass-produced and cheap European iron bars and iron implements. A number of industries such as the cloth and gold mining were, however, able to resist competition.

The impact of trade was not restricted to the economic sector; but also affected the political and social institutions of West Africa, particularly those of the coastal states. The rise of the African merchants already referred to threatened the power and the continued survival of the indigenous power elites. Whether in Abeokuta and Lagos in Nigeria, Freetown in Sierra Leone, Accra in Ghana or St. Louis and Dakar in Senegal, the new merchant class struggled to be part and parcel of government in order to make and execute laws instead of being subjects who must take instructions. In Abeokuta, they competed for chieftaincy titles and became members of the Ogboni, a secret society with wide powers. In Lagos, they ignored the traditional chiefs and held them in contempt until the 1880s. In Ghana, the merchants also, acquired power.

The success of the merchants in gaining power at the expense of the chiefs owed largely to their wealth in forms of tributes, fines and presents. They spent the wealth on large feasts, gifts, and to maintain their bureaucracies, thus dispersing their wealth as soon as they were acquired. The merchants, on the other hand, acquired their wealth through trade and spent their money to seek more fortunes and other achievements, including the acquisition of power. Renolds whose study on the African merchants has earlier been cited examines the increasing power of these merchants as well as the decline of traditional rulers in Ghana. According to him, the merchants gained power because of their money at a time when the influence of the traditional chiefs was fastly declining because of their dwindling income, following the abolition of the atlantic slave trade in which they actively participated as suppliers of slaves. The money which accrued to the chiefs from customary rents, salaries and gifts from European traders were also riot as forthcoming as in the 18th century. "With their ever-decreasing political and economic power", he concluded, "it was unlikely that the chiefs could successfully reassert their former influence. With augmented trade and social change to the Gold Coast and growing influence of the power of a new class of merchants, this group came to dominate the affairs of the Gold Coast. Frequently in opposition to the British and sometimes vying for power with the traditional rulers, they often used their influence to protect and to foster their own interests.42

Since the quest for wealth could not be divorced from political power, the merchants struggled for power in order to further their economic interests. The merchants took part in the major crises from 1850 to 1874 (e.g. the poll tax, the Krobo dispute and the exchange of territories between
the Dutch and the English) in order to exert their control.

The Niger Delta which was the leading producer of palm oil in Africa experienced the most far-reaching socio-political changes,43 the most revolutionary being the replacement of freedom aristocracies in a number of city-states by ex-slaves. Early in the 19th century, the Niger Delta had five principal city states (Calabar at the mouth of the Calabar and Cross Rivers, Brass, Grand Bonny and Elem Kalahari to the east and Itsekiri to the West). The leadership of the city-states and the Houses (a group of lineages organised for politics and trade) was in the hands of the nobility which derived its wealth partly from participating in the Atlantic slave trade. Every House had its free-born commoners and slaves who were prevented from becoming rulers.

The trade in palm oil in which the slaves and the commoners participated led to the emergence of a few rich citizens among them. Wealth could bring power; and these citizens became eager to secure political power. In Brass and Elem Kalahari, a number of these new men became heads of subordinate Houses. In Itsekiri, Nana, a commoner rose to the prestigious post of the king, though he was never crowned. In Calabar, numerous oppressed slaves and commoners working in the exploitative palm plantations ran away to the Qua river where they established a community. The leading men among them formed a society known as the Order of Blood Men which employed non-violent means to demand equal rights. In Bonny where the revolution was most successful, there was an intense competition for the throne between men of servile origin and the nobility. Alali, an assimilated slave in the Anna Pepple Royal House, became not only the head of the House but also the most powerful person in Bonny from 1830 to 1866. He was succeeded as the head of the House by Jaja, an Igbo slave.

In the bid to gain political ascendancy in Bonny, the Manilla Pepple, a rival Royal House to the Anna Pepple attacked Jaja in 1868. He withdrew from Bonny to Opobo, a strategic location which cut off Bonny from its trading empire on the river Imo. At Opobo, Jaja established a new city-state with himself as the ruler and a flourishing trading empire. Jaja grew to become the most celebrated king in the Delta.

Finally, the profits from and the problems of "legitimate" commerce were partly responsible for the partition of West Africa.

Notes


5. British Parliamentary Papers (B.P.R),

CO. 2/16 E. Barthurst to H. Clapperton, 30 July, 1825.

F.O. 101/23 Lord Palmerston to James Richardson: Draft Instructions, Nov. 1849.


The best analysis on this is Newbury, C.W., The Western Slave Coast and its Rulers (Oxford, 1961).

These figures represent more than half of the total production for the whole of Africa. See Dike, K.O., Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885 (Oxford, 1956), pp. 100-101.


Hopkins, An Economic History of West Africa, op. cit, p. 128.

Ibid, p. 130.

Besides the small European business enterprises, a few large companies were prominent in the trade and among them were the CFAO (Compagnie Francaise de l’Afrique Occidentale), Compagnue du Senegal, Messrs Miller Brothers and Company, the African Merchants of Bristol, John Holt and the United African Company which finally changed its name to the Royal Niger Company.


26. Along the River Niger were merchants of Messrs Alexander Miller Brothers and CO. (Glasgow), James Pinnock and Co. (Liverpool), West African Company (Manchester) and The Central African Trading Company (London).


28. The company paved the way for the partition; see Ibid, Chap. XII.


To the historian, the proliferation of individual and group of people as merchants in recent times has historical antecedents. Though the evolution of a merchant class in West Africa was a continuing process, different periods in history witnessed an upsurge in the rise of the class. For instance, the 13th to the 15th centuries which was a period of demand for West African goods through the trans-saharan trade, saw a rapid development of the merchant class at varying degrees of sophistication.

Likewise, the rise of the atlantic trade and the accompanying slave trade witnessed the rise of another group of merchants especially in the coastal belt. The mid nineteenth century also was a period of development which brought to being numerous groups of merchants. Indeed by the end of the nineteenth century, an articulate, prosperous and influential class of merchants was already in existence in many West African societies especially in the trading centres that dotted the sub-region during the time.

The history of merchandising in West Africa pre-dates even the trans-saharan trade and could indeed be traced for centuries. The writing of the history of the class poses a problem of chronology especially in the early period. This is due to inadequacies of source materials because of dearth of historical research in this direction. This however cannot prevent a reconstruction of the history. This chapter is therefore interested in the rise of the merchant class in West Africa. Discussions will centre on the historical development of professional trading which of course is directly related to the rise of the merchant class; the factors that led to the rise of the super merchants, the process of capital formation, the modus operandi and to a certain extent the socio-political involvements of merchants in the historical development of their societies. Merchants in this context would mean those persons or groups of persons whose business is buying and selling of goods for profits whether in wholesale or retail.

It is difficult to say precisely when a discernible group of merchants emerged in West Africa. It would seem, however, that the process of evolution of the class was closely tied to the development of trade and markets in West Africa. Critics like Bohannan and Dalton argue that Africa as a whole lacked markets and market principles in the pre-colonial era and that exchange depended not on market principles of demand and supply but on social obligation governed by the concept of reciprocity in redistribution.1 Others like Hodder are of the opinion that markets where they existed were stimulated by external, trade.2 If this was so, then it could be said that the development of the merchant class did not take place in many West Africa societies until the nineteenth century. If this view is accepted then we will be doing so at the expense of historical evidence which shows that trade developed naturally because of the mutual exchange needs of
the people and by the first millennium, a lot of trading activities had taken place in most West African societies.

As production improved especially during the late stone age and afterwards, people gradually produced enough for their consumption and surpluses must have been accumulated. Also recurrent failures of crops in certain areas due to natural disasters like droughts, inadequate or too much rain must have created a demand for accumulated surpluses in other areas. This must have occasioned wide spread, but small scale trade. During this early stage, producers were also involved in trading activities and a distinct class of merchants had not yet emerged.

Regional variations in productive activities were a stimulating factor in the rise of the merchant class. There arose the need for people to organise and carry goods from centres of production in one region or sub-region to demand centres in other areas. This could be in the neighbouring villages or market centres five to ten miles from the centres of production. It would seem that the first operation of these early merchants at this early stage was confined within a short distance of their homes. However, with time and increased demand, people started to devote their time to the sole purpose of buying bulking and transporting of goods to different demand locations.

Professional trading must have started with foodstuff as the major article of trade. With specialisation in agriculture, mining and manufacture, according to geographical regions, local resource endowment and technological know-how, professional trading increased. People then started to accumulate goods such as iron implements, tools, pottery, cloth and foodstuff to sell in areas where demand was high. In this way a two way merchant traffic was created, whereby merchants purchased goods special in their home areas to sell to others in areas where such goods could not be derived in abundance and buying specialities from the foreign markets back home. Many groups of merchants were involved in this traffic. There were those who bought and bulked the goods directly from the producers from their farms or small local markets. This group would then display the commodities in a larger market where the prices would favour them. From there, other groups of merchants would buy and bulk larger quantities for onward transportation to other areas of demand.

Indeed, it required a chain of merchants of different categories before goods could reach the consumer or final port of exportation. This is not to say that there were no instances where consumers bought directly from the producers. However, where long distance trade goods were concerned, a number of merchants were involved in the relay process through which goods reached the consumers.

The development of the trans-saharan trade as early as 1000 B.C. boosted the rise of the merchant class. This trade for the first time created a demand for many West African commodities which had hitherto been of lesser value. As desert crossing was simplified by the use of the camel, more demand for West African goods was created. By the seventh century A.D., when the Arabs were in control of North Africa, trade with West Africa, was expanded. The Tuaregs who were adept in desert crossing played a vitally important part in controlling the trade; acting as contractors and offering services to the merchants at the northern and southern termini of the trade. They made trading across the desert generally easier than before. This brought many merchants from Northern Africa to the Western Sudan in quest of commodities.
such as gold, kolanuts, gum arabic, dye and slaves.

In fact, by the eleventh century, many caravans of merchants were arriving Western Sudan. It therefore required a professional group of West African merchants to supply the goods needed by the seemingly insatiable North African merchants. The demand created in the Western Sudan had a strong spread effects and linkages which stimulated production even in the forest region. It follows as a corollary that merchants emerged in West Africa so as to supply the demands created at the market place.

Different groups of merchants of different calibre arose to take part in the lucrative trade. From the forest region of West Africa to the great trade centres of the Sudan, one could notice different groups of merchants at various stages of buying, bulking and distribution of commodities. By the eleventh century, a discernible group of merchants had emerged and indeed Ghana Empire became well known and famous because of their activities. The city of Kumbi Saleh became the greatest market in Western Sudan and merchants from all over the Maghreb frequented it.6 Famous among the Sudanic merchants at Kumbi were the Soninke and the Tuculors who bought gold from Wangara to sell to the North African merchants. The Hausa merchants were also discernible in many areas of West Africa especially in the nineteenth century.

As trade became more competitive, another group of merchants emerged. This included the brokers and agents. Long distance merchants required storage facilities because it usually took sometime before they could dispose of all their goods. Also the necessity to acquire goods in advance before the arrival of the caravans and the need to dispose of imported goods easily led to this new development in the market place. The brokers usually understood the language of trade of both the Northern and Western African merchants and they easily became important middlemen between them. Sometimes agents who worked for a particular merchant or group of merchants existed and rendered similar services to the merchants for a fee. Most times, the brokers also acted as the landlords providing accommodation for the merchants and their goods in their (brokers) facilities, and were responsible for the general welfare of the merchants who patronised them.7

It was customary for the broker to ascertain the price that the merchants wanted for their goods. On knowing this, the broker would arrange with other interested merchants to buy the goods. If he sold more than expected, he kept the rest of the profits plus the commission. It was possible to conclude business at the broker’s house without making use of the market place. It is reasonable to argue that most whole-sale merchants did not utilise the market place since they bought and sold their wares using the broker’s facilities.8 The goods must have reached the market place through those merchants who bought from the wholesalers.

A number of middlemen arose to take part in the lucrative trade. Some of the landlords specialised in receiving merchants handling certain types of products. Thus, the business of the brokers and agents was that of intermediary between the merchants from North and West Africa to facilitate the process of exchange. More often than not, these brokers and agents became renowned merchants after learning the intricacies of merchandising and capital accumulation. Some however were only brokers and did not engage in any other from of commercial activities.
The golden age of the trans-Saharan trade therefore aided the rise of merchants in West Africa. Indeed, there were many who dealt mainly in local craft and agricultural products and concentrated mainly on local trade. There were no barriers to entry in the trans-Saharan trade and many people joined the ranks of the merchants to service the mutual demands of the North and West Africans.

From the sixteenth century onward, the economic environment militated against the activities of the merchants. This started with the fall of Songhay and the disruption of commercial activities which prevailed in the Sudan under the Ruma. The chaos which attended the fall of the Songhai Empire deprived the producers and merchants of a favourable economic environment to pursue their business activities. Thus, there was a decline in external trade as it was only the western route to Borno that was active. Many merchants had lost their fortunes in the uncertain situation and they were unable to rise up again.

During the same period, the intensification of the slave trade through the trans-Atlantic route with all the accompanying hazards changed the pattern of commerce and many merchants were thrown out of business. Many could not compete in this trade since it required ability and military power to be successful. A large capital outlay was required and many merchants who had participated in the trade in other goods fell on the wayside. Even those who did not trade in slaves had difficulties obtaining their trade goods, and ensuring their personal safety, since strangers could easily be killed, enslaved and used for human sacrifice.

Though there was slave trade before this time, slaves did not constitute a dominant article of trade and the states did not depend on it for their survival. Moreover, the wars of expansion which took place in many West African communities was one of the factors limiting the activities of merchants. For the first time, therefore, the economic environment became very hostile and the activities of merchants became restricted to known areas and long distance trade suffered a great deal.

However, the rise of the Atlantic slave trade and the conditions inherent in this commerce stimulated the rise of another group of merchants the state merchants. The development of state merchants was not totally new. They had existed in Ghana, Mali and Songhai and were responsible for disposing of goods derived through tributes and gifts to the King. Also in Ghana, the king had the monopoly of the gold trade. This was done by reserving all gold nuggets for the king and allowing only the gold dust to the people. In this way, through his agents he was able to regulate the amount of gold in the market.

From the sixteenth century to the early nineteenth century, the dominant commerce was slave trade. As already discussed, this required a capital outlay which ordinary citizens could not afford. The trade required ability to capture, subdue, and transport slaves to the coast. War captives were state property and it required organised state mercantile facilities to dispose of the slaves. Also, the states were rich enough to pay for slaves sold by individuals. State merchants were active in Dahomey where the king set the price and had the greatest number of slaves to sell. Others not belonging to him were tolled before they could be sold.

Also in the Akan states, there was a special group of merchants the Gyanse who traded for the
kings. As in Dahomey all captives in the Akan states belonged to the kings though individuals could be rewarded. Though some private merchants such as Antera Duke in Calabar managed to prosper during the time, trade was mostly in the hands of the local potentates; and private merchants were few because the economic environment dictated lots of barriers to entry. However, such merchants as the Asante salt merchants continued to trade in locally derived products over long distances despite the slave trade. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries they supplied salt to many Gold Coast communities and the trade in ivory, kolanuts and gold still flourished.

As the trans-Saharan trade gave rise to numerous merchants in the Sudan, the trans-Atlantic trade also aided the rise of many merchants. Apart from the state merchants, there were mostly Africans and people of Afro-European extraction who were found in most coastal societies. Through their long association with both the European and African merchant communities these men had come to understand the language and the intricacies of external trade. By the seventeenth century, the Afro-Portuguese of the Senegambia were very aggressive and successful in keeping other merchants inland, denying them the opportunity to trade directly with the Europeans. They handled all sorts of commodities like salt, leather products, slaves, cloth, dyes, kolanuts, rice, palm oil and groundnuts. The Afro-Portuguese had made commerce a full time occupation. Since trade was seasonal among many groups in the sub-region, they dominated the trade of the area and resisted any attempt by any group to oust them from commerce.

By 1680, such a name as Bibiana Vaz was prominent in the Senegambia. She owned many light vessels and was able to exploit the rivers. In the Gambia, people like Tomba Mendez and Antonio Vaz were well known. By 1731, Antonio Vaz, was reportedly worth £10,000. In Sierra Leone, Jose Lopez, the Tuckers, Rogers and Caulkers were influential both in the commerce and politics of the area. Between 1640 and 1662, the Akrosan brothers wielded enormous economic and political power and their influence overshadowed that of the king of Fetu in the Gold Coast. John Kabes of Komenda, John Konny, John Claessen and Edward Barter were also successful merchant princes in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In the nineteenth century however, a new class of merchants emerged. This was sequel to the abolition of the slave trade which had imposed many entry barriers for prospective merchants. By the middle of the nineteenth century, emphasis had shifted from the trade in human beings to trade in other natural endowments. Entry to this trade was relatively easy since little or no capital was required. Elaborate arrangements for the protection of self and goods were reduced as the risk of capture and enslavement was reduced.

Many people entered the trade in staple goods and achieved various degrees of success. The period saw the emergence of various groups of middlemen who handled the goods before they reached the consumer or the final port of exportation. Local potentates who had already developed their trading channels became the major middlemen between the interior and coastal merchants. For instance, men like Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Itsekiri, Eyo Honesty and Eyamba of Calabar were such local potentates. These merchants were well known for their activities among the Africans and European merchants class. Taking advantage of their location at the ports of trade, and their commanding power among the people, African rulers were able without
difficulties, to impose themselves as the only middlemen between local merchants and the Europeans.  

However, in certain areas the development of the Mulatto group of merchants supplanted the commercial and indeed the political powers of local potentates. The nineteenth-century Mulatto merchants had some education either from the mission schools or in Europe where their European fathers sent them to boarding schools. Possessing the cultures of both the European and African merchants the Mulattoes became very successful middlemen. Men like John Sarbah represented a commercial authority in the Gold Coast and was worth $100,000 in the 1880s. His contemporary, George Blankson was a merchant of real success and owned several trading firms along the coast with over a thousand people in his employment. Others like James Bannerman, Samuel Brew, Frank Clealand, Robert Hutchinson, Thomas Hughes and John Smith were merchants to be reckoned with in the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century. Although the Mulattoes dominated the coastal trade of the Gold Coast during the nineteenth century; there were some others of pure African stock like Johnson Ghartey who competed favourably.

The establishment of Sierra Leone and Liberia for the settlement of liberated slaves also led to the rise of a new class of merchants. They were known as Americo-Liberians when they settled in Liberia while those in Sierra Leone are commonly referred to as Saros. These new merchants invaded all west African ports for mercantile reason. The Saros were particularly active in Lagos from the 1850s, when educated Saros started filtering into the area. A large percentage of them were involved in commerce as merchants, traders, clerks, agents and shopmen. Great Saro merchants had emerged by the 1860s. These included J.P.L. Davies, J.S. Bucknor and P.P. Martins.

Related to this group were the merchants of Brazilian/African extraction who had also returned to settle in many parts of the sub-region especially Lagos. Tracing their ancestry to some Yoruba towns, they used kinship patronage to trade in the interior, despite the upheavals in the Yorubaland in the nineteenth century. Indeed, these groups of merchants were accused by the Europeans of spoiling trade since as middlemen, they were allegedly making large profits from their interior brothers; they were also accused of promoting the interior wars. These newcomers sometimes got into trouble with local merchants who tried to debar them from participating in the trade. For instance, Duke Ephraim and king Eyo of Calabar tried to expel the Sierra Leoneans from trading in the area.

Further, one of the important developments in world commerce that boosted the rise of merchants in Africa was the development of the steamship and its arrival in West Africa. The steamship offered improved cargo services and freight rates were low due to competition by different steamship lines. While all previous services to the West African coast belonged to European trading firms which carried goods only to their agents and correspondents, the steamship company was an innovation because it offered services to any customer. Many West Africans availed themselves of this opportunity and made direct export to Europe and also ordered their goods directly.

The development of a credit system also added impetus to the rise and growth of the merchant
Credit giving was not new to the West African trade. The practice was there during the trans-Saharan trade era. Many Arab merchants advanced goods on credit to West African merchants who supplied the goods needed by such foreign merchants. Even in, the early days of the Atlantic trade, the super cargoes were giving credits to African merchants as Walter Rodney had shown concerning the Senegambia merchants. However, credit giving became a common practice in the nineteenth century. This was due mainly to the fierce competition for goods by the European merchants. In order to be sure of their supply, the European merchants got the African committed by advancing goods on credit to them so they could supply the necessary cargoes during their return journey. In this way, many merchants were made.

The presence of interlopers further created opportunities for the rise of a merchant class. The interlopers were usually merchant ships belonging to nations that did not have commercial control of their areas of trade. They usually did brisk clandestine business with anybody at any port where they could anchor their ship. Established coastal merchants who were committed to other European merchants could not benefit from this trade with the interlopers. It was the relatively unknown merchants who made quick business with them. The interlopers offered better prices and credit terms and it was generally more profitable to do business with them as many merchants found out.

As credits were extended to African merchants by the supercargoes, the London merchant houses and the interlopers, so did African merchants extend credits to other African merchants especially those in the interior. The system of credit giving was very extensive and intensive in the nineteenth century and contributed largely to the rise of the merchant class. Usually referred to as the "trust system", credit giving depended on the sincerity of the merchants concerned to honour the obligation. Indeed it could be said that the liberal credit system of the nineteenth century was a very important factor in the rise of the merchant class.

Lack of alternative lucrative employment also encouraged the rise of the merchant class. The major economic activity in many West African societies was agriculture which engaged a large percentage of the population. Apart from agriculture, local craft and manufacturing industries like smithing and pottery making had local barriers to entry as only certain groups or families engaged in them. These people guarded their technological know-how jealously thereby deterring a number of people who would have joined their ranks. Trading was the only other major and profitable occupation which presented itself. By the mid nineteenth century, therefore, with limited barriers to entry, many young men became traders and some of them prospered greatly.

The existence of rich merchants especially in the commercial towns and in different communities encouraged others to strive to be wealthy. Thus, the wealth accumulated by earlier merchants...
acted as incentives for others to join their ranks. Also, in the pre-colonial societies, status was either inherited or attained by political skills, diplomatic ability or military prowess, but by the middle of the nineteenth century, status was achieved through the accumulation of wealth by trade and production for the market. The power of this new group of wealthy men grew, most times, at the expense of that of the traditional authorities and many hitherto non-privileged people saw trade as a way to their upliftment. Little wonder that many became traders.

By the 1880s the entrance of more young men into trading was no longer a reflection of continuing prosperity but rather of undue optimism based on the experience of the 1870s when many merchants were made. The increased number of merchants at this time only helped to intensify competition. Indeed the economy was unstable at this time due to the unsteady prices offered for African goods. Local mercantile dealers were therefore eager for new products that would enable them diversify their export bill. This may explain why many of the early cocoa, rubber and cotton farmers were known merchants like Henry Robbin, F.C. Grant and John Sarbah.

Lastly one can also mention that religion curiously aided the rise of some merchant groups. The Aro of Eastern Nigeria present a classic example. The Aro used the religious power associated with Ibin Ukpa (the Long Juju of Arochukwu) to establish themselves as slaves traders in Igbo and some parts of ibibiland during the eighteenth century. In the nineteenth century still using their religious awe, they established trade diasporas in Eastern Nigeria and through a network of trade routes participated effectively in the palm-oil trade. The Dyula in the Senegambia region also used their powerful mystical attributes as possessors of powerful charms to establish themselves as the foremost indigenous merchants in the sub-region as shown by Philip Curtin. Trading in kolanuts, gum and gold, they went as far as Akan territories in search of their trade goods, like their Aro counterparts, they established trade diasporas which gave them security wherever they went. Also being moslems, they were able to find hospitality among other moslem communities.

It is necessary at this point to consider how West African merchants acquired their initial capital. Indeed, this was an important question in the development of the merchant class since without some form of capital, it was virtually impossible to start trading.

Historical evidence has shown that many of the would-be merchants started by engaging in domestic production over a period of time. The proceeds from this were usually saved and if they were substantial, one could use them as the initial capital for trading. For instance, the Kooroko blacksmiths from Mali accumulated implements and weapons and sold them at the height of demand period and used the proceeds to enter the salt and kola trade. In the same way, the tobacco farmers of Katsina grew and stored their products and sold them at Agades where they bought livestock for their return journey. At home, these animals were fattened and the merchant took them down south where they were sold. With the proceeds they bought kolanuts which they sold on their return journey to Katsina. Thus, proceeds from agricultural products supplied the capital for a complex mercantile business.

Others raised their capital by getting loans from friends and relatives. Another avenue for acquiring loans was the traditional mutual credit institutions to which members contributed a
specified sum periodically. A member would indicate the time he would like to collect the loan. He would then be given an amount equivalent to what the members could contribute at one period. Thus if there were twenty members contributing two heads of cowries a month, members would be given credits equivalent to forty heads of cowries. In this way all the members would collect periodically till everybody took his turn.34

One could also raise capital for trading by pledging or pawning. This could be any form of acceptable property or a child or relation. In pledging, one gave out his property to a willing money lender who gave the necessary money and used the property for an agreed number of years or until the money was refunded. The same happened concerning human beings who would remain in the employment of the money lender until they rendered services equivalent to the money borrowed, or for an agreed period of time or until the necessary refunds were made.

As already discussed, many merchants entered the mercantile business by getting loans directly from the super-cargoes, the European houses, or the rich African merchants. For instance, Samuel Brew received goods on credit from the London merchant houses of Hutton and Sons and Foster and Smith.55 Likewise Henry Robbins received credit from J.P.L. Davies as his initial capital.26 Thus, there was a chain of loan giving and taking from the European merchants and among the African merchants of different standings. The liberalisation of loans therefore encouraged and actually helped to enter the mercantile business.

Many more entered the business by working in various capacities for the supercargoes, the European merchant houses and the numerous successful indigenous merchants at the coast. Through savings, and their vast knowledge of the business, many became private traders. Indeed their close previous association with the merchants enhanced their position since they were able to acquire loans more easily than others. For instance, George Blankson, Robert Johnson Ghartey and Robert Hutchinson were employees or agents of different merchant houses before they went private.57

Yet others entered the merchant class through marriage. This happened more frequently at the coastal towns where many African women married big European and African merchants. In the case of the Europeans, it was customary for them to set up thriving businesses for these wives before leaving for Europe. Sometimes the wives acted as their West Coast agents. Almost invariably on death or departure of their European husbands, the women or children inherited and continued the business. Among such merchants were Bibiana Vaz, Mrs. Swanzy and Mrs. Barners.

It was also possible to enter the mercantile business through the sponsorship of the kings. Institutionalised trading was widespread in many parts of West Africa especially in the established kingdom and chiefdoms. In Ghana, Mali and Songhai the kings through their merchants had the monopoly of the gold trade. It was through these array of agents that traders from North Africa could acquire most of the precious material they sought. Such merchants existed in many areas of the Gold Coast and Dahomey. Some of these merchants used to trade their personal goods along with the official ones. Being official merchants, they were advantageously placed to make good bargains and profits.
In certain cases as demonstrated by Daaku concerning the Gold Coast, official merchants were the first to sell their goods before private traders, according to state edicts. They were also well protected and did not lose their goods to robbers as it often happened to the private traders. The merchants were therefore sure to sell all their personal goods at a good profit. Also, it was a frequent practice of the kings of Asante to distribute gold every forty days to official merchants who were not only required to return the principal but to make profits of their own. Thus, state sponsored merchants could in due course establish privately after making enough profits to use as capital.

West African merchants were not all of a similar type. It would seem that the amount of initial capital and later successes influenced their status. There were some that could be referred to as the super merchants. This groups of merchants had large capital and credit worthiness. They dealt mostly in wholesale goods. Some of them controlled all the trade of their localities keeping away interlopers. At the coast, they controlled the peaches and all the trade from the interior passed through them. They acted as brokers and landlords. They were the middleman par-excellence. These types of merchants were active in Kumbi Saleh, Gao, Walata and Jenne. Along the coast, they could be seen in the by trading ports. Some of them actually organised trading concerns with agents in the interior to buy and sell their products. For instance, F.C. Grand and John Sarbah had such organisations to control the rubber trade in the Gold Coast in the nineteenth century. To this group could be added such merchant princes as Jaja of Opobo, Nana of Isekiri, J. Gharkey, George Balankson, J. Addoquay, all of the Cape Coast, and J.P. Davies, Henry Robins, J.C. Geore and J.S. Buchnor of Lagos.

These merchants did not have to travel long distances to buy or sell their goods but depended on a number of interior intermediate merchants or agents who brought goods to their trading depots. As indicated earlier, the super merchants had no use for the market place in the traditional sense of the word but traded from their depots or factories as they were called.

The second group of merchants were the intermediate merchants. Generally, they did not have as much capital as the super merchants. They were also middlemen who bought goods from the super merchants for retail purposes. They sold the goods to the lesser merchants who then sold to the retailers. Goods reached the super merchants through the reverse direction.

However, most times the divisions were not so clear as many super merchants engaged in retail trade if and when they thought that doing so was more profitable. Similarly, one could encounter more groups of middlemen in the business than described. Indeed, some super merchants desirous of making large profits bought goods directly from the producers and sometimes they sponsored them so as to be sure of the supply of goods. Nevertheless, the four groups of merchants were easily discernible.

Some of the merchants specialised in certain types of goods. For instance, Samuel Brew was a specialist in the gold and ivory trade. However, because of exchange difficulties with the Europeans, many merchants dealt both in African and European goods since most times commodity currencies were used. Also the system of credit which involved the giving of European goods to Africans dictated that many traded in assorted goods.
Apparently, the merchants had different methods of operation. Sometimes one encountered the individual itinerant merchant. This type of merchant bought goods and went from place to place peddling them as he went. He usually went to the trading centres to sell the rare finds from the interior and to replenish his stock. Some specialised in local crafts and manufactures. On the other hand, there were those merchants who did business locally by buying local staples from the producers, buying and taking sizeable quantities of goods to the nearest bigger market still within the locality where the price would appreciate.41

On the other hand, there were those merchants who moved in caravans. They had well established routes and criss-crossed the whole of West Africa trading in different towns. The Hausa, Dyula and the Jahanke merchants were well known for this.42 By the nineteenth century, they had established trade diasporas in the areas they frequented and their kinsmen in these communities provided accommodation and security for the caravan men. They belonged to the group of intermediate merchants who connected vast areas of production to centres of demand. The caravan routes could be likened in a way to the railway which in the twentieth century connected the areas of production to the ports of exploration. Such caravans served the major trade centres especially in the savannah area. Donkeys and camels were the major means of transportation.

Long distance merchants also operated in the forest areas. They employed the services of slaves as porters for the transportation of goods by head potage to the ports of trade. Canoes also provided a means of transportation in the forest areas, and merchants travelled up and down the rivers and creeks in search of and to dispose of trade goods.43

The super merchants at the coast could be classified as importers and exporters since it was to them that the Europeans brought imported goods and bought export products. By the nineteenth century, the super merchants had established many centres in the interior for trading purposes.

For the purpose of easy transaction merchants had over the centuries developed some form of currency. These differed from place to place and from period to period. Generally, the cowry was more widespread and was used in almost all parts of West Africa at different periods in history; but it could not be said to have at any time been used as a regional currency. Further, there were regional variations in counting. Other currencies like the brass rods, iron bar, and manillas were used by 1698 and up to the twentieth century as recorded by Barbot.44

However, exchange using commodities did take place in many areas up to the beginning of the twentieth century. Thus, exchange based on gin, salt, gold, cows and cloth were not uncommon. Sometimes there was outright barter of trade goods.

Most West African currencies shared the characteristics of general purpose money and facilitated exchange of goods. They acted as common measure of value, store of wealth and as recognised standard of deferred payment. It was the accumulation of these currencies that singled out the merchant class as a wealthy class second only to the royalty.

The organisation of trade therefore required a complex network of routes, markets, transport system as well as currencies. At various times the merchants of West Africa were able to meet
the challenges presented by organised exchange.

However there were many occupational hazards, such as attacks by robbers, wild animals or unfriendly people. To counter these the merchants travelled in large bands and by the nineteenth century, caravan trading was very common. Even when the traders went to adjoining markets, they went in large numbers. They established good relationship among those whose territories they crossed by giving gift to the chiefs, tolls, and speaking their hosts’ language. Religious bond also provided security, trust and hospitality as evident among the Diola and Hausa merchants.

The merchants also took the risk of purchasing adulterated goods such as gold and by the nineteenth century adulteration of goods by mixing staples with other substances was common. This reduced the price payable to the merchants. This practice was prevalent in staples such as rubber, palm-oil and cotton. There was also a risk of change in tastes especially of imported goods before a particular consignment of goods reached their destination. There was also the risk of damage since goods were often exposed to the elements due to the method and processes of transportation. The credit system was also a great risk and many merchants were defrauded.

The intensity with which the merchants pursued their occupation led to a lot of rivalries. As early as the 13th century, the control of trade routes had become a major issue in West Africa. For instance, the Susu tried to control the trade of Ghana Empire where the Sonninke merchants operated and captured its markets especially Kumbi Saleh in 1203 and successfully diverted trade to Walata in the emerging Mali empire. Such desire also led the Moroccans to capture the Songhay empire in 1591. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, incessant wars between the Asante, Fante and Denkyira were caused by the desire to control trade routes. The same factor precipitated warfare between the Oyo empire and the kingdom of Dahomey in the nineteenth century. Again, wars between the city states of the Niger Delta centred around the issue of the control of markets. Indeed each time war broke out, many merchants lost a great deal of goods and wealth though many others gained through the supply of military hardware.

Occupational hazards notwithstanding, many merchants became very rich and in the late nineteenth century, they were more numerous, more influential and wielded a lot of power than previously. In certain cases the merchants supplanted the position of their local rulers.

During the early days of colonial rule, merchants often used their economic power and ascendancy to encourage protests and to foster a policy of socio-economic development in line with the changing political and economic scene. In this way, they exhibited foresight in dealing with the new political and economic masters. The traditional merchant princes and statesmen who resisted the new order were removed. For instance, Kosoko of Lagos, Nana of Itsekiri and Jaja or Opobo were removed because they wanted to maintain the status quo. However those merchants who understood the nature of change overtaking the region cooperated with the purveyors of the new order and before long, many of them were in positions of authority. For instance, John Bernmannan, a merchant, was a member of the Legislative Council in the Gold Coast from 1850 to 1856 and he became the Lt. Governor of Christianborg from L850-1851. In 1871, the merchant, John Ghartey was elected king of Winneba.

Many of the merchants played important parts in the diplomacy of West Africa in the nineteenth
century in order to maintain peace which was an important prerequisite for the development of trade. J.P.L. David and P.P. Martins acted as intermediaries between the colonial administration and the Yoruba in the 1880s and 1890s. Both carried out talks with different Yoruba groups to facilitate a peace settlement in the warfare of that period. In the same way, George Blankson negotiated between the Asante, Fante and the British in the incessant warfare that raged in the Gold Coast, so as to keep trade routes open. He personally intervened during the Asante threat of 1853. A number of other merchants participated in different capacities in the political development at the turn of the nineteenth century.

Apart from politics, merchants fostered the socio-economic development of their areas. Some like John Sarbah invested money in education and was instrumental to the survival of Wesley College in the Cape Coast. Some of them invested in other economic ventures like newspaper and mining. Thus, they contributed to the general socio-economic and indeed political development of their communities.

It could be concluded therefore that the rise of the merchant class in West Africa had been completed by the end of the nineteenth century. This class, possessing wealth and had influence between both the Europeans and the local people. Since they understood the nature of European presence, the merchant class was in a position to influence the politics and the socio-economic development of their areas as already demonstrated. It should be noted however that West African merchants rarely formed a partnership and their business remained largely a one-man affair or at most a family affair. Almost invariably their lucrative businesses often crumbled immediately after the death of the owner. West African merchants’ monopoly of trade was broken, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by European firms who started to establish themselves in the interior.

Notes


17. Daaku, pp. 107-143.


27. Daaku, p. 41.


33. Ibid.


43. G.O. Qgunremi, *Counting the Camels* New York 1982


46. Reynolds, p. 107-109


The Economic Basis of Imperialism

Ade Alade

West Africa’s poverty, underdevelopment and present-day neo-colonial economic dependency can be traced to the consequences of her historical past. The sub-continent was a victim of the atrocities of the transatlantic slave trade in which millions of the productive population were carted off to the New World. African countries were also subordinated to the imperial powers.

The history of the West African sub-region, like that of the continent as a whole, has been that of constant defeat and loss of sovereignty at the hands of different European colonizing powers. Even post-independence, underdevelopment, poverty, and various obstacles to rapid economic level and the building of virile, viable and stable nation-states has been.

The major objective of this chapter is to unearth the basic reasons for the underdevelopment of West Africa, and in doing this shall address ourselves to the economic basis of imperialism. We shall analyse the multifarious motives behind European activities in Africa and show how the slave trade underdeveloped Africa. We shall also highlight the introduction of “legitimate” trade and how rivalry and competition among the imperial powers led to the partition and eventual subjugation and colonization of Africa.

It should be borne in mind, however, that economic theme is emphasised here because economic motives are central and neglected feature of partition, although they do not provide a complete explanation for it.

Many writers tend to play down the economic basis of imperialism in Africa, but it is difficult to accept their views uncritically. They tend to forget, or are probably ignorant, that European interest in Africa did not begin in the 1880’s. The Europeans’ scramble for African colonies must, be seen as a culmination of stages of unequal interactions between Europe and Africa which has been going on over a long period. By the end of the 19th century, the Europeans had had the scientific, industrial and political revolutions and also possessed unprecedented means to create material wealth and power in the history of mankind. With this power, Europe was able to impose herself in Africa.

To date, the experience of western imperialism remains the most decisive event in the history of Africa, and since this phenomenon (imperialism) is so important for Africa’s economic history, it is necessary to begin our study by understanding it. For some western historians and writers, imperialism generally means principally or exclusively the relationship between the advanced, imperial country and the colonial or semi-colonial areas falling within its formal or informal empire.
Other writers insist either that imperialism is just a relationship of dominance between two countries based on unequal power or, more vaguely, that it is the collective heritage of "dim past" of mankind attributable to psychological and other non-economic phenomenon. Such definitions of imperialism by western authors are designed to obscure its exploitative character and to distract the attention of the oppressed people from their revolutionary ideas.

The major classical writers on imperialism, Hobson and Lenin, appear to agree that the impetus for imperialism comes from economic interests, that imperialism is related to the process of capitalist accumulation. But they differ in their accounts of the precise nature of the character and manifestations of these interests, and the relationship between capitalist accumulation and imperialism.

According to Hobson, the dominant motive for imperialism was the quest for markets as well as opportunities for higher returns on investments. As a result of the development of capitalism in the West, Hobson argues that industries became more productive. There was the need for a much greater import of raw materials and more food for the growing urban population. There was also the need for manufactured products to meet the rising demand for luxury goods created for a rising standard of living. Since production outgrew consumption, there was a tendency towards excess savings and over-investment. Hobson argues further that those who own capital tried to persuade the state to aid them in securing new markets by the establishment of protectorates, colonies and spheres of influence. This option led to imperialism. The marxist theory does more than this. It uses the term to describe a special stage of capitalist development and, by extension, it speaks of the epoch of imperialism in which this has become the dominant form and stresses the new distinguishing feature of this stage.

Although Karl Marx left no theory of imperialism per se, his analysis of the capitalist mode of production provides the starting point for Marxist-Leninist theory. This theory says essentially that imperialism is a necessary outcome of capitalism. Marx shows that the capitalist mode of production was governed not by satisfaction of human needs, but by the desire and drive to extract surplus value from a class of wage-labourers. And to realise this surplus value they find a market for the commodities in which it was embodied. Thus one inescapable consequence of capitalist accumulation is the production of more or bigger capitalists and workers. Capitalism inherently craves expansion, for the capitalist cannot survive and remain competitive without progressive accumulation on a continuously expanding scale. This in itself suggests a relationship between capitalism and imperialism.

Like Marx, Lenin believes that imperialism grows out of the logic of the capitalist system. It is pertinent to note here that the Marxist theory of imperialism derives not directly from Karl Marx, but from Vladimir Lenin’s application of Marx’s methods to a study of the economic and political developments that led to the first (world) imperialist war.

Lenin asserts that imperialism symbolises a particular stage in the development of capitalism, a transitional stage characterised by the "displacement of capitalist free competition by monopoly capitalism". According to Lenin, "imperialism is capital in that stage of development in which the dominance of monopolies and finance capital has established, itself; in which; the, export of
capital has acquired pronounced importance; in which the division of all territories of the globe among the biggest capitalist powers has been completed.” This may be seen as a development and extension into a more finished conceptual form of those traits about which Marx; and Engels had written some decades before they first began to appear.

Although the economic foundation of imperialism is monopoly, this monopoly which has grown out of capitalism "exists in the general environment of capitalism”. The accumulation of capital reaches gigantic proportions at this stage. It should also be noted, that the super-abundance of capital exists side by side with the poverty and starvation of the masses. Indeed, these are the two sides of the same coin: It is one aspect of the relations between capitalism and imperialism.

More contemporary writings have elaborated, criticised and expanded aspects of these classic writings on the nature of imperialism 7 Roger Owen has argued that imperialism is an overgrowth of capitalism in 19th century Europe 8 Dr Landes has called imperialism a “multifarious response to a common opportunity that consists simply in disparity of powers” He opines that inequality is at the base of the imperialist process Throughout the period, a colonial expansion either by conquest by trade, differences in strength and weakness between states have been the starting point in the establishment of imperial relationships This inequality connotes power in terms of armaments, technology, human and material resources and different stages in socio-economic development of societies This has facilitated the imposition of the political will, culture and military might of one state upon another.

Bade Onimode has argued that the expansion of capital, inequality, domination and exploitation are the fundamental variables of imperialism. In one word, imperialism can be defined as a system of relations in which domination, super domination, exploitation, development and underdevelopment play a central role.”

From the above, it is evident that all other motives lead to the economic, and this properly emphasized in this paper. We shall examine briefly the economic basis of imperialism under the following headings:

(a) early European activities in West Africa,

(b) European slave trade era

(c) the era of ‘legitimate’ (normal) trade,

(d) the colonial period, and

(e) the post-colonial, present-day neo colonial developments

**Early European Activities in West Africa**

Without much doubt, trade was the most important of all the economic motives that brought the Europeans to West Africa Hobson has rightly argued that it was trade that first brought the European to Africa in the 15th century and since then trade has under lined the basis of relations (albeit unequal) with the continent One important commodity needed in Europe but available...
only in West Africa was gold it should be remembered that between the, 11th and 17th centimes West Africa accounted for almost two-thirds of world gold production. Although the availability of gold in the Western Sudan was known to the Europeans, for centuries the North Africans through the trans-saharan monopolised the conduct of this trade.

Portugal, the small country in Europe, was the first European power that succeeded in establishing a close contact with West Africa in the 15th century. In 1415, the Portuguese annexed Ceuta and, before the end of the century, the Azores, Cape Verde, Port Eirmina. Fernando-po, Sao Thome Islands had been reached. In 1485, a Portuguese, Afforisb d’Aveiro had made contact with the Benin Empire and its ruler. Besides establishing bases for trade with African coasts, the Portuguese discovered evidence of wealth in gold in the Gold Coast. Encouraged by these successes, the Portuguese further explored the coast of Africa and rounded the Cape of Good Hope in 1487-88, and explored the East African coast on their way to India. Thereafter, the Dutch, Danes, British, French and other Europeans established trading posts along the coast to tap the resources of the hinterland.

In these three centuries before the industrial revolution, the focus pf international trade moved from the mediterranean to the atlantic. Further, it Would be pertinent to note that from the 15th century onwards (before the rise of ”legitimate” trade) the main commercial activities of Europeans included the main exports from West Africa of gold, ivory, timber, dye-woods, gun, beeswax, leather and species and notably peppers. But gold was by far the most valuable of these products and the principal overseas export of Gold Coast.

Camwood, ivory and beeswax were shipped from Sierra Leone. Gum was got from the Senegal valley and the Mauritarian coast, while beeswax was exported from Southern Senegal. Gum and beeswax had pharmaceutical and industrial uses. Gum especially is a significant raw material in the manufacture of textiles,

Slave trade, though in a myopic form was conducted during the period. Slave supplemented the above-named commodities. At the beginning of 1450 the Portuguese started exporting slaves to Europe. The number of slaves purchased was small since African labour was not yet dominant factor on European plantations; but the maritime trade had begun. African labour was, however used to work4he Portuguese sugar plantations in Sao Thome and Fernando-po Islands.

For, African gold contributed to the functioning of the domestic economy in Europe and helped to settle international debts. Furthermore, the control of the gold trade also’ assisted the expansion of Portugal and Spain in the 15th-16th centuries: when Seville became, for a while, Europe’s ”capital of gold”. In a nutshell, commercial activities during this period were beneficial only to the Europeans.13

The motive behind the first ’scramble” for Africa was undoubtedly trade, it sprang from a desire to capture riches which were already known and valued in Europe, Further the Western Europeans had by then learnt that African slaves could be secured on a large scale to work on their plantations in North America, the Caribbean and in Brazil. They therefore abandoned the trade in gold, and. spices for the more lucrative trade in humane cargoes-slaves
The European Slave Trade Era

The European slave trade was the largest intercontinental migration in world history before the 19th century because it moved European and African population en masse to the new world. For more than 300 years, more Africans than Europeans were moved across the Atlantic each year. This migration was the foundation of a network of commerce and production that brought about the wealth of Western Europe and North America and the underdevelopment of Africa as a whole.

The economic basis of imperialism in West Africa would therefore be incomplete without mentioning the forces that drew so many Africans overseas. In North America, the prejudice still persists. The African-Americans are still denied their rights in the society which their labour created. In Western Europe till of recent, the African-Americans were synonymous with slaves. As a result, the Africans have been assigned a low status in human development and contributions to world history and scientific discoveries.

Although Portuguese explorers started shipping slaves to Europe as early as 1450 after direct contact had been made with the coast of West Africa, it was the Dutch West Indian Company that first took active interest in the exportation of Africans to America. Between 1632 and 1654 the Dutch had taken control of a part of Northwest Brazil from the Portuguese, established sugar plantations and with their superiority at sea dominated and monopolized the supply of African slaves to America.

England and France followed the Dutch and monopolized the supply of slaves to their colonies in the West Indies, Barbados, Martinique, and Guadeloupe and Saint Dominique respectively. The importance of the various western powers involvement in the slave trade was largely a reflection of their changing political positions in Europe. Portugal was the leading foreign power in West Africa in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; The Dutch presence became significant in the seventeenth century. In the 18th century English ships carried about two-thirds of the total number of slaves sent across the Atlantic from West Africa while French ships took roughly one-fifth of the total.

From 1650 Africans outnumbered Europeans in the Americas as a whole. The planters throughout tropical America expressed a preference for African labour. The preference for Africans at first was explained by the fact that they could work in hot climates, while Europeans could not. But this pseudo-scientific racist theory was only invented to cover up for the fact that the African slaves were basically cheap and economical to maintain. Thus, the cheapness of African manpower led the imperial planters to equate it no more than what other industries would regard as raw materials.

The role of the African middlemen in this obnoxious trade seems to have been underestimated by scholars. It is true that the Europeans bought the slaves, yet, without the African participation and collaboration, European traders would have found it difficult, if not impossible to enslave Africans. In Dahomey, slave trade was a state monopoly. Enslavement came to be a function performed by Africans alone, and, people fed into the trade were mainly captives, by-products of particular slave-hunting military expeditions.
This brings us to the effect of slave trade on West Africa. Scholars are yet to reach an agreement on the demographic, political, social and economic consequences of the trade. Professor WE. Du Bois estimated that more than 100 million Africans were shipped away into slavery during the 400 years of the slave trade.17 Another estimate is that provided by Professor Curtin. He contends that not more than 11 million slaves were exported from the whole of Africa by the Europeans.18 This is a grossly underestimated figure and has warranted very sharp criticisms and stimulated a reat deal of debates. Laslie Ronts (Jnr), believes that Curtin’s estimate of slave imports into the America is about 69 per cent lower than the likely actual figure.

Whatever the number taken, the fact remains that it was a massive loss to the African labour force, because it was composed of able-bodied young men and women. The continent was denied their immense contribution to the total socio-economic development. Slave buyers preferred their victims between the 15-35 years of age bracket; preferably in the early 20s and a sex ratio of two men to one woman. During this period, there as a record of abnormal stagnation in population growth (compared with population explosion in Europe and Asia) and there is no causative “factor other than the trade in slave. An emphasis on population growth is relevant to the socio-economic development of any society. Population growth played a major role in European development in providing labour, markets and the pressures which led to further advancement.

Africa’s economic activity was affected both directly and indirectly by the population loss. As Professor Ogunremi has pointed out, the slave trade era was a period when Europe was undergoing tremendous economic and political changes. While, at this period, slave raiding created uncertainty and hopelessness as no one could settle down to serious thinking or planning in Africa. It can be concluded that slave trade was the most important and crucial simple factor that led to the economic” backwardness of Africa. Europe and North America used African labour and natural resources for their own development while Africa’s potentialities were retarded.

The Era of "Legitimate” (Normal) Trade

This era emerged after the Industrial Revolution in England, In West Africa, this period Has characterized by the abolition of slave trade. The abolition of slave trade and new iruropean economic activities in Africa were in response to economic situations in Miireope and not the other way round as suggested by some Western writers. Slave labour fed become an obstacle to the development of industrial capitalism. Mercantilist imperialism gave way to free-trade imperialism. The dominant motive was the need for cheap source of raw materials and food, and the search for lucrative markets for European goods. The above factors combined with the loss of American colonies and he improvement in overseas transportation which encouraged European importation of agricultural products and minerals rather than slaves from West Africa.20 The need for commerce and trade was the major motive behind Europeans’ incursion into Africa. The main economic activities of the Europeans in West Africa were agriculture, mining, trade, finance and shipping. Vegetable oils became Africa’s staple exports to Europe in the 19th century and palm kernels and groundnuts were added in the second half of the century. The
expansion of exports of palm products and groundnuts was in response to industrial growth in Europe which led to a rise in the demands for oil and fat.

Palm oil was used in the production of soap, lubricants and candles especially in Britain which became known as the world’s workshop. Soap was required for cleansing fee working population in the growth urban centres. Lubricants were needed to oil the new machinery, especially the railway; and candles were in demand for lighting the expanding towns and factories.

Palm kernels, though jointly produced with palm oil were at first not in demand in Europe. Indeed, the Germans were the first Europeans to demand for palm kernels, on a large scale. They possessed effective machinery for the extraction of the oil and developed an extensive market for the kernel products particularly as margarine and the kernel cake as cattle feed.

Groundnuts were used mainly in the manufacture of cooking oil and soap, other commodities, many of which had been shipped abroad before the 19th century, continued to be exported after abolition. The most important of these were gum from Senegal; rubber; hides and skins; citrus; kolanut; beni-seeds; timber; ivory; cotton; shea-butter; and bananas from various parts of the forest zone. Hides and skins were used for leather; and rubber for tyres and other products. Cotton was required on a large scale in textile industries in Lancashire, Britain. The British and French wanted cocoa for their chocolate confectioneries industries and coffee, tea and cocoa became essentials as beverages. Similarly, Europeans needed African mineral products. Gold, the first mineral that the Europeans sought in Africa remained the most important. It was found in the Gold Coast (now; Ghana), in Northern and Southern Rhodesia (now Zambia and Zimbabwe).

The production of cash crops for export spear-headed the incorporation of the majority of Africans into the colonial economy. The vegetable oils could be produced efficiently and on a small scale by peasant producers possessing little capital, employing family labour, and using traditional tools. The staples were divisible into very small units, marketable and yielded a return in the same season. Moreover, land was cheap and readily available. "Legitimate” trade therefore enabled small scale farmers and traders to play an important role in the overseas exchange economy for the first time.

Trade in staple commodities was more beneficial to the Europeans, since they were the organisers and the introducers of some of the crops, such as cassava, maize and cocoyam. The advantages of the staple exports to the Africans were minimal. The increase in output did not match advancement in technology, as the simple hoe and cutlass remained the major implement for cultivation. Not much money accrued to the Africans as the trade was monopolized by the British, French and their imperialist agents. Like the SCOA, UAC and John Holt. Besides the purchase of indigenously grown agricultural crops, produce was always in the hands of Europeans. But, the fact remains, nonetheless, that it was a step forward when compared to the slave trade. The Africans now had a bargaining purchasing power.

Furthermore, Liverpool, Nantes, Bordeaux, Marseilles and Hamburg benefitted immensely from the staple export. "Legitimate” trade undoubtedly favoured Britain, the first industrialized nation. She, above all others, was in a position to cater for the mass; market which was beginning to
emerge in West Africa, France and Germany benefitted, though to a lesser degree. No African cities gained much from "legitimate" trade when compared with the above mentioned European cities.

Although wage labour was introduced to West Africa, to the Europeans accrued a much greater wealth from the trade. West Africa's raw materials entered a wide range of manufacturing processes and the price paid for them and the volume required were dictated by industrial Europe. West African producers had to accept the price paid by the imperialists, because they were unable to control the volume of palm produce and groundnuts placed at the market, and because the industrialized countries could buy alternative competing products from other underdeveloped regions. By 1850 staple items cost half, and in some cases, only a quarter of what they had at the start of the century.

In exchange for African exports, Europeans sent mainly manufactured products especially textiles, salt and alcohols. By flooding the sub-continent with shoddy manufactures and importing such valuable raw materials as gold, ivory and palm oil, the imperialists discouraged domestic production of manufactured goods and precluded the development of the requisite domestic technology.

This is due to the fact that the African so much concentrated most of his energies in producing exports for Europe that he hardly had time to produce enough salt or textiles for his own use. He, therefore, had to rely more and more on imports from Europe. Vital opportunities for technological developments were thus destroyed or inhibited by the imperialists.

What we are trying to say in effect is that inequality has always underlay the imperialist process. The exploitation of the wealth of and potential economic surplus of the weaker nations (West Africa) by the stronger (Europe) was a critical feature of imperialism. The argument by Myrdal that Africans, in fact, gained more than the Europeans in "legitimate" trade, because the latter invested much capital at a high risk and life and property22 is faulty and untenable.

The Colonial Era

This period and the preceding era have so much in common that they need not be treated separately, but for the sake of analysis. By the end of the 19th century, Europe had possessed the power, scientific and industrial revolutions to impose herself forcibly on Africa. This European imposition was, naturally, in the economic interest of Europe. Colonization, from whatever angle it is viewed as meant to benefit the metropolis rather than the periphery.

According to Lord Luggard,

It is in order to foster the growth of trade of this country (Britain), that our far-seeing statesmen and our commercial men advocate colonial expansion.23

Whatever reasons were adduced for the scramble and partition of Africa, the fact, however, remains that the drive for overseas expansion in the late 19th century was largely the result of the need of the imperialist nations to cope with the strains imposed on their societies by periods of
irregular and unstable economic growth.

V.I. Lenin in his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, has shown that the need for capital to expand has opened the race for colonies. This in turn led to competition, and sometimes war among the greatest capitalist countries for overseas possession. The competition was growing and increasing so fast among them while expansion of trade led to the search for colonies. This is set against Hopkins’ proposition that events in Africa itself led to the partition.24

To further maintain their hold on Africa, the Europeans provided both social and physical infrastructure. Many of those engaged in this venture were energetic and commercially-minded Christians. They were intent on converting the soul of Africa as well as its economy. These men, the militant arm of the abolitionist movement, saw it as their mission to carry the moral convictions and economic optimism of the industrial imperialist world into the "Dark Continent". With the merchants came missionaries and educated African ex-slaves.

Through these Christian missions — Catholic, Church Missionary Society, Wesleyan Methodist, London Mission Society, Baptist and a host of others, Western literacy was introduced into west Africa. A new elite of liberated slaves and their descendants became Christians, took up European names, received education from expatriate missionaries, and were noted for their Victorian dress, bourgeois value and commitment to imperialists’ cause. They became the nucleus of the new middle class, which was to develop the continent’s economy and uplift this spiritual life.

They became lawyers, civil servants, missionaries and merchants. Their influence spread over a wide occupational front. Their role was that of an intermediary between the Europeans and the Africans. Africans called them "black Europeans", while Europeans referred to them, contemptuously as "trousered Africans". The colonists were able to use them for their own selfish political and economic advantages.

Similarly, in order to promote export trade with Africa the imperial powers built ports and harbours. This confirms the saying by an African scholar that "transport is dictated by the nature of demand in the economy as a whole".25 The introduction of the steamship, towards the end of the 19th century made possible to transport a wide range of perishable goods and other bulky vegetable products and enabled Europe to economise on capital. The steamship also guaranteed regularity of service, reduced the time spent in ports and so lowered running costs.

Within Africa, in their respective areas of influence, the imperialists built railways and roads. They were not satisfied with the existing archaic transport system — human porterage, pack animals and canoes — became insufficient in moving the staples from the hinterlands to the ports and harbours for onward transmission to the metropole.

For the same reasons, towards the end of the 19th century construction of the railways started. This was in response to the appeals of colonial officials, missionaries and trade merchants who felt that Africa could not develop without the railways. The shortcoming of the ventures was that the railways were built more for imperial than economic reasons. They were built before the
areas they served had developed enough to serve much economic purpose. Nonetheless, the railways boosted the production of groundnuts in Senegal and Northern Nigeria and of cocoa in Western Nigeria. It also encouraged wage labour, though in most cases forced labour was used by the imperial powers.

However, one should note that the policy of constructing these physical infrastructural facilities served one major objective. Their primary aim was to advance imperialist trade and the transfer of economic surplus from the colonies to the metropole. The colonial apologists who claim that the provision of these infrastructures laid the foundation for the economic development of the colonies have missed the point. In reality, it actually constituted the physical and social arteries for pumping the life-blood of these colonies to Europe and North America. These infrastructures ran vertically from the coast to the hinterland and served as the umbilical cord of the imperialist exploitation of West Africa.

However, as has been argued earlier in this paper, events in Europe actually became the ultimate factor which led to the partition of the continent. The economic depression transmitted by the industrial nations caused England, France and Germany to come into conflict with each other. Their rivalry and bitter competition, which was a reflection of the shifts in the balance of economic and political power in Europe, led to partition and subjugation of Africa.

It is a fact that at first, Britain’s trading success made her not to itch for establishing colonies. But since she could not persuade France and Germany to do the same, she had to maintain the status quo. Although a select committee in 1865 recommended disengagement, it was realised that Britain’s commitments were too large for withdrawal to be possible.

France was the aggressive power in Africa’s partition. Having lost India and Canada to the British having been defeated in the Napoleonic wars, and having been humiliated by the Germans in 1870, Africa was regarded as a hopeful starting point for French recovery since it was largely “unclaimed” except, of course, by Africans. France, therefore, had an incentive to upset the status quo in West Africa.

Germany’s presence became a factor to reckon with by Britain and France. German merchants were already firmly entrenched in Liberia, Togoland, Dahomey and in some parts of southern Nigeria. This the British and French regarded as a threat to their own interests and they feared that a forward move by Germany might exclude their trading firms from the unclaimed markets of Africa.

The great depression and economic crisis of 1875-80 intensified the rivalry and antagonism between France and Britain. As a result of which by the 1880s the concept of free trade came under attack in West Africa. In the quest for revenue, colonial officials extended their territories, adopted differential tariffs and other protectionist measures.

Industrialists, chambers of commerce and other broadly-based imperial movements developed in the metropole. They all saw in imperialism colonial expansion and a guaranteed market for their exports. In the 1900s the partition of West Africa was complete.
An analysis of the strategies adopted by the imperial powers to dominate Africa through the economic apparatus would not be comprehensive enough if other aspects of colonial economy, such as currency, marketing boards and research institutes are not mentioned.

The introduction of the modern money (currency) had a profoundly unsettling effect on west African trade. Besides the fact that as an external economy, it made it easier for foreigners and newcomers to enter West Coast commerce, it also got West Africa firmly entrenched, in the capitalist monetary system as a periphery in the colony-metropole relationships.

British and French silver coins and currencies were the major means of exchange. They were acceptable for virtually all goods and services. While we do agree that modern money helped to increase the number and variety of possible transactions, the decline of these currencies associated with a fall in the cost of supplying them to West Africa, made the Africans dependent on, and at a disadvantage vis-a-vis monetary transactions with imperial Europe.

The marketing board system was another instrument of colonial exploitation introduced by the metropolitan powers to maintain a firm grip over the economy of the West African colonies. They were established for the sake of the export of crops such as cocoa, cotton, and groundnut. In Nigeria, marketing board for cocoa was established 1947, and for groundnut and palm oil produce in 1949. Senegal and other colonial territories had similar boards to monitor the production, sale and export of groundnut to France.26

Though their stated objective was the seasonal ”stabilization” of export-crop prices, they also played the fiscal role of appropriating agricultural surplus for their metropoles. The actual operation of the marketing board system had many elements. It engaged in the bulk purchase of the whole export surplus of oil products, groundnuts, benniseed. Besides that, the board usually fixed next seasonal producer prices well ahead of harvest for an entire crop season. This was the essence of price ”equalization”, and these producer prices were by far below world prices.27

However, prices equalization did not really stabilize incomes, and African peasants lost as much as 20 per cent being the variation in prices in one season. In addition, marketing boards also partook in produce trading and paid differential prices for different grades of produce. As a result of this, inequality as exemplified in price differentials, the marketing boards accumulated huge trading surpluses which were turned over, not to the poor African peasant farmers, but to the British and French colonial governments. Between 1947 and 1960, in Nigeria alone, there was a staggering surplus of well over £276.8 million pounds sterling, generated from the imperialist exploitation of the country’s toiling and impoverished peasants.

Besides the marketing boards, the capitalist institutions which came into most direct contact with the African peasants were the colonial trading companies. They specialised in moving goods to and from colonies. The most noted were the French concerns, CFAO, SCOA and British controlled UAC and John Holt, to mention few. They were responsible for expropriating a great proportion of Africa’s wealth produced by peasant toil.

Apart from agricultural products, mining and other mineral wealth, such as, tin, columbite and gold were also controlled by private metropolitan companies. Hence, it was they who
appropriated the economic surplus generated in these sections.

The Post-Colonial Era

The expression ”post-colonial” could be misleading. It does not mean that an economy has been decolonized. It is only a conventional usage to describe post ”flag” independence era. The political empires built by the imperialist after the 1884-85 Berlin conference started to crumble in the post world war II era, and especially in the 60’s in West Africa, when a ”wind of change”, using Harold Macmillan’s phrase, blew over the continent.

Unfortunately in many of the West African states, independence was handed over to the leaders, who were the colonialists like-minded. They continued to streamline the new economic order under a neocolonial domination. In the economic sphere, the attainment of political independence has effected not much changes. In the economic sphere, the attainment of political independence has effected not much changes, the hopes and expectation of the late leader of Ghana and father of Pan-Africanism, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, that ”seek ye first political independence and all other things would follow”8 have failed to materialise.

The backwardness of specialization in primary production, the secular deterioration in the terms of trade of the third and underdeveloped world, and the associated balance of payments crises continue to be the lot of most countries. they demonstrate the vicious potency of imperialism and imperialist trade strategy.

Since the ”wind of change” in the 60s culminated in political independence for more than 20 African nations, the subsidiaries of the multinational corporations (NC) have emerged as the powerful catalysts of multilateral economic imperialism in West Africa. They are the instruments which constitute the dominant mechanism for integrating third world countries more closely, and more pervasively, into the international capitalist domination.

It was a clever change over from direct colonial occupation and plunder to an imperialist domination, albeit in a vile and subtle manner. The multinationals through their agencies, in the IMF and World Bank, continuously exert pressures on their weak host countries. The MNC sponsor political parties, change governments, finance coups and counter coups d’etat in order to enhance their plundering activities. The role of the MNC in the Middle-East oil crisis; the overthrow of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah’s progressive regime; and current attempts to render the OPEC ineffective are all subtle imperialist attempts to rule- the world. If the economic basis of imperialism is to be sustained, an indirect means of empire building through economic domination, in neocolonialism, had to replace formal colonial dominance and tutelage.

Conclusion

In this study, we have attempted to show that imperialism is itself a phase of capitalist development in which Western European capitalist states, USA and Japan established political, economic, military and cultural hegemony over other parts of the world which were and still are at a lower level of socio-economic development and therefore could not and cannot resist domination.
Imperialism is in effect the extended capitalist system, which for many years embraced the whole world, one part being the exploiters and the other being the exploited; one part being dominated and the other as overlords; one part making policy and the other dependent.

The United Nations Survey of Economic conditions in Africa up to 1980 says that "With 9 per cent of the world’s population, Africa accounts for 28 per cent of the world’s minerals production: 6 per cent of its crude petroleum. Out of 16 important metallic and non-metallic minerals, the share of Africa in 10 varies from 2 per cent to 45 per cent of world’s production.” Unfortunately, the situation is that Africa has yet to come anywhere close to making the most of its natural wealth. Most of the wealth being produced is not retained within the continent for the benefit of Africans, but they are being taken away by the neocolonial multinational corporations.

The question as to who, why and what is responsible for African underdevelopment can be answered at two-levels. First, the answer is that the operation of the imperialist system bears major responsibility for Africa’s economic retardation by draining the continent’s wealth and by making it impossible to develop more rapidly the resources available. Second, the capitalists of Western Europe were the ones who actively extended their exploitation from inside Europe to cover the whole of Africa, and were later joined by North America and Japan.

In conclusion, one may pose the question; what should be done to change this unequal pattern of relationship? This author is of the opinion that African states should restructure their economy. Regional economic bodies like Economic community of West African State (ECOWAS) should be strengthened. It should shift its emphasis from primary agricultural production to manufacturing. The countries of the sub-region should pull all their natural and human resources together, establish joint manufacturing ventures, let their scientists and academicians meet and put their heads together for the purpose of evolving modern technology.

Experience has shown that the so-called transfer of technology from the industrialized West is another method of keeping African under their domination. We should emulate the Soviet, the Chinese and the Korean efforts at self-help, self-reliance. Herein lies our salvation. It is only when and if these are done that Africa would stop playing a subservient role and a second fiddle to the imperialist countries.

Notes


See the ”Marketing Boards and Domestic Stabilization in Nigeria,” in *Review of Economic and Statistics*. Vol. 4D. N.I. Feb. 1966, Table 44.


C.W Newsbury, ”Credit in Early 19th Century West Africa Trade,” in *Journal of African History*, N.B. 1972 pp. 81-95


The Economic Impact of the World Wars

Kehinde Faluyi

The two world wars were caused by differences among European powers. But African colonies were involved directly or indirectly because they were ruled by one or another of the belligerent states. Apart from the participation in the fighting, the expulsion of the Germans from their West African colonies and other territories where they had commercial interests brought untold hardship on the affected states.

Many Africans were recruited into the allied army and thousands paid the supreme sacrifice in the process. Those who did not engage in fighting made contributions in cash and materials towards the success of the colonial powers. Every sector of the economy was affected by the two wars.

The wars had serious implications for West Africa in many respects. The first world war brought the realities of the colonial experiment home to the colonial capitals as it made them realise that although colonial experience might be expensive, the colonies were useful as they, strengthened rather than weakened them after all. The war confirmed the colonial status of the territories as well. Before the war, the colonial powers were not sure of the loyalty of their colonies, as pockets of resistance virtually dominated the first two decades of the century. For instance, the attitude of the French public towards the acquisition of colonies was almost that of apathy, as this was clouded by vagueness of most French at home. The attitude of the ordinary British towards colonial adventures or experiments fared no better as they were sceptical about the gains derivable from colonial ventures. Due to the lukewarm attitude, they showed sustained opposition to the British financial involvement in the colonies.

However, the support enjoyed by the colonial powers in their respective colonies and the cooperation received from the traditional rulers clearly confirmed that the colonies had become a reality and that the “war” of occupation which started in Berlin had been won finally. Thus, the war also confirmed that the destinies and future development of the colonies were linked with those of their respective metropolis.

On the other hand, as the end of the First World War confirmed each of the colonial powers as masters in their respective colonies, except the Germans whose territories were seized and mandated to the British, French and South Africa, the Second World War marked the gradual disengagement of the imperial apparatus in the colonies. The increased political awareness among the West African educated elite, the rise of politically conscious newspapers, militant trade unions, the anti-colonial propaganda machinery of communist Russia and the promise of early independence made by the allies to their colonies so as to enlist their support against the
German axis, all left the European powers no other option than to set in motion programmes which would eventually lead to the granting of independence to the colonies. How soon the task would be accomplished was not clearly perceived by either the colonial governments or their subjects at the time. Whichever way one may view the world wars therefore, they had serious implications for the West African colonies in particular and African continent in general.

The wars have received considerable attention from scholars. However, available materials have concentrated on the political aspects of the wars, the campaigns and their effects on the colonial administration. Moreover, most of the available sources are quite localised as they have been devoted to the examination of the effects of the wars on the writers’ respective countries. With the exception of Professor Crowder who has surveyed the involvement of Africans in the First World War, no other writer has written on this aspect. This essay is therefore an attempt to fill this gap through an examination of the economic consequences of the wars on the West African sub-region.

The economy of the West African territories at the beginning of the century was based on the collection and exploitation of palm kernels, processing of palm oil, exploitation of sylvan products and tapping of rubber. Only in the Gold Coast and Senegal was there an appreciable export trade in cultivated crops. But a substantial part of this trade was with the Germans who had established themselves in most of the capitals and hinterlands of both the British and French colonies as well as in their own territories before the outbreak of the First World War in 1914.

The ability of the Germans to control the West African trade before the war was due mainly to their enterprise. In Nigeria for instance, whereas most nationals remained in Lagos even when the railway was extended into the interior, the Germans took the advantage of the railway to establish themselves in Ejirin, Ibadan, Osogbo and Ilesa as early as 1903 where they expanded the scope of their trade. Because of the British open door policy, the Germans had a high percentage of trade in other British colonies as well.

Their dominance of the West African trade is best demonstrated by the fact that in 1897 when an attempt was made in the British territories to establish a West African Trade Association, all the important German Houses on the West African coast were invited to join, even though the idea was initiated by the British business interests. When the Lagos Palm Kernel Pool of 1898 was established by the eight most important firms in the area, the German firm of G.L. Gaizer got the largest allocation of about one over three of the total, while another German firm was also allocated 20 per cent. Generally speaking, the trade in palm produce all over West African depended on German capital and enterprise.

The reason for the preponderance of German interest in the palm kernel trade was because Germany was the centre of the palm kernel crushing industry in Europe, and therefore virtually monopolised the trade in the product. The demand for kernel in Germany made the price paid for the product by the Germans very attractive and indeed the highest. Germany also had the best facilities for the processing of palm kernel for soap making and for the manufacture of margarine. Such was the German dominance that when the British firm of Alfred Jones entered into the trade, it was forced to abandon the project within a year. Apart from the trade in palm kernel, the Germans also took a keen interest in the cultivation of other crops.
Similarly, they supplied gun-power, stockfish and imported materials quicker and more cheaply. They had controlling shares in Nigeria’s and Dahomey’s maize trade, while they also promoted the production of coffee, cocoa, plantain, coconut and cotton, particularly in the volta region and in the Cameroons.

From the above, there is no doubt that the Germans enjoyed a primal place in the West African trade before the outbreak of the First World war in 1914. Even the British firms operating in West Africa did not only find it easier to ship their products from the British colonies through Hamburg, they found it cheaper and more profitable. Germany’s predominance was demonstrated by the large importation of German goods into West Africa and the export of most of their crops to the country. In most cases, the goods coming to West Africa were obtained from Germany or through the German ports. The situation explains why the outbreak of the war disrupted the West African economy.

**The Wars and the West African Economy**

The First World War as well as the Second were caused by European rivalries, and caught everyone unawares. Because of the dominance of the Germans in West African trade, the economy of the sub-region was dislocated. All parts were adversely affected, as the wars progressed due to the loss of trade and human lives, and the infliction of physical disabilities. The impact of the wars was mostly severe on agricultural goods whose value declined due to restrictions and war operations by the combatants.

Whereas the price of palm kernel was £23.6 per ton in Nigeria in 1913, if fell to £19.14 per ton in 1914 and plummeted further to £16.8 per ton in 1915. The price of groundnuts, which was between £8 and £9 in Kano at the outbreak of war in 1914, fell sharply to £2.10s by 1916. Similarly, the prices of cotton, rubber, shea nuts and maize declined substantially. In Sierra Leone, both the import and export trade declined throughout the period of war and took some time to recover. In Sierra Leone, the palm kernel trade was particularly hard hit due to the loss of the German market. This was so because the Germans were in virtual control of the country’s kernel trade. In 1914, Germany absorbed 87.43 per cent of the territory’s palm kernel and before the outbreak of fighting in 1914, she had already absorbed 48 per cent of total palm kernel produce. The economic stagnation was further aggravated by the crop failure of the year which forced farmers to divert to rice growing in order to avoid famine.

In the Cameroons, the First World War also destroyed the trading network and the system of markets which the Germans had established since the time of occupation. But in the case of the Gambia, although there was a drop in revenue due to the uncertainties of prices the economy soon bounced back to prosperity. However, the war altered her direction of trade drastically. Whereas the French had absorbed almost 80 per cent of her groundnuts before the war, by 1919 she controlled only 2 and a half per cent while the British who shared less than 12 per cent before the war took 91 per cent.

Indeed, the first world war did not only demonstrate the economic potentialities of colonies to the metropolis; it exposed the economic importance of these territories and the need to exploit
them for the benefit of both the metropolis and the territories. "We must now be able to count on
the economic solidarity of our colonies as we have hitherto counted on their military
solidarity".22 These words of the French West African Governor General in 1914 are evident of
the realisation of the contributions the colonies could make to the metropolis.

Just as the First World War had serious consequences for the trade of the colonies, the Second
World War also brought about a decline in revenue arising from shortfalls in custom duties in the
1939/40 season. This was aggravated by the closure of the French, Belgian, Dutch and German
markets, which affected the British colonies very adversely. The loss of the East Asian markets
to the Germans called for a new economic policy aimed at ensuring the colonial markets for the
metropolis. Hence, Britain imposed import restrictions on non-sterling zones so as to conserve
foreign exchange and the supply of currency.23

As the colonies were expected to co-operate fully with the Allied Forces, the prices of exports as
well as imports all over West Africa were brought under control.24 Since the East Asian markets
had been lost, efforts were geared towards ensuring maximum production of vegetable oils and
other commodities which could sustain the allies throughout the duration of the war.

To achieve the objective, the colonial administration embarked on the production drive. The
government suggested and even adopted a number of measures designed to increase collection of
palm kernels and extraction of oil. These included an increase in taxation and a subsequent
reduction in the price of produce. It was assumed that low price would force the farmers to
increase collection so as to meet their tax obligations. But the farmers were more economically
rational, and therefore refused to collect palm kernels until stable prices were guaranteed by the
government.

However, the proposal was shelved in the end because if it was adopted it would have had a
negative effect as price incentives rather than disincentives were needed to beef up production. The
adoption of a definite pricing policy became necessary to ensure regular or continuous supply as
in the French market.25 The adoption of a definite pricing policy in 1939 clearly demonstrated
the economic rationale of the peasant producers as production of palm produce increased by 37
per cent between
1939 and 1954, an increase which is substantial, particularly when one considers the fact that the
production of these commodities depends largely on the uncertainties of nature, which is often
susceptible to fluctuations.

However, the increase in production of vegetable products particularly during the war could
partly and more importantly be attributed to the production drive. All over the British territories,
farmers were discouraged from producing foodstuffs as they and their wives and children were
put under constant pressure to go to the bush to cut down palm nuts and process the oil, for
according to a war propaganda slogan, each bunch of palm nut that could be cut was equivalent
to cutting down a German soldier, and each tin of oil and kernels produced could help to
ruining a German gun or aeroplane on the battle field”.26

Churches were not spared in the campaign to stimulate higher production of the essential
commodities. The clergymen were instructed to preach to the congregation in their respective
churches on Sundays of the need to produce oil and kernel as the victory of the allied forces depended on the availability of the commodities.27 Internal trade was controlled or regulated to divert part for export, while a strong campaign was mounted for garri and starch production, which became necessary with the loss of the East Asian markets. The case of garri and starch production was a pathetic one in which farmers were encouraged to invest their capital in the cultivation of cassava on the promise that there would be continued demand for the commodity even after the war. However, as the farmers invested in cassava planting, the Ministry of Food stopped its exports, and this resulted in heavy losses for many who had responded to the win-the-war campaigns.28

A major factor accounting for the fall in revenue, and rise in the cost of living was the shipping difficulties. Generally, the colonies depended on Britain, France and Germany for over 50 per cent their imports, before the war.29 The figure fell drastically due to the war. The restrictions imposed on the movement of ships were to deny services to the enemy and protect the ships from destruction by the enemy.

Consequently, arrangements had to be made by which shipping facilities were allocated to each of the firms operating on the West African coast. But due to the irregularities of their operations, products for export waited for weeks at the ports in anticipation of the arrival of ships which never came. Since ships were irregular, very limited imports could be brought into the colonies and their prices were prohibitive. Even within West Africa, the firms experienced unimaginable problems in evacuating produce from the interior to the coast as enough spaces were not allocated to them in the railway, most of which had been diverted to war purposes. Shipping delays resulted in holding up produce unnecessarily for long periods and caused considerable deterioration and subsequent loss of revenue.30

If the control in the First World War caused a fall in revenue alone, the economic measures adopted during the Second World war brought greater damage and discontent among the populace. The Defence Control of Imports Regulation of December 29, 1939 brought many goods under government control.31 Under the scheme, ships were allocated for specific goods in an attempt to control them. Business houses were compelled to register with the government before they could import from non-sterling areas. In most cases, import licences were denied, thereby phasing out small businessmen from the import: business.32

The war-time problems did not only result in scarcity of essential goods, but in the disappearance from the market of most of the commodities, and created hardship for all colonies alike. Old people in the rural areas still remember the Second World War for the scarcity of salt due to restrictions imposed on the movements of ships and imported commodities.

The two wars also involved a large number of Africans who were recruited for various services in the prosecution of the wars. Both the British colonies and French territories became the centres for recruitment of soldiers for the masters’ wars. In the Gold Coast, not less than 8,000 were recruited into the army.33 In French West Africa, 35,000 men were recruited in 1914, and by 1915 people above the age of 18 had been called up for enlistment, while by 1917 Senegal had 17 battalions serving in the French Army. In all, about 181,000 people were believed to have been recruited from French West Africa.34 Nigeria also provided about 17,000 fighting men and
another 58,000 service personnel.

The small territory of Gambia was not spared in the exercise. Whereas there were only 130 soldiers in the territory at the outbreak of war, the signallers were dispatched to the Cameroons, and before the end of fighting-in 1918, over 4,000 men had been recruited into the army.35

As the black soldiers actively participated in the First World War and gave a good account of themselves, they were called up to fight in Europe during the Second World War. Rather than serve as cannon fodder for the European soldiers, they became the most reliable and competent fighting squads of the allied forces. Their disregard for danger made it possible to use them instead of their European counterparts, who often fled the battle front or felt reluctant and at times, refused to march.36 All these demonstrated the courage and valour of the African soldiers, in the front. The ability of the blackman to withstand the enemy while his European counterpart fled from the field revealed to the Africans that the whites were not all that invincible after all. It also destroyed the myth of the supremacy of the whiteman and thus encouraged feelings of nationalism among the African soldiers.

Each of the colonial powers called on its territories for combatants in 1939, as was the case in 1914. Consequently, 80,000 men were recruited from French West Africa in 1939-40 while an additional 100,000 men followed in 1943-44.37 Nigeria provided about 90,000 soldiers, while about 92,000 men were recruited into the mines. The staggering figures were achieved through the National Service Essential Mines regulation which diverted between 25,000 and 30,000 farm labour into the mines for a specified number of months.38 The poor response of labour led to the introduction of conscription of labour into the tin mines.39

Despite contributions in men and other sacrifices, which affected their revenue adversely, every colony also contributed cash and material to the war effort. In the British colonies, for example, all the chiefs were expected to mobilise their subjects to contribute to winning the war. In Nigeria for example, the Native Administration and the emirs donated a sum of £98,000 in addition to various items of food stuffs. Similar donations were made by the various communities in the south. The contributions during the Second World War included the following: Oyo £8,000; Ondo £3,000; Abeokuta £1,400; Ijebu £1,060; and Kano £10,270 in 1942, while a further win-the-war fund of £11,000 was raised in 1945. In all, out of the £24,041,945 contributed by 381 countries, Nigeria’s share was £409,255. When this is added to the material contributions, apart from the production drive mounted by the colonial administration, Nigeria’s share in the win-the-war effort must have been very substantial.

Similarly, Gambia paid £10,000 to the relief fund as part of her contributions while the local populace donated food and money generously to demonstrate not only their loyalty to the Union Jack, but also their solidarity with the allied forces in their effort to crush the Germans and their allies.41 In Sierra Leone, Gold Coast and other territories the traditional authorities also demonstrated their loyalty by urging their subjects to make material contributions to the war. All these played an important part in sustaining the soldiers on the field and in the imperial financing of the war generally. When one considers the fact that the financial and material contributions were made against the background of a general fall in revenue accruing to both the government and farmers in the colonies, one must appreciate their immense sacrifices.
The colonies were also called upon to make financial sacrifices either in the form of cuts in their budgets or direct contributions and loans to their respective imperial governments. During the First World War alone, in addition to the monetary contributions from local communities, Nigeria donated £41,000 to the imperial government and thus, the imperial government debt amounted to £6 million pounds. In the Second World War, the staggering financial involvement could be seen from the table below.

The Gold Coast incurred £60,000-^80,000 on behalf of the imperial government in the invasion of Togoland at the outbreak of war in 1914. The emolument of European staff also increased from £6,000 to £10,000 during the same period. The colonial pact which nurtured the French colonies in the classical colonial pattern may perhaps make it difficult to determine the financial involvement of the territories but, definitely, the wars drained their revenue.

There is no doubt that the wars drained the resources (human, financial and material) of the colonial subjects, and affected their economies very adversely. However, some relative benefits accrued from the problems arising from the wars. As the wars caused shortages in shipping, importation of consumer items fell substantially. Since most of the manufactured goods could not be imported, there was a shift to the use of available local materials to make up for the scarcity and shortages.

Thus, the imperial government began to encourage local production of the goods hitherto imported into the country, the development was a good step, as some technical training was given to the indigenes and it also helped to conserve foreign exchange. The difficulties in importing furniture led to the establishment of a carpenters’ workshop in Lagos to make them for government houses. Roofing tiles were also manufactured locally to replace imported iron sheets while sawmills were erected to produce good wood for furniture instead of importing them.

During the Second World War, the imposition of stringent restrictions on imports stimulated the development of local industries for the manufacture of milk, sugar, and orange juice. The encouragement given to import-substitution industries no doubt enhanced further utilization of the agricultural resources of the colonies and provided more employment for the people in the territories. Some of the industries took off in Lagos, Agege, Abeokuta as well as in Senegal. Indeed, the war marked the beginning of industrialisation in Senegal with the development of the oil mill. An attempt to economise the limited shipping space gave impetus to the processing of groundnut oil in the territory.

However, the policy was discontinued after the war in both the British and French territories as there were cuts in production. But the French industrialists feared the damage which competition from mills in the territory might pose to their position in the territories. Inevitably, necessary laws were enacted not only to cut production, but to prevent further expansion. In Nigeria, the situation was slightly different, lack of demand and the influx of imported materials in the absence of protection for the local industries, led to decline and eventual collapse.

The growth of militant trade unions in West Africa was partly due to frustration which had
characterised labour before the Second World War, but it was accentuated by the stringent measures and increase in the cost of living arising from the war-time shortages. In the French territories, the peasants were taxed in the form of food crops of which the cultivator only produced the quantity for his sustenance and for the local market. Rice disappeared in the markets while there were shortages in the major cities particularly in Senegal, where the population suffered from hunger. Despite the desperate conditions in the territories, the French expectation from the colonies in terms of assistance to make up for shortage in France at times forced the local chiefs and people to buy elsewhere at prohibitive prices the goods they could not produce so as to escape the metropolitan scourge as well as meet the French demands. The result was untold famine and hardship which caused general disaffection in the territories and encouraged the development of militant trade union leaders who later played an important role in the socio-political life of the people in the territories.

Similarly, food shortages constituted one of the most serious problems which the British authorities faced in their territories during the Second World War. While the trend reached crisis proportions in the cities, the food producing rural communities suffered in varying degrees particularly from inflation. As a desperate situation, the government in spite of its efforts to conserve food crops as reserves in anticipation of any emergency, was forced to introduce food rationing in 1941 through a price control system directed by Captain A.P. Pullen. Needless to say, such a scheme was not only a dismal failure, it indeed triggered off price increases in non-consumable articles. The resultant general frustration and large scale unemployment induced by large scale migrations to the urban areas added to these problems.

The high cost of living, arising partly from shortages, forced government workers to demand "kola" to cushion them against the unexpected rise in the cost of living and to compensate for sacrifices made in terms of longer hours of work and additional responsibilities during the war. While workers dared not protest even over salary cuts during the depression of 1929-33, the hard conditions of the war time years called for a desperate solution which timidity and ineffective leadership among workers could not handle.

The war time dilemma and its attendant hardship produced the most militant trade unionist in the Nigerian labour history, whose dedication and commitment did not only secure the "kola" award for Nigerian workers in 1942, but gave them improved Renditions of service in 1945. The war therefore provided the climate for the emergence of militant unionists and enhanced the development of trade unionism in West Africa as a whole. These were probably the only positive effects of the wars on the West African sub-region.

The two wars affected very adversely the economy of West Africa. The recruitment of able-bodied labour from West Africa led to food shortages as there were less hands to produce them. The primary products suffered because of the loss of potential markets, and the attempt to divert them to the metropolitan markets. The measures adopted during the two wars to solve the problem of the declining demand for West Africa’s export crops did not only divert the exports to the metropolitan markets buttressed the dominance of the national firms in the colonies for the effective exploitation of their resources.
Likewise, war time shortages, coupled with the deliberate government policy of diverting all available resources towards the prosecution of war, denied the colonies of development. Various projects in progress had to be suspended or shelved as the money which would have been used for them was either donated or contributed to the imperial fund for war purposes. The suspension of some of the projects such as the railway and other infrastructure had great economic consequences for West Africa. Coupled with the financial measures, and deprivation of the colonial subjects was inflation and the high cost of living, which bred general disaffection among them.

The most severe economic consequence of the wars was the loss of thousands of lives of the West African citizens who died fighting the masters’ wars. The number of those who died would perhaps never be known as figures would remain mere estimates. As manpower constitutes an invaluable asset in the productive process, their loss affected the economic development of the sub-region. Whether in the British or French colonies, recruitments and conscriptions removed the labour force and led to a substantial decline in the productive capacity of the region’s labour force as work had to be abandoned completely in some circumstances.

While the colonial administration expected and indeed received much from their colonies, their contribution to the development of these colonies during the same period was marginal. Where they encouraged substitution industries, they were primarily intended for the war-time exigencies, as soon as the wars were over, they were all neglected or abolished. Thus, despite the encouragement given to local production during the two, world wars, West Africa was without appreciable import-substitution industries up to the 1950s as the war-time efforts were not sustained. The government’s intervention in the marketing of agricultural raw materials during the second world war to solve the war-time problems and ensure regular supplies to the allied forces denied the farmers a substantial part of their income and further provided more revenue to the colonial administration.

All points considered, the wars brought hardship and ruin on West Africa. It impoverished its citizens because imported inflation depressed their disposable income. It also affected their standard of living and accentuated their disaffection towards European imperialism its exploitations and extractions.

Notes

1. Michael Crowder, “The First World War and Africa” Paper presented at the Department of History, University of Lagos Seminar, 7th April, 1977, pp. 1-2. The paper was then the draft of a Chapter for Vol. VII of the UNESCO History of Africa. Adu Boahen (ed.) Some of the views expressed then may have been modified in the final production of the book. However, the facts remain essentially the same.


3. Ibid.

4. Some of the published works include Akinjide Osuntokun, Nigeria in the First World War,


6. For instance palm produce accounted for over 50 per cent of Nigeria’s export during the same period while the Gold Coast and the Cameroons also exported the product in considerable quantities. Other territories in West Africa also exported palm produce.


12. N.A.I. CSO 1912 File No. 2547 on Nigeria Trade with Germany, October 1914.


26. N.A.I. Oyo Prof. File No. 3474 Resident Oyo Province to Chiefs and Peoples of Western Nigeria on the war effort production drive. Release No. 1, January 1943, p. 16. This was a general release not only to residents serving in Nigeria, the same went over all the territories under the control of the allied forces.

27. N.A.I. CSO 26, File. No. 36/83/S.60 Chief Secretary Lagos to Secretary Southern Provinces Enugu on War Production Drive, May 24, 1943.


32. Olusanya, G.O., *op. tit,r$.22.


45. Olusanya, CO., *Nigerian end the Second World War*, *op. cit.*, p. 23. Also Suret Canale, p. 482


Transportation in Colonial West Africa

Ayodeji Olukoju

Introduction

Scholars are agreed, as Howard Gauthier stated, that “economic development requires adequate and effective transport services”[1] but they have differed on the actual role of transportation in the process of development. Hence, over the years, three perspectives have been articulated on this issue.[2] The most common one presents transportation as a critical prerequisite for economic growth. Those who subscribed to this view have highlighted the wide-ranging impact of modern transportation on the economy and society as it widens the market, facilitates economies of large-scale production, lowers costs of production (given drastic reductions in transport costs) and tames distance.[3]

Transport development thus enables man to harness existing and new resources and to release labour and capital previously tied up in less productive enterprise or isolated by distance.[4] The decisive role ascribed to transportation in the developing economies is vividly expressed in Lugard’s famous dictum: ”the material development of Africa may be summed up in one word — transport”. [5]

This popular view has, however, been challenged in recent years. Transportation has now been perceived as having a permissive effect on, rather than being a causal factor in, development. The argument is that it is simply an enabling factor which ”does not independently produce directly productive activities or subsequent increases in the level of economic growth”. Consequently, to single out this particular factor in capital formation as a causal agent is, according to this view, ”a gross simplification of a very complex problem”. [6] Fogel’s research is cited to show that the critical role assigned to transportation, in this case, the railways in American economic growth, is a gross exaggeration. Indeed, the railways were built in response to, and not in advance of, demand.

A third view of the role of transportation actually attributes a negative impact to it. It is stated that an over-investment in this sector reduces potential growth in directly productive activity thus leading to an absolute decline in per capita income. Such a prospect is likely, it is argued., if scarce resources that should have been better employed elsewhere were diverted to the transport sector.[7]

It is in the light of the foregoing debate that this chapter discusses colonial policies and indigenous reaction to them, and assesses the overall impact of transportation on the economies of British and French West Africa. The discussion is situated within the larger context of
European imperial rivalry and the economics of colonialism. We shall focus on railway development, road transport, inland navigation, ports and maritime transport.

**Railway Development**

Railway development in West Africa was inspired by the popular belief that the railway had played a crucial role in the march of the industrial revolution in Europe and the remarkable economic developments in North America, India and Australia. The clamour for railway development in West Africa was started by private interests from the middle of the nineteenth century. Many of the railway promoters were enthusiasts who formulated grandiose plans but lacked the financial capacity to execute them. The early railway schemes were not well defined and the attendant high costs did not commend them to colonial officials. Consequently, until the last quarter of the nineteenth century, railway projects in West Africa failed to secure official support.

However, developments in the closing quarter of the century compelled the imperial powers to reconsider their attitude to railway development. First, there was a heightening of imperial rivalry as the colonial powers were required to make good their colonial acquisitions. On the one hand, the railways would facilitate the quick despatch of troops to quell uprisings by Africans during the on-going colonial conquests. On the other, it was good proof of effective occupation and was a potent weapon for the diversion of trade to particular ports in the interest of the colonial power. A second but less strategic consideration was the onset of the depression of the 1880s and 1890s. Officials and merchants were now convinced of the need to construct railways to ensure “West Africa’s competitiveness in international markets”. As colonies were required to be self-financing, officials had to adopt measures that promoted the trade of the colonies upon which rested the fiscal system. Consequently, railway schemes ceased to be private undertakings as officials took over their planning and execution.

French interest in railway development in West Africa was intensified in the 1880s as the conquest and colonization of the vast West African hinterland got underway. Between 1879 and 1882 concrete plans were formulated for the construction of the Senegal Railway. With an approved budget of 120 million francs, the project took off in 1882 and the line from Dakar to Saint Louis was completed in 1885. The line got to Bamako, 720 miles inland, in 1923. Work on the Thies-Kayes line which was interrupted by the First World War was resumed in 1920 and when completed in 1923 gave the Sudan an outlet to the sea at Dakar. This line traversed the most productive groundnut producing zone. The Dakar-Niger and the Dakar-Saint Louis lines were linked also in 1923. In Senegal, a 46-kilometre branch line was constructed from Diourbel to Touba, the spiritual headquarters of the Mourides sect and a great groundnut producing centre. Another branch line from Lotiga to Iinguere was, however, a colossal waste as it ran through an unproductive region.

Railway-construction on the Ivory Coast began in 1903 and the line got to Bouake, 315 kilometres inland, in 1912. Attempts were then made to extend it towards Ouagadougou in Upper Volta. Ferkessedougou (558 kilometres) and Bobo Dioulasso (.796 kilometres) were reached in 1926 and 1934 respectively but the line never got to Ouagadougou. In Guinea, the line
from Conakry to Kankan was completed in 1914 and all plans for further extension were never realized. In Dahomey, the Pobe-Porto-Nov line built between 1905 and 1913 was extended to Cotonou, 108 kilometres in all, between 1928 and 1930. The central line got to Save in 1910 and Parakou by 1936. The western line from Pahon to Segboroue had been built at the beginning of the century. The Segboroue — Grand Popo-Athiene-Lokosa line and that from Abomey to Zagnanado gave Southern Dahomey a fairly dense network. The Benin-Niger one-metre gauge line covered a distance of 577 kilometres.11

Railway development in Togo had been commenced by the Germans who constructed three one-metre gauge lines. These were the central line from Lome to Atakpame, which was extended by the French to Blita in 1934; the Lome-Anecho and Lome-Palime lines. The Germans in Togo named these lines after the products they carried — cocoa, cotton, iron and palm oil.12 Work began in 192$ on the extension to Sokode but the task was never fully accomplished.

In all, railway construction in French West Africa was done haphazardly. Despite the contiguity of roost French colonies, the lines were not harmonised into a network. Jean Stlret-Canale has thus described them as ”a series of basic penetration, using a metric gauge. At the start they were strategic routes, constructed at little cost, often with difficult sections that were unsuitable for denser traffic”.13 Nevertheless, the lines served the ends of French enterprise in the colonies by facilitating troop movements, colonial administration and the despatch of produce to and imports from the ports.

Railway construction started much later in British West Africa for until the 1890s the British adopted a policy of minimal involvement in the region. Although Britain had laid claim to its West African colonies by treaty and conquest, it still had to make its presence felt in many parts. Colonial officials had to contend with the issue of land rights, specifically indigenous reaction to railway construction on African land. In addition, the parsimonious attitude of the British Treasury hindered a ”forward policy” on railway development. Hence, it was not until the accession of Joseph Chamberlain to the office-of Secretary of State for the Colonies that practical effect was given to the ”development of the imperial estates”.14

Pressure for the construction of the rail lines came, expectedly, from the British business community. It was motivated by fear of the prospect of the diversion of trade fin British colonies to railway lines in the adjoining French colonies.15 In addition, reports I of mineral deposits, such as of gold on the Gold Coast, quickened-the tempo of demand ; for railway construction to facilitate mining operations. Colonial officials also shared the merchants’ enthusiasm and in due course held consultations with them and I commissioned surveys and investigations into possible lines of construction. British I merchants, shipowners, bankers and colonial officials ultimately reached a consensus I on the features of railway construction. Thus, colonial governments, rather than private Bpromoters, would construct and manage the railways. Second, a standard colonial fcauge of 3 feet 6 inches was approved for Nigeria, the Gold Coast and the Gambia while ”a narrower gauge of 2 feet 6 inches was approved .for the Sierra Leone railways given the poor finances of that colony. By the passage of the Colonial Loans Bill in 1899, colonial governments could now incur public debt to finance the railways.
During Chamberlain’s tenure as Secretary of State, much progress was made in pushing the railway lines inland from the coast. Thus, the line from Freetown had reached Baima, a distance of 222 miles, by 1903. A shorter line to Pendembu was completed in 1906. On the Gold Coast, railway construction proceeded from Accra in stages: Tarkwa was reached in 1901 and Obuasi in 1902. The line from Sekondi got to Kumasi in the heart of the rich Ashanti region in 1903. The Accra-Kumasi and Accra-Sekondi lines were completed in 1923 and 1927 respectively. In Nigeria, construction began in Lagos in 1896 and the line was extended to Ibadan in 1901, Jebba on the Niger in 1909 and Kano, 711 miles inland, in 1911. The Port Harcourt-Enugu-Jos line, linking the northern and eastern parts of the country, was completed in 1926. Thus, by 1940, there were 5,200 miles of railways in British and French West Africa.

All told, railway development was a product of what Anthony Hopkins characterised as ”official entrepreneurship” given the deep involvement of the colonial governments. The investment in railways paid off and realized the dreams of government and the merchants. Michael Crowder indeed regarded the railways as the ”major legacy of the economic policies of the colonial powers” while Omosini concluded that they ”have had perhaps the greatest impact of any single innovation in transport brought into West Africa from Europe “. Such comments in no way deny the contributions of other modes of transport, particularly road transport, which competed with and complemented the railways.

Road Transport

So much hope had been placed on railways as the key to the development of West Africa that road transport development lagged behind somewhat until the present century. But it soon became clear that the direct impact of the railway was limited to the thin slices of territory on either side of the tracks. This meant that the vast tracts of land beyond this range which were inhabited by the great bulk of producers could not be tapped effectively or cheaply. For such producers, the cost of head-loading produce to the railway stations was too prohibitive to make the exercise worthwhile. The need for access roads was therefore imperative but was not appreciated early enough. Thus, there were few motorable roads in West Africa before the First World War. The motor car was still a recent innovation and the early brands destroyed the roads. Hence, colonial officials and merchants doubted its utility in West Africa. This pessimism was expressed by the British Cotton Growing Association in 1907: ”metal roads and motor transport are, as far as one can judge, a mistake”. In the face of such scepticism, it took the sheer enterprise of Africans, notably William Akinola Dawodu of Nigeria, for motor transport to be established in West Africa.

The faith of the likes of Dawodu was vindicated as lighter, faster and cheaper American cars were imported into West Africa after the First World War. By 1923, the first trans-saharan crossing by the motor car had taken place and by 1930 the big European firms had been converted to the idea of motor transport. Even then, the impact of commercial haulage was limited. But by 1940 motor transport had become well established for there were 10,000 vehicles in French West Africa alone, a remarkable increase from 16 in 1913. More impressive progress was achieved in the British colonies: as early as the 1920s Nigeria and the Gold Coast imported twice as many vehicles as all the French colonies put together.
While the commercial firms imported these vehicles, the roads required for their use were constructed mainly through African enterprise. Having come to appreciate the economic and political value of road transport, the colonial governments severally mobilized African labour to construct the roads. In French West Africa, there was hardly any motorable highway in the forest zone until the 1920s. This was in view of the difficulties presented by the weather and the terrain. What passed for roads were mere tracks fit only for the use of porters and other travellers on foot. Many of these were seasonal roads which were rendered impassable by streams and rivers especially during the rainy season. Such water courses were forded, bridged with tree trunks or served by ferry boats. For the most part, colonial officials were carried about on litters or “hammocks” borne by porters. Military routes were, however, established such as between Bamako and Kayes and from Conakry to Kankan. They were plied by horses or little carts drawn by donkeys and foot soldiers. Strategic consideration also informed the construction of broad highways in the forests of the Ivory Coast to ease movement of troops.

The advent of the motor car after the First World War gave fillip to road construction in the French colonies. It also had the effect of reducing forced head porterage on the major routes though the practice continued where there were few or no roads. Ironically, forced labour in porterage was now diverted to road construction. Suret-Canale had stated that “the tracks were made and maintained exclusively by requisitioned or statute labour”. Men were conscripted to undertake this task but where they had been requisitioned for other tasks or had escaped, women and children took their place. Moreover, the French colonial authorities did not supply tools: the people had to use bare hands and baskets made of woven leaves supplied by themselves. As late as 1943, eye witnesses reported cases of “a half-starved crowd of women, children and old men” working under such conditions, “under the whip of the circle police”.

Given these circumstances, the roads were rough and ready contraptions. The tracks were easily eroded by torrential rains which produced “corrugated iron” surfaces that jostled and wore down the vehicles plying them. Although the foregoing presents a dismal picture of road transport development in French West Africa, the situation was much better than in French Equatorial Africa, for while 64,000 kilometres of roads had been constructed in French West Africa by 1930, only 100 kilometres had been built in the latter area by 1936.

In British East Africa, developments paralleled those in the French colonies. The colonial governments did encourage road construction but this was achieved largely through African enterprise. Afigbo had made the general observation that “in French, British and German territories an important part of the duties of the chiefs was the recruitment of forced labour for the roads as well as the supervision of roadmaking and maintenance”. Thus, the Southern Nigerian Protectorate enacted a Roads and Rivers Proclamation in 1903 which, among other things, required the Warrant Chief, acting on the District or Provincial Commissioner’s instructions, to recruit labour for road construction and clearing of inland waterways. Each adult was required to work for six days in the quarter. This was akin to the practice in Togo and Dahomey where every male had to spare twelve days in a year for this purpose or pay a certain amount of money in lieu of forced labour on the roads.

Colonial officials generally exhibited an enthusiastic interest in road construction. The tenure of Water Egerton in Southern Nigeria (1905-1912) and that of Gordon Guggisberg on the Gold
Coast (1919-29) witnessed intense road construction. Egerton’s remarks clearly reveal the importance he attached to road building: "if you ask what my policy is, I should say 'Open means of communication’ and if you would wish for additional information, I would reply ’Open more of them’”26 His Gold Coast counterpart had constructed some 3,000 miles of roads in the 1920s.27

However, much of what was achieved owed much more to the enthusiasm of the colonial subjects who were seeking to establish effective transport links with other communities. On the Gold Coast and in Western Nigeria, cocoa farmers took the initiative to construct roads to facilitate the export of their produce in the first two decades of this century.28 The enthusiasm of a community seeking to have road links with the outside world is demonstrated by Badagry in South-western Nigeria. A former slave port, cut off from the open sea by a sand spit and located in a swampy terrain, the settlement supplied men and material and clamoured for official assistance to establish road links with Ado in Egbado territory to the north.29

The provision of motor vehicles to ply these roads was an important contribution by African pioneers notably W.A. Dawodu of Lagos, Nigeria. He imported American Ford and Dodge cars and ran motor transport services in Lagos and in the Osogbo area in the cocoa belt of Western Nigeria. But even before his death in 1930, European and Levantine firms had intruded and come to dominate the business. The Levantines eventually dominated motor transport notably in South-Western Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In Lagos, J.N. Zarpas, popularly called the "Bus King”, was the most prominent name among the Lebanese and other Levantines in the transport and distributive trades.31

It is worth noting that though roads were constructed as feeders to the railways, they soon competed with them for freight. Rail-road competition was a thorny issue in Nigeria during the 1930s and actually provoked a strike of motor transporters in 1937.32 Many roads ran parallel to the rail lines though others did serve areas that lacked rail links. Motor transport succeeded in capturing a considerable proportion of the export and import traffic especially after the Second World War. This mode of transport was not cheaper than the railway but it was far more flexible in terms of adjustment of schedules and rates. It was also speedier and provided a door-to-door service. In all, there was a tenfold increase in the number of motor vehicles in West Africa during the period from 1945 to 1960. By the latter date, there were some 86,000 motor vehicles in French West Africa and 94,000 in the British colonies. These figures reflected an increase in roadbuilding and an improvement in the quality of roads. Thus, the mileage of tarred roads in Nigeria increased from about 500 in 1945 to 8,000 in 1963.33

Another complementary though sometimes competitive mode of transport was inland navigation. This hardly presented any example of colonial innovation and it thus furnishes another instance of African enterprise in the colonial context.

Inland Navigation

Although West Africa is fairly well drained, inland navigation has been constrained since the pre-colonial era by two major factors — the seasonally of the rivers and obstructions such as rapids and fallen trees. In spite of this, a considerable volume of cargo and human traffic had
been carried by river transport over the centuries on the Niger, Benue and Senegal.

During the colonial period, some attempt was made to improve the navigability of these rivers by clearing the waterways of weeds and other obstructions. In Southern Nigeria, for example, colonial and traditional authorities encouraged the clearing of the courses of the Ogun, Yewa and Oni in the west and the Enyong, Kwa Ibo, Imo, New Calabar, Sombreiro and Osumi rivers as well as the Ikoba and Azumini creeks in the east. The colonial government in Northern Nigeria also dredged the Niger, though with unsatisfactory results, in order to make it an outlet for the Kano-Baro railway.

Moreover, paddle steamers were introduced on the Niger, Benue and Senegal and river transport was used to link railway systems severed by rivers as in Senegal. Thus, transport on the Senegal connected the railway line from Dakar with Timbuktu and Gao. Ironically, river transport often competed with the railway as exemplified by the Ogun river and the Lagos-Abeokuta railway during the opening decade of this century. In this particular case, railway authorities had to charge low freight rates in this section before it could compete favourably with canoe transport on the Ogun.

It is generally difficult to measure the magnitude of the river-borne traffic. In all, the rivers were in flood for the few months between July and October. This was true of the Senegal and the Upper Niger up to Bamako. In the latter case, the traffic was absorbed by the Conakry-Niger railway but in the section of the river between Koulikoro and Ansongo, river transport remained important because road construction was either difficult or impossible. The types of river craft varied with the depth of the rivers. Steam boats were in use when the river was full, while flat-bottomed barges plied the river in the drier season. From Koulikoro to Segu, the river level was often too low at certain periods in the year to permit river transport. In all, available statistics show that the volume of traffic on the Niger was substantial; it rose from four million metric tons in 1926 to 13 million tons in 1930. But from the 1930s, river transport was displaced by road transport given the greater speed of the motor vehicle.

While it lasted, steam transport on the rivers was an expatriate enterprise. A few Africans nevertheless operated launch services on the lagoons east of Lagos. Thus, the fleets of the Ricketts of Agbowa and Owolowo Company of Ikorodu ran from Ikorodu to Lagos. On the Lower Niger, below Lokoja, as well as on the Benue, the Royal Niger Company operated its own river fleet which, however, faced German competition before the First World War. On the Senegal and the Middle Niger, French companies monopolised river transport aided by state subventions to compensate for the inadequate traffic. On the Middle Niger, the Messageries Africaines acquired in 1934 the Societe de Bamako and the government-owned fleet thus establishing a monopoly. By a convention of 1935, the company won monopoly of transport on the river for 25 years. Nevertheless, the Niger Office and the CFAO continued to operate their vessels for their own commercial purposes.

Inland navigation, like other forms of land-based transport, was ultimately oriented towards the ports. The final section of this chapter examines port development and maritime transport in colonial West Africa.
The discussion on ports and maritime transport takes a cue from three related developments — the transition from sail to steam in shipping, the establishment of colonial rule and the considerable growth in the volume, value and variety of West Africa’s overseas trade. The transition to steamships took place in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and this registered a far-reaching impact on the conduct of external trade. The steamship enjoyed the advantages of lower costs and greater speed when compared with sailing ships. Moreover, the steamship did not depend on such natural conditions as the direction and strength of the wind as did the sailing ship and this afforded regularity of her service. All these advantages had a positive effect on West Africa’s seaborne trade. Lower costs of steamships made it remunerative to carry bulky vegetable products the value of which was low in relation to their weight. The speed of the steamship which by 1900, had reduced by half the length of the voyage made it possible to ship perishable goods and for merchants to have a quicker turnover on their capital. Less time spent on the voyages and in the ports reduced ship’s running costs and merchants’ overheads. These developments took place during the crucial period of the establishment of colonial rule and the rapid development of the groundnut, cocoa, palm produce and mining industries in West Africa. As these commodities were channelled through coastal outlets, it became clear that seaports were vital to the conduct of external trade and held the key to the prosperity of the colonies.

There were almost one hundred ports of various descriptions along the West African coast but only a few of these were natural harbours. The need to make these accessible to ocean shipping prompted colonial governments to embark upon port development programmes. By 1900, it had become clear that the capacity of these ports was inadequate for the traffic brought down by the railways.

in French west Africa, Dakar evolved as the only well-equipped port. It was developed into the major outlet for Senegal and the Sudan hinterland. Its location made it the entrepot between Europe and other parts of French West Africa. The port was also the refuelling station for ships on their way from Europe to South America. Furthermore, it had enormous strategic value being an imperial naval base which had a dry dock constructed between 1903 and 1912. This was the only such facility along the entire coastline from Gibraltar to the Cape until the Second World War.

Dakar port was constructed in 1865 when it had a depth of a mere five metres. From 1898, after two jetties had been built, it gained pre-eminence in the Senegal basin at the expense of Saint Louis and Goree. Further construction took place principally from 1902 to 1912 and then from 1926 to 1932. By the 1930s it handled 65 per cent of the total trade of French West Africa. By 1936, extensive development had taken place on its southern and northern jetties and the port’s pre-eminence rested on its being the sole import terminal for the Senegal-Sudan system. Its export traffic was, however, second to that of Kaolack, located on the estuary some 120 kilometres from the open sea. Although the latter port had a depth below five metres, it was advantageously located in the heart of the richly endowed Sine-Saloum region.

Port development in other parts of French West Africa took place at Conakry, Abidjan, Cotonou
and Lome each of which had varying importance. Railway construction gave Conakry the import monopoly for Guinea but its export trade was limited to rubber. It did not have a harbour bar and was sheltered by the Los archipelago. By 1940, the port had 300 metres of quays and a depth of eight metres. In Ivory Coast, Port Bouet emerged to supersede Grand Bassam by 1932. With an eleven-kilometre rail link with the new capital at Abidjan, Port Bouet became pre-eminent on the Ivory Coast. Grand Bassam subsequently handled the local traffic. Abidjan itself was cut off from the open sea by a sand spit but it had access via the deepwater Ebrie lagoon. Direct access was later effected by cutting a canal across the sand spit. Wharves had been built at Lome by the Germans and at Cotonou, after 1893, by the French. But these could not compare with developments at Dakar or Abidjan and especially in the British colonies — at Lagos, Takoradi, Freetown and Port Harcourt.

While Lagos and Freetown had been well established trade outlets, Port Harcourt and Takoradi were colonial creations. However, all these ports needed capital-intensive improvements as existing capacity could not cope with the volume of produce being conveyed to the coast by the roads and railways. In addition, the depth at the entrance of most of these ports and the existing wharfage accommodation were inadequate for the tonnage and draught of the steamships as bigger vessels were being built to cope with the demands of trade.

Lagos and Freetown thus witnessed extensive harbour improvement works. In the meantime, cargo was transhipped, in the case of Lagos, through Forcados, a costly and hazardous exercise. Freetown was quite exceptional given its “deep spacious anchorage” which made it the dominant port along the Sierra Leone coast. Unfortunately, the port lost the bulk of its natural hinterland to French encirclement which literally beheaded the port. At the end of the imperial rivalries and delimitation: of colonial boundaries in the nineteenth century, Freetown’s hinterland in the Sierra Leone Protectorate was ”some 30 to 50 per cent smaller” than its natural hinterland. Produce from the lost hinterland was now diverted by colonial fiat to Conakry some 450 to 500 miles away. The loss was also shared by the Sierra Leone railways.

In all, port development in colonial West Africa was undertaken in response to rather than in anticipation of the growth of trade. In this regard, the development of the export industry and inland transport induced colonial governments to effect improvements in port capacity in their own interest. The exercise was capital-intensive and its cost was borne by the finances of the respective colonies. The thrust of port development policy was the concentration of trade at a few ports. This resulted in the ascendency of Lagos, Dakar, Takoradi, Freetown, Conakry and Port Harcourt and the concurrent decline of Old Calabar, Forcados, Saint Louis and Badagry. It is significant that the dominant ports were those which had railway links with the hinterland.

The ports of West Africa ultimately justified the expense involved in their improvement or creation. Like ports in other parts of Africa, they came to handle the I great bulk of the external trade. It is only since the Second World War that air transport has offered stiff competition to the ports in passenger traffic and the export of low-bulk high-value items like diamonds.
Conclusion

The development of roads, railways and ports had significant effect on the colonial economies of West Africa. There is no doubt that roads and railways reduced transport costs significantly, facilitated the access of European merchants and officials to new markets in the hinterland and enabled them to exploit the colonies more effectively. Economic activity was stimulated and existing modes of transport were displaced in large measure especially in long distance transactions. However, this was not achieved without effort: river transport offered stiff competition on the Weme river, in Dahomey and the Ogun in the Lagos hinterland. Indeed, up to the outbreak of the First World War, the lagoon traffic supplied a considerable proportion of Lagos exports.

Moreover, head porterage and pack animal transport survived in many parts of West Africa since the new modes of transport were not evenly spread. In the Sahelo-Sudan regions, donkey transport survived the colonial presence to this day. Indeed, colonial officials in Northern Nigeria had cause to hire pack animals in the present century.

The railway probably had the greatest impact of all. It was the critical factor in the re-orientation of Sudanese entrepots like Kano from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coasts of West Africa. Its advent consolidated the position of existing commercial centres, caused the decline of others — unless such had road links with the railways — and led to the emergence of new towns and markets at railway junctions. The railway was also a major employer of labour in the colonial economy, an early centre of militant trade unionism and a ready facility for the spread of European currency. In terms of volume, it was certainly the greatest carrier of merchandise.

Nevertheless, the railway systems of West Africa, like the entire transport system, lacked co-ordination. Having been built in the context of imperial rivalry, they never crossed colonial boundaries and were designed to serve the interests of particular imperial powers. Consequently, many areas were left untapped while a few places had a dense network which exceeded local requirements. In the French colonies in particular, ”political” lines crossed tracts of unproductive territories in furtherance of strategic ends.

In all, colonial transport development was a combination of European capital and African enterprise. While it is possible to compute the former, the latter is incalculable as it took a heavy toll in lives and forced labour. The transport ”revolution” in the final analysis did not register a uniform impact on West Africa and did not completely displace existing modes of transport. On the whole, this study has shown that modern transport played an enabling, though sometimes crucial, role in the process of West African development during this period, not least because of what Hopkins called the ”dramatic reductions” in transport costs.

Notes


and Traditions of an Ancient City, Ibadan, 1994, pp. 72-89.


35. See, Ayodeji Olukoju, ”Spatial Analysis and Inter-Port Competition: Lagos, the Niger and the ’Capture’ of the Kano-Tripoli Trade, c. 1890-1914,” The Great Circle: Journal of the Australian Association for Maritime History, Vol. 18, No. 1 (1996).


37. Suret-Canale, French Colonialism, p. 206.


41. Suret-Canale, French Colonialism, p. 207.


47. Sesay and Mitchell, "Freetown," pp. 77-78, 80.


52. See, Oyemakinde, "Railway Construction," pp. 322-324.

53. See, Olukoju, "Spatial Analysis" for details.

54. The Sierra Leone Railways had a narrow gauge of 2 feet 6 inches partly because of limited funds but particularly "to prevent any linkage with a future French line!" See Crowder, *West Africa*, p. 276.

Transition from the Traditional to Modern Currency System in West Africa

Lawal, A.A.

Introduction

Various studies on precolonial African economies have confirmed the prevalence of several types of currencies in different localities and regions. Indeed, the traditional use of currency as a medium of exchange was well established in various markets and trade centers by producers, consumers, creditors, merchants and brokers. Thus in West Africa, a monetary system was already well established before European contact to facilitate distributive trade in various dimensions. Earlier disputations among historians, economic historians and economic anthropologists have provoked further research that eventually led to the emergence of Pan Africanist historians whose disquisitions have shed more light on the debatable issue of West African currencies.

In the process both the substantivist and formalist schools become better educated about the complex nature of African economies. Scholars in the formalist tradition of historical interpretation have succeeded in analysing and explaining the configuration of the precolonial currency and monetary system in Africa and they concluded that the structure, character and functions of the system led to the evolution of not only a market economy but also a capital market and a credit system. Presently, their dispassionate analyses of available disparate evidence in various parts of Africa have a positive impact on historical scholarship that jettisons eurocentrism.

By their analytical disquisitions, we have been educated that through the forces of demand and supply which determined the prices of specific commodities in particular markets, a market economy has evolved. African merchants had a way of communicating with each other about price changes and thereby determined what quantities of capital to be invested in a trade or what amount of credit was crucial in perils of boom and depression.

General Characteristics of West African Currencies

Since trade was widespread and involved multi-lateral relations, money was used to effect exchange, hence the variety of such principal currencies as gold, cowries, strips of cloth, copper and iron rods. As they were adopted and circulated within specific geographical zones, the currencies performed the functions of modern money by facilitating exchange at will. Different localities gave various names to those currencies that were commonly used. Each society
accepted goods that were freely exchangeable with anyone, based on the system or method of convertibility from one good to the others. African traders were always in possession of particular currencies that were used for exchange purposes. There were special purpose or general purpose currencies because of the dynamism of African economy and market systems. Thus currency systems were not static. They rather adjusted to changing trading conditions in different societies. A currency system could easily be introduced and blended to the cultural practices or tradition of another society over a period of time.” Thus there were currencies that were designated for facilitating liquidity and effecting exchange of all goods and services through free market forces. African traders also employed specific currencies for controlling liquidity; in other words, only a limited range of goods could be purchased with them. Such class of currencies was exemplified by copper rods which were acceptable for all goods and services on account of their existence in small denominations that facilitated exchange. More of these characteristics will be delineated in the text.

Use and Circulation of Traditional Currencies

For trade purposes, a variety of currencies was used and the principal early ones included gold, cowries, strips of cloth, copper and iron rods. In the Western Sudan and Asante environs there was a wide circulation and use of gold from the 1st century onwards. Two main forms of gold currency, gold dust and mithquals, dominated the trade of the eastern half of the Western Sudan in the early 19th century.

A combination of cowries and gold formed a unique currency system which was instrumental to trade in a larger part of West Africa. The system facilitated the fixing of exchange rate by traders and merchants from different trade diasporas. At other times however the exchange rate was allowed to float. According to the experience of African traders, the unique currency system was the most appropriate for long distance commerce. Like other currencies, the cowries had the attributes of and performed all the functions of modern money.

By the 18th and 19th centuries, European adventurers testified to the widespread use of the cowries especially from the Niger bend, eastward to Nigeria. Cowries were imported at the coast and shipped eastward to the Niger valley. But gold dust was used sometimes by weight in long distance trade along the trade routes. In the 17930s on the Cold Coast, “trade ounce” was a prominent currency. By the first half of the 17th century an ounce of gold was worth four pounds in Britain but the British merchants on the Coast used a fictitious unit known as the trade ounce whose actual value was equal to the prime cost of goods worth about two pounds in England. However, the cowries established an unrivalled popularity throughout African. They were brought through the middle East and North Africa to West Africa, and were commonly used in the principal markets of the middle Niger since the 11th Century. By the 15th century they had spread to other parts of West Africa and reached Hausaland in the 18th century. In the second half of the 19th century they became a popular legal tender in Bomu.

Cloth money and metal currencies also circulated in many parts of West Africa. Cotton strips thrived as money in Bornu in the 14th century and in parts of Senegambia among the Wolof in the 19th century. Systematic equivalents were provided for cloth currencies from the 17th century up to the colonial times. Among the Moors, the monetary system was based on cattle.
with a head of cattle as the currency account. An elaborate vocabulary was developed for dealing with variations form this basic value even within the neighbouring polities including Mauritania. In the Senegal valley, the cloth money was called a piece de Guinee or simply guinee. As a monetary unit, it was a substitution of one cloth for another that was given different names in different localities especially in Funta Toro, Timbuktu, among the Fulbe, Futa Jalon and Niger Valley indigenes. All of them used cloth currency which later spread to the Cape Verde Island in the 15th century where it superseded other forms of exchange and became the standard currency, and was given a distinctive local name. For example, in the Gambia, the cloth currency was known as country cloth, whereas in Pulaar, it was Soro; in Soninke it was tama while the people of Cape Verde Islands called it barafula.

Upper Guinea, Conakry and Ivory Coast were popular for the use of iron money of various kinds while copper rods and wires dominated trade transactions in the eastern parts of the Niger Delta. By the 18th century these currencies had spread to Bomu. The foregoing vividly illustrated the existence of currency zones in West Africa.

Maria Theresa dollar was also widely used in the polities of the Hausaland and Bomu, the currency having been introduced from Tripoli or the Nile Basin. The same currency and brass rods later became a predominant means of exchange in South Eastern Nigeria. Bars of salt at certain times were employed as legal tender on account of their general importance in the commerce of the Upper Guinea to the South. These became very prominent in several areas after the European contact with West Africa.

Thus far, historical scholarship in the formalist tradition has established the fact that all these currencies in their respective zones performed the functions of modern money before and after European contact with Africans. The existence of vibrant capital markets, credit institutions and money economy has also been confirmed beyond any reasonable doubt.

The prevalence of credit institutions at the various entrepots at the termini of the trans-Saharan routes like Timbuktu, Gao, Jenne, Kano and Sijilmasa and several relay markets served as the solid basis of capital market. These institutions were organised either by kinsmen or groups of friends and trade associates for raising money for social and economic purposes. Among the Yoruba, the esusu was the most popular and predominant means of raising money for various purposes. At the principal trade centres, a commercial capital market performed the unique function of promoting local and inter-regional trade. Such credit institutions fostered closer relationships between debtors and creditors from various trade diasporas. Thus among the Hausa and Dioula extra-territorial trade relationship was cemented by such credit institutions that provided credit facilities to professional traders. At the trade centres like Kintampo, Atebubu, Salaga, Sokoto and Kano, were specialised bankers and money lenders who were patronized by merchants for capital. Exchange brokers were also in the brisk business of speculating in currency values especially during harvest seasons and booming trade sessions. Money lenders like their counterparts in Lagos and other coastal cities, varied interest rates according to the changing business environment and obtained ample or commensurate security from their debtors before endorsing any credit agreements in the presence of eye witnesses. According to the conventional practice, failure to redeem the credit at the appointed time could compel the creditor to dispatch a debt distrainer to the debtor’s house to enforce payment. If that measure
failed, the eyewitnesses would then prevail on the debtor either to pawn himself or any of his children to the creditor until the debt was liquidated.21

Curtin’s impressive studies also confirm that market forces were at work in West African markets and that the process of bargaining between buyers and sellers was a common phenomenon. Market forces were also instrumental to the allocation of scarce resources, goods and services as exemplified by the Tuareg, Dioula, Malinke, Mandingo and Hausa in the Caravan trade.22

**European Contact and Trade with West Africa**

The various pre-existing currencies facilitated the distributive trade between African and European traders. The later had to learn more about the spending behaviour of African buyers, and the complexities of African monetary and trade system. However before their change of attitude, Europeans had under-estimated the functional values of African traditions of economic culture which had been developed within the framework of multiple exchange rates.

As trade relationships developed further, African and European traders evolved various units of account in an attempt to avert the harrowing difficulty of evaluating slaves in terms of assorted trade goods and currencies. Thus throughout West Africa, the mythical ’bar’, the ’sorting’ and the ’ounce’ were adopted as units of account.25

It was in the sale and purchase of assorted goods that the seller and buyer tested their bargaining power to have an advantage over the other. In the Senegambia area, iron bars and bar prices were popularly used for assortment bargaining. In the process, Europeans’ foreknowledge of the prime cost of the goods gave them the confidence to increase the quantities of assorted goods. Similarly, African merchants understood what kind of market conditions would prevail whenever they resold the imports either in a local or distant market. Thus they tried to increase the quantities of those goods that would yield highest return.24 The bar price system left little or no room for any tendency to swindle any party to the assortment bargaining since both Africans and Europeans knew quite well which commodity was either overvalued or undervalued. From the 17th century onwards, other African merchants adopted the ’sorting’ between the Gold Coast and the Cameroons in negotiating the purchase of assorted goods. Once they were accustomed to the African accounting system, Europeans could easily determine the profitability of their commercial investments and transactions with African traders especially in the periods of boom.25 Contact with Europeans also stimulated the importation of silver coins in large quantities up to mid-eighteenth century. But in the Senegambia as elsewhere, the coins were melted down for jewelry, as Africans preferred the traditional iron currencies like the Sompe or Kissi money of northern Ivory Coasts, Liberia and the north eastern Guinea — Conakry axis.26

As more European traders swarmed into the coastal trade centres such as Lagos, Whydah, Bonny, Freetown and Dakar, in the second half of the 19th century, large qualities of assorted currencies were imported and distributed. Prominent among these currencies were the cowries, Maria Theresa dollar, manillas, iron rods, brass rods, strips of cloth, silver and copper coins. Spanish peseta, French, Spanish and American gold coins were unlimited legal tender in the Western provinces of the Niger27 while an extensive use of Francs facilitated the groundnut
trade in the Senegambia area. In the palm produce business in Sierra Leone and south eastern Nigeria, the florins and shillings were the most prominent foreign media of exchange.28.

The unprecedented oversupply of these currencies to West Africa were attributed to the sensational boom in steamship building and the concomitant advances in communication by 1875. Indeed, from 1860s to 1913, cheaper transportation and lower cost of freight gradually reduced the prices of goods. Technological advances resulted in faster transport that made steamships more reliable and more punctual. International trade thereby ceased to be the exclusive reserve of privateers and merchant adventurers29. Thus faster and cheaper transportation and lower cost of freight eased the importation of the currencies. It was now easier to bring shiploads of cowrie shells form the East African coast to West Africa. It was the reckless oversupply of currencies that caused the depreciation of West African currencies and eroded confidence in their exchange rate with other currencies.30

**From Imperialism to Colonialism 1890s -1910**

Two major actors in the imperial mission to West African were France and Britain. Their agents were in various parts of the subregion to translate into reality their respective imperial designs military conquest, occupation by force, demonetization, introduction of a new administrative system, colonial state, monetization, integration of the colonies to the capitalist world and the metropolis and exploitation. Our concern is with consequences of all these efforts on the precolonial currencies.

Once the military subjection and occupation of African societies were assured, the imperial overlords planned for demonetization on account of their negative impressions about the local currencies.31 Whereas European traders, companies and agents were already accustomed to the West African monetary system, the European imperial lords overemphasized the weaknesses, limitations and other demerits of the local currencies. Even though certain groups of seasoned European traders had a contrary view they were in no position to influence imperial policies as such hence the obstacles that encumbered the demonetization programmes in the French and British colonies.

The basis for demonetization must therefore be established to justify the policy and to win support form a number of cynics who were archetypal enemies of colonialism. The imperial notion was that all the precolonial currencies encouraged trade by barter. There were some inconveniences in handling a few of them on account of their physical character e.g. cloth money: they were not convertible into international currencies. The supply of currencies to West Africa by the big European firms encouraged monopoly which in turn crippled the expansion of commerce. Lack of control mechanism gave the firms untrammeled freedom to supply or withhold supply of the currencies according their respective whims. When over production occurred, currencies were not only unstable but were depreciated. Lack of confidence in the pre-existing currencies therefore justified the introduction of the British and French currencies in their respective spheres of influence.

The merits of the colonial currencies were vehemently extolled thus: they were convenient to handle, freely convertible, afforded a flexible system of standard multiples, and were not under
the control of particular firms but imperial institutions, hence the fear of easy depreciation by particular firms was non-existent.34

**Demonetization of West African Economies**

Both demonetization and monetization activities were backed up by decrees in the French colonies, and by proclamations and legislative council ordinances in the British colonies. The French Decree of 14 April, 1905 both prohibited the use of all old currencies and ordered that a series of taxes should be paid in the new French coins. Thus the manillas, and gold dust which were widely used were gradually withdrawn by the French authorities from 1902 to 1009. Also withdrawn was the old three franc thaler which the people of Chad preferred to the French new coins initially.35

As early as 1891, the British had outlawed the use manillas and brass rods in Southern Nigeria while by 1881 the Maria Theresa dollar and the French five franc piece had been withdrawn from Lagos and replaced with the British currency. But the indigenous population preferred the manillas and the cowrie shells to the newly introduced silver, nickel and bronze coins which were of the value of 1 d, l/2d, l/4d and 1 s denominations. The development persisted despite the imposition of Cowries Prohibition Proclamation No. 6 of 1904 in Nigeria. People continued to use the cowries in Lagos, Gold Coast and Sierra Leone in defiance of the law and a fine of fifty pounds or three months’ imprisonment.36

Throughout British West Africa, the traditional currencies defied the prohibition by the proclamations of 1911, 1919 and the Nigerian Legislative Council Ordinance, 1935. Up till 1946 people still used the popular manillas as legal tender in Southern Nigeria. It was a daunting task for the British to withdraw 32 million manillas from circulation in 1949 and ship them to Europe. Yet more were still in circulation in the village till 1952. In several parts of West Africa, brass rods and copper wires finally ceased to be legal tender in 1956. Similarly, despite the prohibition of importation of cowries, large quantities that were hoarded were put to use in the village for market transactions and small-scale purchases till 1946.37

Recent studies have emphasized Africans’ admiration for the manilla on account of its unique quality and value. When damaged, it was useful for making bullets. This advantage inspired the British to import it in large quantities in the early twentieth century to Britain to break it down and use it for war munition. Africans also melted manilla into knives and other household wares.38 Herbalists in the various communities used the cowrie shells in traditional religion. And in the same way, African smiths smelted the new British coins into ear-rings, necklaces and bangles for the use of African women.

**Methods of Monetization of the Colonies**

Monetization was a very daunting task indeed. The exercise involved careful planning and arrangements. The preliminary arrangements by the French and British colonial powers included the creation and use of banking institutions for the supply and distribution of a uniform currency. The banque de Senegal, which was founded in 1851 changed into Banque de l’Afrique Occidentale in 1901) and was mandated to satisfy the financial needs of the West African French
colonies. Similarly, the British Bank for West Africa, which was established in 1891 was authorised to serve as a central bank and as a commercial bank to the British colonies in the subregion.

While the Banque de l’Afrique Occidentale exercised the sole right as the bank of issue for the whole French colonies till the 1950’s the contract with the British Bank for West Africa was terminated in 1912 when the West African Currency Board was established to perform the functions of monetary supply and control. Henceforth the two major banks had more branches all over the major commercial towns. Later other banks that were established hastened the demonetization and monetization processes.

Some methods were inevitably employed in the distribution and popular use of the two new colonial currency systems, the British sterling in pound, shillings, pence and farthing denominations and the French francs. Wage labour was introduced on the railways, in the ports, harbours and mines, and wages were paid in the new currencies. Also with the new coins, African consumers bought European consumer items which were massively imported. By and large possession of attractive imported items like textiles and bicycles as status symbols, inspired African to seek employment in the colonial service and European stores to earn the new currency.

The introduction of colonial taxation and the compulsory payment of tax by cash in the new currencies, was also a serious challenge to Africans. To secure the required cash, Africans turned for wage labour and embarked on the production of such crops as cocoa, groundnut, palm produce, rubber, coffee and cotton. These were sold to European firms through their agents for cash out of which African producers paid taxes. Payment of tax was consistently enforced and tax defaulters were heavily punished. In the French colonies, soldiers and policemen witch-hunted such tax evaders with such brutality and provocative highhandedness that Africans emigrated in protest from the French to the neighbouring British colonies.

European firms also collaborated with the two colonial regimes in distributing the new currencies and popularizing their uses. In 1905, the Niger company discontinued the policy of barter trade while African middlemen upheld the new monetary system in their commercial interactions with the importers and merchant men. Significantly however, the unique role of the Levantine settlers in this regard is well appreciated in the history textbooks and colonial records. Thus the Lebanese, Syrians and even the Indians who were favoured by colonial immigration laws and European banking system, were able to obtain credit facilities and establish retail shops in several towns, trade centres and administrative headquarters. Thus by their trade networks they were instrumental to the rapid spread of the new currencies into the interior parts of West Africa.

Of course the construction of roads, bridges, railways and the improvement of the waterways facilitated the extension of colonial control-and opening up of the interior to European values and tastes. Through these channels commercial expansion and the spread of the new currencies were unhindered.
Effects of Monetization on Africans

Initially the illiterate Africans did not understand the new currency system. As a result, their apathy to the new coins hampered the development and growth of the domestic exchange in the European perspective. As for Africans, especially those in the rural communities it was normal business as usual. The illiterate society therefore needed more time to be education about the operating mechanism of the new currency system. A few Africans who transacted business in the banks could not initially trust bank workers for the security of their deposits and the guarantee of withdrawals. They did not know the equivalents between the old and new currencies.

Apart form their lack of confidence in the banks, that were strictly prejudicial in the application of their regulations, African traders had to travel long distances from villages to the commercial centres where banks were located to collect new notes and coins. But the cost of frequent travels to procure the new money could only be borne and endured by only an insignificant proportion of the populace. Rather than resign themselves to the fate imposed by the horridous currency system, majority of the peasants resorted to hoarding of both the new and old currencies. The smiths applied their artistic skill in counterfeiting the new coins for circulation for years without defection. The hoarded money was hidden inside pits, pots and holes in the banana trees at the risk of fire disasters, termites, insects and soil erosion. The same practice continued after the introduction of paper money during the First World War in the denominations of one pound, ten shillings, two shillings and one shilling. These were received with disdain and kept in cigarette cups and buried in the ground.

Demonetization sent shock waves into the spines of the affluent members of the society with large stocks of traditional currencies who became impoverished overnight as their possession became useless because of lack of any means of equitable exchange for the new currency. The resultant decline in their purchasing power thereby had some adverse effects on their social status and standard of living. To a very large extent their degradation was inevitable on account of their inability to perform their usual social obligations to many dependents in the extended family system. Yet as said earlier, traditional currencies were hoarded for use in the domestic markets while the hoarded new currency was used for paving taxes and for periodic purchases in the European stores.

Conclusion

It is crystal clear that through the instrumentality of the colonial state apparatus, colonialism monetised African economies. The colonial state with its unlimited powers enforced demonetization and monetization to create a modern economy, a modern credit system, and a uniform currency system to be used and manipulated to the detriment of the colony and its citizens but only to the benefit of metropole and the emerging European dominant class within the colony.

An economically dominant class has a nature of controlling the organs of government and employing them selfishly to the detriment of the oppressed class who are usually in the majority. Logically the colonial government was the agency of the dominant class whose economic interests were well protected by legislation and military personnel. As class
domination is facilitated by class ideology so demonetization was propelled both by racial ideology and racial prejudice against the traditional currencies and monetary system. With the new colonial monetary system, colonial economies were tied to the economy and monetary system of the metropolis, whereby a centre periphery relationship was forged. According to the logic of this new development, the colony was enmeshed in a relationship of unequal exchange, exploitation and under-development. Even though there was free convertibility of the metropolitan and colonial currencies, the metropolitan powers, through their established institutions directly determined the monetary practices of the colony, its ratio of reserves to money in circulation and supply of currency. With these inflexible policies, the colony not only depended on but also served the interests of the metropole.

Notes


3. The Substantivist Interpretation of African economic behaviour by K. Bohannan and Dalton, has been challenged by Firth and Jones. A review of the controversy has been articulated by A.G. Hopkins in An Economic History of West Africa, Longman, Harlow, 5th impression 1982, pp 5-7, 9-11,52.


5. like modern money, they were media of exchange, measure of value, store of wealth and standard for deferred payment. See also L. Sundtstrom. The Exchange Economy of Precolonal African. New York, St. Martins Press, 1974, p.41.


8. Ibid. p. 71; philip D. Curtin, p. 234


11. Philip, D. Curtin, pp. 238, 254


15. A.G. Hopkins, p. 68; Curtin, p. 238.


17. Jean Suret-Canale, p. 59.


19. A trade diaspora was a trade settlement made up of commercial specialists from their home community, that existed in another town as aliens. Members promoted trade between the host society and their kins. A number of such cross-cultural commercial communities then formed a trade network. See Philip. D. Curtin, 59-75; Tiyambe Zeleza, pp. 279-281.


23. A.G. Hopkins, p. 11

25. A.G. Hopkins, p. Ill
26. Philip, D. Curtin, Economic Change, p. 234
27. Tiyambe Zeleza, p. 284
28. A.G. Hopkins, pp. 149, 150
32. These were Messrs. Alexander Miller, Brother and Co, and the Nigeria Company who spearheaded the opposition of the European Commercial Community. See W.I. Ofonagoro, Trade and Imperialism, pp. 264, 265.
34. Claude Ake, p. 33.
35. Suret-Canale, pp 10, 100
37. Ibid., pp. 283. 284,290.


43. *Ibid.* p. 233


46. Richard Fry. p. 116


49. Tiyambe Zeleza, p. 284.

The Development of Agricultural Exports and Official Intervention in Produce Marketing

Kehinde Faluyi

The importance of agriculture for the economic development of the West African sub-region cannot be over-emphasised. The economic resources of the region depend on it and it provides a gainful occupation for about 70 per cent of this population. Agriculture supplies raw materials for Nigeria’s growing industries, while it is the main source of food for the teeming population. More importantly, the agricultural sector provides the cash crops which constitute the most important source of revenue for most of the states of West Africa. The purpose of this essay is two fold. First, it is intended to discuss the development of export trade in agricultural raw materials and, second, to examine the genesis of government intervention in the sale of export produce and its impact on the West African sub-region.

Trade in agricultural commodities was the basis for early commercial relations between West Africa and Europe. The Portuguese and the Dutch exchanged manufactured goods for West Africa’s agricultural raw materials and gold.1 Rice and slaves were traded from part of Senegambia to North Africa while considerable volumes of trade in cotton, cloth, leopard skins, ivory and palm oil took place between Benin and the Gold Coast.2 Similarly, extensive trade in cloth and indigo was conducted between the Gold Coast and the Futa-Djalon.3 Generally, trade in agricultural commodities dominated the early trade between the Europeans and West Africa.

However, trade in farm products changed with the rise of the sugar and tobacco plantation economy in the New World. The seizure of North-east Brazil led to the rapid expansion of plantation culture in South American colonies. Initially the Indians and Europeans served as indentured labour, but they were found unsuitable due to the heavy mortality rate particularly among the Indians; as severe exploitation worked them to death. Many Indians also fled away from centres of European concentrations as a result of the strains and stresses of the harsh conditions on the plantations. As the Amerindians were unacceptable, the Europeans turned to West Africa for labour recruits since the New World and West Africa fell within the same geographical zone and because West Africa was close to the plantations.

Inevitably, the development of the American plantations and the demand for labour led to the decline in the export of agricultural raw materials from West Africa and the concomitant rise in the export of labour. In an attempt to foster the slave trade and secure labour, campaigns were directed at discouraging agricultural production. Thus, as slavery involved raiding villages and farmlands, the industry was disrupted as production was limited to that which could be bought for feeding slaves before their transportation across the atlantic. The export of slaves lasted for
almost four hundred years and this led to the migration of over twenty five million able-bodied Africans into the New World. Every part of Africa was affected, but the most important slave depots were the Gold Coast, Dahomey, Alladah, Whydah, Badagry, Lagos, Bonny and Calabar.4

The end of the Atlantic Slave Trade did not bring an end to slavery. Rather, domestic slavery increased as legitimate trade in agricultural exports required several hands for higher productivity, just as the American plantations required heavy Labour recruitments. Apart from the labour required for the production of legitimate commerce, a thriving clandestine trade in slaves continued on the West African coast until the 1870s. The development agrees with Northrup’s view that the slave trade and palm oil trade were compatible, not only in the Bight of Biafra,6 but everywhere along the coast. As palm oil and kernel production increased so also did the illegal export of slaves from West Africa, until the trade was finally abolished at the end of the 19th century.

Initially, palm produce constituted the major exports from West Africa as there was demand for the product in Europe for soap and as lubricants. The trade in palm oil and Kernel remained dominant throughout the 19th century despite the depression of the last decades of the century which rendered the collection of palm kernel and extraction of oil unprofitable.

Rubber provided an alternative source of revenue for both the government and producers in the last quarter of the century. The rise in price of rubber in the world market resulted in stampede in rubber tapping all over West Africa as it also offered the only alternative economic activity besides extraction of palm oil and kernel. In Nigeria, Guinea, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Gambia, rubber trade became very attractive as farmers rushed for latex. The invention of vulcanisation in the 1840s and of pheumatic tyres by John William Boyd in Scotland led to a phenomenal rise in the demand for rubber in Europe.7

The rise in population and the improvement in the standard of living enhanced the demand for footwear and clothing,8 and thus enhanced the rubber trade. The good price paid for rubber provided the incentive for West African farmers to prospect for rubber, the production of which rose substantially. The figures below (page 169) clearly demonstrate the rapid expansion of rubber production in parts of West Africa.9

Just as the people rushed for latex and production reached an unprecedented proportion towards the close of the century, the rubber trade also experienced a precipitous fall. Whereas Western Nigeria produced about 6 million lbs. of rubber in 1896, this had fallen to less than a quarter of a million lbs. by 1901.10 In Gambia the export of 154,737lbs. valued £10.144 in 1890 fell to £1,544 in 1903 and by 1915 rubber yielded only £31, which indicated a sharp fall in production.11 Export of rubber from other parts of the West African sub-region experienced a similar trend; and elasticaplants almost disappeared.

The sharp fall was due primarily to careless tapping of latex by farmers which led to destruction of the trees. However, the ruthless tapping of latex could not fully explain the fall in all parts of the region. The introduction of cocoa in the Gold Coast and Nigeria probably diverted the interest of farmers away from rubber as cocoa offered better prospect in the world market, and cocoa holding was more permanent to the owner than rubber. The fluctuation was also due
chiefly to competition from plantation rubber from South-East Asia and Indonesia.12

At the beginning of the 20th century, the colonial administration started to encourage the development of cotton in Nigeria and Dahomey. It was intended to reduce the British dependence on American cotton. Kano area of Nigeria was viewed or surveyed and mapped out for cotton production as the area was reputed for the production of cotton in the central Sudan in the 19th century. The prospect that a large volume of cotton could be produced in Nigeria encouraged the British Cotton Association to commit substantial resources towards the promotion of cotton in West Africa. To encourage the spread, botanical gardens were established in Nigeria and Ghana where experiments were conducted for the suitability of the indigenous cotton for commercial production.

In addition, seeds of American cotton and gineries were distributed to farmers to popularise its production. In spite of the heavy investment on cotton cultivation by the British Cotton Growing Association and the Empire Cotton Corporation, the result was discouraging.13 Similar efforts were also made in the French territories to promote the growth of the cotton industry by granting monopoly rights to some individuals who engaged in the manufacture and import of textiles. As in the British territories the French authorities established research centres for the promotion of cotton, but the venture was a failure.15 The failure of the colonial administration to turn West Africa into a cotton empire diverted efforts to the production of other industrial raw materials for exports.

One of such was maize, which received the government attention following the failure of the cotton experiments. The initiative was started by the John Holt Company which advertised to farmers the demand for maize in Europe. In an effort to encourage maize cultivation on a large scale, the firm went ahead by distributing shelling machines to farmers in Nigeria.16 In other areas such as Togo, Ghana, Dahomey and Ivory Coast, seeds were distributed to farmers, and they were promised good prospects for the commodity to encourage large scale production.17

As in rubber, production increased rapidly in the first two decades of the century, but by the 1930s export had virtually ceased completely, due partly to a glut in world production and poor prices offered for the commodity.18 Since maize had an alternative demand when export prices are poor, maize was used locally in preference to exports.19 The French encouraged revival of the maize export in her territories after the depression by giving preferential tariffs to the commodity, but the British were not very convinced about the rationale for resuscitating its development, and even went ahead and prohibited the export of maize from her colonies shortly before the Second World War.

The most important export crops in West Africa throughout the colonial period were cocoa which became prominent mostly in Ghana, Nigeria, and Cote d’Ivoire and to some extent in the Cameroons. Others were palm produce, pea-nuts or groundnuts in Nigeria, Senegal, and Gambia; banana in the Cameroons and Guinea; kolanuts in the Gold Coast, Sierra-Leone and Nigeria; shea butter, beniseed, and soya beans from the savannah zone of the sub-region. Except in Ghana, it took considerable time before cocoa became popular and accepted widely in other areas particularly Nigeria, while farmers were forced into the adoption of cocoa cultivation in Ivory Coast. However, once the initial problems were over, cocoa production expanded
phenomenally, becoming the most important revenue earner for the three territories for most of the period under review.

The variation in response to cocoa cultivation in the British West African territories is shown in the table below.20

Nigeria was slow to adopt cocoa cultivation unlike Ghana where export had become important by 1912. It is probable that Nigeria waited for Ghana to prove that Cocoa culture would be a profitable venture. Unconvincing as the reason may be, Nigerians might be unwilling to risk capital on a crop whose prospect had not been tested anywhere in the territory. The slow take off might also be connected with the political upheaval which ravaged Yorubaland for most of the 19th century. People had to settle after the long period of waif are. Since provision of food was necessary to resettle and feed the large population, the cultivation of any crop that would require a long period of gestation would not have made a good appeal. In the Ivory Coast, cocoa cultivation was made compulsory, particularly after 1913 when the rubber crisis made its production an urgent alternative. In spite of the harsh methods adopted cocoa did not become widespread until the indigenous peasants were convinced of the prospect of the industry, hence increased production between 1922 and 1939 from 2,500 to 48,000 tons.21

The rapid expansion of cocoa was due primarily to the good soil which supported its cultivation, government assistance in some areas and the indigenous farmers who popularised cocoa and made it a successful export crop for West Africa. In Ghana, for instance, the government established a botanical garden at Aburi and distributed cocoa seedlings to farmers. Governor Bradford Griffith personally supervised the farmers and ensured that they planted the seedlings.22 The campaigns bore fruitful results as peasant farmers abandoned extraction of palm oil and kernels and switched to cocoa cultivation. In the Ivory Coast, farmers were forced to plant cocoa seedlings and failure to measure up to imperial expectation were either fined, imprisoned or flogged publicly.23 In Nigeria, cocoa seedlings were planted at the botanical gardens from where farmers were expected to purchase their young cocoa.

The missionaries also played some prominent role in the promotion of cocoa cultivation. The early growers at Agege in Nigeria were members of the African Church. Rev. Charles Phillip of Ondo spared no effort in convincing his converts both in Ondo and in Lagos of the benefits they could derive from growing cocoa and coffee for export,24 as he believed that their prosperity lay in farming.25 From the foregoing, therefore, the administration provided the impulse for the initial take-off of cocoa cultivation, but the spread and subsequent expansion rested solely with the peasant farmer who not only popularised production, but made seeds available to their members.

While cocoa became important in Nigeria, Ghana and Ivory Coast, groundnut became the mainstay of Gambia. Export of groundnuts in the territory began in 1830 when a basket of the commodity valued at about £10.16s.8d. was offered for sale.26 The development of the industry in Gambia contrasts with development in other territories in West Africa, because it pre-dated the arrival of the British as the commodity had been grown since 1816 by the local population whereas the development and expansion of groundnuts in Northern Nigeria particularly in Kano is associated with the extension of the railway to the city at the beginning of the present century.
Although some instructions are believed to have been given to freed or liberated Africans in Gambia on how to grow groundnuts, the commodities were developed principally by the indigenous farmers from the interior on land hired from the chiefs as a means to secure purchasing power to acquire European goods. Thus, the demand for European manufactures stimulated the expansion of the industry in Gambia.

Senegal is the major producer of groundnuts in French West Africa and was the largest (exporter of the commodity) in all francophone territories before the First World War and still retains that position today. Nigeria and Senegal produced over 75 per cent of the world supply up to the 1950s and early 1960s. The rapid increase in domestic (consumption of groundnuts oil all over West Africa must have cut exports of the commodity very drastically. Banana is produced mainly in Guinea which accounted for 170 per cent of the commodity in French West Africa. Other producers include ICameroons and Ivory Coast. The export of Banana was only 114 tons in 1920 but rose to 1,187 tons in 1925, 8,769 by 1930 and 52,800 tons by 1938.

The development of export crops all over the West African sub-region was due partly to government encouragement in respect of cocoa in Ghana and Ivory Coast, where many experimental farms were established to distribute seedlings to farmers. The provision of mechanical transport such as the railway boosted the expansion of many crops. For instance, a substantial part of Ghana remained unexploited for cocoa production until the railway connected the interior with Accra. Similarly, the completion of the Dakar-Niger railway extended the areas of groundnuts over wide areas. Kano assumed prominence for the production of groundnuts with the extension of the Lagos railway to the city.

In fact, groundnut production was a legacy of the railways, and a sine qua non for its trade. Whereas export of groundnuts never exceeded 2,500 tons before 1912 the export jumped to 19,300 tons in 1913, 50,000 in 1918 despite the wartime problem of evacuation, and 127,200 tons by 1925. The phenomenal rise in the production of groundnuts in Kano as the railway linked the city with the port is a clear demonstration of the role of mechanical transport in the promotion of the industry.

Although the role of the railway in the expansion of exports in many countries of West Africa cannot be overemphasised, it is less important in the production of cocoa and palm produce in Nigeria, as farmers preferred conveying the commodities by motor transport because it offered quicker, cheaper and more convenient services for the haulage of small consignments. The inter-personal relations and services offered by motor transport gave it an advantage over the railway. While government assistance in the promotion of export encouraged farmers to produce for exports, the provision of the railway made travelling safer, easier and increased the number of people moving from one area to the other. Above all, the railway widened the market and brought the commerce of widely dispersed areas and people nearer to the ports. However, indigenous enterprise and response to new economic activities and incentives made the expansion feasible.

The trade in cash crops expanded tremendously from the beginning of the century, though the sector faced many problems. The problems included fluctuations in produce prices, competition in the export trade which encouraged adulteration of produce by both producers, middlemen, and
expatriate firms, with a consequent fall in the income of farmers. Perhaps the greatest problem was fluctuation and uncertainty in produce prices which often put producers at the mercy of the expatriate firms. The attempt to check some of these abuses led to government intervention in the marketing of agricultural exports as part of the effort to stabilise the income of producers.

**Genesis of Government Intervention in Marketing**

Initially, the marketing of export crops was handled by foreign firms which had their offices in Europe. The firms employed agents who were either on commission or their pay-roll. The agents also appointed sub-agents in villages and hamlets who bought in small quantities which they delivered to the accredited produce buyers at selected centres. These firms were also responsible for the distribution of imports. The import and export trade went hand in hand as some imported commodities provided incentives to producers in the remote areas to increase their production.

As many firms were involved in produce buying and distributive trade, competition was keen. Since it was so intense, various methods were employed by them to attract regular and large supply of exports. Many firms were also forced into mergers in the face of competition in order to capture a larger share of trade. In the process the middlemen assumed great importance as they constituted the main links between the merchant firms and producers. They purchased agricultural raw materials deep in the bush and sold to the firms while they carried imported goods to the villages for sale. The trade in export crops was greatly facilitated as a result of their activities as they also stimulated demand for imported goods in the rural areas and encouraged productive activities.

The middlemen often advanced credits to their customers far ahead of harvesting as a guarantee for regular supply of produce during harvest. Although credit facilities encouraged higher productivity, it accounted for harvesting of immature products and large scale adulteration, which resulted in bad trade.

The export trade also experienced fluctuations from the last decade of the 19th century which affected farmers very adversely and forced them to abandon collection of palm kernels and tapping of rubber which formed the major export commodities during the period. A gradual recovery was halted by the outbreak of the First World War which further compounded the problems of producers. War time measures and the destruction of ships by enemy operations resulted in difficulties in the shipment of export.

As the ships plying the sea were few and infrequent, there was the complaint that some firms received more allocation than others. Even some firms enjoyed preferential treatment on the railway for the evacuation of their produce while others were denied space. As goods waited at the centres and ports for weeks without evacuation, they either deteriorated in quality or were destroyed thereby causing heavy loses to the firms. Due to lack of storage facilities, many firms stopped buying produce from the farmers. Some export crops were more adversely affected than others but the worst hit were sheanuts, maize and timber whose prices depreciated substantially.

The recovery at the end of the war which gave great optimism was shortlived because of the slump of 1921-1922 which depressed prices and income of farmers considerably. Whereas in
Nigeria a ton of cocoa was £50 in 1919, it slumped to £30 in 1920 and further to SI 8 shortly amidst uncertainty that the crop might be rejected outright.37 Palm oil which was £32 per ton in 1919 also depreciated to £14 in 1921-22. Consequently, many farmers refused to harvest their produce while those who harvested before the slump stored them in anticipation of improved market prices. In the Gold Coast, the Liverpool price of cocoa reached the climax and stood at SI 22 per ton by February of 1920, but by May, had dropped to £85 and tumbled down further to £39 per ton by December and still less than £30 in 1923-4 season.38

As the government was unable to solve the problem posed by the slump, farmers were advised to increase production and sell more to offset declining revenue.39 Although this was economically unsound the farmers had little option because if they cut-back export by leaving their crops unharvested, the produce would have rotted away resulting in greater loses to the producers in the end.

Perhaps the depression of 1929-33 had greater impact on the producers and their crops in general. All branches of the West African economy were severely hit. The annual revenue depreciated by 50 per cent while the government suspended all development programmes. While development of any kind was suspended till the situation improved, workers in private and public service were retrenched. It was a desperate economic situation for West Africa in general. Helleiner gave a gloomy picture of the impact on the Nigerian economy when he said "the world wide collapse in comodity markets brought severe reduction in Nigeria’s export prices and temporary stagnation in export value, the value of Nigeria export plummetted from £17.8 million in 1929 to £8.8 million in 1931, the purchasing power of exports dropped by 38 per cent and the value of imports which was £13.2 million in 1929 dropped to 6.5 million by 1933.40 As economic activities tumbled, and prices of produce fell, the value of money in circulation contracted from £6.7 million in 1929 to £3.8 million by 1933."41

Other West African territories had similar experiences but it was more desperate for monoculture countries such as Gambia or Senegal whose economy depended on groundnuts exports because the crop did not sell in the world market. Whereas, Marseilles in France absorbed a substantial part of Nigeria’s groundnuts before 1929 depression, due to its effect on Senegal, there was a request from groundnut producers and other commercial interests from the territory for the imposition of a restriction on the entry of Nigeria’s crop into the French Market as this competed with groundnuts from the French territories.

Even though West African producers were severely hit by the depression, they were still relatively better off than the Latin American states where producers experienced a calamitous depreciation in prices by up to about 90 per cent in Chile and Cuba.43 The outcome of the global economic recession was the inability of traders to meet their financial obligations to their bankers as tons of exports were stock piled in anticipation of improved prices. But as months rolled by, hopes of revival faded and many firms in export business were forced into liquidation.

Whereas the depression was global the problem posed by adulteration was localised. Adulteration was commonly practised among producers and even traders all over West Africa. It could take various forms, such as harvesting of exports prematurely, or mixing crops with impurities in attempt to increase the weight of export produce. In Nigeria, the middle-men often
employed special labour to mix foreign bodies like pebbles, stones, beans and other impurities with export commodities to boost the volume of their purchases.

As far back as the early 1920s some West African export produce could not sell because of their low quality in comparison with exports from other parts of the world. West African even attained the notoriety as exporters of the worst produce in the world market. Although farmers received instructions on the treatment of their produce, the practice persisted. But in the French territories the government control and supervision was helpful in improving the quality of exports. However, the involvement of indigenous farmers, cocoa production was often adulterated as did by their counterparts in British territories.

Generally, adulteration of exports was widespread all over the sub-region because of the competitive nature of the produce trade. In an attempt to purchase large quantities, the firms and middlemen indulged in advancing credits and advances to farmers ahead of harvesting season; which in turn encouraged the harvesting of immature and adulterated produce in the race to meet obligations to customers. Perhaps it was partly in an attempt to improve the quality of exports and ensure stable prices which brought about government intervention in produce marketing.

The establishment of the produce Inspection Unit was a positive attempt to reduce the rate of adulteration of produce and improve the quality of export but it could not eradicate the malpractices completely.

The establishment of the marketing boards for the export and sale of produce in 1941/42 was not the first attempt to centralise export marketing in West Africa. Efforts aimed at centralising marketing by the establishment of a pool agreement to check or eliminate competition was initiated earlier at the beginning of the century. In the palm oil trade, for instance, each firm was allotted the quantity of produce they could purchase from the collectors. But it was ineffective as some firms refused to enter into such pool agreements. Consequently, rather than reduce competition it indeed escalated it. In Nigeria, the government wanted to reduce competition by channeling exports through a single source so as to eliminate the middlemen and dispense with their services. The arrangement, if implemented, was to compel farmers to carry their produce to designated or gazetted market throughout the country for sale. The scheme was rejected by the merchants as its operations would add to their over-head costs. Since no decision could be reached, the scheme failed like the earlier pool Agreement of 1889. However, if the plan succeeded, the quantity of exports would have diminished as many farmers would have been discouraged from carrying their exports to the markets, because of the remoteness or distance to producing areas.

Perhaps it was the failure of the government to centralise marketing of produce, particularly cocoa, that led to the formation of the co-operative movement in Nigeria and Ghana. It was established in Ghana as a means of improving the quality and quantity of cocoa exports. The body witnessed a rapid expansion with an estimated number of about 390 co-operative societies between 1931 and 1933. The success in Ghana led to the introduction in Nigeria in 1933 with an initial enrolment of about 4,850 members.

But enthusiasm soon-waned as the government indicated its intention to control the activities of
the societies. The farmers appreciated the advantages that could be derived from co-operative societies, through increased production and improvement in quality of exports, but detested controlled societies, and decided to enrol in independent unrecognised movements until after the Cocoa pool of 1937. While the farmers recognized the value of co-operative efforts, they suspected that government control would deprive them of the power of effective bargaining for better prices from the merchants firms. Even then, since only a small part of exports would have been channelled through the co-operative societies, they would not have succeeded in ensuring the much needed price stability in the two territories as much would have been sold outside the arrangements.

But as the depression descended on the economy, the need to secure stable marketing arrangements for West African produce became more imperative. The farmers had no confidence in the co-operative movements as they believed that their control by government was aimed to buttress the power of the merchants and further depress the prices of agricultural exports. The adverse effects of the depression on export proceeds further demonstrated the urgency and necessity to solve the problem of marketing produce in West Africa; to check competition and stabilise incomes of the producers.

Two schemes were proposed by some individuals to stabilise prices to farmers. These were the Keepler plan and Bartholomeu marketing schemes. The plans sought to (centralise marketing of produce, particularly cocoa, throughout West Africa as a means of ensuring fair and stable prices) for producers. Like the earlier efforts the schemes were rejected by the government on the ground that they were too complex and difficult to operate as there was doubt about the prospect of their success and about the integrity of the originators of the scheme.

However, the plan of the European firms in the produce business in West Africa to form a buying cartel and reduce prices particularly on cocoa further accentuated the uncertainties of producers. The firms opined that there was a glut in the world price for cocoa due to excessive supply over demand. To buy cocoa in West Africa at high prices in a situation of falling prices in the world market therefore, was economically unrealistic involving them in heavy financial losses. Thus, the merchants cut the prices of cocoa from 25s per 601bs. to 6s56 and the protest thereof triggered off the cocoa hold-up of 1937 in Ghana and Nigeria.

The producers’ reaction led to hold-up of their cocoa from the market in Nigeria and Ghana to compel the government to save them from the exploitative activities of the merchant firms and prevent the formation of the pool Agreement. In Ghana and Togoland, the hold-up was accompanied by a total boycott of European goods. Although the hold-up was a partial success in Nigeria, a delegation was sent to Ghana as a demonstration of its solidarity with the action. The attempt by the government to know the causes of the hold-up with a view to guard against future occurrences and find a solution led to the setting up of the Nowell commission in 1938, which later proposed that the government should intervene in the marketing of agricultural exports. But the recommendation was not implemented until war-time exigencies compelled the government to control marketing of cocoa in West Africa; and later formalised by the establishment of the marketing boards in the post war years.

The control scheme introduced by the government was a special arrangement to ensure war-time
supplies, deny supplies to the enemy and maintain the socio-economic well being of the West African colonies.57 Towards achieving this goal, the colonial Ministry of Food decided to purchase all British West African cocoa at guaranteed prices. The responsibility was later transferred from the ministry to the West African Cocoa Control Board, a body vested with the operations under the Secretary of states for colonies. The Board purchased all the cocoa in British West Africa through the old established firms. The body also fixed all prices to be paid to producers at all gazetted stations throughout the territories. The measure was in force throughout the duration of the war.

In the same period, a loss was recorded by the board only once, while generally it accumulated huge reserves even when the prices paid to farmers appreciated substantially. Neither did the colonial administration realise that it had discovered a new source of revenue for the government by the control scheme, nor did the body foresee the future role of the board in the socio-economic development of the producing areas and the territories in general. However, the success of the scheme and the relative stability which it brought to the incomes of farmers, gave rise to the establishment of the Statutory Marketing Boards as a permanent organ for the sale of produce in West Africa.

The establishment of the board was an innovation in the marketing of the West African produce, because it involved direct government intervention in the purchase and sale of agricultural raw materials. By direct intervention, the government ceased to be a passive observer in the competition between the European firms and middlemen in the purchase of exports, on the one hand, and the producers, on the other, but the innovation was incomplete, as the government still unutilised the same European firms, who were originally in the produce business as buying agents. Similarly, the government sold to their bigger organisation in Europe and also protected the foreign firms. In a way, therefore, government intervention accorded greater privileges to the firms and boosted their margin of profit.

The role of the marketing board has attracted much debate among scholars.58 Their financial operations came under severe attack. Initially the boards were set up to stabilise prices for farmers by withholding from them the difference between the prevailing market prices and the board prices. In a year when prices for commodities were low, these were to be subsidized from the reserves accumulated over the years, particularly during the season when the world prices for the commodities were high. Fortunately, the board accumulated reserves over the years as prices continued to rise. Consequently, the board had huge reserves which were later diverted into development projects and research, as it was considered impracticable and unrealistic to return the accumulated funds back to individuals.59

As the reserves accumulated, the government, which had guaranteed stable prices in years of low prices, came under severe criticism for cheating the producers. The colonial government was accused of depriving farmers of part of their income by withholding it from them. The accusation seems unjustified because if much money was left in the hands of producers, inflation would have resulted and would have brought a disincentive to farmers. But instead of leaving much money in the hands of the individuals, the accumulated funds were used for infrastructural development of the producing areas and for the provision of education. In effect, the reserves became an instrument for the development of the agricultural areas, particularly in Ghana and
In the French territories, it was assumed that the colonies existed for the benefit of the metropole, and should be self-supporting and this had been guaranteed by the imperial preference which was enforced through the tariff regime. An artificial price system was created which provided outlet for the exports of the colonial territories at a price slightly higher than world rates. However, the scheme entrenched the dependence of the colonial economy entirely on France. In all, over seventy per cent of the French West African exports went to France while about the same of her imports came from the same source.

Conclusion

The colonial period witnessed rapid development and expansion of agricultural exports in West Africa. In the same period, emphasis shifted from the collection of sylvan products to the cultivation of more staple products such as cocoa, coffee, and groundnuts. This phenomenal expansion was achieved with government assistance in varying degrees in both British and French territories, missionary effort in the British West Africa, and through indigenous initiatives which were pivotal to development all over the states. The provision of mechanical transport also enhanced the development of cash crops in some areas, as was the case of groundnuts in Kano, Nigeria and Senegal and cocoa in Ghana.

The industry also experienced some problems in the period under review; as a result of fluctuations and instability in prices of produce. The depression and the First World War coupled with the slump, further accentuated the problems of producers as prices depleted precipitously. Several abortive attempts were made to centralise marketing of produce by merchant firms and individuals. The search for stabilised prices and incomes to farmers led to government intervention in the export of produce in the British territories. While there was the control scheme in the marketing of produce in the British territories, imperial preferences tied the French colonial economy to the fortunes of imperial France.

Generally, although the policies of the two imperial powers differed the goals were the same. While the French enforced rigid compulsion, the British approach was more liberal as they believed that once the framework of law and other and administration of justice had been provided, the British expected natural forces to lead to economic development. Whichever policy the two government adopted, in their respective colonies indigenous or peasant farmers remained the great and tested force for the development of export raw materials from West Africa.

Notes


3. P.D. Curtin, Economic Change in Pre-Colonial Africa: The Senegambia Example, Wisconsin


17. Marvin Miracle, op. cit. p. 176.


25. Sara Berry, op. cit., p. 45.


28. Jean Suret-Canale, op. cit., pp. 46. Sudan refers to Upper Senegal and Niger, but the export from these areas is almost negligible.

29. Suret-Canale, op. cit, p. 225.


33. E.K. Faluyi, "The Development of the Export Trade in Agricultural Raw Materials in Nigeria..."
Nigeria
1900-59.” M.A. Unilag (unpublished) 1978, p. 114. The figure cited in the thesis is based on
Walker op. cit., p. 3. See also E.K. Faluyi, ”The Railway and the Development of the


35. For a detailed study of competition in the export trade see RT. Bauer, West African
Trade, I Routledge 1953.

36. N.A I. CSO. 1/1 Vol. 21 on the bad trade of Lagos 1898. See also N.A.K. File No.
41086/S. 1 G. 17
and 22 on Export of Immature Groundnuts in Northern Nigeria 1935 and Adulteration of
Groundnuts 1936 respectively.

37. A Olorunfemi. ”The Export Trade of South Western Nigeria in the inter-war Years.” Paper
read at Unife Dept. of History Seminar 1979/80 series p. 327.

66. However the local price was about half of the Liverpool price.


40. G.K. Helleiner, Peasant Agriculture and Economic Development in Nigeria. Homewood III.
1966, p. 18.

41. Ibid.

42. N.A.I. CSO 26 File No. 03109. Petition from the Kano Chamber of Commerce to Sir
Cameron on the imposition of Tariff by France on Nigerian groundnuts. September 26, 1933, p.
312.

43. Hector Soza. ”The Industrialization of Chile,” in Claudio Veltz (ed.) Latin American and the


45. A. Olorunfemi, op. cit., p. 331.


52. De Graft-Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 64.


55. For all about the plans, see N.A.I. CSO 26. File No. 363388 on the Batholomew Plan for Marketing West African Cocoa, June 1931 and File No. 36388/S. 1 for the Keepler Plan, 1939.

56. De Graft-Johnson, p. 73.


The Role of Government in the Promotion of Agriculture

Wale Oyemakinde

The contribution of the colonial government to agricultural development in Nigeria began rather imperceptibly. The pre-occupation of the British in Nigeria was to open up the country for greater commercial activities than had been possible in the previous era of informal empire before the flag followed the trade.1 The Berlin West African Conference of 1884-5 had stipulated the principle of effective occupation as the necessary condition for exercising European authority over African territories. The Brussels Conference which followed in 1890 endorsed the same notion and it became clear that any European nation intending to gain recognition over her acquisition of African areas should make her presence felt in such places.2

Captain Lugard (later Lord Lugard) must have cast his mind back to such provisions of the Berlin West African Conference and the Brussels Conference when he opined that to colonize was to transport.3 It was clear to him that such places that modern transportation could reach in the African region were the only zones that could be claimed as belonging to the particular European principally. For it was by linking up the territories to the metropolitan economic nexus that human activities could be strengthened in them and vast regions opened up as taxable areas. This was why the British presence in Nigeria produced a transport revolution.

Beginning with railway construction from the Lagos coast to the hinterland from December 1895,4 the British succeeded in spreading wheeled transportation to Ibadan by 1901, to Jebba by 1909, to Minna and Baro by 1910, to Kaduna, Zaria and Kano by 1911, to Port-Harcourt and Enugu by 1916, to Makurdi by 1924, to Kafanchan and Jos by 1926 and between 1929 and 1930 the network had reached the two northern extremities of Kaura Namoda and Nguru.5 In each of these areas connected by rail, motor roads were subsequently constructed for lateral links and particularly to tie more remote localities to rail-points.6 The wheeled transportation system was integrated with inland waterways thus completing a transportation framework which overwhelmingly surpassed the traditional system which had featured human porterage, pack animals and canoe haulage service.7

The stage was thereby set for the stimulation of agricultural production since inadequate transportation facilities were no longer a constraint. Whereas in the past, inter-community commercial transactions had been limited by transportation difficulties, even perishable commodities could henceforth be carried over long distances. Just as yams that were cultivated in the southern provinces of the country could be consumed in the northern provinces, so also the
pepper raised in Jos enriched the delicacies of Lagosians.8

The impact of modern transportation on agricultural production in Nigeria was even more pronounced with export crops promotion. Palm oil and kernel gathered in barrels and bags respectively moved to Lagos and Port-Harcourt by rail before they were shipped overseas. The cocoa frontier extended from Agege to Ibadan and Ondo taking advantage of transportation facilities by the railway and motor-roads.9 The cotton and groundnuts produced up north found their way to the coast for onward shipment through haulage by rail.10 Indeed, the railway stations here and there in the country were like export depots collecting farm produce in anticipation of the movement of trains.

The station masters acted more or less as economic advisers to the village dignitaries and local farmers. A sensible farmer would not just decide on his own the time to harvest his crop, it was for the station master to provide information from the railway time table so that the farmer could plan and act accordingly. 'I So enviable was the encouragement which the railway factor gave agricultural production that communities that were not connected by rail lobbied vigorously for it. The best known example of this was the Owa of Ijeshaland who early in the 20th century prayed the railway survey engineers to let the line pass through his land and promised to raise whatever crop was wanted in return for the kindness he was soliciting.12

Another way in which the colonial administration had a positive impact on agricultural production was through the institution of convenient currency.13 Unlike cowrie currency or commodity currency which being cumbersome inhibited economic activities, the introduction of coin and paper currency marked a sharp difference. From 1912, the imperial government issued convertible notes through the West African Currency Board. Transactions of small and great dimensions could henceforth be entertained without the difficulty of disputed measure of value or the nuisance of awaiting a situation of double co-incidence of wants. Farmers could calculate in advance the possible returns from their efforts and plan their socio-economic relationships well ahead of time.

One dimension to this was that they could pledge a part of their tangible trees like cocoa, oil palm or kolanuts to some creditor to provide the funding for further investments in agriculture and related ventures.14 Another advantage was that the use of convenient currency facilitated the buying and selling of the fruit of the farmer’s labour so that he could readily transform his farm resources into liquid asset. Indeed, with money in his pocket, the farmer was at home anywhere he went, however distant from his regular base. He joined his clerical, artisan and merchant compatriots to pursue the bread and butter aspect of life by engaging in complex and complementary economic activities. As each vocational or professional grouping flourished in its own way, various needs cancelled out by mutual compensation because convenient currency served as arbiter in the scheme of things. With such occupational specialization, the traditional economy was getting set for modernization.

By enthroning the rule of law, Pax Britannica also incidentally contributed to agricultural development in Nigeria.15 There were courts to protect people’s rights over their land. There were also lawyers and letter-writers to draw up land agreements and prepare conveyances.16 Therefore, by introducing the concept of individual right of ownership over landed property, Pax
Britannion inspired systematic investment on farmland and increased the yields there from.

The more direct contribution of the colonial government to the development of agriculture in Nigeria is most visible in the institution of agricultural schools,17 agricultural research centres and the prosecution of extension services.18 Apart from breeding beautiful plants for the distribution of seeds and seedlings to farmers, the research stations experimented in, and advised farmers on, the use of compost manure, mucuna and other legumes for the restoration of soil fertility. They also concerned themselves with fighting pest and diseases to enhance the yield from the farmers’ crops. It was later that government embarked on chemical control of herbs to ease the farmer’s burden over weeding. Although their efforts were feeble and the spread effects limited, the experimental centres no doubt succeeded in calling the attention of the few enlightened farmers then to the need to practise scientific agriculture.

Perhaps more noticeable wasihe impact of the agricultural schools in the training of personnel. The department of agriculture needed both office and field staff and they had to be trained for the task before them. Rural science, as the study of agriculture came to be called in schools and colleges, had to be taught by specialists who would themselves have been prepared in the schools of agriculture. Grade II teachers pursued further training in these centres on the completion of which they obtained the Grade I certificate.19

Such promotional role of the colonial government linked with the productive initiative of the Nigerian farmers themselves accounted for the rise in agricultural output in the country.20

Although the basis of technology remained traditional as it was limited to the hoe and cutlass standard, the extension of farming activities to areas that had not been previously affected resulted in increased production.21 Even though labour continued to be in short supply, the population rose progressively and farm yield grew.22 It was a fortunate thing that business generally boomed the world over in the years that followed World War I such that the 1920s witnessed rising prices for agricultural commodities and consequent expansion in both their demand and supply.

The opulence and confidence which the Nigerian farmers enjoyed in the period 1919-1929 however proved impermanent. Whereas agricultural products had a ready market in that decade, the succeeding years ushered global economic depression which severely threatened the viability of the colonial state in Nigeria. Economic activities declined, government revenue fell and official spending which should stimulate the economy was virtually at a stand still. The suddenness of the fall in the prices of agricultural commodities was as bad as its depth, for instance, cocoa which had been sold for about £50 or #100.00 per ton in 1929 went as low as £20 or #40.00 the following year 1930.23

The situation actually degenerated as the depression worsened such that some Nigerian farmers thought it was not worth their while to harvest their crops for sale.

Groundnuts were allowed to rot away on the ridges just as cotton was left to perish in the furrows. If so much energy was expended on harvesting them, additional time and energy must be reserved for their sale in the dull market and all the efforts would only fetch minimum
financial returns.24

Just as farmers had low monetary remuneration for their sweat, so also salary earners suffered for the depression. Because of the steady emptiness of the treasury, the imperial government which was the greatest single employer of labour began a policy of mass retrenchment. Thousands of public servants were relieved of their position whether they were railway workers or direct civil servants. Since this was the era of Governor Donald Cameroon, the sacked workers referred to retrenchment as Cameroon’s axe and blamed him for it as if he was personally responsible for their plight.25

It would not have mattered much if those thrown out of the public service were rehabilitated in the private sector. The depression affected the entire economy such that there was hardly any salvation anywhere. The retrenched workers and their families therefore had to bear the brunt of their predicament. As if to worsen matters for them, their lean purse from which they would have made do with cheap Japanese goods was overstretched on expensive commodities from the British factories. Since the Imperial authority was bent on utilizing the territories to cushion off the metropolis from the penetrating pinch of the depression, the subject people had to buy the colonial master’s products.26

Those workmen who were fortunate enough to miss retrenchment also suffered in another respect. They were compelled to a rescheduling of their operations such that they worked less per day and thus earned less so as to spread occasional idleness among many workmen as a way of limiting the need for outright retrenchment. The impact of all this on agricultural production was great. Since the wage earners who were the major purchasers of the food stuffs produced by the farmer were themselves in abject poverty, their customers could not have been in prosperity either. Indeed, the attendant recession affected both the export oriented agricultural endeavours and the consumption motivated farming activities.

By 1936 it appeared that economic revival was in the pipeline. This seeming termination of depression however proved abortive as early as the following year and the general doom even deepened more than ever before. Further retrenchment therefore featured. The affected workers became sullenly resigned to their fate just as the destabilized farmers grudgingly accepted their lot. It took the coming of World War II to brighten economic activities, lift the price level and elevate the confidence of workers and farmers alike.27

The war brought with it incredible high demand for agricultural products. Further, European factories needed raw materials to keep alive the British pioneered industrialization in Europe, which she extensively dominated. Britain was anxious to make Nigeria and the other colonial territories produce agricultural goods as much as possible. This was to be their contribution to the war efforts and all hands were expected to be on deck.28 Export crop promotion was launched from one province to another and the railway department was specially mobilized to haul the materials to the coast for their eventual shipment.

Unlike the situation in the previous decade, anything that was produced had a ready market and as such greater production was encouraged. The inland waterways were kept busy just as the road traffic system was constantly engaged. Aerodromes were constructed here and there and
railway stations were extended to co-ordinate and convey the increased human and material traffic. The public service expanded to cope with the generally buoyant economic activities while the private sector itself flourished. Rather than retrench workmen as in the decade of depression, employers required more labour than was available. School leavers had a task, not concerning getting fixed up, but over choosing from keenly competing alternatives. The economy was thus operating at a very high capacity generating gainful employment for many, trade unionists therefore had all the confidence to negotiate for higher remuneration and the courage to threaten industrial action if their demands were not met.29

With the World at war and the attendant increased demand for goods, agricultural products which normally attracted a low price now continued to witness a rise. Export crops like cocoa, groundnuts, cotton, palm oil and kernel brought their growers greater wealth than they ever dreamt about. The prosperity could, in fact, have been much higher if the colonial government had given the local farmers all that the world market could fetch them. Rather, a system of controlled commodity marketing was organized in Nigeria. Marketing boards were instituted to arrange the collection and despatch of the key export crops such that the farmers did not deal directly with the ultimate purchasers of their products but transacted business through the marketing board as the intermediary market.30

The marketing boards fixed the producers’ prices for the key commodities like cocoa and groundnuts at the start of the harvesting season in a way that ensured that part of the earnings of these crops stayed in the coffers of the boards in trust for the imperial government.31 The original idea was to provide for the farmers a sort of insurance against irregular income. Since the price of these agricultural commodities often fluctuated in the world market, a series of particularly bright years might give the farmer a false optimism over expected earnings in subsequent years. This could disrupt the basis of his expenditure and indeed his total economy in the event of a sudden slump which though unpredictable was yet most probable.

The price stabilization policy of the marketing boards was therefore intended to cushion the local planters off the nuisance of unstable income such that what the board would have accumulated over the good years might in part be spent to augment the farmers earnings in the years when the world market would quote unkind prices. In reality, however, the marketing boards operated more or less as collectors of export duties.32 The colonial authorities and later the local politicians who took over found it convenient to raise revenue through such indirect taxation. Indeed, the purse of the marketing boards provided the capital formation which subsequently supported socio-economic development projects in post-World War II Nigeria. Part of the reserves of the marketing boards also served as soft loans at low interest accretment for the prosecution of development projects elsewhere in the British empire. It was soon forgotten that the local farmer’s income needed to be stabilized. This exploitation was justified by saying that he was after all not responsible for the global economic stimulation which brought increased demand for agricultural goods and consequently rising prices. Nor was it believed that he could account for the bounties of nature in terms of sunshine and rainfall which enabled fat harvests and put the farmer at a vantage position. There was even some opinion about his supposed irrationality or irresponsibility such that if sumptuous payments reached him, he might indulge in conspicuous and unproductive spending and cause avoidable inflation.34
Rather than strengthen him for "needless expenditure", the authorities decided to tax him, unknown to him, so that he could assist in financing development projects like constructing roads and building health and educational institutions without him grumbling.35 It happened, however, that he did not totally lose out. For one thing, he stood to benefit from the public investment in motor-roads construction, some portions of which might be located in his neighbourhood if only the authorities wanted to encourage greater production efforts. For another, his children could attend the educational institutions which were built and financed from the reserves of the marketing boards. Besides, such improvements in health care delivery made possible by the credit resources for commodity marketing were available to the farmers and other alike.

The disparity between the farmers and the non-farming population in terms of duties to and benefits from government might not have been too glaring if the former had been exempted form direct taxation. But this was not so. Indeed, whereas it was convenient for the artisans and other city dwellers to evade payment of tax, the constant tax raids in the villages were such that there was no room for escape.36 Government tended to pamper the urban dwellers who, being articulate and sensitive, could cause civil unrest to embarrass the authorities. On the other hand, the rural inhabitants could be safely neglected since it was unlikely that they would be easily organized for subversion. They lacked western education; the newspaper did not circulate among them; trade union activities did not extend to them; although the villages all over the country were very many, they lacked a common association on.

If one were to judge the involvement of the colonial government in agricultural development in Nigeria by the amount of talking and memoranda writing in the department of agriculture, the impression would be given that agriculture took top priority. For instance, all the promise about irrigation schemes amounted to very little in reality.37 Similarly, the issue of raising a group of scientific farmers to open up kilometres of underdeveloped land for cultivation and promotion of industry ended as mere wistful thinking.

On the other hand, there was considerable excitement among the colonial officials in Nigeria over the idea that the agricultural department should arrange to cultivate vegetables like beans, cabbages, tomatoes, lettuce, cucumber and carrots, for them to buy at "reasonable prices" to enrich their nutrition.38 It was even suggested that the proposed vegetable gardens be located here and there in the country as close as possible to the prison yards so that the prisoners could provide regular labour because normal avenues for labour supply could not be relied upon for the nurture of the vegetable yards.39 The Chief Secretary to the government did not, however, agree to make this a general policy although he would not stop the practice in parts of the northern provinces which had actually started.40

Whereas the department of education was able to co-ordinate educational activities in the country through setting standards of instructions and examinations and through inspection of schools and colleges whether they were public or owned by voluntary agencies, the department of agriculture could not make any impact as the schools did. The two situations of course differed. While the schools and colleges were few and far between the communities, nearly every citizen owned a farm in the predominantly agrarian society of Nigeria.
Some city dwellers even maintained links with their village land resources and operated farms from such remote area, apart from the rural majority which only earned their bread through farming. It should also be noted that the problem facing agriculture were varied from one locality to another such that improvement schemes designed at some distant headquarters needed to be heavily adapted to suit the particular condition on hand. At any rate, the colonial authorities as well as the indigenous leaders who took over lacked the human and material resources and the will to transform and modernize agriculture from its traditional base.

Perhaps the most celebrated attempt by the colonial government in Nigerian to boost agricultural production in the country would be found in the Niger Agricultural Projects. Conceived after World War II, the scheme was intended to contribute to post-war rehabilitation in terms of rebuilding the society and the economy, specifically to combat poverty through the elimination of food shortage by large scale and rapid production of essential materials. Although the metropolitan needs were paramount, the territories were themselves expected to gain from organized economic activities in their neighbourhood.

The Niger Agricultural Project began in 1949 around the small town of Mokwa in present day Niger State. The scheme involved the setting aside of some 50 square miles of farming area in that sparsely populated locality. The objective was to practise mechanized agriculture, producing groundnuts for export and guinea corn for local consumption while demonstrating to the immediate and wider communities the merits of scientific farming. Administered by the Niger Agricultural Project Limited, the scheme had a capital of £450,000 (or #900,000) contributed equally by the Colonial Development Corporation and the Nigerian Government.

But this scheme failed. For one thing, mechanized farming required much stricter care and control than the company’s resources could afford. For another, the hope that peasant settlers would be attracted to the scheme in large number did not materialize. There were only 78 of them in 1951, 135 the year after and 163 in 1953. Besides, the expectation that casual labourers would supplement the efforts of the settlers did not come to reality. The local people did not seem to consider it worth their while to abandon independent farming for employment in the Niger Agricultural Project. The company could not obtain any machine capable of performing the follow-up farming operations like planting, weeding, tendering and harvesting. Once the ploughing and the ridging had been done, the available machines remained useless even if they were in good maintenance condition which was hardly the case. Whereas a local farmer could at best cultivate about four acres of farm land, each settler had on his hands a twenty-four acre piece which he was expected to care for after mechanized ploughing and ridging.

All sorts of problems appeared. The sharecropping system adopted by the company by which the settler had one third of the production of his farm while the company kept two-thirds for its services proved to be a major disincentive to hard-work. Indeed, the whole arrangement encouraged cheating and pilferage for which the company severely suffered. In the end, the company had to be liquidated. The Central Government of Nigeria and the Colonial Development Corporation withdrew their interests from the projects on 1st June 1954 leaving the Northern Regional Government to manage it as an experimental and training farm. As at 31st December, 1954, the net loss to the Colonial Development Corporation was £123,494 or N246,988.
The failure of the Niger Agricultural Project generated a lot of press comments as well as appraisals from the community at large. Just as those who were asked to implement the project were blamed so also were the local people who were said to be lazy, irresponsible and obstructive to innovation. The critics of the local people could not concede that the latter were being rational by not accepting an economic culture that did not seem superior to the one they were used to. With abundant land resources in the neighbourhood, most villagers naturally chose independent pursuit of farming rather than pledge their freedom and labour to a nascent project struggling haphazardly for survival that remained elusive.

The obvious failure of the project by 1954 so embarrassed both the metropolitan authorities and the Nigerian government that no new agricultural improvement scheme was conceived in Nigeria until the achievement of self rule. The department of agriculture seemed satisfied with routine administration and the provision of some measure of guidance through the agricultural schools that had been established. The local farmer, of course, followed his own initiative and kept agriculture going with or without official assistance. As fortune would have it, the primary products like cocoa, groundnuts, palm oil and kernels continued to attract the high prices that had featured since World War II and the monetary accumulations of the marketing boards provided the financial confidence with which the nationalist politicians led the nation to independence in 1960.

Notes

1. Whereas the British had competed against other European nationals over trade in the Niger area, their desire with the coming of colonialism was to expand and control commercial activities in the region of domination.

2. This required huge investments to broaden the economic base of the territory and thereby make the colonial venture profitable.


16. Progressively, traditional land tenure arrangements were being modified. Instead of communal ownership of land, individual ownership began to feature especially as such an attitude started to have legal backing. Tangible trees like-cocoa and kolanut were raised on certain farmlands and children started claiming the right to inherit such legacies with the demise of their parents rather than ownership reverting vaguely to the extended family or clan.

17. For example, the botanical section of Ibadan started to experiment with the rejuvenation of ”native” cocoa farms from 1920. See notes by the Director of Agriculture in (NA.I.) *CSO 26, File 31611*.


19. An example of this was the School of Agriculture at Akure.


22. If the expansion in agricultural output is credited substantially to African initiative, the quality of agricultural exports is explained primarily in terms of the ”initiative and energy of the Agricultural Department and to he unflagging effort and patience of its staff.” See Margery Perliam, *op. cit*.


36. This was a major cause of the farmers’ rising in Western Nigeria in 1969. For details of the Agbekoya Movement, see C. Beer, *The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria*, Ibadan, 1976.

37. This compares favourably with the "lip-service" currently paid to agricultural development whether the Operation Feed the Nation, or more recently the "Green Revolution," officials and politicians seem to engage in money-making rather than project financing.

38. See details of correspondence in three files: (NAI) *CSO26, File 09382*, Vols. I, II & HI.

39. Secretary to the Nigerian Provinces to the Chief Secretary, Lagos, 15 June 1923 (NAI) *CSO 26, File 09382*, Vol. I.

40. His Excellency the Governor to the Chairman of the Association of European Civil Servants in Nigeria, 6 March, 1924 (NAI) *CSO 26, File 09382*, Vot II.

41. This has been ably studied in K.D.S. Baldwin *The Niger Agricultural Project*, Oxford, 1957.
The Origin and Growth of Trade Unionism

Tayo Fashoyin

Introduction

The debate on the origin of African unions remains largely unabated, and this is so primarily because there are two parallel views generally held by people. First, one view posits that the creation of wage-labour and money economy in Africa was due to colonial settlement and that the resultant class formations were organized to fight for social justice and other ills of colonialism. The second view holds that before the advent of colonialism, there had been well developed social institutions, mutual aid societies and guilds which provided many of the services now being provided by modern-day trade unions. The question remains, however, whether these tribal societies or guilds transformed themselves into modern trade unions.

There is as yet no strong evidence to prove or disprove this debate, but most analysts tend to believe that there was little direct relationship between pre-colonial social institutions and modern-day trade unions. It is true, for example, that because pre-colonial social groups and institutions were organized not by workers of common employers but on ethnic or tribal relationships, they were unable or had no cause to perform many of the functions which unions of today perform. It is not unlikely, nevertheless, that in some parts of Africa, tribal guilds and societies may have indirectly influenced the development of modern trade unionism. In any event, the debate on the origin of workers organizations is hardly surprising since the development of modern force at the beginning of this century.

In this chapter, however, we are concerned with the origin of modern trade unionism Fin West Africa, and we talk about the emergence of wage employment as the beginning development, which itself evolved from colonial interference in the West African sub-region.

The West African sub-region comprise two main political or linguistic blocs, viz: The I English-speaking or Anglophone area, comprising Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria and Sierra Leone. With the sole exception of Liberia which was never colonized, all the English speaking countries were former British colonial territories. For this basic historical or political reason, the Anglophone countries instituted the British model of social, economic and political relations, although after independence in each country, there had been marked differences and modifications in these relationships.
The present French-speaking or Francophone West African states, known as French West Africa Afrique Occidentale Francise (AOF) comprise Mauritania, Guinea, Mali, Senegal, Ivory Coast, Niger, Benin, Burkina Fasso formerly Upper Volta, Burkina Fasso and Togo which was United Nations Territory administered by France. Before World War II, these states were consolidated in French West Africa Federation with a common capital in Dakar. Partly as a result of this centralization, the colonialists maintained tight control on both political and social institutions and, expectedly, trade unionism developed relatively late in the Francophone territories.

Origin and Sources of Growth

In the West African sub-region the factors that have influenced the development and growth of trade unionism are primarily the same, whether one looks at them from the linguistic and historical perspectives or the social and economic forces that accompanied colonialism. It is however meaningful to examine these forces and factors independently since there are marked differences in the processes of union formation and growth between the Anglophone and Francophone territories. Further, in the post-independent period, the forces that have influenced the growth of trade unionism show quite interesting dissimilarities as occasioned by the emerging ideological views of the ruling party in each of the West African countries. We shall therefore first examine the factors that influenced the emergence and growth of trade unionism during the colonial period, and later on proceed to the post-independence period. The three general factors that seem to have played the leading role are:

(a) class conflict and political development:

(b) industrial and social development; and

(c) colonial labour policy: They are discussed in turn although there is a considerable overlapping.

Class Struggle and Political Development

Even before modern trade unions were formed and subsequent legal recognition granted to them, African workers had embarked on spontaneous strikes in protests against poor conditions of service. One of such early protests was said to have taken place in Sierra Leone in 1874 while similar unorganized protests occurred in Ghana in 1919 and in Nigeria in 1897 among PWD workers in both countries. Throughout the 1920s, similar strikes occurred in the AOF countries. In Senegal, railroad workers frequently engaged in sporadic strikes against the dehumanizing conditions of work. The posture of the African workers however changed beginning from the 1920s.

In the British West Africa colonies, these strikes were followed by the world-wide depression of the 1920s and 1930s which led to rising unemployment, and as a result of the economic conditions the colonial administrations reduced civil service salaries. The policy created serious discontent among African workers and in turn served as one major force behind the formation of unions in the colonies. During this period, the Sierra Leone Labourers’ Union was formed in 1929, Ghana’s Motor-Drivers formed a union in
1931. In Nigeria the Railway Workers Union and the Nigerian Union of Teachers were formed in 1931 while the Bathurst Trade Union was formed in Gambia in 1933.7

A contributory factor to the development of class consciousness was the contacts between African workers and their counterparts else where. During the war, this served to broaden their outlook as regards the logic and advantages of collective action. In the Francophone countries, for example, railroad men organized relatively early and this is due partly to their close contracts with railroad men in France and partly to the nature of their work which facilitated a good communication network within the AOF. The railroad men formed the Association Amicale et Professionelle de Agents Indigenes du Chemin de Fer de L’AOF based in Senegal in 1929.8

The already established class consciousness among the African workers was given a major boost by the role of the international unions and political parties, the latter playing a relatively more important role in the AOF countries. Admittedly, the influence of international unions and political parties in the formation of African unions has been a source of controversy if not confusion, especially in the manner in which nationalist movements and political parties helped to articulate class consciousness.

In any event, the relationship between political parties and worker’s unions during the colonial period was considerable in West African countries. In fact, it can be said that in these countries the struggle for independence was piloted by trade unions while leading nationalists such as Sekou Toure of Guinea, Senghor of Senegal and Nkrumah of Ghana were leading trade unionists. As Damachi and his collaborators described the inter-relatedness of class conflict and political consciousness in Africa,

As the demand for higher wages or better working conditions was being regarded as subversive by the colonial government, Africans learned the lesson that a strike was not only an economic but a political tool. Henceforth African political leaders and some trade unionists started to see the strike as a political weapon, or at least that it could be used with political overtones. The early history of African trade unions thus became as much a reaction to imperial rule and a reaction to working conditions.9

In spite of the trade unions involvement in nationalist movement, it would be misleading to argue that the reasons for forming trade unions were similar to those upon which the nationalist movements were formed. In most cases the scope of trade union involvement in nationalist movements was limited to the union leadership, while the rank-and-file often show greater disposition in class rather than political struggle. Indeed, as Berg and Buler have argued, African unions during the independence struggle had low commitment to politics and parties.10

The processes through which class conflict and political struggle influenced the growth of West African unions are quite different between the Francophone and Anglophone counties. In the former, the greatest impetus was provided by the French unions, which have strong political and ideological perspectives. In contrast, British unions played a relatively little role particularly during the 1940s. Subsequently the greatest influence in the formation of unions in the English speaking areas was provided by the international unions.
As noted, a major distinguishing characteristic of unions in the Francophone West African countries is their great degree of political and ideological commitment than those in the Anglophone areas. This is perhaps hardly surprising since African unions inherited much of their structure, policies and methods of operation from the highly politicized French unions. In fact, unlike unions in the Anglophone countries which evolved largely as independent organisations AOF unions originated as affiliates or groups of the metropolitan unions and it was not until the late 1940s that the dependency relationship began to break. Again this marked difference is understandable given the unique political relationship between France and its former African colonies.

The Confederation General des Travailleurs (CGT) based in France played the leading role in the unionization of African workers during the colonial period. The union sent advisers, organizers and financial aid to Africa while its officials travelled throughout AQF and Togo between 1944 and 1948 organizing local unions. By 1946, of the total 70,000 to 75,000 trade union membership in the AOF, about 60 per cent were affiliates of the CGT.

The political parties which dominated the political struggle in the AOF also helped in the formation of African union. Two of these parties — the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA) and the Socialist (SFIO) helped in the establishment of African CGT sections in Senegal, Ivory Coast, French Mali and Togo. They organized communist study groups, such as Groupes d’Etudes Communistes (GEC) in the big cities during the 1940s. Christian unionism which also exist in France and influenced by the catholic mission, contributed to the growth of trade unionism in the French-speaking West African counties. The Confederation Francaise des Travailleurs Chretiens (CFTC) began the organization of African workers in 1946 and was especially successful in Upper Volta, Dahomey, Togo, Ivory Coast, Guinea and Dakar.

From the foregoing, it is instructive that France-based social-political institutions provided a major crystalizing effect on class formations in French West Africa. A final impact on the growth of trade unionism in the area was the authoritarian attitude of French employers. Indeed, the unfavourable action of these employers instigated nationalist sentiments and talks of secession circulated in Senegal through the active leadership of a Dakar Lawyer, Lamine Gueye. In response to this obvious threat to French legitimacy and authority in the colonies, a Free French Conference was held in Brazzaville in 1944 at which it was proposed that both trade unions and political parties should be authorized for inhabitants in all the French colonies.

While French unions and political parties provided the main impetus for the origin and growth of unions in French West Africa, the situation was clearly different in the English-speaking areas. Here the African union, even though they received initial support from Britain’s Trades Union Congress (TUC), the influence and role of the latter were on a much lesser scale than the assistance which French union gave their African affiliates. Instead, unions in the Anglophone countries received considerable support from international unions. The World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) formed in 1945 was, until 1949, the main international body that propagated the formation of African unions since the 1930s. However, due to a split in 1949 which gave birth to the International Confederation of TVade Union (ICFTU), both organizations continued to champion the cause of African workers, albeit somewhat divisively.
This is because the split in the international labour movement had had a ripple effect on African trade unionism. Although an account of this development is beyond the scope of this chapter, suffice it to say that in spite of the encouragements which these organizations gave to the emerging African unions, they were equally the main source of the balkanization within many African labour movements. This led in many cases, such as Nigeria, to the growth of inferior and poorly organized unions. In Gambia, the ICFTU was the main financier of the GWU. Similarly in Nigeria, the Federation provided between 92 and 98 per cent of the funding of the United Labour Congress (ULC) during 1963 and 1965. Other labour organisations in Nigeria received considerable sums of money from international labour organizations up to the mid 1970s.16

As earlier noted, though the provision of financial technical and organizational assistance to African unions was a source of growth, the overall impact of the influence of international unions on national trade union movements has revealed that the relationship created not only a dependency case, financial malpractices or intra-inter-organizational factions, it did drew African unions to ideological leanings, undoubtedly beyond the cope that could facilitate stability in African unions. Ultimately, the state had to intervene. In Nigeria, for example, where the activities of the international labour movements were quite significant up to the mid-1970s, the military administration had dismissed them from the country in 1975.

In a sharp contrast of the Anglophone West African countries, international labour movements outside France played little or no role in the growth of unions in the Francophone countries. Although both the WFTU and the ICFTU had affiliated French unions, the latter, such as CGT-FO, refused direct ICFTU relationship with its African groups, and instead preferred to serve as intermediary. This was ostensibly a design to prevent the international unions from undermining the influence of the metropolitan unions in the Francophone territories.

**Industrial and Social Development**

Throughout the English and French speaking West African territories trade unionism evolved not with industrialization as was the case in Europe and North America, but primarily through the characteristics -of the colonial economy; forced labour; poor and exploitative conditions of service for African workers vis-a-vis the white colonial workers; and the resentment to colonialism. Civil service workers in Sierra Leone, Ghana, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Senegal and other parts of the sub-region embarked on unorganized protests early at the turn of the century in protests against poor and unsatisfactory conditions of service.17 Although the protests and strikes of the period precluded formal organisation of workers, they were indications that industrial development were likely to escalate social and economic injustice. Though the governments were the main employers of labour the lack of any coherent labour policies exposed the African workers to abuses by these employers.

Thus, apart from the unions that were organized in the public sector the slow pace of industrialization affected the growth of unions. The countries of the sub-region which are primarily agricultural export economy had little scope from the organization of agricultural workers who operated mainly in small units, although they constitute the overwhelming majority of the labour force. In the 1930s industries began to surface in the Francophone African
territories. Groundnut oil, soap and metalwork industries were set up to transform local materials into finished goods of the rapidly expanding local market. Through generous funding, a significant amount of capital was pumped into the economy especially for building infrastructural projects. Transportation, particularly railways and roads, were constructed. One important outcome of this industrialization process was a rapid expansion in employment. According to Martens, a total of 3,000 workers engaged in modern maintenance on the railroads. Indeed it was in this sector that the organization of workers militancy in both the English and French speaking countries took root and spread to other sector of industrial activity.

The increase in industrial activity led to “an extensive recruitment of new trade union members from among the expanding salaried workforce, and an increased number of skilled local worker were trained swelling the ranks of the growing African elites”. In Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire) which was the first Francophone country to be exposed to industrialization, trade unionism came well in advance of industrialization. The earliest workers organizations were formed during 1919-20, while the earliest groundnut oil plant was established in 1938. But industrial development provided immense impetus for rapid growth of unions especially among unskilled workers; the incessant charges of exploitation provided a breeding ground of worker’s unions.

After the Second World War, there was a great demand for Africa’s raw materials which led to expansion in industrial development in the colonies. In-flow of capital and grants from metropolitan countries of Britain and France contributed to increase in industrial development and expansion in the economies. This naturally led to expansion in employment. In 1959, for example, Nigeria’s wage earning population was 472,695 while Ghana had 261,849 workers in wage employment in 1956.

The increase in industrial development after the Second World War was due partly to a decline in imports from metropolitan countries and partly to a sharp rise in the prices of many tropical African agricultural products. Again, this naturally led to increase in employment of African workers. In the AOF, for example, wage employment rose by an average of 4.5 per cent between 1936 and 1948, and by 9.3 per cent between 1954 and 1957.

In spite of this rapid pace of industrial development and increases in employment, real wages fell as a result of inflation. In the AOF countries, wages were actually frozen, even though increases were granted in France. The partiality of the colonial masters led to massive protests by African workers and the colonial administration was forced to increase wages. In Gambia, industrial development helped the Gambia Workers Union (GWU) to became the dominant workers organization as a result of this militant posture.

The one outstanding outcome of these protests and actions was that they demonstrated the advantage of class action and encouraged African workers to join unions, a development which was noticeable in both the Anglophone and Francophone countries, during the 1940 and 1950s.

**Colonial Labour Policy**

The contention that modern trade unions evolved with the advent of colonialism has virtually
overshadowed the fact that the colonial administrations in both the English and French Speaking West African countries did not, at the onset, willingly embrace the development of trade unionism. Colonial support for trade unionism was brought about by the desire to maintain and strengthen trade links with the colonies. Partly also, it was to create social groups which will neutralise the influence of the nationalist movement which the colonial administrations believed were confrontationists. Also, the colonialists were concerned about the likelihood that the emerging trade unions might be used by certain disaffected persons to achieve objectives which were not in consonance with the purposes of the unions. Even then, some of the unions that emerged in the early years of colonialism, mainly the white-collar civil service unions, were non-militant groups that sought improvements in sectional interests since the workers were relatively well-off in society.

Yet in spite of this negative response to trade union development, governments in both the English and French-speaking African countries were anxious to put the emerging social conflict under control which otherwise, might create instability and threaten their presence. Similarly, certain groups within the metropolitan countries of Britain and France, mainly in the moderate and progressive political parties and trade unions had a genuine concern for the improvement in the conditions of workers in the colonies and for promoting social institutions like the trade unions.

It is therefore, not surprising that the series of labour legislation introduced in the English-speaking West African territories were models of the British system. In all the West African countries, except Liberia, the Trade Union Ordinance was successively enacted in each country. Nigeria passed the law in 1938, Gambia in-1940, Ghana in 1941 and Sierra Leone in 1939. These laws regulated the formation and the management of trade unions. Information on each of the countries suggest that whatever their colonial outlook the laws contributed to the growth of unions. Usually, the fact that the formation of a trade union could be achieved by the combination of as few as five workers, created a sudden interest in organisation of unions.

In French West Africa, unlike the English speaking areas, there was little evidence of modern trade unionism until the 1930s. This was primarily due to the tight control on social and political relations of the colonial administration. When the Popular Front government instituted some reforms in 1937, the reforms restricted the right to form trade unions to the small local French subjects who could read, write and speak French. Mainly because of the qualification requirement the vast majority of Africans were excluded.

Efforts to develop modern trade unions were interrupted by the Second World War and in 1940, the French government outlawed all organized labour in the colonies. Four years later, however, trade unions resurfaced, partly due to the encouragement of the ILO and the reforms instituted by the Brazzaville Conference. Thus, on January 1944, a Free French Conference held in Brazzaville (Congo) organised by Charles de Gaulle outlined a favourable social policy which influenced the development of interest groups in the colonies. As George Martens described this new policy:

The economic growth, progressive labour legislation and new political institutions of this dynamic post war period immediately resulted in the emergence of a host of organization seeking
the African’ allegiance: French unions and political organizations needed African colleagues in order to assume the responsibilities offered by the institutional structure of the Fourth Republic.

The aftermath of the conference was the decree of 1947 which removed the legal requirements of a basic primary school certificate for union membership though this requirement remained for those aspiring to union leadership). After this barrier had been removed, there was rapid expansion in the African labour movement. Similar to experience in the English speaking countries, first to organize in the AOF areas were white-collar workers such as civil servants and teachers. But unlike their counterparts in the Anglophone countries. French African unions had greater revolutionary and ideological orientation which explains their sensitivity to issues of social injustice and discrimination. They demanded for example, equal pay for equal work a goal which was pursued through anti-colonial activities.

In trying to achieve their policy of modelling African unions after those that existed in Britain and France, trade union experts and advisers were despatched to the colonies to give organizational, technical and financial support for the unions. Though the assistance of the metropolitan unions were contributory to the growth of African unions, critics have been skeptical of the benevolence of colonial labour policies. Jack Woddis, for example, argued that the assistance legal, financial organizational, constituted a control device aimed at indoctrinating African unions to pursue purely industrial relations objectives.31 Damachi has equally argued that primarily the reason for encouraging the growth of unions was to promote colonial economic interests.32

There are, however, contradictions in colonial labour policies. Though they provided ample opportunities for the formation of workers unions, the policies were based on the implicit understanding that protests, whether occupational or otherwise, were not to be tolerated. Indeed, trade union action which were expressed in the form of protests and strikes were vehemently opposed by colonial administrations, even though these were the main machinery through which metropolitan unions in Great Britain and France advanced and protected their self-interests. Strike actions in the colonies were abhorred and regarded as rebellious and were accordingly dealt with severely. For example, the ruthless reactions of colonial administrators to strikes by the Enugu mine-workers in Nigeria in 1949, the Ghana’s general strike of 1950 and the Sierra Leone strike of 1939, clearly demonstrated the intolerance of the colonialists to allow unions to develop or pursue their legitimate self-interest without being branded political or disloyal to the colonial administration.

**Trade Unionism in Post Independent Period**

Undoubtedly two important though interrelated issue can be identified as the main sources of growth and or decline in West African unions after independence. The first was public policy which throughout the West African countries, had been fashioned after colonial models. After independence each state took definite decisions on labour policies, although there are wide variations in the emerging legislations and policies. The second influence on the development of trade unionism in the sub-region was the pattern of relationship between, the state and trade unions. Issues bordering on economic development and political stability have constituted a major determining factor influencing this relationship and in turn the potentials for growth of
trade unionism.

**Labour Legislation**

In the post-independence period in West Africa the law contributed immensely to the growth of unions. In some cases, particularly in the Anglophone countries the role of the law was slow in coming to give strength to the unions. In the case of the Francophone countries, the relatively slow development of labour laws on trade unions is a reflection of the historical evolution of not only the unions in French West Africa but also the closer political relationship between France and its former West African colonies.

Although the English speaking West African countries became independent during the first half of the 1960s (with the exception of Ghana which attained independence in 1957, the colonial labour legislation remained in most of the countries up to the 1970s. In Gambia and Nigeria, for example, the Trade Union Ordinances were not reviewed until 1964 and 1973 respectively even though there were obvious urgent reasons for changes in the laws. In contrast, immediately after independence in Ghana, a new labour legislation, the Industrial Relations Act of 1958 was enacted. It made provisions which were generally consistent with the economic and political objectives of the country.

For example, the Act of 1958 created industrial union structure, thus reducing the number of unions from 125 to 24 large industrial unions with one trade union centre. Subsequent consolidation reduced the number of union to 16 big industrial unions. In 1960 an amendment to the law introduced union shop, which allowed the termination of any worker who failed to join an appropriate certified union. Also the Civil Service Act of 1960 allowed civil servants who had hitherto been unorganized to belong to unions. As a result of the supportive legislation Ghana, labour movement experienced substantial increase in membership. For example, total union membership rose from 57,845 in 1957 to 342,648 in 1963.

In Nigeria, the supportive nature of labour legislation was slow in coming in that the Trade Union Ordinance of 1938 was not reviewed until 1973. Before the time the number of unions were about 1,000 although total membership was only 820,430 giving an average of 820 members per union. Critics have argued that the explosion in the number of unions in Nigeria was due partly to the permissiveness of the 1938 law which allowed any group of five workers to form a union, and partly to the recklessness with which unionists formed unions.

The 1973 law however played little role in stemming the growth of ephemeral and moribound union. As at 1976, there were 1170 unions while total union membership was 881,198, or an average of 753 members per union. In fact a closer look indicated that as many as 531 unions had not more than 250 members each. In any event, the Trade union (Amendment) Decree of 1978 followed the pattern of the Ghanaian law by restructuring the labour movement along industrial union structure. Thus, 42 industrial unions were created, accounting for nearly two million membership as at 1982. Union, membership range from 5,000 in the smallest union to 250,000 in the largest union. Average membership as at 1982 was about 15,000.

In Gambia, the Trade Union (Amendment) Ordinance of 1964 ensures employees freedom of
association and preclude interference of public authorities in the exercise of the right of workers to organize trade unions.

Although it can be seen that post-independent labour legislation generally encouraged the growth and development of unionism in these countries, public policy, as will be demonstrated presently, has been used to cripple trade unionism in many of the West African countries. In Ghana the Busia government abolished the Trade Union Congress in 1971 and made union membership voluntary through the contract in clause. Similarly in Nigeria the military government in 1976 proscribed three unions because of dissatisfaction in the way the unions pursued their occupational interests.

It is important to note that even where legislation has not been specifically enacted to influence the performance of trade unions, states in West Africa, although by no means exceptions, have used other coercive methods generally to restrict the activities of the unions, and this in turn affects the latter’s capacity to perform.

Trade Union and the State

The reaction of post-independence government in West Africa to trade unions, especially as regard the latter’s pursuit of their objectives has generally been as negative as during the colonial period. Obviously this has evoked considerable discussion in the literature, centering on what role unions ought to play in the development process.33 On the one hand, there are those who argue that the goal of economic development which the various states are pursuing makes it imperative for unions to place less emphasis on the self-interest of their members and instead collaborate with governments in the task of nation-building. On the other hand, opponents of this view insist that trade unions by pursuing the collective interests of their members are contributing to societal advancement.34

Our concern here is less on what roles trade unions should play than on government’s reaction to the development and growth of unions. In many African countries, the government or political leadership have either restricted the freedom of unions to operate as independent bodies or in some cases they have been proscribed from existence. In yet some cases, government have taken over the unions as appendages of political parties. As Berg and Bulter noted, ”almost everywhere labour organizations were taken over by the government parties.”35

In most of the Francophone West African countries trade unionism has been driven underground as a result of the integration of union leadership into the ruling political parties. In some cases, such integration became inevitable particularly in cases where the trade union movement had played a leading role in the political process. For example, in Benin in 1963 and Upper Volta (Burkina Fasso) during 1966 and 1980 trade unions were instrumental in effecting the change of government. In these and other African countries where trade unions effectively became rivals through their political power, governments have turned around to curb their influence either by making them instruments of the ruling political party or influencing their leadership structure.

In Senegal, Burkina Fasso, Togo and Ghana, government have encouraged (sometimes through coercion) close relationship between unions and political parties. During
1972, Senghor of Senegal noted that "the trade union movement... is, for us, only an autonomous branch of a larger grouping based in the African spirit of community, composed of dynamic participation and democratic solidarity."36

In all cases where government or ruling parties have interfered with the development of trade unions as independent bodies, rank-and-file solidarity is affected since the most important concern of members is the improvement in their standard of living, a goal which leaders cannot possibly pursue with determination once they are made a part of the decision-making in government or political parties. Inevitably members are demoralised on realising that their unions and leaders could not fight for them, which leads to apathy and loss of interest in trade unionism.

Summary

Trade unionism in West Africa emerged due to several interrelated factors. In particular, class conflict between workers and their colonial employers which became obvious as a result of the exploitative labour policies of employers and colonial administration instructed the formation of trade unions. At various times during the colonial period, the determination of the workers to improve their conditions of living was instigated by the growth of the industrial sector and consequent increase in wage employment. Other factors include the fight for political independence through the nationalist movement and the legal recognition granted to trade union organizations.

In the post independent period, public policy, while tending to strengthen the labour movement, has been used to curb the influence and activities of the unions and consequently leading to decline in some labour movements. Although the intervention of governments in the structure and activities of trade unions helped the unions to grow, state intervention, largely based on the conflicting views on the role of trade unions in development, has by and large, undermined the growth in trade unionism in most West African countries.

Notes


33:


4. In Nigeria, many of the mutual aid societies and guilds were, until 1978, registered under the Trade Union Ordinance of 1938.


7. In 1912, the Civil Service Union was formed in Nigeria, but because of its attitudes to trade union methods such as the strike, the railway workers broke away to form their own union.


15. *Ibid*.


20. *Ibid*.


27. A good example was the Civil Service Union formed in Lagos in 1912. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the union was opposed to any form of action that might tarnish its image.


Industrialisation Under Colonial Rule

Kehinde Faluyi

A major criticism of the colonial administration was its failure to encourage the industrial growth of West Africa. It is generally believed that part of the underdevelopment of the sub-region arose from the non-industrialisation. The opinion of some scholars is that the operation of the colonial system was incompatible with the industrial development of the colonies. The colonies were first and foremost meant to serve as markets for products of the industries of the mother country. They were expected to supply raw materials to the metropolitan industries and in return serve as outlets for the manufactures of the industries. Industrialisation of the colonies would have been at variance with the objective of colonialism where the colonies were conceived as outlets for the products of the industries of the imperial state.

The general policy throughout the colonial period was to fulfill the imperial mission of securing the colonial markets for products of the metropolitan industries. If industries were encouraged, the cheap raw materials, labour and unprotected markets for industrial manufactures which dominated the motives for exploits would have been shared between the imperial and the home industries. In order to avoid such sharing or competition, if any industries were to be established or encouraged, they were those which could not be established at home, or were not economically viable or rewarding enough to be established in the metropolis. In British territories for example, the British adopted a mercantilist policy in respect of Industrialisation where European firms operating within each territory monopolised the colonies market. This was achieved through the imposition of restriction of goods coming from non-western European countries through imperial preferences or imposition of quantitative quota on imports even when these were cheaper and superior to those coming from the metropolitan capitals. This policy ensured that the bulk of the exports of the colonies went to the metropolitan industries while their industrial goods dominated the markets of the colonies.

Apart from mining, the Europeans, both British and French invested very little in the colonies. Each colony was expected to be self-sufficient and self-financing and each was valued according to the extent to which its resources could be exploited and its market open to the manufactured products of the imperial state, the duty of the imperial state according to Lord Lugard, was to develop the colony for the benefit of its one people and of the outside world. A similar view was expressed by Governor Boudillon of Nigeria when he said, ”Our duty to the British tax payers is to extend the supply of raw materials and market for British manufactured goods”. Similarly, the French administration jealously protected the colonial markets for her industries. Hence, for a long time there was almost no attempt at
industrialisation until the wind of change forced the colonial authorities to undertake processing of some goods. In the early decades of the colonial administration, attempt to process export crops of West Africa on the spot rather than in the metropolis were few; even groundnuts were exported undercorticated.

Owing to the type of relationship which existed between the metropolitan capitals and the colonies, the dependency school described it as the centre-periphery relationship, which was dominated by unequal exchange and exploitation, which contributed to the backwardness of the colonial territories and their underdevelopment. The situation was summed up by Davidson when he said, "is the colonial systems aimed at taking wealth out of Africa by means of cheap labour, by paying prices to export farmers that were lower than prices on the world market, and by controlling all big business. They bought in modern technology, but no technical skill to Africans ... They introduced no industrial revolution."8

From the above, it is clear that the colonial administration never intended to develop industries or any form of manufacturing in the colonies. This accounted for the near absence of any form of manufacturing in West Africa territories before the end of the Second World War. This has influenced Lawal to describe effort at industrialisation as mere tokenism during the period.9

The restrictions imposed on importation of certain commodities was not utilized to initiate some form of processing for domestic use. Even where some attempts were made to produce furniture for office use, this was abandoned at the end of the war. The Second World War and its attendant problems also forced the colonial powers to embark on the processing of some goods needed for the successful prosecution of the war. But most of these were abandoned as soon as the war ended.

However, the major problem of the British administration in the post war period was how development could be accelerated in the colonies. Two options were open to the government. The first was to introduce a reasonable amount of Industrialisation, while the second was to dispose and control the natural resources of the colonies. The concensus was that the predominantly agricultural economy of Africa should be supplemented by secondary industries in order to free the territories from comparatively expensive imports of European manufactured goods.10 Thus it was the attempt to resolve the problem arising from the Second World War that brought about the need to develop few local industries.11

The attempt to introduce manufacturing in West Africa was not a deliberate policy to uplift the quality of life of the people. Export processing was dictated by the Second World War which made importation of goods difficult due to enemy blockades. Secondly, the end of the World War witnessed intensified nationalist activities. The Nationalist started to advocate for progressive industrialisation of the colonies as a necessary condition for raising productivity and the standard of living of the masses.12

Industrialisation, they argued would reduce dependence on the metropolis and preserve foreign exchange. Even the British colonial secretary saw the need to process some of the raw materials when he said, "The development of secondary industries is essential to the dependency in order to secure a balanced internal economy, since any price depression which most seriously affects
the producers of raw materials will be partially off-set, if the raw materials necessary for local consumption can be produced locally at lower cost.”13

It was paradoxical that despite the fact that the British colonial administration saw the need to engage in some form of processing and set up a committee to assess the viability or otherwise of embarking on processing products like palm produce, the committee was of the view that there was no market for such industry.14 Whereas, the development of the manufacturing can stimulate rapid economic development by increasing productivity and growth, flimsy excuses were advanced to discourage the development of this sector so as to secure perpetually the colonial markets for the manufactured goods from the metropolis.

The term manufacturing or industrialisation has been misconstrued by many. Some regard Industrialisation as the installation of heavy capital intensive machineries while mere fabrication of iron or processing which involves few workers can also be seen as manufacturing. To others, processing of such product as palm produce through mechanical means is also industrialisation. Thus in our discussion of industrialisation in West Africa during the period under review, industrialisation would not be seen from the perspective of Yusuf Bala Usman in his book titled, The Nigerian Economic Crisis, as the process of developing the capacity of a country to master and locate within its borders, the whole industrial production process, production of raw materials; including production of intermediate products for other industries ... and to organise the production process.15 Rather, I subscribe to Wells and Wamington’s definition which describes Industrialisation as substitution of power-driven, machinery for handicraft methods of production or setting up of plants for extracting minerals providing power or processing materials or manufacturing Finished products.16

The adoption of the above definition is intended to achieve the purpose of this chapter, which is to examine the character of manufacturing in West Africa during the colonial period and shortly after independence and its impact on the economy. This would be discussed in three parts, the first examines the character of industrialisation, the second is the efforts made by each government to encourage the growth of industrialisation, and the last, the impact of industrialisation on the sub-region.

**The Nature of Industrialisation**

Before 1950, most of the states in West Africa were under colonial rule. As stated earlier, colonies were conceived as markets for distribution of the industrial manufactures from their metropolitan industries. They were also sources for the supply of the much needed raw materials. Industrialisation was not encouraged by the administration to avoid competition. However, certain circumstance gave rise to processing of some products before the Second World War. The earliest form of processing was the Cotton Ginneries for the British Cotton Growing Association in Kano and others at Oloke Meji (Abeokuta) Ibadan, Iwo, Oyo and Osogbo.17 These were intended to make cotton available to the British Industries. Palm Oil crushing Mills were also established, one at Apapa and the other in Opobo, but were soon abandoned.

An attempt to establish the juice industry in Nigeria between 1920 and 1924 was also abandoned on the excuse that the product did not meet international standard.18 A tobacco industry was set
up at Ibadan in 1937, becoming one of first modern industry in West Africa. The French West African colonies were administered as a single political entity, hence, most of the developments were concentrated in Dakar, the Administrative Headquarters of the French territory. Thus, the first industry to be established in the OAF territories was the soap industry in Dakar and another at Bouake in the Ivory Coast in 1923. To a very large extent, the industries established in Senegal were meant to serve the needs of all the French West Africa territories. In all, not much industrial processing took place in West Africa before the Second World War.

With the outbreak of the war it became increasingly difficult to import some much needed consumer goods because of shipping difficulty and enemy action. As it was no longer easy to secure the materials for the prosecution of the war, the colonial government, particularly the British tried to promote such activities as palm oil bulking, cotton ginning, groundnut and fish processing as well as canning of fruits which hitherto had been exported completely unprocessed. Thus it was in the attempt to solve the problem arising from the Second World War that gave rise to the development a few local industries.

At the end of the war, the colonial administration realised that industrialisation in their West African colonies could no longer be delayed unnecessarily.

Despite the fact that the colonial administration felt the need to engage in the processing of some agricultural crops to reduce costs, there was no definite colonial policy on industrialisation.

Generally industrialisation in West Africa during the colonial period was characterised by the following:

(a) Most industries were either of low value to bulk imports, which required few sophisticated inputs like cement for the construction or simple consumer goods such as textiles, clothing, shoes, soap detergents, beer and spirit for mass market.

(b) Industrialisation was limited in character and content.

(c) Most of the output of the industries was composed of final consumer goods hence, sales of output by other sectors for use as input was limited. Thus forward linkage of the manufacturing was generally low.

(d) The development of industry did not stimulate the growth of the economy generally.

(e) Most of the industries can be described as assembly industries.

Thus, the predominant industries during the colonial period consisted mainly of Mining, Quarrying, Food Production, Fish Processing, Oil Seed Processing, Baking, Sugar and Confectionery, Beers, Carbonated Drinks, Textiles, Clothing, Wood, Furniture, Paper Construction Materials and Electricity. Everywhere, whether in Nigeria, Senegal, Ivory Coast, or Mali, the pattern was the same. Industrialisation was mainly, agro-allied, processing textiles, chemicals and building materials. In the word of Peter Kilby, "the industrial output exhibited considerable uniformity. Food and beverages (grains milling baking margarine, soft drinks)
cigarettes, cotton, textiles and cement constitute more than half of the manufacturing in all but a handful of countries." In all, Industrialisation was mainly processing of agricultural raw materials for export as such had to be exported in semi processed form to avoid spoilage.

**Factors Accelerating Industrialisation**

Certain factors encouraged the promotion of Industrialisation in the last two decades of the colonial period. After the Second World War, the colonial government established some pioneer Mills and Research institutes. For instance, mechanical processing of palm fruits was established in Eastern Nigeria in 1946, and another canning factory was also set up in Lagos. The establishment of the colonial’development Boards which gave financial assistance for processing or manufacturing encouraged the growth of industries.

The introduction of new constitutions in the colonies which transferred some political power into the hand of Africans led to the emergence of the African elite. These leaders became increasingly interested in industrialisation to achieve greater economic independence and make their economies self reliant in the area of manufacturing. In many territories, the acquisition of an Industrial sector became the main goal of the new leaders, as a way of diversifying the economy, thereby reducing over-dependence on agriculture, particularly export of agricultural goods.

The increase in the purchasing power of the citizenry resulted in a phenomenal increase in demand for imported goods. In Nigeria for example, import increased from 520 million pounds in 1946, to £62 million pounds in 1950 to SI 14 million pounds in 1954. This did not only encourage specialisation in importation of one or two commodities, it encouraged the establishment of import substitution industry for the supply of the commodities.

The influx of new distributor into the area formerly seen as the exclusive preserve of the established trading concerns, did not only threaten their position and reduce their profit, it put them at a competitive disadvantage. Faced with ever increasing over-head cost, and stiff competition, many of the concerns withdrew from distributive and retail trade into the manufacturing sector, to retain their former stake in the commerce of the West African sub-region.

The import market witnessed a remarkable increase in the 1950s to such an extent that manufactured articles were large enough to sustain the erection of factories close to the market. This encouraged large importers to take advantage and produced locally the commodities which had hitherto been imported into West Africa, hence the rise of industries to meet the peoples’ needs.

The role of government in encouraging the growth of industries cannot be over-emphasised. After the Second World War, the official response to industrialisation, though varied from one area to the other tended to be in favour of some elements of Industrialisation. The government introduced a number of incentives to stimulate more foreign and domestic investment in the industrial sector. From 1946, colonial government embarked on sponsoring programmes of technical education, Industrial research\^ palm oil extraction. The government introduced fiscal incentives, such as Pioneer Income tax holiday (1952). This was followed later by the
enactment of the Import-duty-relief. Act (1956) all to attract investors to this vital sector. For instance, the 1952 legislation gave relief from payment of income tax on profits to companies which were engaged in pioneer industries for, from two to five years, depending on the capital invested on the industrial project.31

The colonial government also gave other incentives by the creation of Industrial estates or lay outs with facilities such as roads, drains, water, electricity and accommodation for workers. The main objective was to attracts those wishing to invest in industries as these would reduce their over-head cost and other expenses. Such facilities were provided in the Ivory Coast, the Gold Coast and in Nigeria.32

Also, companies were encouraged to plough back certain percentage of their profit by investing in industry. This was done by granting tax concessions and by permitting repatriation to the investors way back at home, the balance of their profit. This method enhanced industrial growth in Ivory Coast.

In the 1950s for example, both the Federal and Regional Governments in Nigeria sent trade and industrial missions abroad to publicise the industrial potentials of the country to the International Capital. The assurance of profitable investment and promise of a healthy industrial climate gave rise to the growth of industries.

In some territories government built factories and established corporations to manage them. Several of these were set up in the Gold Coast. They were mainly steel works a packaging factory, a printing press and a cocoa processing factory. A packaging factory was also set up in Jebba in Nigeria, while Guinea and Mali obtained manufacturing plants from communist countries of Eastern Europe.33 Also apart from equity participation, both regional and federal government went into partnership with other foreign interests without requiring them to share the profit with them. Assured of protection, and granted a tax free period as well as a full repatriation of their profit, foreign investors were encouraged to invest in the manufacturing sector.34

More importantly, the quest to be self reliant through internal development, a conscious policy of industrial expansion and encouragement to private investors resulted in substantial industrial development in the closing years of colonial rule and the first decade of independence.35

**Contributions of the Manufacturing to the Economy**

The contribution of manufacturing to the economy during the colonial period cannot be correctly evaluated without a look into the performance of the sector in the first decade of independence. The reason is that a good number of industries established during the colonial period did not take off fully until after independence.

As stated earlier, most of the industries established were on import substitution depending on the importation of raw materials machinery and experts. Consequently the linkage between the domestic economy was low. The linkage of the industries with the other sectors of the economy is important, because it determines the growth and development of the sector. Forward or backward linkage means the extent the product of a particular industry is utilized or put into use.
in other industries or other sectors of the economy. But unfortunately, in case of the industries in West Africa, most of the products of the industries went to the final consumers thereby contributing little or nothing by the way of forward or backward linkages to other industries or sectors of the economy. Thus the growth and development of industries did not stimulate the growth of the economy in general.

Secondly most of the industries were more of assembly plants where most of the materials were of foreign origins. For example, in the beverages or breweries both the raw materials as well as the bottles and the machinery were all imported, and in most cases only water was added, a situation which made its impact on the economy very minimal.

The contribution of the manufacturing sector to the GDP was also very small as could be seen from the table below.

In terms of employment generation, the sector provided employment for some, but did not meet the general expectation of the people. Available record shows that agriculture remains the major occupation of the people of the region, the employment generated varied from one country to another as is shown from the table below. Although industrialisation offers some prospects.

For the creation of job opportunities, this sector has not developed on a large scale during this period to fully realise one of the primary objectives for the clamouring for industrialisation in the West African sub-region.

As far as the transfer of technology was concerned, some degree of success was achieved in the area of training of labour, introduction of new ideas, and new techniques. Researches were carried out in various ways to ensure high quality production. The effect on this area was appreciable.

Similarly the indirect impact of industrialisation was substantial. Industrialisation which was an urban phenomenon attracted many people from the rural areas to take advantage of industrial growth. Consequently the influx of a large number of Youths into the industrial cities resulted in the rapid urbanisation of the industrial axis. The trend also stimulated demand in the urban centres which gave rise to commercialisation of many areas. Thus there emerged a group of people who came to provide services of various types to the rapidly growing industrial estates and zones.

The indirect effect could also be felt in the provision of accommodation. Investors constructed estates to provide the much needed accommodation for their workers. The private citizen rose to provide houses which they rented out to workers in areas where industries were located. Also, restaurants, banks, road, small scale industries and other auxiliary services grew in the industrial neighbourhood and or within the industrial zones. All these gave rise to commercial activities which were of great significance to the surrounding communities.

There was also some fiscal linkages as the various governments derived substantial revenue form import and exports, royalties, lease license etc. The effect of these measures was a gradual
reduction in the prices of essential commodities and availability of goods in large quantities.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the colonial period, there was no policy intended to industrialise the colonies. Indeed colonies were meant to supply the raw materials needs of the metropolitan industries and as markets for products of their manufactures, although this has often been denied on the excuse that industries could not be set up in the colonies for lack of demand as the purchasing power of the colonies was low. However, the expansion of peasant exports crops coupled with an appreciable rise in their income did not only lead to substantial increase in demand for imports, but improved standard of living of the citizenry. Such was the increase in demand that foreign investors who wanted to retain their share of the West African trade decided to establish the plants for the processing of the products. Also, the introduction of constitutional changes which brought African elite into colonial government. This stimulated the demand for rapid industrialisation of the colonies.

In the Post Second World War years, the colonial authorities realised the need for some measure of industrialisation and provided conducive atmosphere for foreign investors. These included construction of infrastructures granting of tax relief, tax holiday, and repatriation of profits by the investors. All these paved the way for accelerated industrial growth. Although West Africa witnessed industrial growth from the 1950s, most of the establishments were merely import substitution with low linkages.

But industrial development had some impact on the area of employment generation and in boosting the informal sector.

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Inter-State Economic Cooperation

M.O.A. Adejugbe

Inter-state economic cooperation in West Africa had existed during the colonial era. In fact, France had a unified administration for the whole of French West Africa. There were also many common economic institutions for the former British dependencies. The independent West African states failed to build on these foundations after the attainment of independence. The euphoria of political independence drove the newly independent states to disregard the benefits of economic cooperation. The French dependencies of West Africa, Afrique Occidentale (AOF), that had been under a unified and federated administration, forced France into a U-turn on the eve of independence. The relatively richer members of the federation opted for a divided Francophone West Africa.

It was not long, however, before economic realities began to force these states into one form of economic cooperation or the other. Rhetorics subsequently started to be issued about cooperation on bilateral basis, and on economic integration ranging from been made. But, for some countries, there is scarcely any alternative to a form of integration. The case of the Gambia, a geo-political anomaly in Senegal, is a good example. For the past two decades, a Senegambia union has been undergoing a process of ante-natal treatment. Thanks to the inducement offered by the Gambian insecurity problem as demonstrated by the abortive coup d’etat of 1982. The birth maybe imminent given the progress made since then. Three protocols relating to institutions of confederation, external relations policies and the financial regulations of the confederation have been signed. The two countries are planning an economic union, the highest form of economic integration. It is essentially a political fusion.

Other existing institutions of cooperation in West Africa have been less ambitious. They range from functional organisations to a custom union with prospects of development ultimately into a common market. Albeit many economists still doubt the relevance of economic integration in the less developed countries (LDGs). They argue that the environment and the economies belie the hopes of economic integration. It is the objective of this chapter to review the past efforts devoted to economic cooperation of all forms in the region and to assess the future prospects.

In the next section, we look into these economics in outline form with particular consideration to intra-West African trade. Section III reviews the existing functional organisation including monetary institutions for effecting inter-state monetary payments. Section IV examines the existing custom unions, while the final section examines the future economic integration in the region.
The Economies of West African States

The features of the LDCs, the prevalent low per capita income and the underdevelopment state of their transport and communications, continue to raise doubts as to the gain of economic integration among them. It is also argued that trade among the LDCs is negligible because the bulk of their trade consists in exporting primary products to developed countries and importing manufactures from the latter. The existing transport facilities are also geared towards serving the south-north trade. This section briefly examines the features of West African economies in a sketchy outline. No attempt is made to elaborate. An elaborate study of this has recently been accomplished by Rimmer.1

Per Capital Income

There are two striking features of per capital income in the contemporary West Africa: very low per capital income among majority of the states and a high degree of dispersion between the low income state and the relatively high income state. Within each country, the income distribution exhibits a high amount of disparity. But, by and large, the majority of people in West Africa just manage to eke some living from the soil. The World Bank classified eleven out of the sixteen countries in West African among the poorest countries of the world.2 The West Africans are also aware of this poverty and disparity. In 1983, ECOWAS Heads of State agreed to a classification of three groups according to their perception of relative affluence or poverty.

Group I countries are the poorest and III, the richest3

Group I: Cape Verde; Guinea Bissau; The Gambia; Mali; Upper Volta; Mauritania; and Niger.

Group II: Benin; Guinea; Liberia, Sierra Leone; and Togo. Groups III: Cote d’Ivoire; Nigeria; Ghana; and Senegal.

In 1960, real income per capital at 1975 US price level had ranged from $108 in Mali to $498 in Ghana. In 1980, income per capita was still lowest in Mali, but the range from $89 to $711 had widened by about 60 per cent. Mali’s plight was not unique in the region. Several other countries have suffered from a fall in real income.

On average, real income increased in the region from $360 (Weighted mean) to $396 in 1970 to $510 in 1980. So, in the 1960s, real income grew in the region by 1.1 percent and in the 1970s by about 2.0 per cent. As it is obvious from, the foregoing discussion, i only a few of the countries enjoyed increases in real income; Yeal income in several countries slipped backwards. But the few countries that did accounted for 71 per cent of the regional population.

Those countries that enjoyed a rise in income include Nigeria, Ivory Coast, The Gambia, Guinea and Liberia. The rise in Nigeria’s income was entirely due to the oil boom of the 1970s. By 1980, mining accounted for 21 per cent of her GDP, whereas in 1970 it was less than 10 per cent. On the other hand, the Ivorian increase in income was due to
growth in export value and accelerated industrialisation through import substitution. Importation of machinery and raw materials was made possible through increase foreign earnings from export of agricultural products; coffee; banana; cocoa; timber and pineapples. This has also been supplemented by heavy borrowing from the international capital market.

Senegal remains the most industrialised country in West Africa. It used to be the industrial centre for AOF. After the attainment of independence of the French colonies in 1960 Senegal lost most of these markets. Industrial output gradually fell and excess capacities in many of her industries developed.

Ghana’s industrialization strategy has been based upon import substitution and the financing was supported by earnings from cocoa exports. The influx of foreigners had been crucial to the cocoa economy in the 1940s and 1950s. In the early 1950s annual budgetary surplus averaged $20 million. It was upon this background that Ghana’s ambitious Seven Year Development Plan was based. Cocoa prices collapsed in the early 1960s. Nkrumah also fell from power. The Ghanaian economic mismanagement worsened. The foreigners that had been crucial to the cocoa plantations were also ejected from Ghana. But, more importantly, the ageing cocoa trees were not replaced. Since then, per capita income in Ghana has continued to fall.

On the other hand, land-locked countries of Upper Volta and Mali had suffered seriously in the 1970s from the Sahelian drought which continued to devastate their farmland and kill their cattle. Mining is also of little significance in the countries. Their fate was therefore one of falling income in the 1970s.

Most of the national boundaries in Africa are the by-products of the empire builders of the 19th and early 20th centuries. They remain mere geographical expressions. Nothing illustrates this more than Gambia — an accidental intrusion into Senegal along River Gambia. The country continues to enjoy growing per capita income. Amin, considers Gambia’s GDP inflated since there is considerable smuggling of groundnuts from Senegal into Gambia. Income per capita in Liberia has been growing, but not much development has been taking place. Her situation has been cited as the symbol of ”growth” without development.

Structure of the Economies

Table 2 gives the structure of the economies in West Africa for 1980. The first two columns represent the primary sector consisting agriculture, mining and quarrying. These two sectors largely dominated the economies of West Africa. They accounted for about 41 per cent of the GDP in 1980. They were surpassed only by the service sectors. The manufacturing sectors of these economies accounted for a small proportion of the GDP. Manufacturing contributed 15 per cent in the Senegalese GDP and 16 per cent of the Ivorien GDP in 1980. The comparative proportion in Nigeria was 5 per cent.

Utilities in these countries remain unimportant and underdeveloped. This has obvious adverse effects on future industrialisation of the region. Nigeria’s constant power failure and inadequate water supply remain a perennial problem. Power generation in Sierra Leone is provided through the expensive oil-fired thermal plants. The hydro-electric potentials cannot be developed for lack
of funds.

Intra-West African transport and communications also pose an insuperable problem. The existing road and railway were destined to promote trans-oceanic trade’ with Europe: they were not designed to facilitate trade among West African countries. Attempts to correct this situation are just being made in the plan to build two Trans-West African highways: a Trans-Sahelean Highways linking Dakar to Niamey and a Trans-Coastal Highway linking Lagos to Noauketptt.

**Intra-West African Trade**

Trade among the states of West Africa is negligible and falls below five per cent of the total external trade in the region. Several factors account for this: external factors, parallel production structures, past colonial ties and underdeveloped West African inter-state transport and Communications; and there is the problem posed by the multiplicity of currencies, most of them inconvertible.

The mainstay of West African economies remain peasant agriculture. There is great similarity in the agricultural products. Viner had suggested that competitive production would enhance inter-state trade in a custom union. Other economists have added that the greater the cost differences among partners, the greater the economic gain from economic cooperation. This assumes a process of creative destruction and survival of the fittest in the process of competition. However, these are inapplicable in a peasant agriculture economy in which farmers stress subsistence and market only the surplus which is also subject to the vagaries of the weather.

The agricultural export economy continues to be closely linked to the former metropolitan country. France succeeded in bringing her former colonies into the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1956. By a special arrangement, these former dependencies could export their agricultural products to the EEC under special concessions conferred by the Youande Conventions. This was also supported by grants from the European Development Funds. Between 1957, and 1974, some $2229 million was disbursed to the EEC-associated members, the bulk of the fund went to the French former dependencies in West and Central Africa.

Since the 1960s, the influence of multinational enterprises (MNEs) has been enormous and pervading. Considerable proportion of the world trade now takes the form of affiliate to parent company or affiliate to affiliate shipments. Among the most important affiliates of MNEs in West Africa are United African Company, Coca Cola, Lever Brothers, Air Liquide, Firestone, Texaco and Barclays Bank, etc. However, there has been relatively little vertical integration in the’ operations of these MNEs, the exception being those in the oil, industry. An important reason for this is that export of most agricultural products in West Africa has, since 1940s, been handled by special boards set up by the government; the Marketing Boards in the Anglophone West Africa and *Caisses de Stabilisation* in the Francophone West Africa.

As a result of the factors discussed above, the proportion of trade that occurs among West African states remains very little. Table III shows the volume of trade, imports and exports, in percentage terms, that took place among West African countries in 1975.
In relative terms, Benin and the landlocked countries of Mali, Upper Volta and Niger, engaged in greater inter-state trade in West Africa. Benin, Niger and Upper Volta are members of the West African monetary union. The Malian franc is closely linked to the French franc. This confers ease of inter-state payment. This is reflected in the relatively high proportion of their trade with other French-speaking West African countries, particularly Senegal and the Cote d’ivoire. These countries are relatively more industrialised and they belong to the West African Monetary Union.

The intra-West African trade was, of course, dominated in 1975 by Nigeria, Cote d’Ivoire, Senegal and Ghana. In relative terms, Nigerian trade with the rest of West Africa was not significant. In absolute terms, however, it was bigger than those of many other countries individually considered. In 1975, Nigeria’s export to other West African countries was about $152 million, while her import was just over $24 million. The comparative figure for 1980 was over $418 million export to other West Africa countries and just about $34 million imports from them. In relative terms, Nigeria’s trade with West Africa has always ben under two percent up to 1983. It is also, important to note that Nigeria’s export to her West African neighbours is mainly crude and refined oil, rather than manufactures.

On the other hand, the Senegalese exports continue to be dominated by manufactures, while the Cote d’Ivoire’s export is a mixture of manufactures and refined petroleum products. These exports of manufactures and refined oil were directed mainly to Mali, Mauritania, Burkina Fasso and Niger. Past colonial ties and membership of the West African Monetary Union were responsible. Senegal and Ivory Coast have comparative advantage in those manufactures over these countries.

In sum, the intra-West African trade remained insignificant even in 1980. Intra-West African import in 1980 was 3.2 per cent, while export was 3.6 per cent of the total. This did not constitute any significant improvement compared with 1975 performance. In fact, it was slipping backwards in relative terms. In 1975 intra-West African trade had been 3.8 per cent export and 4.4 per cent import.

There is, however, substantial, room for improvement. But this demands greater efficiency in production in the existing manufacturing concerns, greater regional industrial specialisation or a reduction in the present competitive production lines. And these should be complemented by a more developed inter state transport system and an inter-West African state payment system.

**Economic Cooperation through Functional Organisations**

During the colonial era, economic cooperation was built around countries belonging to the same colonial power. In the British dependencies there was the West African Currency Board that was responsible for the issue of the West African Pound to Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Gambia. These countries also jointly operated the West African Airways Corporation. Research institutions were also jointly owned and maintained: these included the West African Cocoa Research Institute; the West African Palm Oil Research; and West African Institute of Social and Economic Research. In the AOF, a unified federaflon was adopted; only Togo was separately administered.
Within the period of 1957 and 1961 twelve countries had been added to the list of independent states in West Africa. Liberia had been independent since 1847. The French West Africa broke up and each state set up its own administration and services. The common services under the British Colonial era mentioned above were replaced by national institutions. In the early years of independence, revolution against multi-national common services or anything that might derogate from national sovereignty was strong. This was particularly noticeable among the former British colonies.

Confronted with the hollowness of political independence, devoid of any economic power and faced with problems of unfulfilled economic expectations, these newly independent countries soon started to seek solutions through multinational economic cooperation. All forms of multinational economic institutions later mushroomed. They seem to defy classification. There were commodity associations and functional organisations among neighbouring states which Abangwu had described as homogenic integration. Most of these were river basin commissions, trade and financial organisations. Later, other organisations emerged in form of custom unions and common markets: Mano River Union (MRU), Economic Community of West Africa Communauté (Economique de rAfrique de l’Ouest — CEAO) and Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The discussion in the remaining part of this chapter is divided into three. In the proximate sub-section we examine the important multinational functional organisations and institutions of monetary cooperation.

**Multinational Functional Organisations**

It is neither desirable nor purposeful to give a full catalogue of the plethora of multinational organisations that existed in West Africa between the 1950s and up to date. Some of them were still-born; some had an ephemeral existence and disappeared without achieving anything. The discussion centres, therefore, on a few active river basin commissions, commodity organisations and financial organisations.

The more important commodity organisations include the Cocoa Producers Alliance, the African Groundnut Council, and the West African Rice Development Association (WARDA). The first two are essentially commodity associations with the objective of promoting technical and scientific information among members of each organisation, and maintenance of fair and equitable prices for the products. The members of the Cocoa Producers Alliance are Brazil4 Ghana, Nigeria, Cameroun, Gabon, Cote d’Ivoire, and Togo. The organisation was established in 1962 with its headquarters in Lagos. The African Groundnut Council was founded in 1964 with the Gambia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sudan and Burkina Fasso as members. The headquarters is similarly located in Lagos. WARDA is not a cartel; it is a research organisation with the objective of promoting the production of rice and of improving the quality of rice produced in the region. It also undertakes the development of storage and processing facilities. WARDA has its headquarters in Monrovia.

The river basin commissions, on the other hand, were founded for the purpose of carrying out studies and disseminating information relating to the different rivers. Such studies aim at
promoting irrigation, agriculture, and river transportation. Among the more important commissions are the River Niger Commission, the Lake Chad Commission and the Organisation for the Development of the Senegal River.

The Niger Basin Commission was founded in 1964 after two conferences in the previous year by the river's adjoining states. The signatories to Niamey Agreement upon which the commission was established, were Nigeria, Cameroun, Chad, Niger, Upper Volta (Burkina Fasso), Benin, guinea, Mali and Ivory Coast (Cote d'Ivoire). The Niger Basin Commission’s goal was to promote research into the navigability of River Niger, and studies relating to the development of the basin, since its inception, the commission has been engaged in collection and dissemination of information on the river basin. It has also prescribed rules for navigation on the river.

However, the landlocked members of this mammoth body soon grew disillusioned about its effectiveness and the extent it could solve their peculiar economic problem. And, spurred on by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Mali, Niger and Upper Volta (Burkina Fasso) founded the Liptako-Gourma Integrated Development Authority in 1971. The objective of the organisation was a "tri-state development" of mineral, energy, hydraulic, agricultural, pastoral and fishing resources of the Liptako-Gourma zone.

Another parallel functional organisation developed contemporaneously around Lake Chad: the Lake Chad Basin Commission. The members of the commission were Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroun. Its headquarters was located at N’Djamoana in Chad. The objective of the Chad Basin Commission was optimal exploitation of Lake Chad water, and fixing a rate of water flow that will best develop the lake basin.

The Lake Chad Basin commission had since sponsored studies relating to irrigation, agriculture, fishing and transportation in respect of the lake. Nigeria has embarked upon some gigantic irrigation scheme involving 49,000 hectares south of the lake. She planned to develop the area for growing wheat, maize, tomato, sugar cane and groundnut.

Organisation for the Development of Senegal River (OMVS) was established at a much later period by Senegal, Mali and Mauritania. This multinational functional organisation was a reconstitution of Organisation of Senegal River states which has been formed earlier and of which Guinea had been a member, the aims were similar to those of the Niger Basin Commission and the Lake Chad Basin Commission. It was to promote a planned development of the Senegal river basin through sponsoring of technical and economic studies. Some of its past research studies had produced projects, some of which had been executed.

Monetary Cooperation

Transactions among nationals and organisations belonging to different states with different currencies demand a means of financial intermediation or a means of exchange. During the colonial era in West Africa, there were two main currencies covering more than 95 per cent of West Africa either in terms of population or in terms of land space. There was the West African pound in the British territories and CFA franc in the French domain. In addition, Liberia uses the...
US dollar. Since both the West African pound and the AOF franc were tied to metropolitan currencies, intra-West African trade was not impeded by the problem of inter-state payment. The problem in those days was that trade traffic was in the direction of West Africa and Europe.

**Union Monetaire Ouest Africain (UMOA)**

This currency fabric was destroyed within a few years in the early 1960s which witnessed the attainment of independence of a majority of these states. The Nigerian Naira, the Ghanaian Cedi, the Sierra Leone, the Guinean Syli etc. all emerged and bore no relation to one another. Only the Leone was initially convertible. Each was related to international currencies of Europe. The exception to the multiplicity was the emergence of a monetary union among six countries in the region. The case of members of UMOA, that is. West African Monetary Union, has had no parallel, therefore.

UMOA was founded in 1962 by Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Niger, Senegal, Togo, Upper Volta (Burkina Fasso) and Mauritania, which later pulled out, since its formation about a quarter of a century ago, the members stuck to a common currency issued by the monetary union’s Central Bank: *Banque Centrale des etats de VAfrique de VOuest* (BCEAO).

BCEAO was founded in 1962 by UMOA. The headquarters was originally located at Paris; the 1974 reorganisation and redefinition of the role of BCEAO brought the headquarters to Dakar. At the time of its inception, until 1974, BCEAO was a passive monetary authority with restricted functions of issuing of the CFA franc (which was linked to the French franc with one French franc equal to 50 CFA francs), pooling together the external reserves of member countries and maintaining convertibility of CFA franc to French franc.

BCEAO was empowered by UMOA in 1975 to take on a more dynamic and developmental role. At the outset, the BCEAO’s credit to the government of any member was limited to 10 per cent of the borrowing country’s previous year revenue. This was raised to 20 per cent in 1975, having been previously raised from 10 to 15 per cent. This credit consists of direct advances, treasury bills purchases by BCEAO and government treasuries’ indebtedness towards financial institutions. 12 This central bank was also enjoined to promote economic growth and harmonisation of the economies of member states, protection of the pooled external reserves as well as maintenance of price stability.

Since the latter part of the 1970s, BCEAO has pursued more active and radical monetary policies than between the period of 1962-74. Credit expansion grew fairly rapidly. In 1967, liquidity, that is, Money Supply/GDP, was 14 per cent; in 1977 it had grown to 28 per cent.13 Flexible operations within the group’s overall monetary and exchange policies since the last decade, have also permitted member states to pursue monetary policies appropriate to their different national circumstances. Fiscal coordination among member states continued to be achieved through statutory ceiling on government domestic borrowing. Albeit member states have often resorted to external borrowing, resulting in increased burden of external debt servicing. External reserves have been reduced to a critical level by 1980: they fell to 27.4 billion CFA francs compared with 192.5 billion in 1977.14
However, the UMOA had an impressive performance in managing the external resources, in maintaining price stability and in sustaining CFA convertibility within the franc zone. France has continued to support the currency. This could not depreciate the merit of the system, however. Trade among members of the Union has been vigorously fostered. The level of cooperation exhibited remains unparalleled in West Africa. Other multinational monetary institutions have had more restricted scope and goal.

**The West African Clearing House (WACH)**

The WACH was established in 1975 by the Governors of the West African Sub-Regional Committee of the Association of African Central Banks, and it was in fulfilment of the provisions of Article 38 of ECOWAS. It started operations in the following year and its headquarters was located at Freetown. All the member states of ECOWAS except Cape Verde, are members of WACH. Essentially, WACH is a monetary institution designed to facilitate international payment among members whose different currencies are inconvertible.

The objectives of WACH are to promote intra-West African trade and to foster monetary cooperation among members. The institution also aims at reducing the cost of servicing international payment in respect of intra-West African transactions such as commission paid on foreign exchange, transfer charges and fees for confirmation of letters of credit. It is also to boost the use of member states’ currencies.

The unit of account of WACH is the West African Unit of Account (WAUA) which is linked to the IMF Special Drawing Right by ratio 1:1. The currency of each member state is linked to WAUA by calculations which are based on its middle rate of exchange with SDR. Daily calculations are made; the monthly averages are derived from the daily computations, the value of each currency is then determined on the basis of the monthly averages, vis-a-vis WAUA. In their operation, not every transaction involves the use of money. Credits are multilaterally set against debits; only the monthly net balances involved require to be offset by a convertible foreign currency.

The benefits of WACH depends upon the volume of transaction it handles and that volume remains a negligible proportion of total West African international trade and payments. The average volume of business was 3 million WAUA in the second half of 1976; it rose to 4.3 million in 1978; it moved up to about 14 million WAUA in 1981.15 It has been observed that countries with highly inconvertible currencies like Ghana and Guinea have been channelling increasing proportion of their intra-regional transactions through WACH, while the BCEAO members have been minimally using the clearing facility.6 There have been delays in payments occasioned by the underdeveloped level of communications in West Africa. The institution has, however, fostered some economic cooperation in the region.

**Cooperation Through Economic Integration**

There are several multinational arrangements within which economic integration can be effected ranging from a free trade area to an economic union. In between these polar points are custom unions and common markets. A free trade involves an arrangement that eliminates all forms of
trade restriction among members. A custom union abolishes restrictions on intra-union trade and also sets up common external tariffs.

There are three important ingredients of a common market: elimination of restrictions on intra-union trade, a common set of restrictions on non-member trade, and free movement of factors of production within the common market. The economic union possesses these features of a common market. In addition, it combines with them harmonisation of the monetary and fiscal policies.

The relevance of economic integration in the LDCs has been an area of controversy in economics. A brief review of this is taken up below. In the subsequent sections, we evaluate the existing economic integrative institutions; West African Economic Community (CEAO), Mano River Union and ECOWAS, beginning with CEAO.

**Economic Integration and the LDCs**

The theoretical basis of economic integration rests on Viner’s theory of custom union. In a custom union, members enjoy a preferential tax on intra-union trade. Viner demonstrated that the effect of this is a mixed bag of trade creation and trade diversion. The trade creation aspect involves a shift from a high cost to a low cost intra-union source of supply. On the other hand, trade diversion involves a shift from extra union low cost to high cost sources of supply. Trade creation is regarded as beneficial, whereas trade diversion produces a negative effect on welfare. Whether a custom union will increase welfare of members, therefore, depends upon the net effect of trade creation and trade diversion.

This is the traditional custom union theory. It deals directly with developed economies. And many scholars argue that it is inapplicable to the LDCs. This view started to alter in the 1960s. The core of the argument centres on the potential gains of LDCs with respect to custom union, when consideration is given to the dynamic rather than the static aspect.

Part of the argument is that custom union in the LDCs should be treated as an approach to economic development rather than a static welfare. Mikesell argues that the economic theory of integration with respect to the LDCs should be to assess the impact of future investment and future production and the extent to which integration can contribute to an acceleration of economic growth.17 Mennes has carried the argument further, that economic integration among the LDCs should be evaluated from a planning point of view and that an appropriate planning technique should be developed.18 One of the promising techniques that has been suggested is planned industrial specialisation aligned closely to member country resource endowments.

In a recent, study, for instance, Pearson and Williams demonstrate that there are potential gains from a rationalisation and integration between the manufacturing industries of Ghana and Ivory Coast (Code d’Ivoire).19 Industries in both countries enjoy high nominal and effective tariff protection, complemented by a mixture of other taxes and subsidising policies. Widespread under utilised capacities are common to the Ivorian and Ghanaian industries. They concluded, therefore, that
Economies of scale and domestic divergences offer an important scope for gains from industrial integration among developing countries. The widespread existence of under utilised industrial capacity, together with distorting policies and imperfections in factor markets provide a rationale for countries to swap opportunities for industrial expansion within a custom union.

It has also been argued that there exists considerable opportunities for cooperation and integration among the LDCs in primary products when a broad spectrum of products is involved. With higher scales of production in each product on disaggregating the bunch, potential areas of cooperation and inter-state exchange exist. At present, there is a large amount of south-north trade between the cereal and the husbandry economy of northern Nigeria on one hand, and the root tuber and the forest economy of the southern Nigeria on the other hand.

These potentialities can be translated into realities given in depth integrated planning cooperation and mutual understanding among West African states. Unfortunately, the records of economic planning in West Africa have been disappointing.

Economic planning started in West Africa after the Second World War. The British Colonial Office, in the process of allocating the ”Colonial Development and Welfare Fund” had requested for a Ten Year Development Programme from the British dependencies in 1945. The Nigerian Plan was revised twice before independence in 1960. Between 1962 and 1980, Nigeria has drawn up four plans. The Ghanaian experience is also similar. The post-colonial Ghana started with the celebrated and ambitious Seven Year Development Plan of 1963.

Similar planning exercises were undertaken in the Francophone West African States. In 1947, France set up the Investment Fund for Social Development (FIDES). Funds were disbursed from FIDES for executing projects related to transport, communication and urban developments.

Rimmer has correctly observed that these economic plans follow the same pattern. They started as ”edited compilations of the desiderata of government departments produced as conditions for sharing metropolitan aid funds”.21 As the foreign funds dwindled away, they were replaced by revenues from primary produce export taxes. The price stabilising boards metamorphosed into government tax collecting institutions. The petro-naira replaced this source in Nigeria in the 1970s. The salient point that has been observed here is that the case with which the funds were obtained partly explained the squander mania into which they were put.

Plan distortions were always considerable.22 Many government manufacturing products were bad propositions in terms of investment criteria, and in terms of location. The Kaduna Peugeot Automobile (Nigeria) epitomises the sad situation. It was 100 per cent based upon imported inputs which were air-lifted from Europe. The product is inferior to the European counterpart. High tariff and import quotas were imposed to give the assembled cars a slice of the Nigerian automobile market. Industrial integration in the region will require far greater thoroughness than these shoddy plans. It will also require considerable discipline during implementation.

In recent times, there has been a growing economic literature about industrial planning among underdeveloped states of a custom union. The model by Westphal,23 subsequently elaborated by Mannes, is a promising one. It is a technique for planning regional industrial specialisation. It
involves the drawing up of an indicative regional programme for specific range of industrial projects to be undertaken within a specific period. The input-output tables of each project with details about sources of raw materials and their where-withals as well as the destinations of the final output, are set out.

This approach confers the advantage of efficiently utilising production factors through economies of scale and industrial specialisation. Technological optimum of plants can be jointly attained, which would have been otherwise impossible if countries were to establish individually. Equity among the states can be ensured through granting of special considerations to the least advantaged members of the union. This approach to economic integration is capable of accelerating regional growth. And, in the final analysis, it is a more effective tool of ensuring the survival of economic integration than granting of funds for compensation or cooperation. In the next section, we review the three existing customs unions in West Africa. They were all established between 1973 and 1975.

**West African Economic Community (CEAO)**

Metropolitan France had wanted to unify French West Africa into a loose economic bloc just before the independence of these countries. In 1959, Custom Union French West Africa (UDAO), embracing all AOF except Guinea, was founded. UDAO never got over its teething problems. Rivalry between Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire) and Senegal accelerated its demise. Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire) did not wish to continue to serve as a market outlet for Senegalese manufactures and she employed value added tax to destroy the competitiveness of Senegalese goods in the territory.25

UDAO became moribund, even before the middle of the 1960s. It was replaced in 1966 by Custom Union of French West African States (UDEAO). UDEAO was an economic grouping linked together through a council of ministers and a committee of experts; it was restricted to a circumscribed goal of trade promotion among members by the use of special tax credits. It has been described as a negative approach to economic integration,26 and its failure had become apparent by 1969.

Determined to counter the growing influence of Nigeria at the beginning of the 1970s, and intent to destroy Nigeria’s moves to organise an economic union in the region, France stepped in again to resuscitate and to reshape UDEAO.

The outcome was the founding of CEAO in 1973. It became operational in 1974. Nigeria’s counter-diplomatic offensives considerably reduced the membership of CEAO; the members of the new organisation are Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire), Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Senegal and Burkina Fasso.27 The Secretariat is located at Ouagadougou, with four important institutions. At the apex is the Conference of Heads of States of the member countries. Next to it is the Council of Ministers that is statutorily required to meet at least twice a year. The other two organs are the Secretariat and the Court of Arbitration.

The goal of CEAO is a harmonised and balanced economic development. It aims at creating a unified regional market. Emphasis is laid on industrialisation, though in practice CEAO has also
been giving active support to agricultural development. CEAO also aims to develop common policies relating to research and technological development as well as coordinated development in transport and communication. The policy instruments designed for achieving these goals are Regional Cooperation Tax (RCT), Fiscal Compensation and Community Development Fund.

The Regional Cooperation Tax is one of the instruments of achieving the goal of fostering intra-CEAO trade. It is a preferential tax on imported manufactures from other members of the community. RCT is not a uniform tax. The level of the tax depends on the enterprise, its state of origin, the product in question and the country importing it. Considerations are accorded the extent to which local raw materials have been used, the inter-industry linkage involved, and whether a similar product is being manufactured in the importing country. The Council of Minister is responsible for fixing RCT on application from firms.

The system came into operation in January 1976. By December 1978 over 600 products, involving 175 firms, have been subjected to the RCT. About 54 percent of these firms were from the Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire), 32 per cent from Senegal and the remaining 24 per cent shared among the four least developed states. This imbalance among the states in respect of intra-CEAO trade, and the loss of revenue imposed by the application of RCT are compensated for through fiscal compensation.

This compensation fund is obtained from Community Development Fund (CDF). Each member state’s contribution to the fund is determined by its level of participation in the intra-CEAO trade in industrial products. Table 4 shows the CDF revenue between 1975 and 1981. The biggest exporting members of the community were Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire) about 50 per cent of export, and Senegal about 48 per cent. The biggest importers were Mali, about 33 per cent, and Mauritania about 20 per cent. The bulk of the contribution of CDF has always been made by Ivory Coast and Senegal.

The full CDF revenue does not go into compensation, only 67 per cent of it does. The remaining 33 per cent has always been set aside for promoting community development. Compensation depends upon the volume of imports from members and the extent by which the RCT has reduced tax revenue. For the period 1976-78, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Upper Volta received 25 per cent each, Mali 10 per cent, Niger 8 per cent and Mauritania 7 per cent of the total sum of funds transferred. It has been argued that these transfers remain insignificant a proportion of the budgets of the least developed members. The system has not impeded their industrial progress on the other hand. It has never exceeded 2 per cent of the budget of any member. Funds for development which were 33 per cent of the CDF had turned out to be too small for the purpose.

In 1978, the Solidarity Fund was introduced to augment it. The community has planned to use this fund to foster regional balance. No enterprise has been undertaken from the fund. However, feasibility studies on new projects have been supported, subsidies to rescue existing enterprises and loan guarantees have also been made. As much as about 95 per cent of the fund was used for development projects in the four least developed states of the community in 1980.

CEAO has had a passable performance in its first decade of existence. It has succeeded in establishing a common customs system and nomenclature. The trade liberalisation measures
have also boosted intra-CEAO trade. The community has no problem of payment among members. Four members of CEAO are also members of BCEAO; the currencies of Mali and Mauritania are tied to the French franc. Mali has completed arrangements for a re-integration into the CFA franc by the middle of 1984. The Malian Central Bank will come under the BCEAO. There has been no progress on regional industrial planning and specialisation, so duplication of plants abound. The goal of a common external tariff also remains unfulfilled. And non tariff barriers still exist in all the member states except Upper Volta (Burkina Faso).

The Mano River Union (MRU)

The diplomatic moves between Liberia and Siena Leone which dated to the middle of the 1960s resulted in the signing of the Mano River Declarations in October 1973. The Declarations had provisions for admitting any interested West African States into the union. This provision was used to admit Guinea in 1980. The Union Ministerial Council, consisting of all ministers closely connected with the affairs of MRU, is the supreme authority responsible for formulating policies and for taking decisions. The secretariat is located in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The founding members have ethnic and cultural affinity, a common border; they possess similar economic potentials. But the MRU transcends Abagwu’s homogamic analytical frame. It is designed to be a custom union.

Both Liberia and Sierra Leone had a relatively lengthy period of political stability. Liberia was ruled by the True Whig Party for over one hundred years 1877-1979. Both countries had a settler population. Guinea was also under the iron rule of Sekou Toure between 1958 and 1984. But she is a political and ideological strange bed-fellow with Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Private enterprise, including private distribution network, plays an important role in the economies of Sierra Leone and Liberia. The trans-national corporations also dominate these economies. The mining in Sierra Leone is dominated by the Selection Trust (diamonds), William Baird of Glasgow (iron), Alusuisse and others (bauxite and rutile). Similarly, the Liberia mining industry is dominated by the Bong Mining Company of West Germany and Lamco, a Swedish-American Group. It has also been observed that there is a lot of mix-up in government and in business. Ministers run private businesses that depend partly on government contracts and patronage.

Paradoxically, the Guinean economy has been very dependent upon her mining industry which has been dominated by an MNE. This company, which is a joint venture between Guinea and Harveys of California, is virtually controlled by the latter. Other sectors of the economy, including distribution, were state-owned and state-managed but with disastrous results. There was widespread under-utilisation of productive capacities, chronic corruption and gross inefficiency prevail, so there was low productivity quality and low labour productivity.30 Albeit, the private enterprise system in Liberia and Sierra Leone did not perform much better. Besides, the MRU encompasses the polar points of currency convertibility in West Africa: the highly convertible dollar in Liberia; and the inconvertible Guinea Syli.

The foregoing is the political and economic environment within which MRU is expected to operate. The goals of the MRU are:
(i) trade expansion through the elimination of all forms of trade barriers and the creation of a congenial climate for setting up joint industrial capacity for the union market; and

(ii) equitable distribution of benefits accruing from the union.

The MRU set out with bright hopes for an integrated regional industrial cooperation through regional specialisation. Albeit, joint infrastructural development is another. As will be discussed, any gain from intra-MRU trade bill for a long time be negligible. The provisions for the Union Industries enshrined in Protocol 12 of the MRU outlined the fiscal incentives of such industries. They include tariff protection for up to six years, tax exemption on import of raw materials of up to 90 per cent of dutiable value, unrestricted repatriation of profits and free access to the union market. A union industry is an approved new industry, or expansion of an existing one which is meant to serve the combined union market. But a decade after the signing of the Declarations of the Mano River, no industry has been so designated!

However, there appears to be some more impressive progress in the area of Common External Tariff (CET). The MRU and CET and harmonised Customs and Excise Tariff schedules and procedures in respect of about 90% of all tariff items were implemented in 1978. The MRU Trade Liberation Programme which provides liberalisation for all local products, including agricultural products, became effective in May 1981.31 This achievement has been depreciated by the fact that both Sierra Leone and Liberia have continued to maintain non-tariff barriers such as import and export licensing, restrictive distribution clauses, in franchise agreement and border control procedures.

Intra-MRU trade remains infinitesimal. As Kanu and Elliott admitted, that although the value of intra-Union trade doubled from $1 million to $2 million in the fifteen months following May, 1981,

the emerging structure and volume of intra-Union trade has not demonstrated any significant indication of a comparatively major increase in the volume or value of trade. The economies are parallel and competing.

And, after taking cognisance of unrecorded trade in traditional produce and in smuggled manufactures which might amount to 1 per cent of total trade, intra-MRU trade in the first half of the 1980s remains negligible. And the situation is likely to remain unless there is increased efficiency and reduced un-utilised capacities in the manufacturing plants. Progress in establishing some of the already identified joint manufacturing projects, such as Cassava Processing Plant, Integrated Fruit Juices will also increase the volume of intra-Union trade, though only to a small extent.

Another promising area of cooperation is infrastructural development. An outstanding achievement in this direction is the construction of the Mano River Union Bridge. It has also been reported that activities are currently concentrated on the Freetown Monrovia Highway. The hydro-electricity potentials of Mano River can be usefully exploited by the Union to serve the
member states, Such infrastructural developments are likely to induce the growth of economic activities including manufacturing more than what MRU or the state government can undertake.

**ECOWAS**

ECOWAS is the biggest economic bloc in the contemporary West Africa. It encompasses all the sixteen countries stretching along the West African coast, from Mauritania to Nigeria, including the landlocked countries of Mali, Upper Volta and Niger, as well as the islands of Cape Verde. The two custom unions discussed earlier, the Mano River Union and the CEAO, are sub-groups within ECOWAS. The Lagos Treaty establishing ECOWAS came into force in 1975.

The formation of ECOWAS had taken a tortuous process. It had been a dream that had taken some fifteen years to realise. Inter-state rivalry, distrust among the West African Heads of State, dislike of Nigeria’s leading role in its formation and French opposition, held its creation back for more than a decade. Indeed, CEAO has been described as a complex manœuvre to counter-balance Nigeria’s political and economic weight, in particular, and to check her attempts to organise an economic community.

The ultimate objective of ECOWAS is to establish a Common Market in West Africa. It is envisaged that the community would have graduated into a custom union by 1990. The community aims to promote economic development of the region through cooperation in economic, infrastructural, social and cultural matters. It aims at promoting intra-ECOWAS trade through harmonisation of fiscal, monetary and payment policies; it also aims at maintaining economic stability and at fostering friendly relations among the members of ECOWAS.

The institutions designed to pursue the goals are set out in the Article 4 of the Treaty of Lagos. The structural frame is depicted in Figure 1. The supreme and final authority lies with the Authority of Heads of States of ECOWAS members. This organ meets once a year to finalise decisions and policies recommended to it by the Council of Ministers. One of the two yearly meetings of the Council of Ministers is held just before the meeting of the Heads of States.

Two ministers from each member state, closely connected with ECOWAS affairs, form the Council of Ministers. This Council is charged with the responsibility of directing the operations of the community in pursuance of the goals set out in the Territory, and making policy recommendations to the Authority of the Heads of State. The Council is assisted by four technical commissions:

(i) Industrial, Agricultural and Natural Resources Commissions; (ii) Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Commissions; (Hi) Trade, Customs, Immigration, Monetary and Payments Commission; and (iv) Social and Cultural Affairs Commission.

Reports and recommendations of the commissions are submitted to the Council of Ministers through the Executive Secretary. The prime function of these technical commissions is policy formulation and recommendations for implementation in their respective fields.

ECOWAS secretariat is headed by the Executive Secretary, who is assisted by two Deputy
Secretaries, one for administration and economic matters, and the other who is the controller of finance. This secretariat is based in Lagos.

The Treaty of Lagos makes provisions for compensating losses arising from preferential tariffs accorded to members for promoting intra-ECOWAS trade, and for compensating losses resulting from location of community enterprises. ECOWAS also intends to promote industrial projects in the least developed states. Provisions are made to assist them through granting of loan or guaranteeing loans they take from other financial institutions. *The Fund for Compensation, Cooperation and Development* has been set up to meet the demands for fulfilling these objectives. The Fund headquarters is at Lome. The sources of funding the Fund include capital budgets of the community, foreign aid, interest payments on loans granted and loans attracted by the Fund. All disputes arising from interpretations of the Treaty are settled by the Community Tribunal.

In essence, ECOWAS is an economic integration designed to achieve trade liberalisation, regional industrial specialisation, equity and social development. In respect of trade liberalisation, a three-staged process has been adopted for removing all kinds of barriers to intra-ECOWAS trade and for setting up a Common External Tariff (CET). The first stage is a two-year freeze on tariffs in respect of intra-ECOWAS traded goods. This was implemented in May 1981. Tariff and non-tariff restrictions on unprocessed products have also been removed in respect of trade within the community.

In May 1983, the Authority of the Heads of State reached an agreement on the timetable for wiping out custom duties on intra-ECOWAS trade in manufactures. For this purpose, the community was divided into three: groups I, II and III; members of each group have already been mentioned earlier. Members of Group I are expected to comply within four to six years; Group II six to eight years, and Group III over a period of eight years, reduction at equal instalments. Products are divided into two groups: priority products and the rest described as non-priority. Members of groups I and II are required to comply with respect to priority products within their respective minimum period of compliance.

The Council Decision of 1982 set out the list of priority industrial products. It includes certain building materials, mineral fuel, pharmaceutical products, fertilisers, plastic, rubber and articles, wood, ceramics, iron and steel, and certain agricultural machinery.

ECOWAS thus aimed at achieving a free-trade area by 1989, and a custom union in 1994. It is also expected that this will give a forceful fillip to trade among member states. But not much can be attained here without such complementary factors much as improved transport, fast and efficient communication and complementary structures in manufacturing, supported by higher productivity and efficiency.

As shown earlier, intra-West-African trade was 3.5 per cent of the total regional trade. If cognisance is taken of unrecorded trade this would still be about 5 per cent. Table III also shows that members of CEAO contributed more to intra-West African trade than the rest of the community. Two important factors are the ease of inter-state payment through the BCEAO and a more integrated transport structure dating back into the colonial era.
Progress in the area of transport and communication involves two projects and some programmes of road and rail development. A telecommunication project linking all the state capitals has been awarded. It is expected to be completed in 1986. As mentioned earlier, a programme of two trans-West African highways has also been agreed upon. Feasibility studies are also currently being considered for three trans-West African rail links.36

The major achievement in the area of monetary cooperation is the establishment of WACH already discussed. A West African Bankers Association was also formed in Accra in 1981. Among other goals, the new organisation aims at expanding banking facilities in the sub-region, thus enhancing trade, commerce and the transfer of funds.37

In the final analysis, the degree of success of ECOWAS will largely depend upon its ability to formulate balanced regional industrialisation programmes based upon comparative advantage of each state, with special consideration for the least developed members. In a recent memorandum, it has been suggested that a second best option is to draw up a list of industrial projects that ECOWAS can implement within a specified time profile. Allocations are made to states on the basis of availability of basic raw materials and supporting facilities.38

It has been correctly observed that the present position with ECOWAS is that only a broad based and loosely worded industrial programme has emerged.39 And there is very slim hope that some of the priority industries, such as iron and steel, electronics, petro-chemicals and Pharmaceuticals, can be successfully tackled in the present century. In the area of iron and steel, for instance, the specialists, such as mining engineers, geophysicists and metallurgists are not yet available. Nigeria has been grappling with its iron and steel industry with little success, and at an enormous cost in the last two decades. The automobile industry is, in the present state of West Africa, a wrong priority; the kind of “finishing touches industries” that generate negative impact on development. The import in this exposition is that indulgence with elephantine manufacturing projects can easily rock and ultimately ruin the community.

ECOWAS’s agricultural programme has advocated for regional “self-sufficiency in food, in provisions of raw materials for industrial use, and improving rural income and living conditions”. Achievements have, so far, been limited to pre-feasibility studies in agricultural products, agreement over operation of a cattle passport and the creation of a Regional Fisheries Research Centre.40

The problem of agricultural development is more complex and more intractable than implied by ECOWAS’ conception of it, and ECOWAS’ contemporary strategy to combat the problem may not be able to touch even the tip of the iceberg. There is a broad spectrum of agricultural products produced in West Africa. There is, therefore, great potential for intra-ECOWAS trade. But national governments may prevent this, as it is currently the case in Ghana, on the ground that not much has been produced to satisfy domestic demand. Obviously, there is a basic problem of expanding output.

The population in the rural area is continually drifting into towns. It has been correctly analysed that the rural exodus may never be reversed.41 This phenomenon is in consonance with
economic development process. The solution lies in higher productivity per hectare and per man. The decisive factor is improvement in the labour quality factor rather than in space, energy or cropland. Most of the farmers operate in harsh environments and earn a pittance from their labour. The crops are in constant danger of harsh weather and pests. The farmers need to be equipped with knowledge to enable them to subdue nature and satisfy the wants for food.42 That demands a far more elaborate programme. In the present programme, even the decisive factor of improving the rural population is missing.

The protocol for realising the objective of free movement of persons within ECOWAS was signed by ECOWAS Heads of State in Dakar in 1979. Only Liberia has not signed this protocol. The protocol enables ECOWAS citizens to visit, without visa, any ECOWAS State for not more than ninety days. This is stage one. The subsequent two stages envisage right of residence and of establishment.

In many cases, the advantage of free movement of persons has been abused by visitors that decide to stay put. Nigeria forcefully ejected such aliens in 1983. This led to widespread condemnation. Nigeria clung to the real aspect and ignored the human consideration side of the issue. This incident demonstrates the fragile state of ECOWAS.

**Concluding Remarks on Economic Integration in West Africa**

A lot of efforts were devoted to formation of customs unions in the 1970s, the manifestation of which was the formation of CEAO, MRU and ECOWAS during the decade. In the end, there were duplications. ECOWAS and CEAO have similar goals and almost parallel institutions. Members of the CEAO have also been accused of divided loyalty to ECOWAS.

The first obvious problem is that this duplication of institutions of economic integration leads to waste of scarce resources within the region. As explained earlier, some of the reasons lie in suspicion of Nigeria and fear of her preponderance within ECOWAS. The Cote d'Ivoire and Senegalese Heads of State certainly did not want a situation in which they may be over-shadowed by Nigeria. That is politics.

Nigeria has so far been accommodating and considerate. The political scene also continues to undergo changes. The new Head of State of Senegal, after the exit of Leopold Senghor, gave a good perspective of the situation:

It is in everybody’s interest that if ECOWAS reaches its cruising speed the CEAO should normally melt into the structures of ECOWAS ... what we do not want, we members of CEAO, is to be asked to eliminate something that works well that produces brilliant results — CEAO, when ECOWAS has not reached (the) cruising speed.43

It is a dicey card. ECOWAS also needs the sincere support of the members of CEAO to attain that height.

There are other real reasons elsewhere, no doubt. The international factor is one. And CEAO have been nurtured by that factor, with France at the forefront, the most industrialised
Francophone West African continues to be teleguided from Europe by means of access to soft loans and aids.

The problem of multiplicity of currencies that is neither related to each other nor easily convertible, poses another problem with the exception of the CEAO sub-group. This is not a problem the WACH can effectively tackle. Further, Nigeria has not set any creditable example. A convertible and stable Naira will considerably promote regional trade.

Most of the states in West Africa have also failed to achieve internal national cohesion. It has been correctly observed that the countries which are poorly integrated internally make poor partners in a regional integration process. Political instability and economic mismanagement have led to border closures lasting for months occasionally. This does not foster a congenial environment for inter-state trade or an integrated regional industrial planning and production.

Success of economic interaction in West Africa will depend upon successful solutions to these problems. The structure of ECOWAS has fulfilled most important conditions for regional integration scheme: gradual phasing of custom union; mechanism of settlement of payment and compensation fund for less developed areas. But the community is yet to set up a regional development bank and coordination mechanism for incentives for regional and external investment.

The Secretariat and the Commissions require to be strengthened to meet the demands in respect of economic and technical reports to aid decision taking process. As at the moment, the physical facilities and personnel are not sufficient. It also requires a bigger and well-staffed library for information, storage and retrieval.

Other problems such as transport and communication, have been discussed earlier. Greater freedom of movement of persons within the region is also necessary. Ultimately, a lot will depend upon the commitment of the states, their sincerity and the extent to which they are prepared to develop within the regional integration. Also, it should be noted that economic integration cannot transform the economies of West Africa in one quinquennium or two. It is essentially a long term programme, even if the political climate has been more favourable, ECOWAS could not have achieved economic self-reliance in less than a decade. So, it is difficult to agree with Bach on this issue.

**Prospects of Future Cooperation in West Africa**

Substantial efforts in respect of inter-state economic cooperation in West Africa have been exhibited in the last thirty years. These efforts are manifested in the founding of many inter-state functional organisations and custom unions. Polarisation among the states in the region remains visible, particularly between the Francophone and the Anglophone. These states remain poorly internally integrated too. Political instability is still high: violent change of governments is the rule, while peaceful change remains the exception. Governments pay insufficient attention to economic progress. All these factors form the lenses through which the inter-state cooperation and integration can be projected into the future.
Another paradox of the age and the region is that there has been little or no coordination of the past efforts at coopetation and interaction. The river basin commissions remain virtually isolated from one another, thus allowing the benefits of cooperation to slip in terms of research findings, in terms of high level personnel and in terms of equipment and laboratory facilities. The interactive efforts have had a similar fate.

The theoretical foundations upon which economic interaction is laid in the LDCs are shaky. The benefits can only be conditionally earned. Earning of the benefits is predicted upon the hope that future agricultural and industrial development can be shaped to reap economies of scale in industries in which the region has some comparative advantage, and upon an industrial structure in which parallel and competitive manufacturing plants can be reduced to the barest minimum.

If these were to be achieved, the political climate would have to change. Relevant decisions would have to be taken upon the designs and plans of technocrats and economic planners rather than upon political whims and caprices. Changes would also have to occur in internal administration, monetary and fiscal policies would have to be more carefully designed to avoid the existence of contemporary chaotic and inconvertible currencies in West Africa.

The present government’s weakness in undertaking manufacturing projects must be included in the integration matrix. Considerable discussion is going on about African Multinational Corporations. Firms grow over years acquiring experience and building up organisational team spirit; they also gather in the process, expertise, goodwill and international connections. It will be a grave miscalculation to think that West African government can easily create firms to operate high technology industries. These are some of the reasons why we have been sceptical about this elsewhere.

The immediate important task is to create a congenial climate for business in West Africa. Physical facilities are not sufficient. In areas where there are adequate facilities, the advantage has been considerably reduced by lawlessness, corruption and theft. The seaports in Nigeria demonstrate the problem. Postal system currently existing in the region can hardly support greater volume of intra-West African trade. WACH has experienced considerable problem in this respect even with the light volume of transactions the organisation currently handles.

Respect for law and order in each government will be a very important factor for future integration. Perennial ejection of aliens in West African countries neither encourages trade links nor the establishment of branch plants in neighbouring states. The property law in West Africa has also not taken deep roots. Governments occasionally act as predators upon private property. Moreover, government officials, including ministers and commissioners, make grossly inadequate distinction between private and public property. Frequently, they surreptitiously siphon public funds, thus exacerbating the foreign exchange constraint in the development process. This situation does not create a conducive climate for community enterprises.

These are the factors that will shape future economic integration and cooperation in West Africa. Much will depend upon politics. Weighty words of professing African brotherhood will not do the magic. A clearer line between politics and economics will have to be drawn. National governments should be prepared to surrender part of their power to supranational organisations.
The ability of the interactive efforts to row and bear fruits depends upon the extent to which the strains and stresses of the next decade can be borne.

**Note**


Robson, R (183). P.34.


ECOWAS: *Annual Report of the Executive Secretary, 1981-82, ECW/CM/XI/2.*


A high proportion of government officials, civilian or military, in West Africa have been described as grossly corrupt. Government corporations and government-owned companies are abyss into which public funds are sunk. It was widely rumoured in 1982 that some IMF officials showed a list of fifteen Nigerians, any two of whom could lend the Nigerian government $2 billion. That list was reported to contain three ministers in Shagari’s administration. See *West Africa*, April 30, 1984, p. 936. Five former military Heads of State were executed in Ghana in 1979 for corruption and economic sabotage. We have referred to corruption in Guinea in the text. See also O. Odetola (1982), *Military Regimes and Development: A Comparative Analysis in African Societies*, London: George Allen & Unwin, pp. 45-9.
Economic Cooperation: The ECOWAS Example

Jide Olagbaju and Toyin Falola

Introduction

Economic cooperation has been defined as the coming together of geographically proximate states which share a sense inadequacy in dealing with the problems of security and welfare. Economic integration as a strategy of socio-political and economic development is now recognised by most countries. The desire to achieve increase in living standards of the people through economic cooperation has given rise to many forms and stages of economic cooperation such as Free Trade Areas, Custom Unions, Common Markets and Economic Unions.

Following the achievements of economic cooperation in developed countries, there is a heightened interest to try cooperation among developing countries as well. The developing countries view is that through economic integration they could rely more upon each other for supply of goods and services and less dependent on developed countries for industrial goods. Also, through cooperation they could combine forces to enhance their bargaining power vis-a-vis the developed countries and ensure a new international economic order that is more favourable to them.

During the post-independence era in West Africa, a variety of intergovernmental organisations have been formed but with little outstanding success. More recently, there are hopeful signs that West African countries have renewed their interests in cooperative efforts, and this determination is reflected in the formation of ECOWAS in 1975. The objectives of forming ECOWAS represent a comprehensive form of cooperative effort which anticipates total economic and social integration of West African countries. This chapter will review the activities of ECOWAS since its inception in 1975 with a view to highlighting its major constraints and critical issues for the future of the community.

Rationale for Economic Cooperation in West Africa

Orthodox theory of economic cooperation is concerned with the trade creating and trade diverting aspect. Most importantly, in the theory of customs union as presented by Viner, any economic grouping that leads to trade creation increases society’s welfare. The conditions necessary for a trade creating economic cooperation have been identified as:

i. a large economic area and large number of countries in the union;
ii. a lower average post-union tariff level than the pre-union level;
iii. competitive member states’ economies such that the range of products produced by higher cost industries in the different parts of the customs union is similar but their raw materials should be complementary; and
v. larger intra-union trade than trade with non-members.

The conditions that are favourable to a successful economic integration based on orthodox theory are apparently absent in West Africa countries (see Table 1). However, their trade with developed countries is relatively high and their inputs from them consist of intermediate and capital goods. This makes economic cooperation on the conception of trade creation apparently non-promising among West African countries and developing countries in general. Besides, there are constraints which are partly historical and partly political.

Nevertheless, gains from integration is not derivable from trade creation alone. In fact, many of the pre-conditions for successful economic integration are derived from the experience in Western Europe. There are some prospective gains which touch on the more fundamental problems of developing countries such as the need to industrialise, the need to mobilise unemployed resources and create opportunities for profitable investments and the need for economic growth. AS Charles Pentland has rightly observed:

In the Third World, free trade areas, common markets, resource cartels, and other groupings are based on the belief that in some form of unity there is strength to resist exploitation and manipulation by major economic powers and multinationals. Cooperations to resolve regionally shared economic and social problems and to force structural reform of the international economy.

The abolition of tariffs as a result of economic integration will promote intra-union trade and create regional markets for products of member countries. There will also be ample opportunities to mobilise domestic unemployed resources for investment and industrial purposes. The formation of a union will also strengthen the bargaining powers of member countries as a group, and this can be used to get better export prices, improve terms of trade and balance of payments conditions and ensure a more favourable international economic order.

**History of Economic Cooperation in West Africa**

Owing to diverse constraints such as small size and lack of resources impeding the achievement of rapid economic development in West Africa, the first generation of post-independence leaders created a great interest in various forms of sub-regional cooperation as another way of achieving rapid economic development. There have been three main approaches to cooperation in West Africa, all aiming at bringing profitable specialisation directly or indirectly.

First, there have been organisations with mainly political goals such as Organisation Communauté Africaine et Mauri-cienne (OCAM), founded in 1966 and Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union. Second, there were organisations that were active in trade and financial fields and lastly, there were specific and more specialised types in form of inter-country agreement for the establishment of
new industries on a regional basis. Here, we are concerned with the last two types which deal with cooperative activities in economic matters in West Africa.

The colonial powers in West Africa such as Britain, France and Portugal have influenced considerably the pattern and growth of economic cooperation. The four former British colonies were not contiguous and were administered separately yet they had a common currency administered by the West African Currency Board. They also jointly operated an airline (West African Airway Corporation) and research institute, such as the West African Palm Oil Research Institute. They also maintained a common educational system through the West African Examinations Council. The French colonies on the other hand were geographically contiguous and were joined together in the federation of French West Africa and governed as one economic unit.

After independence, however, only the French colonies continued with their pre-independence cooperative efforts, especially in economic fields. All links among the former British colonies except the existence of WAEC were dissolved after independence. The Union Donaiere des Etated de l’Afrique Orridentale (UDAO) was formed in the early 1960s by Cote d’Ivoire, Dahomey (now Republic of Benin), Mauritania, Mali, Senegal, Niger and Upper Volta.6 UDAO later became UDEAO (Union Donaiere des Etats de l’Afrique de l’Quest) in 1966 and was transformed to CEAO (Communatue Economique de l’Afrique de ’Quest) in 1973. The main objective was to achieve economic integration through the development of common policies with regard to transport and communications, agriculture, industry, external trade and tourism. The CEAO has made considerable progress in recent times and it is an example of a custom union in West Africa.

Moreover, before the Lome convention, the French West African countries were associate members of the European Economic Community (EEC) and many of these countries also belonged to the African and Mauritanian Common Organisation (OCAM) which initially started in 1961 as African and Malagasy Union (UAM) with political objectives.7

Some organisations of a more specific nature had also been formed in West Africa before ECOWAS and the French West African countries had been the most active. There was the Organization for the Development of Senegal River Valley (OMVS) initiated by Mali, Mauritania and Senegal in 1972 and also the Liptako-Gourma Region integrated Development of 1971 by Mali, Niger and Upper Volta. The lake Chad Basin Commission of 1964 included Nigeria along with Cameroon, Chad and Niger as members. Nigeria also participated in the Niger River Commission which comprised mostly Francophone states.8 These organisations are for the development of specific resources such as minerals, irrigation, and electricity.

Other types of sub-regional groupings in West Africa shortly after independence included primary producer associations such as the African Groundnut Council of 1964, the West African Rice Development Association (WARDA) and the Organisation de Coordination et de Cooperation pour la lutte Centre les Grandes Endemies (OCCGE). There was also a host of others which involved some West African countries and other countries such as the Cocoa Producers Alliance of 1962 which comprised Brazil, Cameroon, Gabon and West African countries, the African Society for the Development of Millet and Sorghum-based food, and the
African and Mauritanian Common Organisation.

Most of the organisations which sprang up shortly after Independence were either more or less a continuation of colonial groupings or patterned and monitored by colonial administrators. They are reputed for their failures for reasons which earlier writers have explained.9 Today, there are about thirty economic groupings with predominantly West African membership. Eighteen of these organisations were founded in the 1970s and ECOWAS was one of them.

ECOWAS

Despite the several abortive attempts at regional economic groupings, West African leaders of the early 1970s were still convinced that the panacea for development in West Africa is through an economic grouping involving all countries of the region. ECOWAS is a concrete example of this and it was formed when the Heads of States and governments or their representatives from 15 West African nations met in Lagos on 18th July 1975 and signed the treaty providing for the establishment of ECOWAS.

Prior to this date, the idea had been conceived and the preparatory work for this had been in form of conferences and proposals on common industrial policies for West Africa. There was one such conference in Lagos in 1963.” In 1967, 12 countries signed an agreement establishing the Economic Community of West Africa and an interim council of ministers which was to prepare a treaty embodying the principles of a common market and identifying priority areas for speedy implementation was set up.

The Heads of States met in Monrovia in 1968 to sign a protocol creating the West African Regional Group, and Nigeria and Guinea were delegated to prepare studies on the first set of priority areas while Liberia and Senegal were to study the requirements for a customs union. There was a short break after 1968 due to unforeseen circumstance ore of which was the outbreak of civil war in Nigeria, the country that was supposed to play an active role in Africa. At the end of the civil war, there was a renewed effort and by early 1975 arrangements for a Heads of States summit at which the Treaty creating ECOWAS could be signed was finalised. The aim of ECOWAS was set out in Article 2 of the Treaty:13

It shall be the aim of the community to promote cooperation and development in all fields of economic activity particularly in all fields of industry, transport and telecommunications, energy, agriculture, natural sciences, commerce, monetary and financial issues and in social and cultural matters for the purpose of raising the standard of living of its peoples, of increasing and maintaining economic stability, of fostering closer relations among its members and of contributing to progress and development of the African continent.

The treaty further goes to spell the sequence and steps of achieving the aims:

(a) the elimination of custom duties and other charges of equivalent effect on imports and exports;
(b) the elimination of quantitative and administrative restrictions on trade among members;

(c) the establishment of a common tariff structure and commercial policy towards non-member states;

(d) the elimination of obstacles restricting the free movement of persons, services and capital among member states;

(e) the harmonisation of the agricultural policies and the promotion of common projects in the member states notably in the fields of marketing, research and agro-industrial enterprises;

(f) the evolution of common policy in, and joint development of transport, communication, energy and other infrastructural facilities;

(g) the harmonisation of economic, industrial and monetary policies of members, and the elimination of disparities in the level of development of members; and

(h) the establishment of a fund for cooperation, compensation and development. The policies listed above will eventually lead to the creation of an economic union common of the countries which are members.

For example, the implementation of (a) and (b) will establish a free trade area; implementation of (c) establishes a customs union; (d) establishes a common market and the implementation of (e) to (g) will establish an economic union. According to the treaty, the first fifteen years of existence of ECOWAS should be sufficient to achieve (c) i.e., the establishment of a customs union. Although the Treaty made provision for a lengthy transitional period for all the goals to be realised, necessary adjustments must be made almost immediately. For example, according to the Treaty goals (a) and (b) i.e. a free trade area should be established between two and three years for a necessary take off to a customs union, common market and economic union.

The institutional framework within which these goals are to be implemented, and the aims of ECOWAS comprise:

1. the authority made up of the Heads of the States and governments;

2. the Council of Ministers in form of two representatives from each member state;

3. the Executive Secretariat; and

4. a tribunal of the community whose composition is to be determined by Heads of States to ensure the observance of law and justice & the Treaty.

The Treaty also called for the creation of specialised commissions in sectoral areas. Each member state will have a representative in the commission. The Treaty assigns various technical functions to the commissions. The technical commissions include:
(a) the trade, customs, immigration, monetary and payments commission;

(b) the industry, agriculture and monetary and payments commission;

(c) the transport, telecommunications and energy commission; and

(d) the social and cultural affairs commission.

The main governing institution is the Authority of the Heads of States and governments. Its decision shall be binding on all other institutions and its chairmanship will rotate among member states. It shall be responsible for, and have the general direction and control of the performance of the executive functions of the community for the progressive development of the community and the achievement of its aims.16 The Council of Ministers is responsible for keeping “under review the functioning-and development of the community and making recommendations to the other institutions proposed by the Treaty are:

1. the committee of West African Central Banks and the capital issues committee; and

2. the fund for co-operation, compensation and development which has the following functions:

(a) to provide compensation to member states which suffer losses as a result of trade liberalisation and location of community enterprises in the ECOWAS sub-region;

(b) to finance projects in member states;

(c) to guarantee certain foreign investments in the sub-region;

(d) to promote development projects in less developed member states.17

The Treaty also contains details about harmonisation of industrial, agricultural, fiscal and monetary policies and the steps to achieve the various goals already discussed.

The Treaty is supposed to come into effect if seven signatories have ratified it. By June 22, 1975 seven states have ratified the treaty.18 One thing that remained was the writing and ratifying of protocols to be attached to the Treaty and the selection of headquarters of the community and the executive secretary. Some of the most ambiguous issues in the Treaty were to be handled in five separate protocols dealing with:

1. the contributions of member states to the budget of ECOWAS;

2. the re-exportation of goods within the ECOWAS region of goods originally imported from other countries;

3. details to govern the operation of the fund for cooperation, compensation and development;
4. the assessment of losses of revenue by member states resulting from trade liberalisation; and

5. the definition of the concept of products which originate in ECOWAS countries.’9

By July 1976 the” first three of the protocols were ratified and no concensus was reached on the last two. This is not to say that there were no contentious issues on the first three, especially the formula for determining the contributions of member states to the budget of ECOWAS. Dr. Abourbakar Diaby Quattara of Cote d’Ivoire was appointed Executive Secretary of ECOWAS and Dr. Romeo Horton, Director of the Fund for Cooperation, Compensation and Development. The ”Authority” and the Council of Ministers have also started to function and the major high level positions in the Secretariat have been filled.20

Since the Lome Summit of November 1976, there have been several meetings of the Council of Ministers, and a third ECOWAS Summit meeting was held in Lagos in 1978. There have also been meetings of some technical commissions, ad hoc studies on specific matters related to the goals of ECOWAS and proposals for the implementation of the move towards the formation of a customs union. At the Iihird summit of Heads of States and Governments in 1979 custom tariffs on goods among member countries were to be frozen and an agreement on free movement of members within, ECOWAS sub-region was reached. Citizens of member countries can stay in any otherndmember country for a period of ninety days without visas but with a valid passport. However, this experiment may not after all serve as an encouragement as desired owing to the gross abuse of the concessions. There have been cases of immigrants without passports, expulsion and counter-expulsion of illegal aliens which can generate bad feelings among cooperating countries.

Problems of ECOWAS

We have mentioned earlier on that the various background conditions or requirements for a trade creating customs union as documented by orthodox theory are apparently absent in West Africa. Although this has been found not to be a critical issue in cooperative efforts, today it has constituted an indirect hindrance to effective economic integration in West Africa.

The large disparities between member states particularly in population, land area and resources endowment, and economic development are serious obstacles to integration. Great inequality is characteristic of West African countries. Nigeria, for example, has the largest population and is endowed with rich natural resources including petroleum while other areas especially northwards in the West African sub-region are, sparsely populated and poorly endowed with resources.

There is the fear of domination by the rich countries especially Nigeria and it has been alleged that it is probably because of this reason that Senegal has been reluctant to sign the Treaty in Lagos.21

The low per capital income in West Africa means low purchasing power which in turn limits the scope of industrialisation and diversification. West African economies are also competitive in terms of raw materials and production (see Table 2).
Another problem is the low-level of trade between West African countries which limits the scope of trade creation. Unless barriers limiting trade flows between these countries are broken, the volume of trade will remain small and *ipso facto* the potential benefits from integration. Related to the above is the poor infrastructural links among West African countries. The railroad and telecommunications systems were built to serve individual countries.

Transport facilities are also geared to the need of overseas rather than intra-regional trade. Intra-regional trade among ECOWAS is therefore physically difficult, time consuming and costly. For example, it costs less to transport cocoa to Europe than to West Africa importers. Transport and telecommunications are frequently quicker to and through Europe than between neighbouring states. More of regional projects such as the Mano River Bridge between Liberia and Sierra Leone are indispensable preconditions for effective integration among ECOWAS. Apart from facilitating intra-union trade it should also provide a framework for industrial development.

A further area of problem is the distribution of benefits from integration. The issue of distributing equitably the gains and/or losses from integration has been repeatedly identified as a potential threat to the success of ECOWAS, judging from the experiences of similar groupings among developing countries. There is the tendency for the few new investment and other economic activities to be concentrated in a few growth poles because of availability of related industries, social and higher overhead capital returns.

Consequently, these countries will experience expanded employment and wage incomes, a more balanced economic structure, and increased rate of economic growth while other territories are "back waters". Unless there is a well designed competition scheme this problem will continue to be responsible for the demise of any economic grouping if the experiences of the defunct East African Community or even the UDAO in West Africa and others are anything to go by.

Apart from these, there are other administrative and political problems such as the effect of colonialism, concentration of power to representatives of Heads of States (in the Authority) and ministers (in the Council of Ministers) and frequent political changes in West Africa. Owing to the differing colonial experiences of West African countries, the countries have more links and trading relations with their former colonial administrators than with neighbouring West African countries, and they have different ideological orientations. These foreign powers are not unaware of the unfavourable effects that ECOWAS might have on them and they, if anything at all, will not wish the economic grouping well in their own interest. Not only that, the mere existence of the Frenchspeaking West African Economic Community- (the CEAO) within ECOWAS may cause a conflict of interest in the future.

The rate of political change in West Africa is also high and varies within the region. While some countries have enjoyed relative stability others have had frequent political changes and military coup d’etat. Nine countries have had at least one military take over and in three there have been more than one. It has been observed that coup d’etat can upset cooperative regional linkages and often lead to unstable government for which foreign policy shall be subordinate.
Conclusion

It has been observed that there is a widespread belief among developing countries that economic integration could be a panacea for economic development. This is reflected in a number of sub-regional groupings in West Africa, ECOWAS has been focused here because of its potentialities for restructuring West African economies and its possible tremendous impact on economic development in West Africa.

It has also been shown that there are several key obstacles on the way to achieving the aims and objectives of ECOWAS which may after all, and if care is not taken, the organisation a forum for perpetuating neo-colonialism, serving the interests of those who benefit from neo-colonialism and promoting the values associated with colonialism. In fact, non-participant observers have labelled ECOWAS as too conventional and have questioned the claim that it could be an instrument for achieving Collective self-reliance in West Africa. However, on our own part, we have pointed out the potential problems not out of pessimism concerning ECOWAS but as a warning to policy makers in the sub-region to be better prepared to tackle them. Hopefully, ECOWAS can succeed if there is the sufficient determination and the right political commitment by member states for it to succeed.

Notes

See Charles Pehthand, "The Regionalisation of World Politics: Concepts and Evidence."


The earliest theories of economic integration were concerned with customs union.


10. Benin, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Bissau, Cote d’Ivoire, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Upper Volta. They were later joined by Cape Verde.


12. -Nine countries signed the protocol. They are Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal and Upper Volta.


18. The countries are Liberia, Ghana, Guinea, Cote d’Ivoire, Nigeria, Togo and Upper Volta.


22. Extensive discussion of some of these experiences can be found in Eduardo Iizano (ed.) *Current Problems of Economic Integration: The Distribution of Benefits and Cost in Integration Among Developing Countries*, UNCTAD TD/B/394.


Post-Independence Economic Changes and Development in West Africa

Jide Olagbaju and Toyin Falola

Introduction

It is not easy to make generalisations about development in West Africa in the post-independence period owing to different factors which influenced each country’s economic performance. These factors include human and material resources, development strategy or priority and sources of finance which vary between these countries. Apart from these, West Africa comprises sixteen countries, all formerly under colonial rule.

During this colonial period, West Africa was divided between Britain and France except the free state of Liberia and the Portuguese territories of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde Islands. Former British West Africa was constituted by Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana and Nigeria, while former French West Africa comprised Senegal (the oldest) Mali, Muritania, Niger, Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire), Upper, Volta (Burkina Fasso), Benin, Guinea and Togo (Togo was formerly under Germany until the Second World War).

With the independence of Sierra Leone on April 27, 1961, apparently all British West African countries became politically independent. Similarly, the independence of Mauritania on November 28, 1960 marked the end of French political administration in the nine French-speaking West Africa. The youngest of all is Cape Verde Islands which became independent on July 5, 1975 though presently surviving under an intensive programme of international economic aid.

During the colonial rule, the colonial administrators successfully imposed and impressed their alien pattern and orientation on the socio-political and economic affairs and outlook on West African countries. Some parts acquired the British pattern and orientation; others the French and yet others the Portuguese. West African economic affairs were so distorted to an extent that two decades after independence, all the countries are very much dependent economically on their former colonial administrators.

Consequently, West African countries today are still resolving those contradictions inherent in their neo-political economy. Their economies are still foreign oriented as there is heavy reliance
on developed countries for entrepreneurship and capital. Their economies are still characterised by high unemployment, serious poverty and insecurity.

However, since independence the increased, efforts of nationalist leaders directed towards the raising of national income and industrialisation of the economy yielded some significant changes, though there has been little or no appreciable impact on the institutional transformation and standard of living of the people. This chapter reviews the economic changes that are noticeable in West African economies during the post-independence era, the extent to which the changes have affected the standard of living of the people) and the problem and prospects of economic development.

**Economic Performance from the Time of Political Independence**

West African government are very well aware of the problems arising from the underdeveloped nature of their economy, and that is why since independence, they have made concrete programmes to transform the economy and improve the people’s standard of living. The determination is reflected in the various development plans that have been drawn up by almost all the countries.

**Economic Planning**

All the plans drawn up after independence are more comprehensive and integrated than the pre-independence plans. The plans included, among others, the details about each country’s resources and potentials and their mobilisation in the different sectors of the economy. All the plans are influenced by the theories and approaches most widely accepted at the time. Some plans were drawn up along capitalist lines suggested by Euro-American developmental pattern. Some countries such as Mali and Guinea place greater emphasis on state intervention and control and sought to develop economic and other ties with socialist countries. For others such as Nigeria and Ivory Coast (Cote d’Ivoire) there is no sharp line drawn between capitalism and socialism as both private and public sectors are allowed to play their proper roles in the development process.

The first generation of plans emphasised economic growth and the provision of infrastructures. Ghana which was the first to become independent drew up its first national plan for the period 1959-1964 with an estimated expenditure of $G243m1 The major projects of the plan was the Volta Dam at Akosombo. Other projects included the aluminium and bauxite industries, roads, processing industries and electricity. The second plans was also a seven year plan for National Reconstruction and Development for the period 1963-64-69/702 with an estimated expenditure of $G452. The major project was also the Volta Dam. Others included roads, processing industries and electricity.

The first Sierra Leone Development Plan3 also stressed quantitative increases in GDP, investment and infrastructures and emphasised industrialisation as the key to development. The first Nigerian National Development Plan4 had the Kainji Dam as the major project together with planned increases in GDP; investment and infrastructures.
Similarly in French-speaking countries, Senegal’s first plan was intended to increase agricultural and industrial goods and provide infrastructural facilities. Mali launched its five year plan on becoming independent with an estimated expenditure of 78 million CFA Francs with industrialisation and growth as the basic objective. Other Frenchspeaking countries also drew up their first plans with a view to accelerating the rate of economic growth and providing infrastructure facilities.

Most recent plans seek to transform the economy fundamentally and tend to stress some issues of rural development and income distribution. For Example, the objective of Nigeria’s Second National Development Plan and subsequent plans were expressly stated as follows:5

To make Nigeria;

(i) a united, strong and self-reliant nation;

(ii) a great and dynamic economy;

(iii) a just and egalitarian society;

(iv) a land bright and full of opportunities for all citizens; and

(v) a free and democratic society.

Similarly, the second Sierra Leone’s plan6 placed the highest priority on agriculture and rural development.

Despite these development planning efforts, the post independence era is a disappointment to West Africa in the opinion of many economists.7 West African economies are bedeviled by a variety of problems such as inefficient planning, over reliance on foreign aid, wrong priority, serious unemployment, rising cost of living, lack of adequate transport facilities which resulted in structural dislocations within the economy, heavy external debt obligations, deteriorating terms of trade and balance of payment problems.

There are, however, some quantitative changes in some of the sectors of the economy but these changes do not bring faster structural transformations or correct existing social relations in the spheres of production, distribution and exchange.8

**The Performance of the Economic Sectors Growth Rate**

The post-independence years are characterized by market expansion of general economic activities in West African countries Several West African countries achieved very high rate of economic growth9 between 1960 and 1970. Between these years the the GDP of West African countries grew at an average real growth rate of 4.3 per cent while between 1970 and 1979 the growth rate was 3.3 per cent.
Table 1 shows the average growth rate in GDP of some West African countries for the period 1960-1970 and 1970-1979.

While the GDP grew at those rates in the two decades after independence, the per capita income grew at a much lower rate because of the rapid increase in population. Between 1960 and 1979 the average annual growth rate of per capita GDP for some West African countries were as follows:

Mali 1.1%; Upper Volta 0.3%; Benin 0.6%; Sierra Leone 0.4%; Niger -1.3%; Guinea 0.3%; Mauritania 1.9%; Togo 3.6%; Ghana 0.8%; Senegal -2.1%; Liberia 1.6%; Nigeria 3.7% and Ivory Coast .4%. 10 In comparison with Japan, Canada and United Kingdom which had a growth rate of per capita GDP of 9.4%; 3.6% and 2.2% respectively there still exists a wide economic gap between West African countries and the industrialised countries.

Agriculture

The sector that contributed to the rapid growth of GDP of West African countries in the first decade after independence was agriculture which is actually the mainstay of their economies. It provides food, employment, etc. Unfortunately, because of the discoveries of minerals in some of the countries, and reduced emphasis on agriculture in development plans, and the unfavourable developments in the world economy, the role of agriculture and its contribution to GDP declined considerably in the second decade after political independence. The growth rate of agricultural output in the mineral rich countries also declined in the second decade.

Production in the agricultural sector concentrated on export crops and raw materials for local industries. The emphasis on export crops was to earn external purchasing power so as to finance some development projects. This emphasis was soon shifted to import substitution and part of the burden was placed on agricultural sector to produce raw materials for local industries. Unfortunately, food production was neglected to such an extent that in the first decade after independence, the countries had to import food from industrial countries to feed their population (see Tables 2, 3, & 4).

The second decade after independence also witnessed massive importation of food items because of the neglect of the agricultural sector. Food imports now constitute over 20 per cent of some West African countries’ imports.

The percentage contribution of agriculture to exports has also declined over the years, most especially in mineral rich countries. Agriculture which accounted for over 60 per cent of Nigeria’s export in the 1960s now accounts for a little over 5 per cent. But for some other countries, agriculture still forms the greatest share of exports (see Table 5).

Industries

The industrial sector of West African countries is relatively small because the economies are basically agrarian. With political independence however there is an increase in industrial
activities over those of the colonial period. Many of the industrial enterprises are small scale in nature and they are concentrated in large cities such as Lagos, Ibadan and Port Harcourt in Nigeria, Accra in Ghana, Freetown in Sierra Leone and Monrovia in Liberia. Despite increasing consideration given to industrialisation in West African development plans, the contribution to GDP is low. However, the share has been increasing over the years (see Table 6).

The strategy most commonly adopted by West African countries is import substitution and indigenisation. Increasing efforts are being made to manufacture formerly imported items. The manufacture has however concentrated on light consumer goods such as soft drinks, plastics, shoes, cotton, textiles, cigarettes, flour, biscuits, matches, vegetable oil and assembly of radios and vehicles. In the realm of indigenisation, almost all the countries want to control their industrial sector as foreign entrepreneurship dominate the manufacturing, distributive and banking sectors.

Economic development efforts through industrialisation relied heavily on external stimuli and lacked internal dynamism. Foreign investment accounted for between 50 and 85 per cent of total investment during the two decades following independence. For example, foreign investment as a percentage of total investment in some of the countries are as follows: Togo 83 per cent; Upper Volta (Burkina Faso) 72 per cent; Guinea 60 per cent; Benin Republic 64 per cent; and Mauritania 78 per cent. However, some countries such as Nigeria and Guinea have made significant success in the indigenization of their economy by either acquiring equity shares in companies or increasing government participation in industries.12

The share of industrial sector in total exports is also not substantial in West Africa. For example, the industrial sector accounted for only 1.9 per cent of total Nigerian export value in 1973. The trend is similar in other West African countries because of the import substitution industrialisation strategy which leaves little surplus for exports to other countries.

**Balance of Payments**

Since independence, West African countries have continued to suffer from chronic balance of payments deficit. This trend started even before independence but the problem was aggravated due to massive importation of capital and consumer goods to finance development projects. Consequently, each country had to institute monetary, fiscal and exchange policies to maintain external equilibrium and conserve foreign exchange reserves.

**Foreign Trade**

As a result of the colonial experience, West African countries still have trade and monetary ties with their former colonial administrators. Their trade pattern is considerably influenced by trading blocs such as European Economic Community (EEC), European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and industrial countries such as USA, Japan, Canada and USSR. These trade blocks and countries form the main markets for West African agricultural and mineral exports and their
imports of manufactures, intermediate and capital goods, are from there. Unfortunately trade between West African countries is small; and this constitutes a barrier to economic integration. This situation is attributable in part to low level of infrastructural facilities and poor transportation and communication system.

**Transportation**

Transport by road has remained the most significant among other forms of transportation in West African countries. The roads constructed in the 1960s followed the colonial pattern of road building mainly as feeders of railways but later emphasis changed to the construction of roads for social and commercial reasons. In Mali for example, more than 12,000 km roads are motorable and these include important ones from Sam, Mopti, Bamako to Segou, Bamako to Bougouni and the border of Ivory Coast. In Nigeria, roads have been constructed from Lagos to Ibadan, Ife, Benin and the eastern part of the country. The northern and western parts are similarly linked. Efforts are also being made to improve the few international roads linking some West African countries such as Nigeria, Benin and Ghana.

Apart from road transportation, railways and air transport are also given some attention to facilitate social and commercial activities. Water transportation is also being explored in areas blessed with navigable rivers.

Despite the efforts given to transportation and infrastructural facilities in development plans, the available ones are still grossly inadequate and beset with a lot of problems. The land terrain is not ideal for durable roads and because of heavy rainfall in many areas, most of the roads are not motorable. the railway and air transports are inefficient and the numerous rivers are not navigable. Two decades after independence, the use of traditional means of transportation such as animals and foot paths is still prevalent.

**Economic Development**

Both the internal and external factors in the economy of West Africa countries have generated strong inflationary pressures such that the purchasing power of their currencies is being seriously eroded. The unemployment rate has also been rising while their income distribution is also skewed in favour of rich people such that a wide gap still exists between the have and the have nots. Using the criteria of economic development mostly used especially by United Nations, none of the West African countries has changed its position from underdeveloped to developed countries even after twenty years of political independence (see Table 7). It is a case of growth without development as many economists have rightly observed.

**Problems of Economic Development**

Three major problems can be identified with economic development, these are development planning, industries and agriculture.
Problem of Development Planning

The two major aspects of planning are plan formulation and plan implementation or execution. The problems that West African countries face in planning and implementing development plans arise from the basic characteristics of their underdeveloped economies. Lack of adequate and useful data about the sectors of the economy has been a hindrance to the formulation or preparation of plans. Owing to the unreliability of the data from the statistical offices, there is usually a divergence between the actual needs of planning and what the statistical offices made available for planning. Besides, there is lack of efficiency and promptness in the administrative machinery concerned with planning.

Despite this problem of data, most West African countries have acquired the capability to formulate "elegant", comprehensive and internally consistent plans. However, experience has shown that plan implementation is as important as plan formulation and West African countries are yet to acquire the capacity for plan implementation. There is usually substantial unfulfilment of development plans owing to lack of skilled manpower and technical know-how.

Another problem is the scarcity of essential capital equipment. Equipment are imported from overseas and massive importation has created balance of payments problems for West African countries. It has become necessary in some countries to impose restrictions on importation and these sometimes affect capital imports. Related to this is over reliance on foreign aide many of which never come in sufficient quantities. Besides, many of the aids have strings attached to them with the result that recipient countries are forced to use donor’s spare parts for projects, buy donor country’s goods, services and personnel.

Other problems include lack of emphasis on manpower budgets which could correct the discrepancy between manpower requirements and the available manpower. The problem is compounded by the inability of many of the countries to conduct reliable population censuses. Moreover, there are usually not enough feasibility studies and careful project preparation for most of the plans. Consequently, resources are wasted on unprofitable projects and many projects were abandoned because they are not feasible. Finally, there is always the lack of proper publicity to generate public enthusiasm. The people are not sufficiently involved in planning exercises and their priorities may not be taken care of.

Problems of Industrial Development

Owing to the predominance of agricultural sector, the industrial sector of West African economies is relatively small. The rate of industrialisation is slow and its contribution to GDP is minimal. The contribution of manufacturing industries to GDP in Nigeria was about 4 per cent in 1960 and 1974. In 1970 manufacturing industries accounted for 1 per cent of Ghana’s GDP; 13 per cent of Ivory Coast’s GDP in 1970; 2 per cent of Liberia’s GDP in 1965; 6 per cent of Sierra Leone’s GDP in 1965 and 5 per cent of Togo’s GDP in 1965 (see Table 8). Many of the industrial enterprises were small scale in nature and were concentrated in large cities such as Lagos and Port Harcourt in Nigeria, Accra in Ghana and Dakar in Senegal.
All West African countries are anxious to bring about a structural transformation of their economies through industrialization. Rapid rate of growth of industries is seen as an important means for accelerating the pace of economic development. High projected industrial growth are included in their current development plans and a number of strategies of industrialisation are being embarked upon in all the countries. These strategies vary with each country’s economic structure, policies, objectives and political ideology. The major strategies include import substitution, indigenisation adoption of either labour-intensive or capital-intensive techniques of production. All the countries however face about four major problems in their bid to industrialize:

(a) the choice of strategy for industrialisation;

(b) the dilemma of labour-intensive or capital-intensive techniques;

(c) indigenisation; and

(d) industrial planning.

Choice of Strategy: Import Substitution

The strategy of industrialisation that is widely accepted in West Africa is that of import substitution. Import substitution is a strategy that seeks to replace goods which are imported into a country by domestic production. This strategy is more popular than that of export-oriented industries that seeks to process mining and agricultural products for exports. The substitution of domestic goods for imported one has greatly enlarged the contribution of the manufacturing sector to GDP. The bulk of imports of West African countries is made up of consumer goods which implies that when import substitution is made the basis of industrialisation, the industries will be confined to the production of consumer goods. Manufacturing has been concentrated on light consumer goods such as plastics, soft drinks, cotton, textiles, shoe, soaps and detergents, cigarettes, flour, biscuits, matches, vegetable oil and assembly of radios and vehicles.

However, for production of the import substitutes, raw materials, intermediate and investment goods are needed. West African countries are dependent upon imported material such as capital goods, labour and other requirements from abroad. The importation of the intermediate and capital goods has risen considerably over the years. This implies that the import substitution industrialisation strategy which is most favoured leads to increase in imports. This has aggravated the balance of payments problems of most West African countries. It is often argued that because of technical and economic factors, resource-oriented industries for exports would have a greater comparative advantage over a number of established import substitution industries.17

Labour-intensive and Capital-Intensive Techniques

The technique a country adapts in its production process should ideally be a function of resource and technological endowment, the type of products produced and the objective of economic development. Labour abundant countries such as West African countries favour labour-intensive
techniques because of surplus labour, the existence of unemployment and the low wages.
Besides, some of the products involved labour intensive techniques. Examples are the palm
produce and craft industry. This, however, is not to say that the superiority of capital-intensive
techniques are not recognised.

Capital-intensive technique gives high quality product and enlarges the productive power of
other cooperating factors. Unlike the craft industrial, distribution and other ancilliary services
which are labour-intensive manufacturing industries in West African countries are relatively
capital-intensive, utilising more advanced technologies which are mostly foreign controlled.
Examples of such industries include the iron and steel industry and petroleum mining in Nigeria
and export oriented manufacturing industries in other countries.

The labour-intensive technique most favoured in West African countries can yield increased
output and better employment opportunities for the citizens. However, these countries aim at
industrialisation and higher level of economic development and this objective are best achieved
by adopting capital-intensive technique of production. West African countries are therefore faced
with the problem of striking an optimum balance between labour and capital-intensive
techniques.

**Indigenisation**

West African countries also attempt to promote industrialisation by making the indigenes of the
countries participate fully in the process of industrialization. The countries have been finding
it increasingly difficult to control and coordinate their policies of industrialisation because of
foreign domination. The manufacturing and distribution sectors of West African economies are
dominated by foreign entrepreneurship. Foreign companies such as United African Company
(UAC), John Holts, CFAO and Swiss Union Trading Companies control the commercial
merchandise in West Africa. The major industries such as basic industrial chemicals, paints,
grain manufacturers, silk products, soft drinks, sugar, confectionery, beer brewing and textiles
are dominated by private investors mostly foreign controlled. The banking, shipping and
insurance services are also foreign controlled. These companies repatriate their profits to the
mother countries.

There is therefore the inevitable indigenization of capital and personnel in the manufacturing,
distributive and financial sectors of the economy in order to prepare a reliable ground for a
bolder economic take off. The major problems that face indigenisation in West Africa include:
the inadequate finance in acquiring foreign business affected by indigenisation; the management
of the enterprises affected by indigenisation, recognising the fact that foreign owners will likely
withdraw their capital and trained and dedicated manpower; the dearth of adequately trained
personnel to replace these foreigners; and the inequitable distribution of income and the
enrichment of a few nationals at the expense of the masses in the process of replacing foreign
entrepreneurs with indigenous ones, unjust income distribution have social and political
implications for all West African counties.
Industrial Planning

The problem of industrial planning stems from the general problem of economic development planning. Comprehensive planning for industrial development is relatively recent in West Africa. Apart from the problem of formulation and implementation of industrial development policies, there is the lack of coordination within the industrial sectors on the one hand and between this sectors and the other sectors of the economy on the other hand. There is also the absence of coordination at West African sub-regional level.

Among the problems of industrial policy formulation are the choice between import substitution strategy or export oriented strategy, optimum combination of labour-intensive and capital-intensive techniques of production and indigenisation, all previously discussed. There is also the problem of selection and evaluation of industrial development programmes and projects. Sufficient industrial survey and feasibility studies are not carried out before project are selected. The result has been misplaced priorities and the unattractiveness of the industrial programmes and projects to potential national and international investors. Another common problem is the wide divergence between the projected or declared policies of industrialisation and the programmes designed for their implementation. This has resulted in gross under-fulfilment of industrial development projects.

Finally, most of the industrial development plans in West African countries are done in isolation with little or no regard to what is happening in the other sectors of the economy. There are no coordinated policies for balanced economic development. It will be remarked that subsequent to the discovery of minerals in these countries emphasis shifted to mineral production to the neglect of other sectors, especially the agricultural sector. There is also the lack of coordination of industrial policies at the West African sub-regional level. Industrial policies are formulated with little or no reference to the plans of neighbouring countries. The result has been the narrowness of domestic markets owing to low per capita national income of each country.

Problem of Agricultural Development

The problem of agricultural development in West Africa has been admirably summarised by H.O. OiuWasanmi:

West Africa is largely peasant. The typical West African farmer has small holdings, poor transportation and communication facilities; depends upon primitive tools and arm implements; has little storage and processing facilities and practically no access to credit and capital. Above all, the market for his product is inefficient and unresponsive to consumer tastes and preferences ... The per capita income is much lower than for the non agricultural sector.2

The major problems derive from West African natural environment, social inertia of the people, inadequate infrastructural facilities, lack of economic conditions for the use of fertilisers and application of irrigation, and rural emigration.

West African can be divided into two broad climate zones based on temperature and rainfall. The first zone is characterised by high temperature and heavy rainfall. The annual mean temperature
is about 27°C and the rainfall is not less than 1200 mm per annum. This type of climate is found from the coastland extending to about 7° 3’ north latitude except the coastal area of Accra and Benin which fails to the second climatic zone. The second zone is characterised by high temperature with little rainfall. The mean annual temperature is about 30°C and the rainfall is between 400m and 1000m. This type of climate is experienced further north of the first-zone. The vegetational belts follow closely the temperature and rainfall divisions. The first zone has the mangrove and rainforest belts while the second one is characterised by savannah type of vegetation.

Most West African soils are chemically poor and low in organic content. The nitrogen and phosphate contents required for plants growth have been found to be low. The soils in the belts lack potassium and magnesium while those in the savannah lack sulphur. In isolated areas where fertile soil is found or fertilisers are applied, the humus is usually washed away by erosion due to annual bush burning deforestation. The degraded soils caused by the natural environment and human occupation constitute a great obstacle in the way of agricultural development.

The West African agricultural system is mostly based on the age-long peasant farming. The farming is done on a small scale along the systems of shifting cultivation or bush fallowing. The method of cultivation is quite simple but outdated, the basic implements comprising mainly the hoes and cutlasses. The traditional social framework and value also prevail on land ownership and land exploitation. The land tenure system allegedly described by a West Africa chief as one where ”land belongs to a vast family of which many are dead, a few living, and countless numbers are still unborn” predominates. Owing to the inertia in the traditional social framework and values, it has been extremely difficult to establish technically advanced agricultural systems, extensive farms and plantation agriculture. In some countries (e.g. Mali, Guinea and Upper Volta), the ideal of experimenting with family farms have been resisted. In other countries, the incompetent agricultural policies and wrong programmes have dampened the enthusiasms of farmers in applying techniques to their farming methods. Poor transport and infrastructural facilities in the rural areas have also constituted obstacles to, agricultural developments. Owing to few road which are often in bad condition, the cost of transportation is very high and discouraging. There are no storage facilities and power and water supply in the rural areas. This has led to the high incidence of rural-urban migration of youths from the farm. The old people left in the village mainly produce for their own subsistence needs.

There is also the absence of conditions for the economic use of fertilizers and successful application of irrigation. Before fertilisers can be successfully applied, the area has to be accessible so that the cost of transporting the fertilisers and resulting harvest is not excessive. The area must also be fairly free from climatic hazards. There should be adequate extension works and availability of the plant varieties that respond to the fertilizers. Irrigation schemes are more successful where intensive cultivation is widespread and where anti-erosion measures and proper drainage facilities have been done. These conditions are very difficult to come by in West Africa. Consequently, agricultural development is relatively low when compared even with the other sectors of the economy.
Prospects for Economic Development

In spite of the obstacles enumerated above, West Africa has the potentials for economic development. There is an abundant population which can be mobilised for socio-economic development. The population must however be educated and skilled. The agricultural and industrial sectors are not without their promises. Rapid economic changes will accompany increase in knowledge of soils, the introduction of mechanised and intensive agriculture and the education of farmers which would make them less resistant to innovations and modern technology. Rapid industrial changes will also take place if the necessary skills are acquired and the non-agricultural resources are exploited and utilised for development purposes.

A closer cooperation among West African countries in form of economic unions such as the ECOWAS is called for. This will enhance integration and coordination of agricultural and industrial policies. Regional markets will be created and domestic unemployed resources will be mobilised for economic development.

Above all, West Africa has to do away with all forms of reliance on Euro-American countries. Dependency promotes underdevelopment and exploitation.

Conclusion

It is indisputable that there are significant changes in the economies of West African countries in the twenty years following political independence. Most significantly the GDP and the industrial sectors have been showing considerable growth rates. There is also improvement in infrastructural facilities. There has also been tremendous growth in the international trade which has involved West African countries in deep international relations.

However, the economic changes do not have any meaningful impact on the basic indicators of economic development such as per capital income, GDP, education, health, life expectancy and level of industrialisation. The standard of living has not improved either, as all the countries are suffering from chronic balance of payments problems, high cost of living which has necessitated unpalatable economic policies. Upon all, West African countries still belong to the group with numerous characteristics of underdevelopment after more than two decades of political independence.

Notes

2. Ibid.
5. See Nigeria’s Second and Third Development Plans (Federal Ministry of Information, Lagos 1970,175

Sierra Leone’s Second National Development Plan.


The share of industrial sector in total export value is also not substantial in West African countries because of their import substitution industrialisation strategy which leaves little or no surplus for export to other countries.


