

Original Article

The Nature of Pre-colonial Economic Activities of the People of Adamawa Emirate in the 19th century

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Abstract - This study examines the nature of various economic activities of the Adamawa emirate during the pre-colonial period. It indicates that all African people prior to colonialism have involved in various forms of economic production in order to meet their basic necessities. Some of these activities range from agricultural activities, such as food crop production and handicraft activities, including weaving, pottery, blacksmithing, hunting, and dyeing, among others. Many studies have been carried out in the areas of the social and political history of the region, but not much on the economic aspects. The objective of this study is to look at the basic economic occupations of the people of Adamawa before the colonial era. Empirical approach analysis would be adopted in data collection through the use of primary and secondary sources. It also reveals the positive effects of the pre-colonial economy on the economic development of the people of Adamawa.

Keywords - Economy, Agriculture, Crafts, Occupation, Production.

1. Introduction

In the 19th century, what became Adamawa (*Fombina*) emirate was a vast region largely under the control of the Sokoto caliphate, comprising all communities in varying stages of socioeconomic and political development (Chubado and Musa, 2020).^[10] Although most communities in the region earlier than 1804, Sokoto jihad can be described as "stateless" (Chubado and Sani, 2020).^[12] Therefore, during the jihad (1809) in the region, the number of settlements grew up. These settlements were merely founded by displaced groups or individuals fleeing the effects of the jihad. The region largely consisted of various ethnic groups who speak different languages and dialects with different customs and traditions. These groups include Bata, Fulani, Hausa, Kilba, Laka and Verre. There were also a number of other groups in the region, such as Chamba, Jukun, Mboi, Margi, and Mbula, with some other related groups (Sa'ad, 1976; Sa'ad, 2008; Kirk-Greene, 1969; Chubado, 2019).^[23;24;17;5]

The major economic activities of the people were initially pastoralism, hunting, fishing, farming and trading and other handcraft activities, which consisted of pottery, iron works and wood carving dyeing, among others (Chubado, 2019).^[5] These activities persuaded frequent movement of people from one place to another in search of livelihood, which they found more convenient to settle down due to the upright fertile land and favourable nature of the environment. Their participation in such activities encouraged inter-group relations with one another (Chubado and Hamza, 2020).^[7]

Adamawa emirate is an area whose main economic activities are agriculture and manufacturing. The emirate dwellers cultivated crops such as guinea corn, beans, groundnut, cotton, tobacco, animal husbandry, and fishing. They also engaged in rainy and dry seasons, farming or rearing livestock and mostly farmers who produced for domestic consumption and long-distance trade in the pre-colonial era (Alkasim, 2003).^[4] As we know, agriculture is confined to crop production and includes rearing animals such as cattle, sheep, goats and other livestock (Alkasum, 2003).^[4] This is carried out by pastoralists, who are mostly Fulani. These activities promoted market exchanges in short- and long-distance trades. Larger scale internal trade must also be considered when viewing the movement of goods. The kola nut, for example, is not grown in the region but is a much-desired and needed product. It is therefore shipped to the Adamawa region from southern parts of Nigeria. In the southern region, the producers of kola also ship palm oil, yam produce and fresh fruit to Adamawa in exchange for dried fish, cattle and maize. The specialization of production between different parts of the area and into adjacent regions called for and stimulated the growth of extensive trading systems and markets between Adamawa and other regions (Alkasum, 2003; Hamza, 2018; Chubado, 2019).^[4;19;5]

Agriculture in the emirate is mostly shifting and marginal cultivation (Helleine, 1966).^[21] More specifically, a northern grain economy predominates in the region, with millet and guinea corn being the main crops. Maize, sweet potatoes and groundnuts are also widely grown. All of these crops are, for the most part, grown on the plains. The Adamawa region is also one of the main areas of dry season



grazing of the *Gudale* breed of Fulani (Bororo) cattle (Chubado and Mansur, 2022).^[9] In addition, the Benue River provides a more than adequate fish economy. The non-agricultural sector of the economy in the area is essentially undeveloped. There is some mat weaving, calabash decorating, pottery, primitive metal working, basket weaving and net and rope making. Because of the diverse nature of the tribal groups living in the area, it is difficult to generalize the division of labour between the sexes. Different tribal groups specialize in producing five certain commodities (Hodder, 1969; Chubado and Musa, 2020).^[22;10] For example, members of the Verre tribe concentrate on producing pots made from local red clay. The Bata tribe produce various types of fish nets, and the Fulani create different forms of grass matting (Alkasum, 2003).^[4] Women also play a very large part in the actual work on the farm. They dominate certain craft industries, such as pottery and calabash decorating. They also engage in the basic food processing industry, making beer, spices and dairy products (Chubado, 2019).^[5]

2. Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, historical research techniques are to be used. But to be specific, this research adopted the historical method for data collection. The data used to construct this work are from two broad categories, namely, primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include archival materials and oral information. The secondary sources are mainly published and unpublished works such as books, journal articles, official documents and papers, and internet sources.

3. Significance of the Study

This study contributed to the body of knowledge by providing literature on the pre-colonial economy of Adamawa in the 19th century. It guided students, researchers, scholars, and individuals to advance or develop their works and societies in the future. Also, it provides more light on the achievement of the socioeconomic and political activities of the people of Adamawa to the establishment and growth of modern institutions, particularly in the present time.

4. Nature of the Economy of Adamawa in the Pre-colonial Era

The pre-colonial system of the economy, without any doubt, played a significant role in bringing the various communities of the Adamawa emirate into proximity to one another. This system was special to all the emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate (Lovely, 1978).^[18] The economy in any society serves as a source or means of survival for a people (Ibrahim, 2016).^[15] Agriculture was the mainstay of the economy of Adamawa. Over 80% of the population were farmers; they had no other business other than farming due to the fertile ground for cultivation (Allison, 1975).^[3] Agriculture was geared toward both family consumption and

exchange. The agricultural activities were undertaken mostly during raining season. Different varieties of crops were cultivated, such as guinea corn and millet cultivated in the Adamawa region's farmland. Groundnuts, cassava, and sweet potatoes were also cultivated extensively in the region. Vegetables such as red dower, pumpkin, okro and sugar cane were extensively and largely cultivated in the mash land. The peasant farmers cultivated crops mainly for domestic consumption and commerce to support livelihood. Agricultural production usually extended into the dry season through irrigation farming: maize, sweet potatoes, cassava, and cocoa yam were cultivated during the dry season on the alluvial soils of mash land. However, during the pre-colonial period, dry season farming in Adamawa provided enough food for the communities and occupation for the youths and other dwellers (Chubado, 2019; (Gerald, 1966).^[5;14]

However, as early as the 14th and 15th centuries, the pastoral groups began to occupy an important place in the social and economic life of the Adamawa region (Aliyu, 2011; Chubado and Mansur, 2022).^[2;9] However, the rearing of cattle and other animals was not limited to the Fulani pastoralist, other groups in the emirate engaged in it because of its economic importance. For example, in the Adamawa emirate, *Lamido*, his subordinates and other wealthy individuals and members of the emirate, especially the Hausa people, kept large herds of animals (cattle, sheep and goats). Their slaves reared these; sometimes, they agreed with Fulani pastoralists to tend to them. Pastoralists played a significant role in the pre-colonial economy. It seemed that the pastoral economy was closely linked to other sectors of the economy (Haruna, 2018; Chubado, 2019).^[20;5] The livestock kept by the pastoralists served as a source of food and raw materials demanded by all sections of the population. While pastoralists, especially the Bororo, obtained a large percentage of their life requirements like cereal, spices, clothes, and implements from the farmers and artisans (Chubado and Mansur, 2022).^[9]

Fishing was not only a source of protein for the people, but like pastoralism, it was also an economic activity generally recognized by the people (Chubado, 2019; Femi, 2014).^[5;13] Therefore, fishing was carried out along the Nigerian coastal waters and inland waters, for example, Lake Chad, River Niger and Benue, respectively (Ajayi and Alagoa, 1980).^[1] Benue and its tributaries passed through its plains in the Adamawa area, and lakes and streams were available. Fishing was, therefore, a secondary exercise to supplement agricultural production in farming and the domestic rearing of livestock (Ajayi and Alagoa, 1980).^[1] The fish were produced for consumption and sale within and outside the region. Although fishing is an important source of income in the area, the people who live on the banks of River Benue and its tributaries engage in fishing activity, except for the Fulani group, who are more concerned with cattle grazing. Fishing is conducted in areas where streams,

lakes and rivers are in existence. It is mostly associated with the Bata, Jukun, Bula and Hausa groups of people who specialized in the activities as one of their regional economic engagements. Fishing festivals were organized annually among the inhabitants of Adamawa, and other people from far and near areas attended the ceremony. The festival normally takes place once a year in the following lakes: Njuwa, Pariya and Ribadu, among others (Chubado, 2019).^[5] Hunting was also an important occupation in the Adamawa emirate; many scholars believe that hunting predated the development of agriculture (Chubado, 2012).^[6] The Adamawa emirate's people have been hunting and gathering since time immemorial. Hunting activities were carried out in the forest within the area. There were three categories of hunters; professional hunters who took hunting as an occupation that earned a living for them. The second category was those who undertook hunting as a business; they provided herbal medication to people afflicted by different ailments because of their experience in forestry. The third category was those who took hunting part-time or as a game in their leisure time (Alkasum, 2003).^[4] However, hunting is usually conducted during the dry season; it is conducted in groups and some cases, individually. The hunters played a vital role in society as security providers etc. (Chubado, 2019).^[5]

One of the important pre-colonial industries in Adamawa was the textile industry. There is quite an ancient legacy of cloth production in northern Nigeria, and weaving as a rural occupation of the (Hausa and other people in northern parts of the country). This craft industry certainly predates the colonial period. Since the 16th century, the account of many European travelers to the Sokoto caliphate has referred to cotton and its product as a major aspect of the pre-colonial economy of the area (Chubado and Juliet, 2022).^[8] The existence of the textile industry could be attributed to its necessity for human existence and the availability of its basic raw material; cotton was widely grown in Yola and other parts of the sub-emirates. The pre-colonial textile industry was a complex and integrated industry with many specialists in the different aspects of production. One of the first stages was the spinning of cotton. The cotton is processed by removing the seed and then made into threads of various sizes for making yarn. These are spanned into clothing pieces. The clothing items are used both locally and sold at the markets within and outside the region. It was essentially the process of the production of thread from raw cotton and has always been dominated by women across the population (Alkasum, 2003).^[4]

Forward and backward linkages characterized the textile industry like other industrial activities. Spinning through an exclusive reserve for women existed in all households. The weaving technology of the horizontal and vertical looms production of various handmade designs; involved spinning

and weaving, which were carried out separately in the production areas (Chubado, 2012).^[6] Spinners provided the raw material for the numerous weaving industries. Weaving was a craft for both males and females. Using various tools, weavers produced cloth of different makes and remarkable quality, some of which feed the dyeing industries. While both sexes did weaving, those who produced for sale were full-time specialized weavers, with farming as a secondary occupation. Many industries spring to provide other allied services: dyers, beaters, brokers, and lodgers all provided different services to the industry. It was this complexity that brought specialization among the various communities around the emirate (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019).^[4:5]

Dyeing and cloth beating was also practiced in the emirate alongside the industry. The dyers had their dye pits established on location. Some of the dyers had as many dye pits in some areas as possible. However, indigo dyeing was also a special industry; several dyers were popularly known as *masu rini*, the preparation of which was an important industry of itself in the emirate. One of the processes of dying cloth was through soaking and then leaving it to stay for several days while colouring was made according to choice. This means it took longer to dye an expensive cloth to give it a dark colour (Chubado and Umar, 2021).^[11] Cloth beating is an industry of its own; cloth beating usually takes place after dying. The equipment for beating included the pestle used for stretching the cloth and huge wood to place the cloth during the beating process (Chubado, 2012).^[6]

Leather work was another important occupation on which a large population in the pre-colonial era depended. Leatherworking used animal hides and skins to manufacture various leather products for various purposes, from making bellows used by blacksmiths, saddles for horse's leather shields, sword sheathes, water vessels, foot wears and bags such as bookcases, barber's wallets. It should be noted there has always been interdependence among the various manufacturers. For example, the blacksmith needs bellows to carry out his occupation, while leather workers need knives and other similar implements from blacksmiths (Alkasum, 2003; Umar, 1988).^[4:25]

Wood carving and pottery were also occupations practiced by pre-colonial Adamawa society. Woodcarvers were important in pre-colonial economic growth. They provided wooden handles for various implements and weapons. They also produced household items such as mortars and pestles. However, pottery was widely practiced by some sections of society, particularly those who were located along the riverside. Despite the changes that happened over time in technology, this occupation has flourished. Among the inhabitants of Adamawa, Verre were champions in making and moulding a variety of pots, among others (Alkasum, 2003; Chubado, 2019).^[4:5]

Blacksmithing is a metal smith that creates objects from wrought iron or steel by forging the metal and using tools to hammer, bend and cut. Blacksmiths produce objects for wars, defence, and hunting and tools for farming such as gates, grilles, railings, light fixtures, furniture, sculpture, tools, agricultural implements, decorative and religious items, cooking utensils and weapons. Many people depend on them for their socioeconomic and political activities. The blacksmith had a general knowledge of how to make and repair many tools (Kingsley and Razaq, 2015).^[6] The blacksmithing industry was vital to the society and economy of the Adamawa emirate. Blacksmiths in Adamawa provided a collection of ornaments and gadgets for daily use or preservation for sacrificial oath-making and ritual purposes. They made rings, bangles, bracelets, initiation knives and spears. In an agricultural society, the importance of this industry cannot be over-emphasized (Chubado, 2019).^[5] The smiths provided the farming community (each household) with farming implements while their products entered into the trading system. As a craft closely associated with the requirement of agriculture, it was subject to function during the rainy/planting season (between April and June). Smith's products were quickly disposed of in the village markets, but during the dry season, smith went out to the surrounding hamlets and villages to find customers as well as raw materials (Chubado, 2012).^[6] The smiths also provide the political authority with necessary military equipment, especially bow and arrow, sword, and spear. Many of the swords were of admirable metal, nicely engraved, and some were laid with portions of deeper-colored or more highly oxidized iron (Alkasum, 2003).^[4]

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5. Conclusion

The paper examined the role of agriculture and craft activities as the foundation of the Adamawa emirate's economy. The nature of various economies of the region during the pre-colonial era indicated that all people in the emirate prior to the colonial period have involved in various forms of economic activities to meet their basic desires; some of these activities ranged from agricultural activities such as food crop production and crafts (manufacturing industries) including weaving, pottery, blacksmithing, dying, wood carving, among others. The exchange of goods on a local scale and internal exchange between different parts of the region has always been a characteristic feature of the economy. Inherent within the movement of goods from one part of the region to another, there has been and is a degree of indigenous specialization of production in agricultural crops and industrial craft products. The local and internal exchange of such commodities and their subsequent patterns, processes and relationships were studied.

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