

British Colonial Economic Policy in Nigeria, the Example of Benin Province 1914 - 1954

S. A. Shokpeka and Odigwe A. Nwaokocha

*Department of History, University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
E-mail: shokpeka2000@yahoo.com*

KEYWORDS Colonial Economy. Experimental Farms. Domination and Exploitation. Local Administration. Production and Exportation

ABSTRACT The establishment of British colonial administration brought the introduction of cash crops economy to Nigeria- as elsewhere in Africa. In line with the British colonial policy of providing raw materials for the industries of the metropolitan power, Nigeria witnessed the downplay of the importance of the indigenous economic system which made each family self-sufficient in food and other socio-economic needs. Through a deliberate policy of discouraging food crop cultivation, most clans and communities were gradually rid of food supplies and thus introduced into acute hunger in favour of the cultivation of cash crops needed by British industries. Local governments were used as agents of this destruction of the indigenous food crop economy and the vigorous pursuance of the new economic policy. This work focuses on this role of the local government authorities, with the local government in Benin Province as a case study.

INTRODUCTION

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. Very little, if any regard, was paid to the colonized indigenous population. When the African population was taken into consideration, it was mostly employed as a tool in achieving the main reason for colonization: the domination and exploitation of the local population by the colonizing power. This scenario was quite visible in the Nigerian economy as far as the production of cash crops and food crops were concerned. Using the Benin Province as a case study, this work focuses on the role of local government in the cash crop economy of colonial Nigeria.

It is important to note that agriculture formed the mainstay of Africans in the pre-colonial past. In this enterprise, food production featured prominently for most of Nigeria, including the area that came to be known as the Benin Province in colonial Nigeria. A survey of the vegetation of the area would reveal a combination of the high forest and the savannah, all rich for both cash and food crop production, hence, like most traditional African societies, there was self-sufficiency in food supply. However, given the fact that one major reason why Britain colonized

Nigeria was to ensure a cheap and steady supply of raw materials to British industries, the colonial administration completely discouraged the cultivation of food crops while encouraging cash crops production (Usoro 1977).

Onimode has stated that the raw materials, which Britain needed included cotton for British textile factories, rubber for tyres and other products, palm oil and kernel for soap and margarine, groundnut for manufacturing oil, hides and skins for leather products, timber for furniture as well as tin, coal, amongst others (Onimode 1981). Against this background, it is not surprising that the local administration in the Benin Province, especially from 1938 to 1954, when British reorganization of the local government had proved successful, directed their economic activities in the province towards the satisfaction of some of these colonial needs. However, it is necessary to state here that the British economic policy was put into effect in what later became known as the Benin Province as far back as 1914, soon after the fall of Benin Kingdom in 1897. Finding a greater part of Benin Province to be made up of high forest and therefore a good source of timber and rubber, the different native administrations of the Divisions (as the local governments were then called) were encouraged to carry out a policy of carving out forest reserves. As preparatory steps to this, the British embarked on the policy of road construction, establishment

of markets, the making of route surveys and the ascertainment of the state of trade in Benin and its environs (Igbafe 1979). The idea was to prevent these valuable sources of timber and rubber from being destroyed by the indigenes who could turn them to farmlands.

METHODOLOGY

The study is based largely on primary (archival) materials got from annual reports and handing over notes by colonial administrative officers. Where these archival materials did not answer the questions raised, resort was made to secondary sources, mostly books. The analysis of the materials received from these sources forms the bulk of this study. These revealed a lot of exploitation and double standards on the part of the colonial administrative officers, driven mainly by the need to contribute to the economic and industrial growth and development of Britain. The effect of the neglect of food crop agriculture has been tackled without considerable success by successive independence administrations. Attention has therefore been drawn in the conclusion to a possible repeat of such detrimental outcomes if the nation's continued total dependence on crude oil as foreign reserve earner is not checked and something revolutionary done about it.

The Colonial Economic System

The Nigerian colonial economy depended on three major export crops - cocoa, palm produce and groundnuts. Among them, they accounted for about 70% of Nigeria's total export in colonial times (Ahazuema and Falola 1987). It is therefore not unexpected that British colonial policies and practices in the field of agriculture were geared towards organizing and galvanizing all human and material resources in Nigeria towards the utmost production and export of these cash crops needed to feed her (British) industries. This had very serious implications for the Nigerian economy. Poor Nigerian peasants were forced by circumstances imposed on them by colonial economic policies to ditch the production of food crops to focus on cash crops. This came with all its attendant negative connotations. It is enlightening to note that the produce buying and exporting business were dominated by British companies: the United Africa Company, John Holt, and Paterson and Zochonis (PZ) and Lever Brothers (Ajayi 1999).

In the colonial period, Britain maintained a firm control over and dominated the Nigerian market principally due to the effect of the favorable policies of the colonial government in Nigeria. It has been demonstrated that the policy of Britain and the colonial government in Nigeria hardened in favour of protectionism. The process started in earnest on the eve of the World War I and reached its climax during World War II. In 1917, for instance, the colonial government imposed a total ban on the export of palm oil from Nigeria, except to the U.K. This was aimed at diverting the export of the same product to other places. Between 1919 and 1922, she also imposed highly discriminative duties on palm kernel from Nigeria, with the intention of emphasizing the 1917 ban. Because World War II brought about severe shortages of raw materials to British industries, especially after Japan's seizure of the Far East in 1939, the British Ministry of Food appropriated to itself the right of sole purchase of primary products from West Africa, including Nigeria (Njoku 1987).

The issues raised above helped shape colonial Agricultural policies in colonial Nigeria. An understanding of the deeper consequences of the practical applications of these same policies can be gleaned from the following itemized discussions of the major cash crops produced in colonial Benin Province.

Forest Reserves: Timber

The establishment of forest reserves in the Benin Province varied in scale in all the Divisions. Benin took the lead, being the only one with Native Administration's reserves at the beginning of 1938, followed by Asaba and Esan Divisions. Afenmai Division (known formerly as Kukuru Division) had none and even by 1948, it was still looking for suitable forests for reservation. A look at the individual Native Administrations will give a clearer picture. Beginning with Benin Division, one finds that the total land area as at 1937 (after the Jesse area was transferred to Warri Province in that year) was 4,000 square miles (Annual Report, Benin Division 1937). About half of the total area of Benin Division had been constituted into forest reserves by 1938. Yet, by 1949, more area of over 300 square miles was converted again in the Jemieson River Division.

It is interesting to note the keen interest displayed by the Native Administration and its

Forestry Department in those reserves. A district administrative system was set up for the forest reserves. While in the hinterland as at 1938, there was no road constructed or maintained exclusively by the native administration, a network of motorable roads connected the forest reserve system. In the Jemieson River Division for instance, about thirteen miles of motorable roads were constructed while a new timber bridge was completed over the river in July 1938. Throughout the forties the policy of forest reservation continued in the Benin Province in spite of the opposition from the indigenes. The main problem was lack of foresight. The chiefs did not also see that the white men's economic policies were of little or no positive benefit to the Benin Divisional society save for the few pennies that accrued to them through royalties and fees some of which were halved between government and the native authorities. The frightening food shortage of 1945 led to expressions of doubt over the continuing maintenance and retention of forest reserves in the Division. The people had decided to defy the regulations and numerous "farming encroachments" occurred in the reserves. The courts were reluctant to order the destruction or confiscation of food crops in these farms. The native authorities themselves now saw the truth that the "forest policy will operate mainly for the benefit of European firms, that the forest owners received an inadequate return, and that too small a forest area remains open for cultivation by the Bini." (Annual Report (A.R.) Benin Division 1946). There was now a rethinking of the entire idea of forest reservation. The Benin Native Authority also echoed the perennial complaint of the people that the area allocated to forest reserves was too excessive and that insufficient land had been left for farming. An old Benin chief reportedly told the colonial authorities "we chop yams and corn not timber and rubber." This concern did not put an end to this reservation policy, which had been on since 1937.

By 1951 a total of 44,928 acres of timber were under natural regeneration treatment. Of this, 6,447 acres were added during 1951 in the Ohosu and Igbuobazuwa reserves. By 1953, a few years to the winding up of the Native Administration system, 9,784 acres of forest were opened for regeneration under the tropical shelter wood system, bringing the total forest now under regeneration since 1950 to about 118,449 acres or approximately 185 square miles. A further 13.6

squares miles was again added to this before the end of the year. By 1960, Benin Division had become the home of timber and the official deviation from food crops cultivation was near total.

In the other divisions, attempts to convert part of the land area to the forest reserves had also been going on before 1938, though not much success had been achieved. In Esan Division for instance, much campaign was still going on in 1938 when preliminary agreements were signed for ten new native administration forest reserves. The limited success of the colonial forest reservation policy in Esan and other areas was due to the hostility of the people to the idea. They cherished their forest, which formed the basis of their subsistence farming and economic survival. But in order to make the people sign forest reservation agreement in Esan Division in 1938, the District Officer promised that the forest restrictions would be removed from areas outside the reserves. (A.R. and Returns (A.R.R.), Ishan Division 1938) In Benin Division the reverse had been the case.

To stop farmers in Esan Division from destroying so much needed forest for the purpose of farming, the native administration went out of its own way to establish experimental farms at Irrua to try out various kinds of manure, such as mucuna bean and cow manure, amongst others. The idea was, if found successful, to encourage farmers to stick to the same farmland by continuously managing their plots under the rotational system. The rich high forest that was destroyed every year for food crops farming purpose was highly detested by the British officials in the Esan native administration area. There was nothing wrong with this principle but the motives and interests, which the policy was designed to protect, were not for the benefit of the people.

By 1940, the Esan clan councils were also encouraged to establish the reserves and a total area of 30.67 square miles were fully constituted in that year. Approval for a further nineteen clan reserve was obtained. The conversion of free forest to reserves thus limiting the extent of farm land was bad enough but what made it worse was the discord the system sowed among clans within the same division. Of the nineteen clans reserves approved for Esan clans in 1940, thirteen could not be converted immediately due to the inter-clan disputes they generated (A.R., Ishan

Division 1940). Besides, not being used to the system of reserves, the people fell easy prey to forestry laws and suffered prosecution incessantly. In 1938 alone for instance, one hundred and ninety prosecutions were recorded.

Up till 1948 the establishment of forest reserves by the Esan and other divisional native administrations continued. The Inyelen Clan Native Authority reserve of 282 acres was constituted in 1942 and with that, clan reserves in Esan Division now covered 35.77 square miles. In the same year, the decision to stop the prosecution of farmers who destroyed any protected tree during farming operation was taken. The boundary dispute, which the establishment of clan reserve initiated and the corruption of forest staff disturbed further creation of reserves in 1943 and 1944. Meanwhile, by 1946, the United African Company (U.A.C.), having no ready reserve in Esan continued with the exploitation of Esan wild forest timber to the western and south-western side of the Division. In 1948, further demarcation of Esan forest for reserve purpose was resumed. The demarcation of Urohi-Ojogba and Ojobga-Ugun reserves was done during the year. By the close of the year the constitution of the Unogholo-Urho-Emu reserve was in progress. The seven licenses given to the United African Company (U.A.C.) for timber exploitation covered about half the Division. By 1948, logging in these areas by the U.A.C and other companies had commenced.

The consolidation of areas already reserved began in 1948 although final settlement for the eight square-miles, Urohi-Ujogba and the Ugiogba-Ugun reserves was still to be done. An order of the Esan Division native administration in May 1949, named four farm trees that needed protection by farmers. Cases against this order arose tremendously during the year especially as the farmers interfered with the Obeche and Iroko. The chiefs were brain-washed into believing that whatever action was taken by the Forestry Department including prosecution, fines and seizures of farms was in their interest. They were told to look forward to the days of glory when all needed revenues would be yielded by the forest reserves. They did not see the other side of the coin. They might have, on their own, seen the marked difference between the enthusiasm and the near indifference displayed by those controlling the activities of the native administration when the issue of forest reserve or the planting

of permanent crops and the establishment of schools, health centres and construction of roads were tabled. Even then, they consoled themselves that the land and the forest being reserved were theirs and the white men would leave them behind. But they failed to see that by that time the best of the forest would have been taken.

Even in 1953, a year to the winding up of native administrations, attempts were still being made to constitute the last set of reserves at Ubiaja, Uromi and Atuagbo. By declaring these areas, especially the Irrua-Uromi and Ologolo-Emu-Urho clan areas, government-protected territories in 1953, the total area under such protection rose to 60.1 square miles. A further five square miles was still awaiting settlement between Ohordua and Ewohimi clans. All these protected areas were places where inter-clan disputes had erupted and settlement had not been effected. Put together with the already properly constituted reserves, the total area under reserve in Esan Division by end of the tenure of the native administration was about 160 square miles or 14.22% of the total area of the division.

Asaba Division was saved from the problem of reserves but was, however, not spared the exploitation of its forest by British firms. It was also not spared the extensive turning of its farmland into rubber and oil palm plantations. Investigation have shown that the reason for the existence of only government reserve in the Division was the need to demarcate what belonged to the government from that of the native authority. Otherwise, the whole Division was such a high forest that it could have well been called a native administration forest reserve. Licenses or concessions were granted to Messrs Nigerian Hardwood, the African Timber and Plywood Company (AT and P) and the Norkn Lumber Company, which continued the plundering of the Asaba Divisional high forest till 1955 when the Divisional Local Authority considered it worthwhile to establish three reserves (J.D. Logan 1949; A.G 29 1950). The competition between rival firms to secure owners consent in boom times always caused confusion and boundary disputes. The first proposal to establish forest reserve in Agbor District came up in 1950, but it did not materialize till the end of the tenure of the Native Administration.

In Afemai Division where no reserves were established before 1939, two forest guards were appointed to be trained in readiness for the four

forest reserves anticipated. Many difficulties were encountered in this Division in the establishment of reserves. Apart from the fact that the area had very little high forest compared to the other Divisions, boundary disputes and the absence of forest officers hindered the effort of the government and native administration forestry departments. However, four areas had been compulsorily placed under government regulation in 1938 and in 1943 the Aviele clan native authority reserve was constituted and gazetted. (2KD12/2 A.R Kukuruku Division: 1941). The fact that the Division was based at the northern part of the Province and therefore had little area of thick forest did not stop the search for further reserves. In 1944, a second one was constituted at Uzairue, while the District Officer, Mr. Spottiswood demarcated three others at Uzairue, Auchu and south- Ibie. In addition more clans including Uweppa-Uwano, Ivi-ada-obi, North-Ibie and Avianwu clans were encouraged to reserve some of their forests. The Uweppa-Uwano Clan Council actually went on with an order prohibiting the cutting of high bush in the proposed area. By 1949 proposals were also on to reserve a forest in the Ivi-imion clan area, while the only government forest reserve in the Division in Iuleha was divided into two and handed over to the native authority. With the gazetting of the Orle river reserve in 1950, the total number of the fully constituted reserves came to three and in 1951, all areas outside reserves were placed under native administration timber revenue collection rules. Consolidation work in Aviele, Uzairue and Ivi-ada-obi native administration's forest reserve was in progress while the Ora-Iuleha-Ozalla government reserve was consolidated. The exploitation of these reserves did not begin till 1954. By this year, the total number of properly constituted reserves in Afenmai Division was four. Table 1 shows clearly the statistics of forests reserved in the province at a glance.

Rubber

In addition to so much land already taken up

by these timber forest reserves, rubber, especially the *elastica* specie was being planted. Even those that grew wildly on their own were tended through creeper cutting. The war, which served as a deterrent for the building of schools and roads in the different native administration areas, now served as a stimulus for increased production of essential exports and other commodities "to hasten the victory of the United Nations." (CSO 26/2 14617, A.R, Benin Division 1943). In compliance with this encouragement, the cultivation of rubber, which had hitherto been neglected in other parts of the Province with the exception of Benin kingdom, was now faced with great seriousness. The native administration's agricultural and forest officers and even administrative officers became involved in intensive campaigns for rubber production in 1942. Provincial Officers such as the inspector of produce at Warri and Onitsha began collecting data to provide monthly returns of the rubber produced. According to these returns, production increased from 77 tons in May 1942 to 163 tons in December and for the period of April to December, a total of at least 2,039,610 lbs was produced in the Benin Province. This represented 37.5% of the total rubber of the whole country for the same period in 1938. To improve the quality of rubber, the Benin Divisional native administration Forest Officer, Mr. Somerville took all the trouble to buy the rubber off the big and small producers and improve its quality and then resell to the firms.

By 1943, in Benin Division, rubber production had reached a very high scale. The native administration's Agricultural Assistants had the sole responsibility of going round farmers and teaching them how to carry out properly, all processes between tapping of the trees and drying the prepared sheets so that a maximum of grade one sheets and a minimum of any other type were produced. All other agricultural staff in the department were charged with the responsibility of reporting farmers who refused to tap trees. Just as people were prosecuted for trespassing on the forest reserve so were they

Table 1: Forest reserves in Benin Province, 1937-1953

<i>Division</i>	<i>Total area reserved by the native administration</i>
Benin	118,449 acres or approximately 218 sq. miles.
Esan	60.1 sq. miles of protected areas.160 sq. miles of totally constituted reserves.
Asaba	The entire Asaba forest area was exploited by the different foreign companies.
Afenmai	Four forest reserves constituted but total mileage not known.

Source: Compiled from various Divisional Annual Reports.

warned and forced to tap their rubber trees when reported. In 1943, about 200 warnings were issued to owners of untapped trees. Such owners were made to tap their rubber trees forthwith. (A.R, Benin Division 1943).

The idea of taking off the initiative both from the private farmer and the native administration through all forms of laws, was most unsettling for African rubber planters with the kind of obnoxious regulations guiding tapping. The rubber farmer had no right to decide when his rubber was due for tapping. What determined the tapping was the need for rubber in Britain. Each year saw the opening up of new areas for rubber cultivation. The year 1944 saw 856 acres of planted rubber. In 1945, 862 acres of *Taungya* plantations were cultivated. By 1947, the cry of the majority of people in Benin Division, who had nothing to gain from permanent crops system, had become very loud, though rather belated for people had waited for too long. It is interesting and also saddening to know that before 1945 the native administration carried out the most inhuman act of destroying farms and food crops planted on reserved lands. Both the rubber and timber magnates, who in some cases were also members of the native administration, did not remember that whatever money was derived from both rubber and timber, would be useless if there was no food to purchase with it. But by 1947, when the problem reared its head and had become too much for them to bear, it was these magnates who bore the blame. The District Officer wriggled out of the whole affairs, accusing the native administration of refusing to allow strict penalties for those contravening the order on the planting of permanent crops.

Although the purpose of this order is well known, one cannot blame the chiefs' insatiable lust for wealth at the expense of the populace. Through the chiefs, who were the supposed custodians of the welfare of the people, the British colonial government's policy of exploitation and plundering of farmlands brought hunger on the poor people of Benin Division. It was from the native courts, on which the chiefs sat that orders for the destruction or confiscation of food crops in 'illegal' farms were issued. In 1937, one of the chiefs in the council kicking against the passing of the permanent crops control order, had said that it was below the dignity of a titled chief to obtain permission from a village chief before converting the village land for any use whatever.

They preferred the indiscriminate conversion of village farms to reserves for rubber and palm plantation. By 1948, the outcome of the conversion of this farmland into land for permanent crops was acute shortage of food.

In 1951, rubber, timber, cocoa, coffee, etc. continued to be planted. About 842 acres of *taungya* plantation were laid out in that year and the total area under rubber plantation laid out in that year was 10,020 acres. And under the *taungya* system a further 852 acres were planted during 1953, bringing the total area so cultivated since 1950 to 13,052 acres or approximately twenty square miles. Most of these were wild rubber covered by the forest restrictions order (See Table 2).

Table 2: Acreage of rubber planted in Benin Division.

<i>Division</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Acreage planted</i>	<i>Total of all species</i>
Benin	1944	856 taungya species	
	1945	862 taungya species	
	1951	842 taungya species	10,020
	1953	852 taungya species	13,052

Source: Benin Divisional Annual Reports for the years above.

It is not surprising that the planting of all forms of permanent crops continued till 1955 when the Benin Divisional native administration handed over to elected councils. In 1947 an official statement on the vexed question of production of food crops in Benin Division had said that "the more the Benin land can be kept under deep rooted tree cover, the better; that the Bini should make their money from natural timber resources by making and selling articles of wood, and with the proceeds obtain food from outside (A.R, Benin Division 1947).

This was a most glaring show of disinterestedness in the future of Benin Division by the British officials. Possibly, Mr. Collier who gave this expert advice did not know that the Benin Division had the art of wood working for centuries and yet had survived not only on that skill but on a combination of several economic pursuits. He did not know that as a typical African kingdom the socialization process of Benin had been geared towards the production of adult skills and specialties, which were often lodged in occupational guilds and lineages, and which were directed towards the production of adult with "multi-faceted" productive skills so that each of

them was simultaneously a farmer, a hunter, a fisherman, a wine tapper, amongst others (Iyang 1981). The watertight specialization, which Collier had advised was to take the Bini out of his true self, suppress his skills and ruin his basis of survival. For the first need of man is the survival of himself and his community, which the traditional socio-political system prepared the people for, was what Collier asked the Binis to give away. It has never been known in the history of mankind when a people, except the land does not permit it, make a conscious decision or policy to abandon farming or take to buying of food from outside. The interest of the colonial power was paramount in the mind of Mr. Collier rather than the economic survival of a people forced to swallow the bitter pills of colonial domination.

Other Divisions in the Province continued to introduce measures, which in their thinking were directed towards the economic development of their areas. Certainly what they thought was being introduced was a lesson on economic diversification. If this was truly so, how could one explain the suppression of the indigenous industries such as soap making, mat making and cloth weaving while no alien or new ones arising from the new economic measures were introduced? It is this deceitful nature of the measures that made the educated elite and even some of the chiefs and the people rise against the system. Unlike what was expected, the new economic measures brought hunger and no tangible improvement on the conditions of living of the people. Their farmland and the natural resources of other lands were plundered using the people's exploited labour for the development of British home industries (Falola 1987 and Onimode 1983).

With so much cultivation and production of rubber going on in Benin Province one would have expected at least a shoe making industry to be established to use this raw material. Nothing of this sort happened, instead shoes and other items made out of the sheets shipped out to Britain were brought back to be bought by the people at exorbitant prices. This was the same with all other raw materials shipped out of the Province. The best that came out of the high rubber production in the Benin Division was that the Native Administration was encouraged to establish shoe mending cooperative society to help the people mend their imported shoes when they went bad.

To distract the Asaba Division from the yam growing for which it had been known, extensive

campaign was undertaken also for the production of rubber. In the Ezechima clan area for instance, the wide range cultivation of rubber was so much that it soon became a matter of concern for the people as well the District Officer. Despite this extensive planting of rubber, the Native Administration's forest guards spent their time combing the Asaba forest for the *funtumia elastica* and suitable *landolhia* rubber species. The forest guards' monthly reports were scrutinized and instruction given to the Native Administration tapers to tap the wild rubber growing in the bushes. The lack of enthusiasm shown by this African team was an illustration of how distasteful the whole programme had become to the people. Rubber Production Assistants also visited private farms to teach the farmers tapping methods in order to enhance high quality rubber.

The Native Administration did not hesitate to take to measures no matter how mean, if only such would enhance the interest in rubber or palm oil. In the Illah clan area, as many others in the Division, where enough interest had not been shown in rubber and oil palm in spite of repeated warning, bribery with gun powder was resorted to. When by 1945, this interest was still not forthcoming; 'sanction' was to be taken against the people. Such was the seriousness with which the Asaba Divisional native administration was encouraged to take the issues of planting of rubber and other permanent crops, that were of interest to the colonial government. As if to further impress the importance of commercial crops on the Asaba native administration, forestry matters in the Agbor distinct area of the Division was put under the supervision of the provincial government till the fifties when elected councils took over. No attention was given to rubber in Afenmai Division, since it did not do very well there. Instead, all encouragement was given to the native administration to plant and produce cocoa.

Oil Palm Plantation

No cash crop that could be grown in the Province was left out. As for oil palm, except in Afenmai Division where it did not flourish, all other native administrations provided funds for the maintenance of selected oil palm seedlings at Ogba in Benin Division. These were sold to farmers and distributed to government Agricultural Assistants trained in plantation work. At the

beginning of 1938, there were already 1,696 plantations owners in the Province and a total area of 4,196 acres was under cash crops cultivation. (AR, Benin Province: 1938). A number of unions of farmers formed for the purpose of mutual assistance developed into co-operative societies for the enhanced cultivation and production of oil palm and palm produce. The Esan and Benin native administrations shared the services of a co-operative inspector who assisted and advised these co-operative societies. These two native administrations maintained the lead in the oil palm cultivation while Asaba did not show much enthusiasm.

Individuals were encouraged, at the expense of food crops, to take to the development of oil palm plantation. In 1939 there were seventy-nine new oil palm plantation owners (including extension to already existing ones before 1938), and the total acreage of oil palm plantation rose to 3,771 in Benin Division alone (AR, Benin Province 1938). All forms of encouragement were given to farmers to ensure a high production of palm oil. The Benin Divisional native administration employed junior staff to carry out extension work on the plantations as well as maintain nurseries at Ogba, Ehor, Okhuo and Urhonigbe. Farmers were provided with palm seedlings at token prices and by the end of 1939, over 10,000 wire collars for the protection of young palm seedlings were hired out to them.

In 1947 a total of thirty acres of oil palms were planted by the Benin Divisional native Administration while newly introduced permanent crops seedlings, like citrus and coffee numbering 120 and 1,200 respectively were distributed to farmers (AR Benin Division 1947). The encouragement given in terms of oil palm plantations to farmers in Benin Division was extended to those in Esan. The seriousness with which the issue of

cash crops was viewed is seen in the near passionate appeal to the Esan people to cultivate oil palm and engage in the oil palm press system for the extraction of palm oil. One hundred and ninety-seven new farmers extended their plantations. This gave a total acreage of 1,297.5 out of which 361.8 was planted in 1938. This effort was said not to be impressive enough for what was actually wanted by the colonial authorities was "increases by hundred percent annually." It is difficult to believe that this was the same Esan native administration that had handled the issues of health and education with levity that was making these advances in the economic sphere. The outbreak of war in 1939 did not stop further development of palm plantations in Esan as in other Divisions. The year 1941 saw the establishment, by 147 farmers, of new oil plantations and extension on sixty- five others in Esan Division.

In Asaba Division the planting of oil palm and other permanent crops was so widely carried out that by the early forties serious considerations were on to issue the control of permanent crop order just as was done in Benin Division. By 1938 a total acreage of 155 of oil palm had been planted in Agbor District of Asaba Division alone, 48.5 acres having been planted in that year (see Table 3). Schools in Asaba Division (the mission's and the government's) also established oil palm demonstration farms. The Agbor District native authority also maintained a central seedling nursery at Agbor in 1938. About 2,287 seedlings were sold out to farmers as compared to only 678 in 1937 (Agbor Dist. 8/1 AR, Agbor District 1938).

In 1939 about 9,000 oil palm seedlings were sold out and about twenty-three new palm plantations owners came up bringing the total to a hundred. Extension work on the already existing oil palm plantations was encouraged and eleven

Table 3: Oil palm plantations by native administrations.

<i>Division</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Plantation owners</i>	<i>Acreage</i>
Benin	1939	79	3,771
	1947	Not known	Total 30
Esan	1938	195 old farmers	361.8 for the year
		197 new extensions	Total 1,295.5
	1941	147 new farmers 65 extensions	Not known
Asaba	1938	Not known	48.5
	1939	23 new ones 11 extensions Total now 100	Total acreage stood at 155
		Farmers increased	
	1940	but total not given	Not known

such extensions took place during the year. In 1940 an increased number of farmers joined the group of oil palm plantation owners. With increased number of farmers taking to plantation farming every year, the food crops farming sector suffered. Food crop production, which had been the main occupation of the Ika and Asaba people of this Division, was thus abandoned. To further encourage oil palm plantation, the farmers who had been discouraged by the destruction of seedlings were introduced to wire netting for seedling protection. By 1940, many farmers had hired these from the Agricultural Department of the native administration.

Afenmai Division happened to have been the only area where experiments on oil palm plantation failed. But its place was taken by cocoa although not on a comparable scale as in other Divisions. Generally, cocoa was not produced on a large scale in the Province due to the fact that the land was not suitable for the crop. The output of the Province in 1937 did not exceed 300 tons. The great attention given by the colonial authorities to the development of cash crops needed by Britain in the various Divisions was never accorded to any commodity of high demand among the indigenous people.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, one must say that the main line of development in agriculture during 1914-54 was intensification of the cultivation of cash crops very much needed in Britain. Colonial and then war needs especially, further contributed to the neglect of food crops agriculture save for such items as could substitute for the European foods such as rice which the war had rendered too expensive to purchase. Food production for the survival of the indigenous people was largely ignored and its labour supply seriously depleted by the increasing withdrawal of peasants into wage labour at the various cash crops plantations and reserves. The results were both immediate and far-fetched. The immediate result was that food crops agriculture lost internal stimulus for development. With the exposure of the agricultural system to the vagaries of the imperialist market, any aspect of the system that did not satisfy the need of the market was relegated to the background. This according to Helleiner, "has insured the stagnation, or even degeneration, of Nigerian agriculture to this day, with the real threat

that the country may be unable to feed its population." (Helleiner 1983).

As a matter of fact since the late 1970s successive governments of Nigeria have introduced a number of programmes to revive the interest in food crop agriculture. There had been the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), which was followed by the 'Green Revolution.' All these arose from the need to curb the scarcity and the high cost of local foodstuffs in the Nigerian market (Obadan 1990) for what happened to agriculture in Benin Province happened elsewhere in the country. And even now in the twenty first century Nigeria has not been able to break from the colonial lesson. Its whole attention is given to the oil trade at the expense of sustained efforts to revive and develop agriculture. The result of this total dependence on crude oil is on the one hand, acute hunger among the people and on the other uncertainty of the future. Should there be any war that affects the crude oil trade, Nigeria will become a shadow of its present self. If and when that happens, it will be no thanks to a colonial economy that paid little attention to the future but over-emphasized the then colonial presence. The truth of the matter is that colonial agricultural plantation planting was embraced by most elites, who began seeing food production as dirty labour and largely unrewarding. If today, Nigerian elites look down on food crop production, history can supply the explanation. The colonial system established what appears like an irreversible system of cash crop production to the detriment of food production.

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