

The Nature Of Pre-Colonial Economy In Hausaland

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Abstract

This paper has emphasized that agriculture was the mother of the overall economy of the pre-colonial West African sub-African sub-region with the Hausaland as a case study. It shows the strong connection and interconnection with other aspect of the economy particularly in the nineteenth century. Other aspect of the economy such as trade and craft depended strongly on agriculture. In other words, agriculture feeds both trade and craft. Further, the paper has thrown into the dustbin all the comments made by some of the Eurocentric that West Africa pre-colonial economy was primitive, stagnant, subsistence and it lack real market status before their arrival (colonialism)

Keywords: Pre-colonial economy

Introduction

The first revolution that transformed human economy gave man control over his own food supply, man began to plant, cultivate and improve by selection of edible grasses, roots and trees. This economic advancement has been described as "Neolithic revolution".¹

Agriculture is a primordial economic activity in West Africa sub-region which began about 500B.C. It formed the means of livelihood of the people. The essential factors for selecting a settlement at that time was, availability of rainfall and fertile land suitable for cultivation or grazing.² Whenever the soil failed to yield good crops, people resorted to migration too wherever virgin land was available. In fact, this was a good reason for shifting cultivation.³

The native of other occupation apart from farming, where almost agro-allied in other words all economic activities in the one way or the other related with the agriculture. Non-agricultural jobs were often undertaken on part-time or supplementary basis in the dry season.

It has been argued by some Eurocentric writers, that pre-colonial West African economy was stagnant, subsistence and that it lacked real market status before the advent of Europeans (colonialism). This view stems from some anthropological perceptions that the main sector of this economy was basically subsistence agriculture, which has been made stagnant as a result of application of simple technology with organized specialization. Production target is said to ensure human existence with limited output, to this view, simple and non-industrial region, such as pre-colonial West African societies lacked certain necessary pre-requisite for market economy and as such economic terms theories should not be applied to explain their economic structure.

Typical of the above some Eurocentric comments is what characterize the interpretation of the pre-colonial West African economy. However, other prominent scholars have equally written a great deal to refute the erroneous claims of such writers.

Research Problem Statement

Pre-colonial Hausaland's economic systems and institutions, which shaped the socio-political and cultural dynamics of the region, are still little understood, although encompassing sections of modern-day northern

Nigeria and Niger. The rich and complex character of indigenous economies has been understudied because European colonization and its effects have dominated a large portion of the literature on African economies that is currently available.

A variety of activities, including agriculture, trading, the manufacture of crafts, and the raising of cattle, defined the pre-colonial Hausaland economy. Hausa city-states like Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto were important sites for both regional and trans-Saharan trade. But there are still unanswered concerns regarding the specifics of these commercial endeavors, their relationships with neighboring areas, and the inner workings of social stratification and wealth distribution.

Rebuilding Hausa communities' reliance on indigenous businesses and agriculture, as well as their production techniques, is a difficulty. What impact did local and trans-Saharan long-distance trade have on the political clout and economic might of the Hausa states? In what ways did the economics of pre-colonial societies either mirror or strengthen political and social hierarchies? And what internal and external elements played a role in Hausaland's economic transformation before European colonization?

Justification

Rich economic systems that existed before European influence have been largely obscured by studies on colonial and post-colonial periods in African economic history. One of the most important historical areas in West Africa, Hausaland had a sophisticated pre-colonial economy that was essential to the region's political power structures and trading networks. By showcasing indigenous economic systems and their resiliency, research on this subject will right historical wrongs.

Examining the pre-colonial Hausaland's agricultural, artisanal, and commerce networks sheds light on the native customs and knowledge that kept cultures going for generations. These age-old practices, which include dryland farming, making crafts, and raising cattle, not only fit the topography of the area but also influenced local economies. This can add to the current discussions in the area around food security, climate adaption, and sustainable development.

The political structure of Hausaland was closely linked to its economy. Long-distance trade, agriculture, and regional industries were the main drivers of the growth of city-states like Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto. A more complete understanding of West African history can be obtained by comprehending the ways in which these economic pressures aided in the emergence of strong political institutions. To preserve cultural legacy, it is essential for West Africans in general and Hausa people in particular to comprehend the pre-colonial economy. Examining the economic strategies employed by Hausa communities prior to colonial interventions allows us to recognize the resourcefulness and inventiveness of these societies, thereby enhancing cultural pride and identity.

African economies prior to colonization are frequently seen through Eurocentric prisms, emphasizing stories of underdevelopment or "backwardness." These clichés can be refuted by examining the complex economic systems of pre-colonial Hausaland, including its participation in trans-Saharan trade networks and its many craft industries. These systems show African economies to be dynamic and inventive.

Aim of the Study

The primary aim of this study is to explore and critically analyze the economic structures, systems, and practices that characterized pre-colonial Hausaland. By doing so, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the indigenous economic activities, their regional and trans-regional significance, and their role in shaping the socio-political and cultural landscapes of Hausaland prior to European colonization.

Objectives of the Study

- i. Identify and describe the key economic activities in pre-colonial Hausaland, such as agriculture, craft production, livestock rearing, and local trade, to determine how these activities contributed to the survival and prosperity of Hausa societies.
Examine the role of long-distance and trans-Saharan trade in the economic development of Hausa city-states, focusing on major trading centers like Kano, Katsina, and Zaria, and assess their influence on regional and international trade networks.

- ii. Analyze the relationship between economic activities and political structures by investigating how the accumulation of wealth through trade and production affected governance, leadership, and the rise of powerful city-states in Hausaland.
- iii. Investigate the mechanisms of wealth distribution and social stratification, examining how economic power was distributed among different social classes, including ruling elites, merchants, artisans, and agricultural workers.

Conceptual Clarifications

1. **Pre-Colonial Economy:** The term “pre-colonial economy” refers to the economic systems, structures, and activities that existed in a society before the onset of European colonization.
2. **Hausaland:** refers to a historical region located in present-day northern Nigeria and parts of Niger, inhabited primarily by the Hausa ethnic group. It was made up of several city-states, such as Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Gobir, Daura, and others. Each of these city-states had its own governance, economy, and culture, though they shared common linguistic, religious, and social traits.
3. **Agriculture:** Agriculture describes the practice of growing crops or raising animals. **Trans-Saharan Trade:** This refers to the trade routes that connected Hausaland with North Africa, the Maghreb, and even parts of the Mediterranean world. Commodities such as gold, salt, leather goods, textiles, and slaves were traded across these routes
4. **Artisanal Production:** Products that are produced by artisans, either completely by hand or with the help of hand-tools or even mechanical means, as long as the direct manual contribution of the artisan remains the most substantial component of the finished products
5. **Internal and External Economic Factors:** Internal factors include local conditions like population size, urbanization, and governance structures that influenced the economy. External factors refer to the influence of trade with neighboring regions, climatic changes, and external political pressures (such as from empires or neighboring states) that shaped the economic dynamics of Hausaland.
6. **Sustainability:** Sustainability refers to the ability to meet the current needs of society without compromising the future.

Agriculture

Agricultural production was the mother of the overall economy. Hence it feeds both market and local industries in one way or the other, especially in the 19th century. Hausaland where this (agricultural and non-agricultural production) strong relationship made it impossible to enter into any other aspect of the economy, without linkage with agriculture.

One of the Hausa popular say “*Naduke (Noma) Tsohon ciniki kowa yataho duniya kaiyaisko*” the above mention Hausa popular saying had indicated clearly how agriculture champion any other of the economy in 19th century.

Many system of cultivation existed during the pre-colonial period, these various systems of cultivation were spread all over West Africa and each region choose one that suited it. Hausaland had used its traditional farming methods and tools to produce enough food not only to feed its citizenry but also surplus commodities were taken to the local and regional markets. In fact, the massive expansion of the domestic production for both food stuffs and cash crops during the 19th century. In Hausaland can about largely through the use of traditional methods⁴. Thus, the view expressed by scholars such as Goody, that agricultural production in West Africa was low due to the failure of the farmers to adopt new technology in form of the plough is not ascertained.⁵ the production of variety of farm products in surplus such as grains, cotton, groundnut etc explained the growth and the development oof market center (Kano, Katsina, Sokoto) in the period under review.⁶

Hausaland in the 19th century shows an example of a traditional society undergoing great political and economic changes which were traditional in origin and not caused by Europeans. This makes it an interesting case study of the process of change, expression and development within the content of the pre-colonial economy.⁷

Hokpins observed that in the case of West Africa, the sharp constrast between the so-called ‘primitive’ and ‘modern’ societies has often been greatly exaggerated. As we have seen, the most important economic unit in

Hausaland was the household, where Gandu system was in operation. Usually, the household could always break into smaller units with necessarily losing its identity. It often expanded by incorporating strangers and slaves, and it was very advantageous in mobilizing additional labour, and put more land under cultivation when it was required especially in time of high demand that the system is flexible. Ingawa has attended to the above, when he commented on the progressive nature of West African economy in the case of Hausaland, that;

By 1800, there was already a well established agricultural system, a pastoral society whose contribution to the economy is incontestable and a well-articulated trade system. The use of slaves as economic labourer as expansion of investment in agriculture through surplus re-investment and the arrival of the shaduf, which saw an expansion in irrigation.

Smith has noted that economic factors has played important role in the rise of Birane in Hausaland, Thus, Large when population with their complication needs could obviously only be established in locations capable through their agricultural and industrial resources of supporting such groups. Thus Birnin-Kano (probably the greatest of the Birane) is situated in the midst of industrial crops such as cotton. It also possesses abundant and easily workable Iron-Stone (in Dutsen-Dula for example). It and it was placed where long distance trade routes converged which support a permanent trading population of diverse origin.⁸

Pastoralism is another aspect of the pre-colonial economy of Hausaland. The pastoralism was fairly well integrated with the rest of the Hausa economy despite the fact that the transhumance treks often took away many herds out of some territories especially during the dry season. However, the livestock served as a source of food and raw materials such as meat, butter, milk, hide and skins respectively. Besides, they constituted a major source of wealth as well. Even their waste served as manure for ensuring continuity in fertility on the cultivated field. Indeed, the role of cattle in the pre-colonial economy of the Hausaland it aptly summarized in the famous saying “*Nagge dadi goma*” which roughly means that the cow’s worth is ten fold. Pastoralist co-opted with cultivator succeed manual supplies and that a symbiotic relationship would appear to have existed between them in the 19th century.

Local industries

A careful study of the West African societies would reveal that, of all crafts, iron working was the most significant to the overall economics because tools produced by smelters had far reaching impact on what could be produced by farmers in pre-colonial 19th century Hausaland.¹¹ For instance, Dutsen-Dala Kano was reported to have abundant deposit of iron ore. This development arose the immigration of people from different directions within and outside Hausaland.

This explains the exchange of ideas and the exchange of skills in term of production, farm products such as grains, groundnut, cotton etc and in term of production farm tools like hoe, cutlass, axe, sickle etc in addition, weapon were produce such as arrow, sword, knife. Birane like Kano, Katsina, Sokoto have flourish in the 19th century due to the above interconnection.¹²

In the manufacturing, there was growth in iron, wood and cloth industries. In the dyed-cloth industry, the introduction and subsequent adoption of the dyes pits augured for an increase in both internal and external cloth trade and thus the commercial economy of Hausaland blossomed 19th century.¹³

Usman has contributed by discussing the manufacturing industry of the Kasar Katsina. In his study, he shows that Katsina wood implements, leather goods and cloths; all of which occupied an important position in the pre-colonial economy of the Hausaland¹⁴. According to Shenton and Freund, craft production especially of cloth and iron tools was a general activity in Hausaland on a scale that went well beyond the satisfaction of limited local need.¹⁵

However, in a later piece of research, it has shown that the Kano cloth industry introduced certain innovations during the pre-colonial period, which enable it to achieved internal economies of scale within the manufacturing process albeit at certain stages, the dyeing and beating stage of production. This research clearly demonstrated how larger pots were developed for use by dyers in order to overcome the obvious shortcomings of the erstwhile the sizes of cloths that could be dyed at a time increase.¹⁶

Leather work in Hausaland also received tremendous comments. For instance, a famous explorer Bath, while commenting on the leather work specialization in Hausaland has attested that progressive nature of leather work 19th century Hausaland that;

No place in a whole negro land is famous for excellent leather work and the tanning than Katsina, for the people were highly specialized and skillful so much so that they produced different kinds of materials which attracted so many people from near and far to patronize thie products.¹⁷

Trade

Agricultural production (surplus commodities) have contributed immensely to the development of trade and transport in the 19th century Hausaland looking carefully on the available of commodities in the local and regional market such as cotton, groundnut, cloth etc. hence agricultural production feeds market very well.¹⁸ Trade and transport system were equally germane to the growth and development of pre-colonial trade based on regional specialization of production which implies the practice of the principle of comparative cost advantage. They developed local transportation system of the use of donkey and land (head portage) in the 19th century Hausaland.

Apart from the trade by barter, some forms of medium of exchange were developed (currency) such as manila, iron rods, copper rods, cowries and cloth money. This in no small measures have facilitated the trade and transport system in the 19th century Hausaland. In addition, various cities developed to prominence as result of well organized economic system.

Exchange in the form of trade in Hausaland certainty pre-dates the colonial period. All the surplus items produced on the farms were either the Dioula, have dominated the trading activities in the 19th century and had been commonly refered to as the 'trading hangnates' of West Africa. Local trade had always been a common features of life among the Hausaland and a chain oof internal markets had developed in pre-colonial times all over Hausaland, weher people flocked for their day to day needs. Markets were either periodic (i.e on weekly or half-weekly basis) or a daily affair in some cases²⁰. Nineteenth century Hausaland saw the development and categorization of market based on the societal productions.

Ogunremi while commenting on the organization of trade in the pre-colonial West Africa, has objected that;

Organization of market during their period was largely influenced by the bountiful agricultural and non-agricultural production of the people. As a result of variety of supply of commodities to market places, there wa departmentalization of goods, orderliness and periodic markets system.²¹

Paul Lovejoy has this to add when commenting on the Hausa kola-nut trade that; "*The trade in kola nuts was dominated by three professional Hausa groups - the Aglawawa, the Tokarawa and the Kambarinn Barebari*".²² Since the Gandu system incorporated slaves into households, many slaves came into Hausaland through long-distance trade. The profits from long-distance trade brought a substantial increae in revenue to the Hausaland especially in some commercial centers like Kano, Katsina, Sokoto in the 19th century, which made it possible to offset any shortfall in state revenue²³. In addition, the expression of long-distance trade partly explains the rise of urban centers along the main trade routes. The centers became great centers of commerce and learning as well as being sources of essential supplies to support the trade. Such towns include Kano and Katsina for instance, Kano received hundred of traders, Hausa long distance kola nuts trade could be found in many West African states.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper emphasized that; agriculture was the mother of the overall economy of the pre-colonial West African sub-region with the Hausaland as a case study. It shows the strong connection and interconnection with other aspects of the economy particularly in the nineteenth century. Other forms of economy such as trade and craft defeneded strongly on agriculture. In other words, agriculture feeds both trade and craft. Both agricultural and non-agricultural activities dominated the region with which paved away for the emergency of Bourgeoisie and classification competition among the people in the area of our study.

Recommendations

- i. Invest in more archaeological digs and ethno-historical studies to gather concrete evidence about the economic practices in pre-colonial Hausaland.
- ii. Integrate aspects of pre-colonial economic systems into modern development policies, particularly those related to agriculture and trade.
- iii. Revitalize historical trade routes and connections that once made Hausaland a thriving hub of commerce.
- iv. Develop educational programs and curricula in schools and universities that emphasize the economic history of pre-colonial Africa, including Hausaland.
- v. Encourage the revival and commercialization of traditional Hausa craft and artisanal industries.

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