

Origin and Development of Cotton Production and Trade in Colonial Lafia Societies, 1903–1960

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Accepted: 22/12/2024

Published: 23/12/2024

Abstract: *The Lafia area is naturally endowed with abundant natural resources—a suitable environment and arable land that supports every kind of agricultural activity and crop production. This paper attempts to x-ray the origin and development of cotton production and trade in colonial Lafia societies from 1903–1960. The article is largely concerned with the arrival of British colonial authority, who, without hesitation, concentrate on trade in cotton as one of the major cash crops for their home abroad. It is fascinating to note that cotton became so lucrative in the Lafia Local Government Area that its production and trade have led to the intrusion of both external and internal multinational corporations in the quest for this crop. The study employs both primary and secondary sources of data collection and adopts qualitative and quantitative methods of historical research in its analysis.*

Keywords: Origin, Development, Cotton, Production, Trade

Publish by IJAH 2024.

INTRODUCTION

Any discussion of cotton production for export in any part of the British colonial empire must include the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA), which was at the centre of all cotton industry development operations.¹ The events that led to the evolution of this important organisation are too complex to cover in detail. But for our present purposes, a few remarks will suffice here. The BCGA was formed in 1902 in Manchester with Sir Alfred Jones, chairman of Elder He served as the first president of Dempter shipping lines. The organisation was charged with the responsibility The task is to find Lancashire a new source of raw material to replace that of the southern states of the USA.²

From the early period of the British Industrial Revolution to the early twentieth century, the Lancashire cotton industries remained the largest in Britain. It employed over three million people and supplied over one-third of the British domestic exports. The industry had over fifty percent of the world's cotton spindles. From the onset to 1900, the main sources of British cotton lint were the southern states of the USA. This was considered undesirable, since it was outside the British Empire and could be used as an instrument of political manipulation. Cotton then appeared not to be doing well because of the boll weevil plague. Another important factor for an alternative to US cotton was the increased use of cotton

by the American cotton textile industry, resulting in considerable reductions in the available supply of cotton to Britain. In the British Parliament, the debate was about how to find alternative sources of raw cotton for the very important Lancashire cotton textile industry. The BCGA was thus founded to explore new possibilities and the expansion of imperial sources of cotton. It was considered that Nigeria, Sudan, and Uganda seemed to have other suitable areas of development.

The principal supporter of BCGA in the British parliament, Winston Churchill, and its vice president, the Duke of Malborough, personally visited Nigeria and carried out parliamentary campaigns in its support³. With a team of other experts, it was discovered that as far back as the 1850s, southern Nigeria had exported tonnes of cotton. Thereafter the popular verdict was that with the encouragement of the British government, cotton production could be promoted still further. However, the experts agreed that southern Nigeria alone could not produce enough cotton to meet Lancashire's demands. So the campaign to promote cotton production was extended to Northern Nigeria. The construction of the railway to the north, which was one of the prerequisites for this development, was being pressed by the company, which was also interested in the opening up of the tin mines of the Jos plateau. The same company had already

built a one hundred and eighty-mile road network down to the Benue River to provide access to facilitate trade in goods.

By 1912, the construction of the extension of the western (Lagos) line of the Northern Railway had reached Kano as an essential preliminary development of Northern Nigerian cotton production so that it could be railed to Lagos and shipped eventually to Liverpool. The BCGA sought to distribute the seeds of the Allen variety of North American cotton to farmers in the north of Nigeria so that they would produce that staple variety required by Lancashire's cotton mills.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The reconstruction of the history of cash crop development for export among small farmers in tropical Africa has been a long academic tradition from which the present generation of African scholars can draw. Furthermore, since the early part of 1900, that trend has advanced quite significantly all over Africa among African and Western economic historians. There were a lot of historical reconstructions of the African cash crop revolution that used HlaMyints Vent for the surplus model. J.S. Hogendorn showed how the theory could be used to explain what happened⁵. In broad strokes, it was argued that colonial or international trade masterminded by the colonial administration was the overriding factor in the development of the domestic commodity market. What is done in this book is intended to fill in the existing gap using the development of Kolanut trade among the Hausa in the 19th century⁶, oil palm in southeastern Nigeria⁷, cotton in Uganda and Nigeria, cocoa in western Nigeria, and groundnuts in Hausaland⁸ in Northern Nigeria and in Senegambia.

Except for a few areas in Central Nigeria, as already demonstrated, the conquest of most parts of the protectorate of Northern Nigeria had been completed before the 1914-1918 World War. However, until the 1930s, Britain merely used her indirect rule policy administration as a political tool to raise funds to meet the cost of her administration because there was no clear economic policy act at that time. Robert Shenton⁹ and others have shown that the main thrust of British rule up to self-sufficiency was well as the desire to create and secure political stability.

Adam Smith and a generation of other classical economists also asserted that the "Wealth of Nations" largely depends on the "expansion of world markets to all nations and the incorporation of such territories into the international division of labour¹⁰." When the slave trade began to suffer reverses, it and all those concerned considered the development to be of mutual benefit.¹¹

It was Adam Smith's original idea that Myint developed his theory of international trade with specific reference to the vent-for-surplus theory¹². He argued that all the British colonial territories were considered as

sources of primary commodities for British industries as well as markets for merchandise. Accordingly, roads, harbours, and railways were constructed to ease the movement of goods and services to achieve that expansionist policy. But having no clear-cut agricultural economic policy. The technology of producing the primary commodities remained crude. Thus, most foreign firms preferred to invest in trading activities by using the Niger and Benue waterways as their cheapest means of transport, while cash crop production was left in the hands of peasant farmers.

The Establishment of British Colonial Rule in Lafia Area, 1903-1960

Before the formal colonisation of Nigeria in general and Lafia in particular, some commercial firms, especially. The Royal Niger Company had transacted a series of trade relations with the people of Benue, who are of the defunct Munshi province. Consequently, the trade took on a distinct dimension. The desire by the European powers to conquer and impose their rule and policies over the people of Benue province, which Lafia belongs to, led to the conquest of the entire region. Piecemeal conquest required the British to fight each group that later became Benue¹³. While some of those processes were smooth and uncomplicated, others took a long time and were tedious and expensive.

The conquest was the consequence of the commercial interest generated in the area by the industrial revolution in Europe, which was resolved at the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885¹⁵. Most of the legal documents that gave the British rights over the people were extorted from them. One of such documents purportedly claimed that an agent of the National Africa Company (NAC) entered into a treaty with Sokoto and Gwandu that transferred the entire rights to the country on both sides of the Rivers Benue and Kwara (Niger) for a distance of ten hours in land or such other distance as they may desire from each bank of both rivers throughout their dominions¹⁶. This was in spite of the fact that the British were aware that no such dominion existed and, by their own admission, a large part of northern Nigeria had never been conquered by the Fulani and was unconquered until it submitted to the British¹⁷. The consolidation of the trading company's activities on the Benue was greatly pronounced in the years between 1884 and 1893, leading to major landmakers in traders with rulers of Lafia, Muri, Nasarawa, Keffi, and Bauchi¹⁸.

At this point it should be noted that the conquest of the Lafia area began in the 1860s when a British explorer, W. Baikie, paid a visit to the area¹⁹. He was followed by another British merchant, Mr. Tubman Goldie, who also visited the area²⁰. The purpose of Goldie's visit on behalf of the United African Company (U.A.C.) was to sign a commercial treaty with the Emir of Lafia to offer them protection against robbers from the north bank of the

River Benue to cover an area whose journey by foot was ten days from Lafia¹². In appreciation, Mr. Goldie later presented gifts to the chief (Sarki) in Lafia. It was not surprising, therefore, that the emir began to wonder, "Why the kind of gift? I hope nothing would follow it because you did not conquer anybody in a war, but he was presenting you with a gift."²²

The commercial treaty signed was only in disguise, but the hidden agenda was the subsequent subjugation of the area for the interest of British economic, social, and political reasons. For example, it has been observed that the pretext for the occupation of northern Nigeria, especially the Keffi, Nasarawa, and Lafia areas, was an opportunity to open trade routes that were closed by the emir of Abuja (Suleja), descendant of the Habe/Hausa ruler of Zaria. In the process, also Magaji Dan Yamusa of Keffi, a famous warrior and a close ally of the Zaria ruling house, was attacked for his slave trading and for assassinating the British resident, Captain Maloney, who tried to persuade him against slave trade in 1902²³. The consequence of this was the siege of Keffi town for a long period of time. The fall of Keffi exposed other emirates, and the surrender of Bauchi, Lafia's ally, rendered the latter vulnerable. Indeed, In 1903, the British conquered Lafia with its Doma and Keana chiefdoms²⁴.

British forces, who attacked Nupe in 1897 and Tawari in 1898, accelerated the submission and surrender of these emirates²⁵. The nature of British attacks on her colonies made Fantzfanrn describe "Colonisation as nothing but violence."²⁶

British colonial policies in Lafia Area, 1903-1960

The primary objective of the British colonial rule in Nigeria was to use the country as an agricultural estate to produce raw materials for the British industries as well as to provide markets for the same products.²⁷ It was believed that "without cash crops there could be no revenues in peasant economies, except in the embarrassing form of labour or produce." This idea was based partly on the main philosophy of the British imperial policy of "financial self-sufficiency, in which exported agricultural commodities were seen primarily as a means of generating revenue to "balance the annual budget"²⁸. Right from the day Britain assumed political and administrative control of affairs in Nigeria and the time she granted Nigeria political independence, Britain vigorously pursued such economic policies that favoured her at the expense of the colonies. During the period, Nigeria's economy became fully integrated into the world capitalist system.²⁹ There is no doubt about the fact that the British encouraged the production of cash crops, both for their benefits abroad and to the disadvantage of the peasant farmers.

Export commodity was not fairly done. The peasant farmers were forced to sell the product at a given price approved by the marketing boards, in which the farmers

did not properly understand the language involved in this business. This is because there are middlemen that stand in between the foreign firms and the peasant farmers.

Origin and Development of Cotton Production and Trade during the Colonial Lafia Societies, 1903-1960

The origin of cotton production in the Lafia area has not been properly established. Local farmers generally believed that the crop is as old as the agriculture they have been practicing from time past³⁰. However, the most likely explanation for its origin is that cotton as cash and later as an export crop was said to have been introduced by Hausa itinerant traders from northern Nigeria.³¹ The need for cotton as an export crop in Nigeria can be rightly linked to the activities of the British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA). The BCGA was formed in 1902 in Manchester with Sir Alfred Jones, chairman of Elder Dempster shipping lines, as its first president. The organisation was charged with the responsibility of finding for Lancashire a new source of raw material to replace that of the southern states of the United States of America (USA).³² The American Civil War of 1861-65 severely affected cotton-producing areas within its empire and where it could exercise direct control.³³ From the early period of the British Industrial Revolution to the early twentieth century, Britain had the largest population.³⁴ Over three million people were employed in this industry, which also supplied over one-third of the British domestic exports. The industry had over fifty percent of the world's cotton spindles³⁵.

Essentially, in the British Parliament, the debate was about how to find an alternative source of raw cotton for the very important Lancashire cotton textile industry. The BCGA was thus founded to explore new possibilities and expansion of the imperial source of cotton. It was considered that Nigeria, Sudan, and Uganda seemed to be other suitable areas of development.³⁶

On this note, therefore, the attempt to shift Nigeria's indigenous cotton textile industry by the colonial government from a consumer of raw cotton to an importer of cotton textiles was acknowledged by both Lugard and Allan Mcphee.³⁷ It was therefore not surprising that the principal supporter of BCGA in the British parliament, Winston Churchill, and its vice president, the Duke of Marlborough, personally visited Nigeria and carried out parliamentary campaigns in its support³⁸.

The outcome of this visit revealed that cotton production has been in existence in Nigeria since the 1850s, but it was not until the Allen long staple, an American upland cotton, was introduced from Uganda that spectacular increases took place³⁹. The first seeds were issued to farmers in Northern Nigeria in 1916, and by 1921 the production of supreme cotton had reached 6000 bales.⁴⁰ The BCGA and the Department of Agriculture attempted to encourage farmers to increase cotton production, but response was generally low.

It should be understood that cotton production and exports from Nigeria were dominated by western Nigeria between the 1850s and the early 1920s. During that period, the established Asian cotton varieties were widely grown. However, cotton production in western Nigeria has been at a very low level since the 1920s when northern Nigeria assumed a leading role. The failure of the Allen Lang staple variety in western Nigeria was attributed to heavy insect attack. 41 Since the Allen Long staple produced superior cotton lint and thrived better in Northern Nigeria, production was emphasised more than in the West from that time on. Cotton exports came to a complete halt in western Nigeria in the 1950s during the cocoa boom. That period also marked the beginning of a cotton boom in Northern Nigeria. In order to promote cotton production in Northern Nigeria, the construction of the railway line and its extension in 1912 from the western line to Kano were emphasised. In fact, the construction of the railway to the north was one of the prerequisites for transporting essential commodities, such as groundnut, cotton, tin, and beniseed, to the coast for onwards shipment to Liverpool or Bristol in the United Kingdom 42

As previously mentioned, there is a scarcity of information regarding cotton production and trade among the people of the Lafia area. The majority of the people

heavily relied on oral information until the arrival of the British in the area. For example, an informant revealed that, in the Lafia area, cotton was produced in almost all the districts under the defunct Lafia division. He maintained that "special seeds" were supplied by the colonial administration to local farmers to encourage them to cultivate the crop. In fact, according to him, there were local industries that produced items such as patari (local underwear), Bargo (blanket), and clothing for the children of rich men's royal houses.

In a related development, places like Adogi Barkin Abdullahi (B.A.D.), Doma, Keana, Obi, and Assakio all cultivated cotton and transported it to the buying station located or centred at the U.A.C. warehouse in the Lafia metropolis. Though the cotton ginnery was established in Keffi town, the majority of the raw materials were produced in the Lafia area. The construction of the railway with a station in Lafia town and the U.A.C. warehouse also attracted its cultivation and trade in the area.

For instance, the divisional officer in charge of the Lafia Division, Mr. J.C.O. Clarke, in a reassessment report of Assakio District under the Lafia Emirate in 1921, stated that: "Numerous seeds were measured, and the yield estimated from local information in the following list gives the average value of the principal crops in Assakio Districts." 45

Table 4.15: A Summary of Major Crops Produced in Lafia Area In 1922

Crop	Average Yield per Farmer	Value
Guinea corn	50 bundles at /	£3.15.0
Yams	1000 roots at id.	£4.3.0
Gero (millet)	50bundles at 9d. to /-	£2.0.0
Rice	8 kwororo at 3/-/3	£1.8.0
Beniseed	8 Kwororo at 3/-	£1.8.0
Cotton	6 Baskets at 5/-to6/-	£1.10.0
Groundnuts	10 Baskets at say 1/6	0.15.0
		Total = £14.19.0

Source: NAK SNP/334/1922/3. Lafia Emirate

The above table indicates major crops produced by farmers in the Assakio District of the Lafia Division. The average and value of each crop, as indicated, also dictated the farmer's tax payment amount. The table also justifies the assertion that, by 1922, British colonial officials had formally recognised some crops as trade commodities. Therefore, it's not surprising that the Lafia area produced cotton, a cash-later export crop, prior to

colonial administration. The main issue stems from the lack of sufficient source material on the history and evolution of cash crop production and trade in the Lafia area, which has significantly impeded the current analysis. The main source of information then was the oral sources and later archival documents compiled by colonial authorities.

Table 4.16: Prices of Cotton in Lafia Area from 1922 to 1960

ITEM	YEARS	AMOUNT
Cotton	1922/27	£0.5
Cotton	1927/30	£1.8
Cotton	1933/39	£1.6
Cotton	1940/45	£2.8
Cotton	1946/50	£4.8
Cotton	1950/55	£5.6
Cotton	1957/60	£6.2

Source: Mak Prof Lafia Division Annual Budget Report, 1944 As Cited By M.M Hassan, A Field Report On Urbanization Problems In Lafia Area Of Plateau State Of Nigeria, Ahmadu Bello University (A.B.U) Zaria, Department Of Publish Administration, Unpublished Advanced Diploma, 1978

In addition, tobacco, Masara (Indian corn maize), Rogo (cassava), Dankali (Sweet potatoes) Indigo etc. were cultivated.

The above table shows the price of cotton from 1922 to 1960. From the table, it can be observed that there was no notable interest in the price of cotton due to the negligence of the local farmers. Up until the 1950s, the companies' demand for cotton production had increased.

It is important to note that trade in cotton production has not witnessed any momentum until the late 1950s.

This problem is attributed to the following reasons: first, the absence of a buying station. A buying station is a place in which one or more produce intended for export will be purchased at less than the minimum buying station price fixed for the produce concerned by the Northern Regional Marketing Board. It is usually a place in which there exist direct employees of the licensed buying agents of the Board. For example, the following Divisions are buying stations of produce under Benue province. They include:

Table 4.17: Divisions and other buying stations in Benue Province, 1950-1960

Donga	Katsina Ala	Sevav (Buruku)
Gberebe	Keffi	Sufa
Tiv	Lafia	Umaisha
Ibi	Loko	
Ihugh	Makurdi	

Source: NAK SNP/956/5.3/32. Lafia Division

The table above shows Lafia Division, including other divisions among the buying stations under Benue Province from 1950–1960. The buying stations were crucial in determining the prices as well as the roles played by middlemen in the purchase of any commodity in the various districts.

Secondly, the famous trading firm located in Lafia crop, rather, the company applied seeking permission for occupancy as well as participating in buying and selling of produce. Thirdly, for cotton production. And trade, special inspection officers on cotton seeds were constituted. The committee's role was to inspect and select quality cotton seeds meant for distribution to local farmers, which can enable them to cultivate a graded variety of cotton for exports abroad. Lastly, there were prices stipulated for all produce this period. The table shows cash crops and their producing villages/districts in the Lafia area as of 1955. The table demonstrated how these crops were produced in quantities and qualities, given the fact that the Lafia area had been an agrarian region with a fast improvement in cash crop production and trade. In addition, the area had a comparative advantage over some of its

neighbouring regions or areas in terms of food/cash crop production and trade.

Addition, the United African Company (U.A.C) continued to remain the major European firm engaged in another letter to the A.D.O. in charge of the Lafia Division, the manager.

U.A.C reiterated that: "If sufficient cash crops are produced, U.A.C will increase buying, thus increasing the wealth of Lafia. Please let me know as soon as possible the production area and expected amounts of the following: cotton, beniseed, soybeans, palm kernel, altd rice."⁴⁶

It is gratifying to note that, despite all these transactions, the Produce Inspection Division of the Ministry of Agriculture, Northern Region, Kano, has nominated cotton examiners from all the provinces. In Benue province, for instance, four (4) Divisions were selected, and each had eight (8) nominees for the 1958/59 season. The divisions include Keffi, Wukari, Nasarawa, and Lafia.⁴⁷ This nomination, as argued by experts, may not be unconnected with instruction specified by the Northern Nigeria marketing boards on

export crop production within the region, especially from the Niger/River areas.

Impact of Cotton Production and Trade in Lafia Area, 1903-1960

In the Lafia Division, all districts and villages actively participate in the production and trade of cotton. Unfortunately, for the Lafia area, only one cotton ginnery was established in Keffi, which is about 120 km away from the area. It is equally important to stress that the cotton produced in the Lafia area was classified under "graded cotton" by the cotton examiners, which made the area be selected among the four divisions by the cotton examiners approved by the Northern Marketing Boards Finally, Kano.

During the colonial era, the area experienced rapid development due to the use of cotton as a cash crop for export. With the construction of the Eastern railway line, the area had witnessed an unprecedented influx of indigenous and foreign firms whose arrival has improved trade relations. It transformed the area, especially Lafia town, into a commercial centre and the largest within the North-Central region. By virtue of the quality and quantity of cotton produced in the Lafia area, the people engaged in the manufacturing of attires and other essential goods made from the cotton material. More importantly, many traders in and out of the area patronised Lafia cotton markets for commercial purposes.

The role of trade, whether in the pre-colonial, colonial, or post-colonial period, in any economic pursuits within an area cannot be overemphasised. Trade had existed between Africa and the outside world for many centuries before the period of colonial rule. However, with the formal conquest and imposition of colonial rules and policies, the past trade relations between Africa and the outside world have changed. Since then, the new partnership has metamorphosed into an unequal trade relationship. The circumstance behind this was the burning desire of the colonial government to acquire the necessary commodities for their home industries as well as an outlet abroad for their finished goods. It was under such circumstances that the European companies, under the permission of their home government, actively engaged in cash crop trade with Africa. Consequently, Africans were denied their fundamental rights to exhibit their former system of trade. This effectively placed them under the constant influence of foreign trade, leading to both positive and negative outcomes.

Arising from the above scenario, this trade relation on cash later export crops between Africa and European firms had both negative and positive consequences on the socio-economic development of the Lafia area from the colonial to the post-colonial period. It has been argued that the negative consequences of colonialism outweigh its advantages. For instance, Walter Rodney maintained that "Colonialism is one-armed bandits; that the disadvantages of colonialism far outweigh its advantages,

while apologists of colonialism contend that the arrival of the

Europeans in Africa have "opened up" the continent to the outside world by introducing social amenities such as schools, hospitals, roads, railways, and sea ports.⁵⁰

CONCLUSION

The years 1903 to 1960 have been a significant milestone in the history of cash crop trade in the Colonial Lafia societies. In an attempt to actualise their motives, the British colonial authority employed all necessary measures (persuasive and forced) to promote cash crop production, the imposition of taxes, as well as labour conscription. In this process, the activities of the multinational corporation and the role played by the African middlemen were crucial in the development of cash crops, the economy, and trade in the Lafia area from 1903 to 1960.

The specialisation in the production of specific cash crops, such as cotton, groundnut, beniseed, soybeans, and palm kernel, was necessary to meet the demands of the British government and their companies. Indeed, this development really affected the nature and organisation of the indigenous agricultural production among the people. For instance, the nature of the agricultural system was changed from subsistence to cash crop economy; similarly, it also affects the nature of inter-group relations among the various ethnic groups in the area. This can be attributed to the nature and character of the indirect rule system of the British administration. It is evident that the indirect system of colonial administration in the Lafia area has empowered the traditional institutions to execute colonial policies with British officials as supervisors in actualising policies.

ENDNOTES

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