



# The British Colonial Agricultural Policies and its Impact on Yola, Adamawa

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the British colonial agricultural policies and its impression on the society of Yola, Adamawa, which should be the objectives of the study. *Yolde* (land) influence not only the inhabitants and their neighbours but also the European powers particularly British imperialists who dominated socio-economic and political activities of the area between 1900 to 1960 and Nigeria as a whole. Agricultural productions were the chief concerned of the imperialists in oversee countries. Due to the fertile land of Yola for cultivation both native authorities and their counterpart (i.e. the British) had benefited generously from the system while the masses were subjugated and achieved the interest of the British at any level. The paper used both primary and secondary sources of data in order to offer appropriate historical information regarding to colonial economic policies and its impact on the communities that constituted Yola. Works have been carry out on the theme around the country but Yola was ignored. Therefore, study on it is substantial.

**Keywords:** Agriculture, economy, colonialism, policies, Yola, Adamawa

## INTRODUCTION

Colonialism or colonial rule is the annexation and subsequent domination of one country by another. In case of Africa all the colonial powers came from Western Europe (i.e. British, France, Germany, Portugal, Italy and Belgium). Domination here means total control of political, economic and social affairs of the colony by the colonizing powers (Apata, 1990). Colonial economy was characterized by search for raw materials, markets for imported goods, areas for profitable investment and cheap labour, (Amina, 2012; Bahago, 2015; Bappa, 1988; Haruna, 2018) these summarizes the colonial economy in general term. However, the quest to achieve their aim led to the development of various strategies used by the colonialists. Monetization of the economy became imperative that the economy of the colonists was directly linked to the world capitalist state. Monetization of the economy was a significant step taken by the colonial state to veto the use of indigenous currencies in Nigeria and Africa as a whole (Tom, 1981; Gerald, 1966)).

The British conquest of *Fombina* (Adamawa) Emirate particularly Yola Division was nothing more than to take control of both human and material resources of the region in order to serve the interest of the colonialists (particularly the British imperialists) because the imperialists wanted cheap agricultural raw materials such as cotton, groundnuts and gums among other products (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019; Hamza, 2018). The British political officers, therefore, used the traditional rulers through Native Authority system in the imposition of colonial taxations, forced labour and generally in agricultural policies in order to sustain exploitation of Africa. Theoretically, such policies were implemented purposely to achieve the interest of the colonists but practically they were exploited to a large extent by the British imperialists (Chubado & Sani, 2020). By the end of 1899 the British were already set for the

conquests of the Sokoto Caliphate on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1900 the caliphate to fall were the Southern emirate of Bida, Ilorin, Kontagora and Yola but conquest of the caliphate started only in 1901. This was after the returned of the West Africa Frontier Force (WAFF) from the Asante Campaigns. Later Zaria and Kano all fell in 1902, Sokoto also fell in 1902 (Utuk, 1975). The Muslims put a fierce resistance under Sultan Attahiru and later at Burmi but were defeated by the superior forces of the British under Lugard (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019).

### **Background of the Study**

The British colonial agricultural policies in Nigeria had implications for the country's economic advancement. The policies, for instance, discouraged indigenous industrialization, but promoted export crop and mineral production to sustain the British industrial growth (Haruna, 2018; Salihu, 2012). The colonial territory of Nigeria served, not only as ready source of cheap raw materials to feed the growing industries in British and other European nations, but also as a trading post for the British and European merchants and agents, and at the same time supported the importation of finish products because the British wanted a channel for their manufactured goods in order to stave off declining domestic consumption, and falling rate of profit at home (Haruna, 2018).

This paper surveys the British colonial agricultural policies in Yola, Adamawa and Nigeria in broad. According to Chubado & Hamza (2020), the region was one of the main trading post of the British colonialist because of the presence of navigable river systems (i.e. river Benue and its tributaries). The colonial economy in most of Africa was structured to improve the economies of the colonizing or metropolitan powers. In the scheme of things, what mattered was how the colonial economy could benefit the colonizers or the so-called mother country. Unfortunately, ending of colonial rule in most countries in Africa has not resulted in a complete control of their economic or political affairs (Gerald, 1966; Ken, 1975). They were sovereign states only in principle. In reality, many of them remain under the economic and political guidance of their former rulers. As can be seen from the history of many African countries, the achievement of political or flag independence does not automatically lead to economic independence (Haruna, 2018).

Economic exploitation accepts and requires a consistent production of surpluses and profits that can be appropriated without harming the production capacity on which the regime of exploitation itself depends (Utuk, 1975). The British, as manufacturers and exploiters of surplus value, were not interested in eroding the productive capacity or disrupting the social organization of their subjects, since these elements were vital to colonial capitalist accumulation. But, as has been demonstrated with regard to various colonial contexts, colonial targets and calculations rarely survived the unexpected instability of colonial and world markets and the survival strategies of the colonized (Moses, 2008). Agriculture came the backbone of Africans in the pre-colonial era. In this enterprise, food production featured prominently for most of Nigerians, hence, like most traditional African societies, there were self-sufficiency in food supply (Mamman, 2002). However, given the fact that one of the major reasons why Britain colonized Nigeria was to ensure a cheap and stable supply of raw materials needed for the British industries, the colonial administration completely discouraged the cultivation of food crops while encouraging cash crops production (Chubado & Sani, 2020; Mamman, 2002).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The specific objectives of this paper are as follows:

1. To examine the historical background of society of Yola, Adamawa province;
2. To explore the nature of economic activities of the inhabitants of the Yola area; and
3. To discuss the British colonial agricultural policies and its impact on the Yola Division.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This paper adopts the historical methodology for data collection and the information used for construction of this paper are from two classifications namely: primary and secondary sources of records. The primary sources include archival records while secondary sources are basically published and unpublished

materials: books and journals. These records were evaluated and collaborated based on the historical analysis.

### **Significance of the Study**

This paper should contribute to the historical development of colonial history of Adamawa and Nigeria as a whole. It should add to the body of knowledge and serve as guidance for future researches. Also, it should be relevant to other disciplines and organizations. Finally, it should encourage an individual to advance their skills of knowledge.

### **Society of Yola**

The society of Yola fall under the Sudan savannah of Nigeria; its geographical features are different from the others (Adebayo & Tukur, 1999). The region is an open land with short grasses and covers the large plain which extends from the Mandara mountainous (in the southern Brorno) in the north to the Mambila mountainous in the south, because of its openness both movement of people and livestock are easy (Abubakar, 1976 & 2008; Kirk-Greene, 1969). However, its temperatures are usually high except in the months of December and January when the Tropical Maritime Air-masses (harmattan) wind brings cold air. Rainfall last for only 3-4 months in a year (Adebayo & Tukur, 1999; Chubado, 2019; Kirk-Greene, 1969). With this condition, the area is drained by number of rivers notably the Benue, Faro, Kilange, Mayo Inne and many Lakes among others (NAK/Yolaprof/1-17: Files No. 1589, 1957). The area is inhabited by numerous groups of people with varying customs/cultures, languages and dialects. Among these groups were the Fulani, Bata, Laka, Verre, Boi and Kilba, among others (Abubakar, 1976 & 2008; Abubakar, 2018; Chubado, 2019; Kirk-Greene, 1969; Hamza, Garba & Amina, 2021). The geographical conditions of the region are favourable to the development of a viable economy (Mohmoud, 1979). Thus, productive activities in agricultural products such as cereals and vegetables as well as industrial products like iron tools, cloths, leather materials, etc. were carried out. Greater number of such groups developed and extended their political administration in the area these include Jukun, Chamba, Bata and Fulani. Yola city, Kilba-land, Verre chieftdom and chieftdom of Bagale were centres of socio-economic political activities (Abubakar, 2008; Alkasum, 2003). Trade contacts were also developed with Borno, Hausaland, Jukun, Margi, Shuwa among others and these enable goods from far areas to reached the region. In addition, foreign ideas and religion, notably Islam also spread to the area and later religion of Christianity. These brought about several changes to their economic and socio-political institutions in the area (Abubakar, 2018).

The region is a strategic location for farming, animal husbandry, fishing, hunting and other handicraft activities. Such activities encouraged the inhabitants to occupy the District (Alkasum, 2003). The District is located in Adamawa State Northeast, Nigeria as mentioned earlier and the area lies between latitudes 9°—12' N and longitudes 12°—29' E covering an area of approximately 831 square kilometres (Adebayo & Tukur, 1999; Kirk-Greene, 1969). The region covers both southern and northern parts of River Benue because it comes across the region. The area shares borders with Mayo-Balwa, Wafango and Verre Districts to the south, by Batta District to the west, Balala and Girei Districts to the north and to the east by Gurin District (Kirk-Greene, 1969).

### **Economic Activities of the People of Yola, Adamawa**

The nature of productive activities and trade among the various ethnic groups in the Yola area, productive activities were mainly carried in two (2) major areas namely agricultural and industrial productions. These activities were to a large extent influenced by the nature of the environment in which the people lived. Trading activities on the other hand were developed and engaged both locally, regionally and internationally in Yola, Adamawa (Chubado, 2019; Chubado & Umar, 2021). Although, Agriculture was an important and predominant economic activity of the people of Yola and farming remain the main productive activity of the people (Alkasum, 2003). Farm work consisted of clearing land, wedding and harvesting. Although, the system of cultivation varied from one community to another, the following were common shifting cultivation; rotational bush follows and mixed cropping. Therefore, shifting

cultivation was the most commonly practiced of all. Simple implements such as hoes, cutlasses, rakes, diggers, axes, knives, etc. were used by the various communities to cultivate the land within their respective domains (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019).

Although, animal husbandry was one of the major economic activities practiced in the region. Cattle rearing were made possible in the area because of the availability of pasture and absence of tsetse flies due to the open plain and nature of the region (Chubado, 2019). Animal husbandry was practiced by both settled, semi-settled and nomadic group of Fulani who usually owned large herds of cattle and moved from one place to another in search of pasture and water. They provided milk, butter, hides and skins to the communities and wider world (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019). Slaughtering of cattle in Yola area was everyday affair based the circumstances, but during market days where people from various villages converged in one location more cattle were slaughtered for the purpose transaction and consumption (Chubado, 2019). Both sheep and goats were mostly kept at home except in the case of large herds. They were either reared separately or combined with cattle. Sheep rearing in particular, assumed more significant position in region because rams replaced cattle as the main animal slaughtered during religious (sacrifices) ceremonies such as naming and the sacrifice feast/feats of the sacrifice (Chubado, 2019). The rearing of livestock was a commercial source of satisfying immediate needs and employment in the area. Therefore, the cattle breeders are basically nomadic, settled Fulani, supplemented by the Hausa and others (Chubado, 2021).

Also, hunting was practiced everywhere but it was most developed in areas with abundant game and common in the region because of the influence of rivers, lakes and abundant hills. It was only practiced by professionals who specialized in the skills of hunting and were known to possess certain spiritual powers to overcome physical dangers. The hunters used traps, clubs, bows and arrows and later guns. The professional groups in the activities were Bata, Laka and Verre among others (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado & Umar, 2021). Nevertheless, Fishing was among the major productive activities of the communities living along the banks of rivers of the region and major rivers like the Benue, Kilage, Faro and Lakes within the area (Chubado, 2019). It was mainly practiced by professional fishermen who specialized in fishing skills and often moved to different areas for fishing activities. Implements used by the fishermen include traps of different types, nets, baskets, etc. and these were manufactured in the fishing communities. Bata, Laka and Hausa were the major groups devoted to the activities (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019).

Although, Industrial production is made up of two (2) areas of productive activities (i.e. mining and manufacturing). Manufacturing was therefore, more diverse than mining as various objects were made from plants, minerals and animals products. Mining activities were practiced in the working of iron, salt, etc. while, iron was the most essential of all its implements represented a more advanced alternative to the wooden. Therefore, hunters, farmers and warriors found it better tools to use in their different trades. Mining and manufacturing were both depended on indigenous products found within their localities (Alkasu, 2003).

Trade and trade routes were developed as a result of the economy capability to generate surpluses and specialization in the production of various goods due to unite two (2) or more areas and international routes which linked many communities with different groups outside the boundary of Yola (Chubado & Musa, 2020). There are major trade routes that linked up with the region even before colonialism. The trade link between Yola and other parts of the area within the region, thereby, enhancing their status. Eventually, many of these communities developed into commercial centres which sold products other than those originated from or within the capital (Alkasu, 2003). Thus, Yola overshadowed Numan, Mubi, Ganye and Jada and other communities as a result of its strategic location at the routes linking Garua and Ngaundere on one hand and Borno and Gombe on the other (Alkasu, 2003). Other main routes linking Yola with other areas and various communities within and outside the province are as follows:

i. One trade route – that is, from Yola to Garua – passes through the Ribadu and another Yola to Gurin, Beka, Rai and Ngaundere just crosses the southwest corner.

ii. The former passes by Dasin, Ribadu, Dulo, and Shafajuale, then cross the Benue to Tepe. Alternative routes from Yola are via Fufore or Beti to Solomsi, Nafori and Chofe Jaule. These are used chiefly when the rains are beginning to hinder traffic on the main route.

iii. However, no matter what path is followed, the route is essentially one for the dry season. The wet weather road to Garua runs north of the river Benue via Girei, Pariya, Wuro Bokki and Dasin (Malabu).

iv. The route to Hausaland from Yola – passes through Numan, Gombe, Bauchi.

v. The northern route that linked Yola to Borno via Kilba, Mubi then Mandara.

vi. Another route connected to Muri from south through Mayo Balwa, Zing to Jalingo then Gembu other route to Jukun and Tivland, southern part of the country (Alkasu, 2003; Chubado, 2019; Kirk-Greene, 1969).

The commercial activities that have been taking place were done primarily with the people of the region. Yola area in this regard was like a meeting point. The articles of the trade also played an important role in shaping the economic activities of the region (Abubakar, 2008). Items such as horses, beads, kolanuts (Hamza, Garba & Amina, 2021) and cloths were carried to the region from Hausaland, Borno and Muri for commercial purposes. Other items like slaves were also taken out to other areas from Yola area (Catherine, 1993). It is here that the role of the merchants and retailers became very crucial. They brought items such as salt, potash and cotton material which they exchanged for cattle, dry fish, bush meat, hides, grains and often slaves (Abubakar, 2008; Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019).

### **British Colonial Agricultural Policies in Yola**

Agricultural policy is a statement of action and a fundamental tool employed in achieving agricultural development (Haruna, 2018). Agricultural policy describes a set of laws relating to domestic agriculture and imports of foreign agricultural products (Bappa, 1988). Agricultural policy of the colonial era type made use of the available land and labour to achieve the goal of maximum utilization of the resources of the colonized. The policies that were adopted ended up benefiting just the colonialist to the detriment of the colonized as well as the land (Tom, 1981).

The British colonial government intensively pursued its objectives of colonial occupation through carefully designed policies determined to achieve their colonial goals of domination, exploitation and excessive transfer of surplus capital in the form of cash crops or raw materials to promote their economic advancement (Catherine, 1993; Henring, 1993). Hence, all the colonial Agricultural policies were aimed at achieving this economic goal. To achieve this goal, they transformed the existing Agriculture into an export oriented one in which only the desired cash crops were produced as raw materials in response to the industrial revolution of Europe and the territories were as well required to become markets for the consumption of European products and will consequently be dependent on the British economy (Moses, 2009).

One of the colonial economic policies for British administration in Nigeria was the introduction of Agricultural policies (Isah, 2014; Tom, 1981). Their aim was primarily to encourage the indigenous people to produce the needed export crops (such as cotton, groundnuts among others) for the metropolis (Isah, 2014.). The policies were based on exploitation and reproduction of the peasantry by promoting a peasant based production of export crops. This ranged from the volume of production and prices, the establishment of market board and introduction of Agricultural education alongside insecticide, pesticide, herbicide and chemical fertilizers. Under this system of economic exploitation, traditional land tenure was maintained, alongside with the introduction of new crops at all times. The peasants were compelled to supply grains and livestock for the consumption of the district officials. The British introduced colonial currency to replace indigenous currency (Alkasum, 2003). The currency as medium of exchange in Adamawa did not prevent trade by barter in the district. This was mainly found in villages where the level of exchange was low and most products of exchange were for consumption (Alkasum, 2003).

Apart from food crops, the export crops which were introduced weakened the pre-colonial economy; these crops included maize, cotton, rice, groundnuts and many others. At the same time, colonial government was promoting the cultivation of Agricultural raw materials for export to the metropolis. The

export crops were made an acceptable commodity for the payment of the colonial taxes and cash; farming was also encouraged by the colonial government and imposed taxes on sylvan products (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019). In the case of Yola, according to the colonial records, there is availability of gum trees in the region but no attempt was made to collect the products (NAK/Yolaprof/File No. 270, 1917). But the people of the region were enforced to pay taxes to the colonial government and by 1920s and 1930s gum Arabic were collected in large number for the British government (Alkasum, 2003).

The major interest of the British was basically commerce and commercial interest. For instance, the region was attractive to the British because of its marketing which attracted various traders of the European companies particularly Royal Niger Company (RNC). Similarly, the British needed cotton, groundnut, hides and skins from the region (Chubado, 2019; Isma'ila, 2016). The communities also served as markets for the British manufactured goods. The whole exercise boils down to the exploitation of the resources of the Yola area to maximize profit and exploit the masses of the area. It is important to note that British constructed roads, built schools, healthcare centres and put system of communication in place but all aimed at transporting raw materials from the sources of production to the coast then route to the British metropolis (Chubado & Sani, 2020). The social developments witnessed in colonial Adamawa such as establishment of dispensaries, clinics, schools and communication system were substandard and came directly under the British control. It was the prolongation of colonial rule coupled with the continued exploitation of the resources of Yola and Nigeria at large (Alkasun, 2003; Chubado, 2019).

### **Impact of the British Colonial Agriculture on Yola**

The colonial agricultural policies were introduced to achieve certain imperial objectives. The most important of which was the development of export or cash crop production which was realized (Haruna, 2018). However, the achievement of the colonial agricultural policy objectives had consequences on other aspects of the economy and society of Yola, especially as it relates to land ownership and usage, the social organization of production, rural well-being, food availability and the indigenous industries of Yola. The impact and nature of the colonial agricultural policies on the region showed substantial variations (Alkasum, 2003).

The capitalist expansion transformed Yola peasant farmers to suppliers of raw material, labour and dependents on the capitalist controlled markets and agencies. It also created class divisions in the Yola communities, similar to those of other capitalist societies (Henring, 1993). Furthermore, the colonial period created a new dimension in production relation among the different social groups in Yola. The economy was monetized in such a manner that the peasants were made to accept a new exchange relationship (Chubado, 2019). The impact of such policies on the economy and society of Yola cannot be overemphasized.

The aim of colonialism is to exploit the physical, human, and economic resources of an area to benefit the colonizing nation. European powers pursued this goal by encouraging the development of a commodity based trading system, a cash crop agriculture system, and by building a trade network linking the total economic output of a region to the demands of the colonizing state (Mike, 2009). The economic goals of colonialism were simple: to provide maximum economic benefit to the colonizing power at the lowest possible price (Bappa, 1988; Mike, 2009; Moses, 2008).

### **CONCLUSION**

The potential of agriculture for propelling Nigeria's economic development was recognized by the colonial government when policies were put in place to encourage output growth and to extract the surpluses there from. The predominant theme of development in this period was the surplus extraction philosophy or policy whereby huge products were generated from the rural areas to satisfy the demand for raw materials in metropolitan British. This early interest of the extraction policy was on forest resources and agricultural exports like cocoa, coffee, rubber, groundnut, oil palm etc. For these and many more we can see what makes agriculture both important and necessary for colonialism. The Yola area provided ample opportunities for the colonialist. It was a region that was good for various kinds of crops and

because of the presence of the rivers and possibility of irrigation; the region was under cultivation all year round. Also, how they encouraged more irrigation in the region as part of the colonial policies introduced in Northern Nigeria. Irrigation had been the practice of Nigerian peoples living near rivers and even those far from it where they made use of swamp (*fadama*) to irrigate the land. Agriculture is in the final analysis an important economic activity and one that attracted and sustains the colonialist in Nigeria.

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