

## **Economic Legacies of Colonialism; Asset or Hindrance to Economic Transformation of Africa?**

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**ABSTRACT:** Apologists of colonialism argue that it left in Africa economic legacies with potentials of triggering economic growth; that it laid the foundation for growth by initiating Africa into the international economic order; that Africa's underdeveloped status lies only in Africa's post colonial experience. Opposing this predominantly Euro-American view are proponents of the position that colonization is responsible for Africa's Post colonial underdevelopment. Theirs is that Africa's underdevelopment derived from historical antecedents of colonialism. Using mostly secondary sources and scholarly analysis of colonial economic data, this paper examines the economic legacies of colonialism and posits that colonial economic legacies are not assets but hindrances to Africa's economic transformation. It implores African leaders to chart a new course to Africa's economic development by jettisoning rudiments of colonial economic legacies.

**Keywords:** colonialism, Africa, economic, underdevelopment

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

The imposition of colonialism on Africa was an introduction of a new epoch in the history of Africa. It was not the beginning of history and civilization in Africa. Colonialism was imposed on Africa by non-Africans whose motive was the maximization of benefits from African resources. To attain this objective, some economic, social and political schemes were put in place. Colonial economic policies included the introduction of infrastructure, introduction of tax systems, exposition of Africa to the international economic system, introduction of banking and monetary systems as well as non-African medium of exchange, and introduction into Africa agricultural systems that encouraged cash crops farming.

Varied positions have been held about the implications of colonial economic legacies for post independence Africa. Apologists of colonialism mostly Eurocentric writers posit often that colonialism bequeathed unto Africa invaluable blessings and unquantifiable benefits whose implications, if properly harnessed hold keys to economic growth in Africa [1]. The argument in this line is that Africa only saw hopes of civilization and modernization upon the imposition of colonialism without which Africa would remain in a crude and natural state.

Furthermore, thoughts in this direction hold that European colonialism of Africa was either a mission of civilization of Africa or a dual mandate [2]. Arising from this position it is to be believed that all economic, political and social infrastructure introduced into Africa by her colonizers aimed at lifting Africa away from its pre-colonial crude state. Contrary to this position, mostly Africanists and other writers on the other divide view the colonization of Africa from a different view. Authors of the dependency theory school believe that colonialism was an exploitative mission of Europeans in Africa. Its main objective was the exploitation of Africa through the subjugation of African economies. And that its economic legacies were exploitative, dehumanizing and of no or little benefit to post colonial Africa.

Piqued by the arguments from both sides, this paper sets to investigate the economic legacies of colonialism, with the primary objective of determining if they are assets or hindrances to economic transformation of Africa.

### **II. ECONOMIC LEGACIES OF COLONIALISM**

- **Transportation**

The colonial administrators established transport systems aimed at linking major trading centres. Especially the rail system was established to connect the major commercial nodes of the colonial governments [3]. In French Senegal, there was the Dakar-St Louis line started in 1882 and finished three years later. Similarly, Senegal-Niger line was completed by 1923. Railways were constructed in Guinea, Ivory Coast, Cotonou, Accra-Kumasi, etc. Economic Implications and benefits were primary consideration for the

construction of these rail lines. For instance, the construction of the rail system in the Gold Coast opened up the expanding cocoa production in the Colony. Crowder buttresses this point when he informed that in Ivory Coast, Governor Antonetti pleaded to the metropolis for extension of his rail lines northwards to tap the resources of the Sudan [4].

In Kenya, the course of the railroads causally determined the location of European settlers which in turn determined the location of the main cities. It was indicated, as in the case of Kenya, that colonial Governments did not only consider connecting the rail tracks to the ports, but also the economic potentials along the routes, as well consideration for the cheapest and shortest routes. These strategic considerations can be seen when viewed from the perspective that these rail roads often bypassed populated settlements on which stopovers were erected [5].

In Nigeria, it has been noted that the rail system were began around 1909 after the discovery of coal in Enugu. Sir Percy Giroard, Lugard's successor in the North built a railway from Kano to Baro from where goods were shipped by barge to the sea. This became a major means of evacuating northern produce[6]. Notable in the development and evolution of colonial rail system is the fact that the major interest was the evacuation of goods. It perhaps aimed only at connecting the points of production, collection, assemblage and exportation. Considerations were not given to sundry human, utilitarian and non-profit benefits of the rail lines. Similarly concentration on only the economic benefit of the rail line marred the development of its potentials.

The motor transport system was in same fate with the rail system. Its origin and evolution was geared towards colonial realization of her colonial economic interests. No doubt, the poor pre-colonial road network in Africa threw up the exigent need for a more efficient transport system by the colonial powers who sought to transport goods to points of collation. Most of these colonial road networks seemingly ended around rail stopovers from where goods are assembled for onward movements through the rails<sup>7</sup> to the sea ports.

- **Colonial Industries**

In the words of Crowder, there was almost no attempt at industrialization of Africa until after the second World War [7]. The only major industries were the extractive ones. In Nigeria, there were only industries whose major trade were extraction of natural resources. There were the tin extractive factory at Jos, and coal mine at Enugu. In Ghana, there were the gold mining factories at Ashanti and other places. At other areas, what some authors called industrialization were attempts at reducing the bulkiness of goods for easy exportation. There were no attempts at transforming these goods into finished products. The decortications of groundnuts were aimed at reducing its weight for easy conveyance. For this, there were the decortications factory in Tanzania and land Spinning mill in Dahomey and Ivory Coast as well as a groundnut processing industry in Senegal.

Raw materials extracted from Africa were sent to the metropolis' industrial plants for finishing into European goods and sent to European colonies for consumption. This therefore meant that any mission at industrializing these colonies may amount to endangering metropolis industries which enjoyed, not just a vast imperial market for their goods, but also a secure source of raw materials from abroad.[8] Colonialism in Africa had a recorded history of exploiting Africa's industrial potentials but not in the direction of making inputs towards establishing industries in Africa.

- **Labour**

Most economic and social ventures of the colonial governments were funded mostly by direct and indirect taxation of the colonies. Direct taxation methods forced Africans to grow crops for sale and as well, as in settler nations, work on the white settler's farms or in the mining industries. Workers were mobilized from densely populated areas to less populated ones to effect cost reduction in the production of cash crops. For instance, in French West Africa, people moved from French Sudan and Upper Volta to seek work in groundnut farms of Senegal and on the cocoa farms of Ivory Coast. Similarly many Mossi from Upper Volta preferred to earn money in the mines and cocoa farms of the Gold coast where remunerations were higher than in Ivory Coast [9].

These movements for the purposes of achieving colonial labour needs, no doubt, were inimical to the healthy survival of the African communal system. These forced gravitations bore for the Africans enormous consequences while the colonizer's needs were maximally attained. While these were basically to increase colonial tax needs, compulsory labour was used in many other parts to meet labour needs. In Nigeria, before 1933, when the Forced Labour Ordinance was passed to proscribe forced labour, administrative officers conscripted labour for use on railway construction and other public works. Similarly, Crowder exposes that in Kenya, when voluntary labour was not available, administrative officers could, with the authorization of the governor, conscript labour for public works projects or portorage with a condition of sixty day limit per man, per year[10].

In the Belgian Congo, the native authority made use of forced labour in the building and maintenance of schools and roads and erection of rest houses. Also the Angolan colonizers ensured forced labour for any African who had no apparent occupation. In fact, this was backed up by a colonial law that supported the moral obligation of man to work. Administrators were at liberty to conscript labour for public works even if it was not in the same area of residence of the labourer. The situation in Portuguese Angola was so bad that it was branded the “modern slavery”. The forcefulness and constant conscription to labour at some time resulted to the inability of villages to cultivate adequate crops to feed themselves.

In French West Africa, all non-assimilated Africans had to undertake twelve days labour for the administration which they could redeem at one to three Francs per day. Administration often used compulsory labour in the construction of large projects, maintenance of roads and construction of rail ways. Until 1921, administrators in Portuguese territories recruited workers for white farmers and European commercial companies. The case was replicated in French West Africa where farmers were recruited for white farmers to the alienation of indigenous cocoa planters,[11]. In many parts of colonial Africa, through compulsory labour, whether for public works projects or in private enterprise, European administrators were responsible not only for redistributing large numbers of African workers, but also for causing much hardship and suffering in many instances both to those conscripted and to their families.

- **Money and Medium of Exchange**

Colonial rule left the legacies of introducing into most of Africa a potable means of exchange in form of money. Before colonial currencies, many parts of Africa had different forms and media of exchange most of which lacked universal acceptability. There were the Kissy pennies in the Sierra Leone-Guinea area, Manillas and certain foreign currencies in the Niger Delta, mana Theresa dollars in the Chad region, gold dust and the ounce on the Gold coast [12]. The domiciliation of these currencies in difference enclaves created room for universality in acceptance. Though by 1900, the cowries had gained relative acceptability, as it exchanged for 4,000 shillings, it was impossible to use it for large scale commercial purposes since the cost of portage was enormous.

The installation of colonialism and its attendant need to establish freer business links between the people, the administrators and the metropolis necessitated the creation and introduction of a commonly acceptable currency and a modern banking system. This initially prompted the creation of the coin which, though an acceptable means of exchange, was limited in use by the problem of carriage. The coin required large numbers of escort and head carriers to be used for large businesses [13]. Perhaps limitations in the use of the coin prompted in British West Africa, the constitution of the West African currency Board saddled with the responsibility of creation and distribution of notes. The Currency Board, whose activities on note production began in 1916 gained popularity among British West African colonies about the period of WWII.

In French West Africa, the Banque de l’Afrique Occidentale was founded in 1901 for the purposes of banking and currency. Africans in these colonies did not easily accept the notes as media of exchange. The common currency according to Suret Canale was five-franc piece, carried in sacks by donkey or camel for especially the merchants trading in the interior [14].

The monetary policies of the colonial regime were designed to benefit the colonizers and not the colonies. Neither was the idea of the creation of currencies for ease and betterment of life for the Africans, rather it was meant to create means of exchange for the different European trading interests. True to need, the introduction of monetary units increased and improved transaction between the colonies and the metropolis. Monetary units as means of exchange further increased the sophistication in transaction between the colonies and metropolis. It, in the final analysis, tied the colonies to the metropolis economies, in which Africans were unequal partners in the ensuing exchange[15].

- **Taxation**

To better understand the essence of taxation in colonial Africa one should first understand the major colonial principle which was that the cost of running these colonies must be affordable and cheap. In fact the British doctrine was that each colony should be fiscally self supporting. This implied that any growth in government expenditure was supposed to be financed from higher revenue. It is likely that part of the benefits derived by the colonial administration from the use of money as a unit of exchange was on taxation.

This taxation, no doubt was vital to the colonial economy, not only in raising revenue, but also to pay for the cost of the colonial administrations as well as raising funds for profit-motivated development projects. Crowder is of the view that the British in some occasions gave loans, interest-free loans or grants-in-aid to the colonies. Much of British negligible succour to the colony was under the Colonial Development Act 1929.[16] Despite these, the administrators covered most of the cost of governance from indirect taxation from export of raw materials from the colonies.

The excruciating effects of colonial taxation were overwhelming on Africans who had to engage more on the cultivation of cash crops to meet up with tax demands. Similarly, others took to compulsory labour to facilitate tax payments. At times, populations travelled away from their homes to farther distances to secure wages from labour. At other times and places, these long distance gravitations were to raise funds to meet up with colonial financial requirements on the citizens.

- **Agriculture**

Agriculture was a mainstay of pre-colonial African societies. It formed the nucleus of commercial activities in pre-European Africa. Most exchanges in trade and commerce were agricultural produce through farming, animal husbandry or mining. Business men and traders improved on their trade as farmers improved either in quality or quantity or both. This pre-colonial aspect of the economy incorporated both the peasantry and other classes which were hardly demarcated clearly. Labour was gotten first from family and mutual labour exchanges before consideration for fiscal or pecuniary remuneration. Therefore, agricultural produce and practice made for inter-group relations [17].

Through agriculture and other economic activities, pre-colonial African societies provided itself with basic requirements for survival. Produce at different epochs and places formed the basis of commercial exchange. Materials for the provision of shelter and food were products of indigenous agricultural practices. Thus, suffice it to say that Eurocentric consciousness of progress and civilization came with the European's need for cash crops which exposed African agro economy to the European dominated international economy. This exposition was to make feats earlier achieved by African agro-economies appear insignificant.

The colonial agricultural policies in Africa were structured to improve the economies, and solve the problems of the colonizing and metropolitan powers. What mattered was how the colonial economy could benefit the colonizers [18]. African agricultural practices have been said to be underdeveloped due partly to crude, non-mechanized practices dependent on nature for harvest and cultivation, lack of an expanded market for sale and exchange of products as well as absence of machineries for processing of agricultural products to finished goods.

Instead of worrying on how to improve on this reported situation of pre colonial state of agriculture in Africa, colonial economic policies encouraged the abandonment of food products by Africans for cash crops required by the European machines. These were administratively sanctioned with no regard for the humanitarian implications of giving up the basic means of survival for cash crops. Similarly, colonial economic policies were, as it were, not designed for reciprocal benefits. Basic considerations were:

- a. Production of raw materials for European factories;
- b. Production of storable goods that can survive the freight and distance across the oceans
- c. Encouraging crops that are suitable for a particular geography;
- d. Ensuring availability of deceitful and coercive policies that will encourage availability of goods;
- e. Availability of markets for goods bought from Europe;
- f. Exertion of tax on cash crops for administrative purposes.

- **Health and Education**

The European colonizers saw at some point the economic benefit of instituting health facilities and educational institutions. The health facilities will enable the workforce remain strong enough with a healthy manpower in the colonies, cash crops production, railways and other colonial interests. This necessitated the need for the colonial administrators to begin considering building few health infrastructure in colonial territories. In the same vein, the cost of travelling to the metropolis to treat a sick administrative officer informed another need for health facilities most of which were initiatives and handiworks of missionaries in the various colonies. Crowder observes that the French did not make any significant impact in her colonies in the health sector until the inter war years when substantial impacts were made on the health facilities of people outside the towns [19].

The educational sector was one of the means through which colonialism underdeveloped Africa. This manifested in the initial unwillingness to put down educational policies that will favour the colonized. Championed by the missionaries, what later became colonial educational policies were aimed basically at training manpower that will provide needed services in colonial offices.

The stifling of educational opportunities was worse in French West Africa where, after the 1905 separation of state and church in France, it was difficult for the colonial government to assist the missionaries. By 1918, the only major educational institution founded in French West Africa was Ecole Normale William Ponty aimed primarily at producing teachers, interpreters and professional cadres most of who were also, initially sons of chiefs[20].

Colonial educational policies were not uniform even for territories under the same metropolitan government. Also, in some cases, same colonial power had varying colonial policies most of which are

discontinuous even in contiguous territories. In Nigeria, for instance, educational policies varied under British control. In Cameroun, the policy was equally not same in the French and British sections especially after WWI.

Education in colonial Africa was in the words of Rodney, designed to underdevelop Africa. Most of the teachings and learning of that period were not necessitated by or occasioned into any meaningful research work aimed at improving Africa. It was mostly teaching and learning aimed at improving clerical and administrative competence[21]

In northern Nigeria, for instance, to establish a school, the demanding institute must get clearance from the Emir. In Sierra Leone, the establishment of secondary education was almost due to the efforts of the various Christian missionaries. It is Halliards' view that the colonial government were only satisfied with playing supervisory roles in matters of education [22]. This was improved in British West Africa after a Cambridge conference exerted pressure on the colonial government to put more effort in educational provision. Crowder, demonstrating the littleness of colonial inputs in education presents colonial educational budgets of the following countries in 1929.

Gambia	£6,455
Gold Coast	£218,052
Nigeria	£304,623
Sierra Leone	£44,141[23]

These sums, minimal as they were, were inadequate for funding education in these colonies within this period when many Africans had become conscious of the need for literacy. Inadequacies in the sector can further be demonstrated by bringing forward the reports of Advisory Committee on Native Education in the British Tropical African Dependencies, that:

*As a result of the economic development of the British African Dependencies, which has placed larger revenues at the disposal of the principle that the controlling power is responsible as trustee for moral advancement of the native population, the governments of these territories are taking an increasing interest in active education which up to recent years has been largely left to the mission societies[24].*

Efforts were not vigorously made in the later colonial periods to channel education towards scientific research. Similarly, teachings in colonial schools were efforts towards subjugating the psychology and mentality of Africans to the colonizer's culture, way of life and ideologies and also to ingrain in him the feeling of inferiority. It became an opportunity to permanently enslave Africa's mentality.

### **Are the economic legacies of colonialism Asset or Hindrance to economic transformation of Africa?**

It requires no conjecture to say that African economies are in comatose state. It is similarly no issue of further debate that Africa's economic problems, though manifest in post colonial times, have colonial origins. That is to say that, the roots of Africa's problems can be found, not just in the ineptitudes of contemporary African leaders, but also in the mischievous exploitative foundations of colonialism deliberately designed for a sustained and in fact interminable dependent status.

The initial exposure of an agrarian people growing at a pace suitable to their environment to a web of competitive European machines which by no kind means forced them into cultivating and producing, not what they needed, but that needed by the imperial machine was one means of impoverishing Africa. Similarly, coercive means and promulgation of ordinances to secure cash crops for colonial profits bore harsher consequences on the colonized.

The amalgamation of different African groups who hitherto were different people of different history and ideology is not just a source of contemporary underdevelopment of Africa but a constant source of avoidable conflicts in post colonial Africa, which no doubt, have negative economic consequences. The basic economic consideration for this merger were perhaps to increase not just the market for European finished goods but also the space to source raw materials as well as considerations for economic implications of governance. It was calculated that pulling these units under one administrative umbrella will have cost- saving implications and increase consistency in policies of exploitation of these areas. Falola asserts that one principal reason for increasing communication among different groups in colonial Africa through rail and road construction was aimed at improving on the exploitative capabilities[25].

That colonial legacies in Africa are hindrances to African economic development becomes clearer if one understands first, the motive of colonialism. This obviously is to make profits through a diametrically unbalanced trade from which Africa had no benefit. Similarly, that Africa did not voluntarily negotiate or call for or initiate the lopsided dealing with the European colonists is a pointer to the fact that the colonizer's interests were preponderant in the exploitative relationship. This further explains why wars costing European lives were fought during the brutal annexation of Africa.

Colonized Africa inherited laws, institutions and norms consistently modified to service colonial needs. These laws, no doubt were geared towards maximizing the exploration, production and appropriating of profit

yielding products of Africa. Ordinances and laws repugnant to African environments and compatible with capitalist ideals of generating more and more profit were promulgated to further exploit Africa. Offenders received varied punishments ranging, as it varied in colonies, from spanking to fining, incarcerations and in a few cases, conscriptions into colonial army [26].

The stifling of other agricultural products for cash crops was one of the ways through which colonial regime underdeveloped Africa. This is true when considered from the point of view that colonial regimes redirected the scope of agricultural output to a near monocultural economy unable to stand the post-colonial competitions of highly capitalist international economic relations. The pre colonial heterogeneous agro economy that encouraged interdependency among African groups was reduced to few major export crops. In Nigeria, for instance, cocoa, palm produce and groundnuts, accounted for 70% of total exports in colonial times [27]. The consequences of this narrowness in scope still lives with Nigeria as in the entire Africa.

The colonial educational system, which Roodney termed “education for underdevelopment”[28], was also referred to by Fanon as a means of stripping Africans of not just their sense of native culture, but also their ideology. The later ideology from western education was such that nothing African is worth any value while everything European was in African’s view, superior[29].

The total absence of any deliberate attempt at industrializing Africa makes unworthy any mention of industrialization when colonization is the subject. Apart from mining and processing factories, colonial administrations left Africa devoid of any industries while exploiting her raw materials and shipped them abroad to feed metropolitan industries whose finished goods were exported back to the African market for more profit ploughed back into the purchase of raw materials. This cycle entangled Africa deeper into the complex web of unprofitable and exploitative global economy, thus hindering her development.

Transport infrastructure did not aim at improving Africa’s welfare, but colonial haulage of goods to points of export. The rail system was channelled to transport goods and raw materials from points of abundance to the seaports. So also were the road networks constructed to receive goods from the hinterlands to points of collation. Today, African countries can no longer sustain most of these railways because their constructions were not in consideration for sundry utilitarian purposes order than to export goods. Considerations were not given to human habitations along the routes; alternative usage outside goods haulage; maintenance routes; and availability of energy sources along the routes. These have made the rail systems more of a hindrance to Africa’s success in the economic, social and political sectors.

Neither the tax system nor the monetary policies of the colonial regimes were instruments of sustainable development. They were neither designed for Arica’s future growth nor were there considerations for development prospects. Rather, these were designed to exploit Africa through special ordinances and laws meant for colonial benefits designed to outlive colonialism. The introduction of, first the coin and later the note only facilitated trade within the colonies. This, though with its obvious benefit to Africa, was designed to subjugate post colonial Africa. This fact is buttressed by Lugard who asserts that:

*European brains, capital and energy have not been and never will be expended in developing the resources of Africa from motives of philanthropy[30].*

It is not unreasonable to argue from the forgoing that, what was instituted in Africa were Europe’s immediate and long term development strategy aimed at servicing the political, social and economic development of Europe during colonialism and in the period after. It was a peculiar system of exploitation meant to take from the exploited all her efforts which will serve the development purpose of the exploiter at both the immediate and later moments.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

Most of the economic legacies of colonialism have been seen to constitute the cog in the wheel of Africa’s underdevelopment. These policies of colonialism were designed to achieve the aim of the colonial masters while in Africa and continue with same through manipulation from the metropolis after independence. It is logical therefore, to align with Crawford that “the character of the contemporary African state has been determined by its colonial origins”[31].

What is left is for African leaders to alter these colonial foundations through proactive developmental measures founded and inspired by indigenous needs and galvanized by the need to institute sustainable growth in Africa. This paper, though aligning with the variously held positions of colonial underdevelopment of Africa, disagrees that African leaders cannot disentangle from the neo-colonial effects of colonial policies. This they can through harnessing and adequately utilizing the abundant human and material resources of Africa; accelerating development efforts in individual African countries and on a regional basis; increasing Africa’s dependency on self, while also reducing dependency on the West; increasing technological output to reduce the existing gap in balance of trade deficit; ensuring participatory governance borne of indigenous elements of culture and norms; recreate models to ensure continued good political leadership and viable institutions saddled with responsibilities for checks and balances of these leaders.

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