



## The Pre Colonial Economic History Akwanga Division

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### Abstract

Development before the advent of British colonial rule was averagely stable contrary to the Hamitic hypothesis that postulates the darkness and backwardness of sub-Sahara Africa. During the pre-colonial period Akwanga Division like other Nigeria societies were organized economically, politically and socially. Crops production has been a major occupation among the people of Akwanga Division before colonial rule, consequently making the area a major theater of cash crop production during that period. Existing works on the area are limited to cultural, political and social history. This research seeks to explore the pre-colonial economic History of Akwanga division. The work focuses on the economic changes that occurred spanning between the pre-colonial to the colonial period. This research is qualitative in nature and the historical method of data collection and analysis is employed to achieve the aims and objectives of this research. The researcher consulted primary and such as published books, reputable Journal articles from recognized databases, seminar papers, working papers, workshop proceedings, magazines, Ph.D. Theses and Masters Dissertations that are relevant to the subject matter. This research argues that the people of Akwanga division and other societies in Nigerian depended on agriculture, blacksmithing, carving, hunting and gathering, soap making, salt making, the barter system of exchange and long-distance trade for consumption and commercial purposes (internal and long-distance trade). The formal subjugation of the area intensified the imposition of the colonial policies that promoted cash crop production and export under the dictates of colonial officials and their Lebanese and African Agents. Cash crop production and export in Nigeria was carried out based on unequal exchange. Europeans controlled 80%, their agents 10% and rural farmers 10%, which was close to nothing. This demonstrates that the colonial economy was highly beneficial to the Europeans and detrimental to the people of Akwanga division. Labour during this period was extremely cheap and not flexible enough to overhaul the economy improve per capita income and standards of living. European merchants did not provide an enabling environment for the factors of production and the key drivers of economic development to drive forward and expand production and increase employment and an income generation mechanism for the people of the study area.

**Keywords:** Economic, History, Precolonial, Colonial, Exploitation, Central Nigeria.

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### INTRODUCTION

The pre-colonial economic history of central Nigeria has been neglected by scholars compared to the advantaged core Hausa and Fulani northern states due to the paucity of written and reliable oral sources. What has been documented is mostly about the communities that were aligned to the "Islamic Reformers and empire builders," their roles as slave reservoirs and tribute donors (Sharpe, 1986). The main focus of this research is pre-colonial economic activities of the peoples of Akwanga division. Though earlier studies have contributed in no small measure to this research, but they were unable to

critically examine the pre-colonial colonial economy of the area during the pre-colonial period.

Akwanga division comprised of Wamba, Nasarawa Eggon and Akwanga, the area was formerly under Nasarawa Province but later transferred to Plateau Province in the 1920s with the administrative headquarters in Wamba. (Ames, 1934) The area was bounded in the north by Jama'a Province, Plateau Province in the East and Benue Province in the south according to the colonial boundary (Ngharen 2014). The area is presently inhabited by the Eggon, the Rindre, and Mada, the Kantana, the Kulere and the Buh ethnic groups. These ethnic nationalities existed independently as families, villages and

settlements before and during the colonial period.

## Pre-colonial Economy of Akwanga Division

Civilization and survival in pre-colonial Nigerian societies were basically on agriculture, blacksmithing, carving, hunting and gathering, soap making, salt making, the barter system of exchange and long-distance trade. During the pre-colonial period Akwanga Division like other Nigeria societies had standard political, judicial and customary institutions. Development before the advent of British colonial rule was averagely stable contrary to the Hamitic hypothesis that postulates the darkness and backwardness of sub-Saharan Africa.

## Agriculture

Agriculture was the oldest and most rewarding occupation in Nigeria during the pre-colonial period and cultivation was basically for consumption while the surplus was set aside for exchange. Ajayi and Alagoa observed that “the production of crops like yam, kola nut and oil palm are autochthonous to Nigeria and were utilized by the hunter-gatherer, during the early, late stone and iron age and the domestication of animals and.” Land, labor, and capital were indispensable factors required by commercial and subsistent farmers in rural and urban centers for copious harvest. The large-scale farming in the pre-colonial Akwanga division was dominated by the aristocrats who carried out some degree of exchange with neighboring localities (Bilya 2018).

Though the land tenure system was commonly practiced in most societies, land allocation and confiscation were the sole responsibilities of community leaders. Under this system, the title was usually bestowed on the entire family and in return each beneficiary is expected to remit some percentage of the produce to the head of the family as an attribute for submission to the landlord (Bilya 2018). Little attention was given to cash crop farming, as the economy was not capitalistic during the period under review. This did not mean that priority was not given to the exchange of goods. As earlier mentioned, the people of Akwanga began exchanging surpluses for other produce they did not cultivate, notably kola-nut, rubber, cocoa groundnut, palm oil, coffee and cotton (Johnson 2018). Subsistent and quasi-commercial agriculture was commonly practiced by the Rindre, the Eggon and the Mada people of Akwanga, who also adopted different strategies and techniques of farming, such as bush fallowing, shifting cultivation and crop rotation (Mamu 2011). The Eggon usually practiced hilltop farming and developed landscape cultivation to control erosion and conserve their domain. Mamu opines that the common farming method in Eggon land was hilltop farming and that the people settled on the prominent Eggon hill because of fear of attack by slave raiders from the Keffi sub- emirate (Mamu 2011). They developed a system of terracing across hilly slopes, which enabled them to conserve the topsoil and create a series of stepped benches suitable for farming (Mamu, 2011). The Eggon people beautifully decorated their hilltop farms with stones in a fascinating manner and the stone walls resemble

fashionable European architecture, (Nettings, 1930 Clark, 1922 and Farrant, 1922).

Johnson argues that commercial and not capitalist agriculture existed in pre-colonial Nigeria, “there was no profit maximization, extreme labour abuse and the interplay of other factors of production in the agricultural economic sector during the period under review (Johnson2018). Agriculture during this period was not determined by the theory of demand and supply (Inikori 2018). In other words, there was no absolute exploitation of labor, profit maximization and monopoly. There was a complete absence of capitalism in pre-colonial West Africa”, as production function was geared toward consumption for survival (Allan Mcphee1971). The obnoxious trade in human beings across the Atlantic Ocean subjected the subcontinent to an acute shortfall of manpower that could have driven the economy to a greater level. Slaves exchanged with European manufactured goods created a class of middlemen that illicitly gained to the detriment of the victims. The proceeding imperialistic tendencies of Western developed societies arrested the development of most countries in sub-Sahara Africa. Other aspects of the agricultural economy in pre-colonial Akwanga were animal husbandry, rearing animals like cows, goats, and chickens both for consumption and commercial purposes. Rearing domestic animals were the source of income and at times for the settlement of debts and the fulfillment of religious obligations. Local implements were used for cultivation, ranging from stone and iron tools. Though the agricultural system was not mechanized, however, there was high output for subsistence. The development of agriculture and population explosion were two supportive variables and yardsticks for societal expansion. As such, land surplus and fertility attracted population movement and urbanization.

The major source of manure in Akwanga during the pre-colonial period was animal dunes. After harvest, farmers usually invited herdsmen to settle on their plot before the commencement of another farming year. Secondly, farmers usually cut down trees from which women and children collected firewood and later on the dry grasses and remaining dry wood was usually burned down. The ashes were also used as manure by farmers and other sources of maintaining soil fertility and nutrients were bush fallowing, crop rotation and planting crops that shielded the soil from depletion, erosion, and evaporation. Other petty farming engaged by women and those that could not trek long-distance was gardening and compound farming. Labour during the pre-colonial period was provided by family members, relatives, peer groups, friends, debtors, and slaves. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade, legitimate trade, imperialism, and neo-colonialism drastically reduced the population needed to overhaul the African economy positively (John.2018).

## Hunting

Hunting was another facet of the economy and a lucrative means of survival for the people of Akwanga division during the pre-colonial period. The trade was taken as a daily commercial transaction by some individuals while a seasonal game, a source of livelihood to some localities in the

study area. The discovery and transition through all these stages, Early Man, Early Stone Age, Acheulian, the Sangoan, Middle Stone Age and Late Stone Age are clear testimonies to the fact that the tools produced by man were basically for hunting, farming, and self-defense. Thurstan (1980). Hunting in the pre-colonial Akwanga division was an aspect of manhood training where young males were prepared into becoming responsible adults and brave warriors. Ndee contends that it was physical training like wrestling, dancing; swimming, horse and donkey riding and a form of military training in traditional Africa were (Ndee 2010). The trade (hunting) was a uniting force amongst the heterogeneous peoples of the division as well as an opportunity for the people to explore the vicinity of their community and a very perfect avenue to test their prowess.

Hunting is the only commercial activity that predated food production in Central Nigeria's Akwanga division and sub-Saharan Africa (Ngharen, 2014). In Mada, land hunting has become an annual event, thus, no one ventures into the bush before the usual commencement period. Accordingly, there are varieties of hunting in Akwanga as thus, *Individual hunting was usually embarked very close to the home to complement the household food, while night hunting collective hunting, ceremonial hunting, professional hunting, bird hunting, and nets or trap setting at a particular time of the day* (Ngharen 2014).

Hunting and other occupations were mediums through which intergroup relation was enforced among the interdependent ethnic groups in the study area during the pre-colonial period. Ayuba argues that hunting in Akwanga was carried out after harvest during the dry season to commemorate the proceeds realized (Ayuba 2010). The game caught during the hunting expedition was usually shared among the peer, individuals and communities. Hunting was exclusively a masculine activity (which encompasses physical exercise, manhood training, bodybuilding and warfare rehearsal) not only in Akwanga but in the continent in general. The transformation of man from hunting and gathering, food production, rearing animals, boat making, ironwork, textiles and pottery is a clear manifestation of ingenuity and civilization in the continent before European incursion (Adesola 2013). This work discovered the people of Akwanga as resourceful, enterprising, and industrious like their counterparts in other pre-colonial Nigerian societies.

## Handcrafts

Handcrafts were also part of the pre-colonial economy that supplemented crop production in Akwanga. Agriculture provided the materials needed for the production of the following handicrafts manufactured, mat, basket weaving, soap marking and pot making. Makama opines that pot marking was a general enterprise practiced by all the households in the study area, it was a venture undertaken by both the young and old as a source of livelihood and supplementing household utensils. The pot is used for cooking and fulfilling religious functions, building granaries and storage facilities (Ngharen 2010). Pottery in Akwanga like elsewhere requires clay as the major ingredient. Mu'azu stressed that "it has been a common trade in Rindre land

before the coming of the Europeans to the division." The production of handcraft has become a venture that provided income to the people of Akwanga as buyers from Lafia, Keffi, and Nasarawa patronized the makers of the product.

## Ironworks (Blacksmithing)

Pieces of evidence of iron technology date back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD in Nok in Central Nigeria and 5<sup>th</sup> AD in Diana. Nok civilization transcends beyond Kaduna state and extends down to the area under review. Iron technology contributed to the development of agriculture during the pre-colonial period and beyond. The smelting of iron made it possible for the production of farm tools and weapons for self-defense and territorial expansion. The evolution of iron was accompanied by growth in commercial activities, population explosion and the development of states (Fagg 1959). As a result of the development of the iron industry, states like Jukun, Borgu, Nupe, Idoma and Akwanga in central Nigeria and Edo and Oyo in the south also developed. The transition from hunter-gatherer to agriculture and other aspects of science, technology and civilization, notably stone age, iron age, soap marking, boat making, textiles, pottery, sculpture and medicine to contemporary science and technology is known as the historical process "epoch" (Adesola and Adediran 2013).

The transformation of modern society, contemporary science and technology were products of man's ingenuity inherent in Africa that has been distorted by the European imperialist from the pre-colonial period to date. The secret behind the prosperity in the manufacturing sector was the desire for commodities that were not produced within Akwanga. Hence, commodities produced in other places were conveyed to the people of the division for exchange and they also traveled to other places to exchange goods for goods. This research has discovered that the people of Akwanga were enterprising and productive during the pre-colonial era.

## Trade

Trade with Arabs across the Sahara Desert on goods, services and human beings was another aspect of long-distance trade. The defunct northern oligarchy and their flag bearers were the major agents of the Arabs; they both played leading roles in the mobilization of slaves and other articles required for onward transportation to North Africa. A major advantage enjoyed by the slave traders was that the slave unlike other wares could transport themselves. The attention of Arab merchants was basically on slaves. "Slaves were used as farmers, craftsmen, potters, domestic servants, government officials, concubines and virtually in all aspects of the pre-colonial economy in Nigeria Lovejoy (1979)." Trade in pre-colonial Nigeria was a means through which finished goods reached the consumer, as the actualization of the production and distributive process was usually determined by market forces (Azgaku 2010).

The exchange of goods has been part of human society borne out of surplus agricultural yields and consequently explains that production was not only for subsistence. Before colonial rule, the people of Akwanga produced not only for

consumption; they exchanged part of their harvest with their neighbors. The people attracted local and foreign customers through internal and long-distance trade. Rotational local and long-distance markets were organized weekly and at times monthly by communities that exchanged common commodities (Ekundares 1976). The available articles of trade attracted a wide range of customers and later on Europeans came to Akwanga for groundnut and palm produce. The arrangement was made in such a way that far and distant trade allies could host their counterparts at periodic intervals.

Local and long-distance traders converged at different markets in Akwanga to exchange goods and cement inter-group relations because of the strategic location and resource endowment of the area. The economic viability (land fertility) and resources endowment of Akwanga attracted people from far and near and consequently a huge market for agricultural and mineral resources. Traders displayed their wares at the famous Wamba Market for exchange with other goods. Customers from within and neighboring Plateau, Benue and Wukari provinces also patronized the market to exchange goods for goods and much later goods for other mediums of exchange.

As primary producers of agricultural produce and experts in blacksmithing, the people of Akwanga had established trading relations with their immediate neighbors in Doma, Keana and Lafia and the people of the Plateau province (Justin and Maaiyaki 2000). Their trading partners conveyed wares on their heads and trekked for long distances to and from Wamba to persuade people to buy. Trade transcends beyond the exchange of goods for goods but also encompasses the transfer of technology and strengthening inter-group relations with their far and immediate neighbors (Ngharen 2000). Historical facts advanced by (Falola and Mahd 1991) divulge that the establishment of a route network facilitated trade and peaceful coexistence among communities in pre-colonial Nigeria. Other factors that inspired inter and intra-community relations during the pre-colonial period were marriage, cultural festival market, trade and religion. In economic parlance, production is incomplete until the finished goods reach the final consumer. During pre-colonial periods goods got to the final consumer through internal and long-distance trade. Accordingly, the delivery of agricultural and manufactured goods was highly organized. Though agriculture was taken more seriously than other occupations, yet attention also was given to production and distribution processes to satisfy human wants (Amadi 2000). (Ekundare 1972) advocated that;

*With the practical limitations of the waterways, footpaths or bush tracks were extensively used in all areas. In the dense forest districts, the footpaths were too narrow for animal haulage, consequently, the easiest and most practicable means of transporting goods was by head-loading. There are limits to the carrying capacity of any human being, and the distance he or she can cover at a given time with a heavy load on the head. The intense heat of the sun and the torrential rain added more problems*

*with what a hazardous system of transport was already. The bush paths of the southern districts of Nigeria found their counterparts in the northern territories in the camel and donkey tracks. Animal haulage was affected by the tsetse fly and animal disease, thus increasing the rate of paralysis of this form of transport.*

(Madugu, 2011) (Kwocha and Dibia 2014) argue that goods were conveyed from one market to another on the head, "human portage," by the beast of burden and canoes in riverine areas. The major mean means of transportation in pre-colonial Northern Nigeria was the land type. Traders usually carried goods and explored pedestrian ways to local markets while animals like camels, horses and donkeys were used to traverse and cover long-distance trade. However, canoes were used in creeks and other parts of eastern Nigeria. The animal most often than not served as the means of transportation and agriculture and as an instrument of defense and security during upheavals.

Traders from Keana and Doma trekked for five to six days with their ware Salt and other paraphernalia to Wamba market for exchange with soap, pots and palm oil. Agricultural and manufactured products like palm kernels, groundnut, soap, and pots were carried on the head by traders from Akwanga division to the Umasha river bank for exchange and transportation by canoe to Okene and Lokoja markets. This demonstrated that local and long-distance trade existed in the area prior to the British incursion and further affirmed that African communities interacted cordially against the Eurocentric assertion that Africa was bedeviled with political and social upheavals before colonial rule. It is pertinent to mention that the division enjoyed the advantage of manufacturing goods such as pots, soap marking, and basket weaving, hence customers patronized their markets from far and near.

## Currency

(Latham 1970) (Douglas 1967) Bohanan, (Jones 1958), and (Ibn Battuta, 1929) argued that copper rod currency was accepted in the following communities: Cross Rivers and Tiv society in central Nigeria (Akwanga division inclusive) during the pre-colonial period. Jones also corroborated the notion and further argues that money was later introduced by Europeans as a medium of exchange in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. They emphasized that copper rod currency predated European incursion of Nigeria's economy. As a result, Latham stressed that "rod currency was a general-purpose currency, it facilitated credit, and the accumulation of capital in a capitalistic commercial system." It is proven that there were no generally recognized means of exchange in Nigeria before colonial rule. But societies in pre-colonial central Nigeria adopted exchanged the goods for goods, while some accepted the following as legal tender, cowry shells, manila, iron rods and slave labour as a means of settling debts. The assertion that supplementary currencies were introduced into the country through the Trans-Sahara trade with North African Arabs and contacts with

European merchants in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century is a misnomer. Hence, Batuta argues that;

*Ibn Battuta described a copper rod currency operating in the Niger region in the mid-fourteenth century, long before European contact with the Cross River. The large number of copper wires unearthed at the Igbo-Ukwu excavations, dated to the tenth century, may also have formed a similar currency, particularly as no cowries or other articles which might have formed a currency were found (Battuta, 1929).*

Existing circumstances of the period had necessitated the creation of an indigenous means of exchange to facilitate the distribution, exchange and marketing of agricultural surplus and manufactured goods during the colonial rule in Nigeria.

There were different means of buying goods and services, sources of raising income for the general administration, adjudication of justice and provision of internal security in pre-colonial Nigeria. Agricultural produce (foodstuff), domestic animals, iron rods, cowry shells and manila were accepted as a medium of exchange, settlement of debts and the payment of taxes Akwanga Division like in other pre-colonial Central Nigerian societies (Habu Ahmad, 2018). Other sources of revenue generation strategies included working on the farms of the rulers and serving as military mercenaries. Some unscrupulous leaders forcefully seized the property of their subjects to boost their revenue source. Though there was no single strategy of the fiscal system in pre-colonial central Nigeria, however, the people of Akwanga were forced to pay exorbitant taxes by the jihadists that later conquered them at the eve of colonial rule. Ekundare contends that:

*In communities conquered by Emirs, it was not unusual to raid for taxes, such communities usually paid very heavy taxes which were arbitrarily imposed on no recognized basis, while the semi-independent tribes paid just as much as their normal ruler could enforce on them and were raided as well.*

The people of Akwanga had a peculiar fiscal policy before the conquest of Mada and Eggon people by the jihadists from Keffi Emirate. After the conquest of these ethnic groups, the fiscal policy changed from an indigenous subtle kind of taxation to an outrageous one known as the Jangali, land tax and agriculture.

## CONCLUSION

The formal subjugation of the area intensified the imposition of the colonial policies that promoted cash crop production and export under the dictates of colonial officials and their Lebanese and African Agents. Cash crop production and export in Nigeria was carried out based on unequal exchange. Europeans controlled 80%, their agents 10% and

rural farmers 10%, which was close to nothing. This demonstrates that the colonial economy was highly beneficial to the Europeans and detrimental to the people of Akwanga division. Labour during this period was extremely cheap and not flexible enough to overhaul the economy improve per capita income and standards of living. European merchants did not provide an enabling environment for the factors of production and the key drivers of economic development to drive forward and expand production and increase employment and an income generation mechanism for the people of the study area. This research argues that the persistent hunger, rural poverty and unemployment that bedeviled Akwanga division during and after the colonial period is linked to harsh colonial policies, notably the colonial tax system, forced labour, export crop production, the introduction of British currency and the influx of multinational corporations.

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### **Oral Interview.**

- Interview Bilya Sarkin Noma, 60 years on 10/1/2018 at  
Wamba
- Interview with Bilya Sarkin Noma, 60 years on 10/1/2018 at  
Wamba.
- Interview with Mohammad Usman, 68 years old at Wamba on  
25/1/2018.
- Interview with Haruna Maharbi at Wamba on 20/1/2020.
- Interview with Mall Dahiru Danyango at Wamba on  
20/12/2018.
- Interview with Yusuf Yakubu Na Yakubu at Andaha on  
25/1/2020.
- Interview by Ali Makama Gbombu at Wamba on 20/2/2020.
- Interview with Mu’azu Kose on 25/1/2018 at Kose village.
- Interview with Mohammed Usman at Wamba on 20/9/2018.
- Interview with David Makama at Yashi on 27/8/2018.
- Interview with Hajaratu Alananana Wamba on 20/1/2018.
- Interview with Aminu Dauda at Wamba on 10<sup>th</sup> February  
2018.