

# Social and Economic Development of Akoko Society under Colonial Rule<sup>1</sup>

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The Akoko people are domiciled in the eastern part of Ondo State, and northeast Yorubaland, Nigeria. In 1897, Akokoland was conquered and brought under British rule. The transformatory impact of British colonial rule, especially in relation to Akoko economy and society still require scholarly attention. Between 1897 and 1960, Akokoland underwent a considerable degree of socio-economic transformation under British rule. In the social sphere, Western education provided Akoko indigenes with the requisite training to take up employment in the local administration workforce. The introduction and promotion of Christianity by European/expatriate missionaries and the colonial officials significantly undermined Akoko traditional religion, which the Akoko people resisted albeit briefly and unsuccessfully. Economically, British rule bequeathed to Akokoland a modern road network, which marked a clear departure from the pre-colonial road system in terms of socio-economic utility value. This was, however, accompanied by the introduction and use of forced labour. The evolution and growth of cash crop economy and the introduction of British currency created a new commercial *elite* of Akoko middlemen, leading to higher purchasing power and the transformation of Akoko architecture. The intensive drive for cash crop production and the attendant scarcity of land resulted in frequent land disputes and food crisis. This study, therefore, examined the role of British rule in Akoko economy and society between 1897 and 1960, with a view to identifying the significant social and economic transformations during the study period. It concludes that British rule served as an agent of positive and negative socio-economic transformation in Akokoland.

[Akokoland; British Rule; Agitations; Reforms; Socio-Economic Transformation]

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## Introduction

In Akokoland, which comprise about 40 towns/kingdoms such as Ikare, Oka, Akungba, Ipesi, Ifira, Ogbagi, Okeagbe, etc, multiple languages

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and value patterns hold sway. Akoko territory is very hilly and rugged, which poses a challenge to communication, development and other socio-economic endeavours. This paper is a historical reconstruction of the social and economic development of Akoko society under colonial rule. It examines the significant social and economic changes in Akoko society during the era of British rule from 1897 to 1960. The study draws on primary sources including the Chief Secretary's Office, Annual Reports and Intelligence Reports files, oral data as well as some existing secondary data. The discourse covers the spheres of religion, education, public works, health services and evolution of cash crop economy.

### Religion

Prior to British rule, traditional religion was firmly rooted in Akokoland. Like other Yoruba people, traditional religion among the Akoko rested upon four major principles which include: belief in one Supreme Being, belief in the existence of spirits and supernatural forces in the universe, belief in deities/lesser gods, and lastly, a devised system by which the Supreme Being could be approached through the divinities (spirits) or *Orisa* for the needs of man.<sup>2</sup> In pre-colonial Akoko society, the Supreme Being was known by various names across the various towns and villages. For example, Isua people called him *Osinni*, Ikare called him *Oosa*, *Osulu* or *Oloun*, while Oba called him *Eleda*, just to mention a few. He was seen as the creator who had power over life and death. Thus, they feared his wrath and therefore worshipped him by means of praise and offering of gifts via religious ceremonies. To win God's favour, the people devised certain rules and regulations, which could modify, and steer their behaviour away from evil acts and thus help them avoid the manifestations of evil forces in the form of ailments and catastrophic situations. Aside ethical issues, the Akoko also associated happenings around them as well as their life activities such as climatic conditions, important events like birth, death, planting and harvesting seasons with the worship of the Supreme Being.<sup>3</sup>

In most Akoko communities, the prevalent divinities were the *Imole* (*Orisa* in some other Yoruba communities) and *Egungun* (masquerade).

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<sup>2</sup> J. A. ATANDA, *A Comprehensive History of the Yoruba Peoples up to 1800*, Ibadan 2007, pp. 161–162; R. A. OLANIYAN, *Nigerian History and Culture*, Essex 1985, p. 235.

<sup>3</sup> V. K. OLUGBANI, *Anglican Church and its Impact on the Muslim and Traditional Religious Communities in Akokoland, 1909–1951*, B. A. Long Essay, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba, Akoko 2008, p. 23; R. SULE, 95 years, (personal communication, Imuren Quarters, Epinmni-Akoko, 13 May, [2013–05–14]).

The *Imole* could either be a person believed to have been deified at death, or a river spirit, while the Akoko notion of *Egungun* aligns with the concept of reincarnation in a materialised form, that is, a costumed figure or masquerade. A few illustrations would suffice here. In Oyin, there were four *Imole*, which included *Imoleohun*, *Imolevenje*, *Imoleoto* and *Imoleoloni*. The people also had two types of masquerades called *Egungun Gbede*, which came out once annually during the *Akaraltan* (Bean Cake) festival and signified the presence of the ancestors in their midst. In addition to these, the people worshipped *Sango* (God of Thunder) who was consulted during illness and drought, and to locate mysteriously stolen goods. In Okeagbe, prominent *Imoles* included *Ene*, *Olomi*, *Imene* and *Aya*, while the masquerades included *Egungun Gbede*, *Oluderi*, *Ede*, and *Aborogin*. In Oyin, the Okeagbe people also worshipped *Sango*. In Erusu, the people worshipped *Imole Olu* and *Egungun Arimisewa*. Arigidi people worshipped *Imole Amo* and *Esi* alongside *Egungun Ede*, while Oba people worshipped *Ogun* (God of Iron), *Orisa Alala*, *Orisainuri*, and *Orisaklenmen*.<sup>4</sup>

*Ifa* consultation was a common practice across Akokoland. In the various towns and villages, it was usual to consult *Orunmila* to regularly decipher the fate of the community. Some of the findings served as a veritable protection and guide for the communities in terms of moral and ethical values. As an illustration, in Isua, it was discovered through *Ifa* that if the married women avoided adultery, and the appropriate rituals are performed, the kingdom would no longer face the trauma of external attacks.<sup>5</sup> As a whole, the nominative effect of indigenous religion on social life in pre-colonial Akoko society was wholesome. If nothing else, it ingrained a general belief among the people on the need to steer clear of evil acts and social vices such as injustice, brigandage, adultery, dishonesty etc as a precondition for God's favour.

Although Islam had reached Akokoland through the activities of the Nupe invaders and traders in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the subsequent penetration of Christianity around 1896 had a revolutionary impact on social and economic developments within the areas thereafter. The advent of Christianity in Akoko can be traced to the activities of returnee converts consisting of former slaves, dispersed soldiers from the Kiriji-Ekitiparapo

<sup>4</sup> Oba B. L. OLUSOLA, 58 years, The *Oloyin* of Oyin (Personal Communication), *Oloyin's* Palace, Oyin-Akoko [2014-06-04]; T. ADAMOLEKUN, Religious Interaction among the Akoko of Nigeria, in: *European Scientific Journal*, 8, 2012, pp. 44-45; OLUGBANI, p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> OLUGBANI, pp. 26-27.

war, and some people who had travelled to towns like Abeokuta, Ijebu, Badagry, Warri, Lagos, Oshogbo, and Iseyin to acquire training in vocations such as carpentry, bricklaying, and tailoring. Back home, these elements which included Samuel Olamudun, Akiti, Isaiah, Omosanya and Akere introduced their new wealth of education and religion to their townsmen and women. Despite the stiff opposition to this new “idea”, Omosanya successfully mobilised the returnee converts in Oba to establish the Anglican Church. Thus, it was from Oba through Ikare that Anglicanism penetrated other *Akoko* towns.<sup>6</sup>

The dawn of colonial rule marked a watershed in the spread and consolidation of Christianity throughout *Akoko* territory. The pioneering initiatives of the aforementioned elements of *Akoko* extraction were buoyed by the combined efforts of British colonial officials and some foreign missionaries. In particular, the support and protection granted by the colonial District Officer during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were crucial for the evolution and growth of Christianity in the area. It needs to be stated that Archdeacon L. A. Lennon, who is generally acknowledged as the consolidator of the Christian mission in *Akokoland* and architect of modern *Akoko*, benefited immensely from these colonial backing. Indeed, on his arrival in Ikare, from Oba (where he first settled and worked), Lennon approached the District Officer for assistance to establish an Anglican mission in *Akokoland*. The protection and support the latter subsequently granted the early Christians in *Akoko* made it possible for them to carry on their religious activities with minimal opposition from the Muslims and traditionalists. By this token, Anglicanism soon permeated the rank of *Akoko* towns and villages like Ipesi, Oka, Okeagbe, Isua, Ajowa, etc. The fortunes of Christianity in *Akokoland* were further bolstered by the appointment of Lennon as District Officer (in acting capacity) following the incumbent’s trip to Britain on leave.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> M. AJAYI, 80 years, farmer (Personal Communication), Oba-Akoko, [2014–06–04], and O. IJALAYE, 55 years, Teacher (Personal Communication), Oba-Akoko, [2014–06–04]; NATIONAL CONCORD, 22 December 1984; A. OGUNTUYI, *A Short History of Ado-Ekiti*, Akure 1952, p. 67; see also, J. F. A. AJAYI, *Christian Mission in Nigeria, 1841–1891: The Making of New Elite*, London 1965.

<sup>7</sup> Bishop FAGBEMI, 74 years (Personal Communication), Erusu-Akoko, [2014–06–01]; and Oba K. OLUSA, 73 years, the *Oludotun* of Iludotun (Personal Communication), *Oludotun’s Palace*, [2013–06–01]; J. L. AKEREDOLU, *Introduction of Christianity into Akoko*, Owo 1986, p. 36; ADAMOLEKUN, p. 46.

The introduction and entrenchment of Christianity in Akoko society, however, amounted to a widespread and permanent erosion of the people's tradition and culture. To start with, the earliest missionaries left an inefaceable stamp on the indigenous religion, denigrating it as idolatry and heathenistic. They despised Akoko names and instead prodded the people to adopt European names. Christian converts were encouraged to jettison indigenous mode of life, belief system, moral and civic responsibilities. Olomola lucidly described the scenario thus: *"In many places, fanatical Christian converts turned against indigenous religious practices and customs to the extent of exposing the religion and customs as unbecoming, the gods as mere artifacts, their worship and festivals as 'pagan' practices. Converts abandoned those civic responsibilities which conflicted with the tenets of their new found faith, no longer contributed in money and in kind to lineage and community sacrifices, refused chieftaincy titles, violated with frightful nonchalance the traditional conventions such as respect for traditional authorities and indigenous sanctions. Gradually but steadily the tap-roots of Yoruba culture were being uprooted. [...] The converts accepted only the authority of their mission, an alien organization, which transcended ethnic and cultural considerations. Indeed, converts no longer regarded themselves as merely as citizens of their respective communities but as members of a universal congregation or brotherhood of Christians."*<sup>8</sup>

All these inevitably facilitated the enduring destruction of Akoko traditional norms, values, and institutions.

The reactions of resilient Akoko traditionalists to the denigration of tradition and customs sometimes resulted in violence. In Ikare, in 1915, a group of Christians were abducted and severely beaten by traditionalists during the *Gidigbe* worship. In Auga, Joseph Ilegbemi, the town's Christians leader, was beheaded at the *Egungun* shrine in 1916. In Arigidi, the church built in the previous year was burnt by angry adherents of traditional religion. In Isua, in 1917, the *Olisua* authorised the seizure of Bibles and other Christian literature and threatened to burn them in order to stem the tide of the impunity among the ranks of the town's Christian converts. Even the Church Missionary Society's (CMS) agent in the town was not spared as he was beaten severely, while his wife was thoroughly threatened.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> I. O. OLOMOLA, *Pre-Colonial Patterns of Inter-State Relations in Eastern Yorubaland*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ife, Ile-Ife 1997, pp. 300–302.

<sup>9</sup> F. AMINU – W. KOLAWOLE, *Akokoland: History and Distinguished People*, Ibadan 1997, p. 78; Chief ADEBAYO, Farmer (Personal Communication), Isua-Akoko, [2013–04–16].

Despite these and other expressions of resistance, Christianity and its concomitant effects had, however, come to stay in Akokoland. In fact, by the 1920s, missions like the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Roman Catholic Mission, Salvation Army and the Wesleyan Mission had become firmly entrenched in many Akoko towns.<sup>10</sup>

### Education

Western education was a corollary of the rise of Christianity in Akokoland. It was introduced in the area by expatriate christen evangelists, as was the case in other parts of the colonial state. But before this, the pre-existing system of education in the area was the indigenous type. Indigenous education in Akokoland, like in other parts of Yorubaland, essentially centred upon inculcating indigenous knowledge, moral and societal values and norms, and vocational skills in members of the various communities.<sup>11</sup> Prior to 1913, literary education in Akokoland operated on the platform of adult literacy evening lessons arranged by former slaves like Solomon Babajide and A. Adeyemi of Ipesi and Omuo respectively. During such lessons, Christian converts received instructions on how to attain comprehensive understanding of the Yoruba alphabets. These foundational efforts received huge encouragement as from 1913, when the CMS acquired the services of Catechists to serve as evangelists in the Akoko District. In the various Akoko towns, they provided informal lessons and Sunday school classes, which covered instructions on character moulding and hygiene, among others.<sup>12</sup>

Archdeacon Lennon's arrival, however, marked a watershed in the evolution of western education in the area. Indeed, his assumption of duty as Assistant Superintendent of Owo District Church Mission in 1920 marked the dawn of formal western education and socio-economic advancement in Akokoland. It is necessary to note that there was no single primary school, let alone secondary or territory institution, in the whole of Akoko when Lennon arrived. He tackled this stiff challenge headlong through a combination of measures. First, he developed a harmonious relationship and understanding with both the British colonial officials and the Native Authorities within the district. He also embarked upon

<sup>10</sup> S.A. APALOMO, 58 years, Teacher (Personal Communication), Ogbagi-Akoko, [2014-06-03]; J. H. BEELEY, *Intelligence Report on the Akoko District*, National Archives Ibadan (further NAI), C.S.O. 26/3, 292667, 1934, p. 88.

<sup>11</sup> *Chief* ADEBAYO, [2013-04-16].

<sup>12</sup> AMINU – KOLAWOLE, p. 80.

a familiarisation tour of the area during which he engaged in wide consultations with Akoko monarchs, chiefs, and church officials on the crucial importance of education and the need to establish schools in their various domains. It is on record that he subsequently secured the needed backing from the traditional authorities and church leaders in his zealous quest for the propagation of western education in the area. But he also faced resistance from Muslims, and elements who may be regarded as resilient traditionalists who were more interested in utilising their wards for farm work and other domestic duties rather than allowing them to attend mission schools where they could be indoctrinated with Christian and western ideas. Nonetheless, western education gradually replaced indigenous education. By 1921, through Lennon's staunch advocacy, six primary schools had emerged in Ikare, Isua, Omuo, Akunnu, Akungba and Arigidi. The curriculum of the early schools in Akokoland covered English language, Writing, Arithmetic, Geography, Religious and Moral teachings, and Agricultural, while the girls received additional training in cookery, laundry, knitting, tailoring and other fields that could prepare them for successful matrimonial lives.<sup>13</sup>

The granting of a separate district to Akokoland by the CMS and the inauguration of the Akoko District Provincial Church Council in 1925 further boosted the growth of western education in the area. Again, through Lennon's determined campaign and efforts, by 1926, schools also emerged in Okeagbe, Oka, Ikaram, Oba, Irun, and Ogbagi, and by 1927 up to eleven Akoko towns had their own schools. A major challenge to most of these schools was the dearth of qualified teachers, due to paucity of funds. The immediate implication of an unqualified teaching staff was substandard academic work and output. In addition, the colonial government refused to provide the needed grants. However, by 1930, Lennon had surmounted this challenge as all the twenty-two schools within Akoko districts were qualified for government subvention. After a long delay caused by government policy and reluctance, Akoko got its premier post-primary educational institution in 1947 with the creation of Victory College, Ikare. This was followed by the establishment of other schools such as the secondary school for boys founded in Ikare in 1947

<sup>13</sup> J. B. OGUNDANA, Ikare, in: G. O. OGUNTOMISIN (ed.), *Yoruba Towns and Cities*, Ibadan 2003, p. 30; AMINU – KOLAWOLE, pp. 81–82; I. A. AKINJOGBIN, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture: A key to Understanding Yoruba History*, Ibadan 2002, p. 82.

and the African Church Grammar school established in Oka in 1957.<sup>14</sup>

Early secondary schools in Akoko, like their primary school counterparts, also faced the challenge of funds and the accompanying problem of inadequate staff. As an illustration, Lennon had to go out of his way to solicit funds from the colonial administration and Akoko leaders to tackle this challenge. In his appeal for funds for Victory College, Ikare, he emphasised the importance of the institution to Akokoland so long as the stakeholders are willing to invest in its development. He gave assurances that the prevalent difficulties in terms of adequate staffing would be overcome once fund was available to recruit expatriate teachers with requisite qualifications. To serve as encouragement, he informed Akoko Federal Council Officials about the pledge by a Technical Teacher from Jamaica to resume work in the college once they were prepared to fund his trip to Nigeria. The Akoko Village Heads subsequently promised to intensify efforts on the voluntary contributions and to make available the total amount collected before 5 May 1951.<sup>15</sup>

British colonial government's ambivalence towards western education in Akokoland (unlike in the Northern Emirates) changed due to the realisation of the necessity of training the people for support services to the administration. Thus, the government brought emphasis upon the teaching of English Language in all classes at the expense of native (Akoko) dialects. In the upper classes, such as Standard 5 and 6, the History syllabus was dominated largely by European topics. Moreover, the syllabi of other subjects (perhaps except for Geography) were, to a great extent, British in outlook.<sup>16</sup> The overall impact of this type of education on Akoko was an admixture of benefits and adversities. On the one hand, the introduction, management, and development of western education fostered an attitude of cooperation within and among the various Akoko communities since the leading personalities had to converge and consult periodically over matters bordering on the schools' stability and progress.

<sup>14</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. 1306, Vol. 111; NATIONAL CONCORD, 22 December 1984; AMINU – KOLAWOLE, p. 85.

<sup>15</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. *Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Akoko Federal Council*, 28 April 1951.

<sup>16</sup> E. O. OMOBORINBOLA, 102 years, Lay-Reader (Personal Communication), Okele Quarter, Akungba – Akoko, [2013–05–14]; see also J. S. COLEMAN, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Benin 1986; S. FSQAHAM, *Government and Mission Education in Northern Nigeria, 1900–1919*, Ibadan 1966, p. 24; C. W. ORR, *The Making of Northern Nigeria*, London 1965, p. 266.



Western education also equipped Akoko indigenes with the requisite training to take up employment in the local administration workforce. On the other hand, however, western education caused a decline in the labour force available for farm work as many people developed aversion for agricultural work. The new type of education engendered a negative perception of indigenous societal values among the now literate Akoko elements. In addition, the newly acquired literacy forced labour migration to cities in quest of greener pastures.<sup>17</sup>

### Public Works

The prime motive for British imperialist undertaking in Akoko territory (like in other parts of Nigeria) was the desire for economic exploitation of Akoko resources. The area experienced a dearth of capital projects during the first two decades of British rule. In terms of road construction, what existed in Akoko up to the closing years of the third decade of the 20th century were pedestrian trade routes consisting of dirt roads and several rope bridges.<sup>18</sup> However, plans had commenced earlier in 1920 (after the transfer of Akoko District to the Southern Provinces) to transform the existing roads by expanding and making them conducive to motor transportation<sup>19</sup>. Consequently, by May 1923, a bridge across River Osse had been constructed. The immediate significance of this was that motor transportation from Akoko to Kabba via Owo became possible. The first through road in the Akoko area (Owo-Kabba-Lokoja road via Ikare and Ikaram), which construction began in 1922 was opened to traffic in 1927. This was complemented by supplementary work in the

<sup>17</sup> A. A. SANNI, 83 years, Retired Public Servant (Personal Communication), Isalu Quarters, Epinmi-Akoko, [2013-05-13]; E. O. ADEOTI, 60 years, Senior Lecturer, and Head of Department, History and International Studies, Lagos State University (Personal Communication), Ojo, [2013-04-02]; J. O. AFOLABI, 70 years, Associate Lecturer, Lagos State University, (Retired Public Servant), (Personal Communication), Ojo, [2013-04-02]; J. B. OGUNDANA, OkeAgbe, in: G. O. OGUNTOMISIN (ed.), *Yoruba Towns and Cities*, Ibadan 2003, p. 72; N.A.I. Ondo Prof. *Minutes of the Meeting of Akoko Federal Council*, 30 September 1950; A. L. MABOGUNJE, *Yoruba Towns*, Ibadan 1962, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> J. O. ADEYERI – J. B. ADEJUWON. The Implication of British Colonial Economic Policies on Nigeria's Development, in: *International Journal of Advanced Research in Management and Social Sciences*, 1, 2012, p. 1; A. OLOWOOKERE A.K.A 'Omo Kola', Cloth Weaver/Farmer/Kolanut Trader (Personal Communication), Epinmi-Akoko, [2013-05-13].

<sup>19</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. 4/1,2, Annual Report, Owo Division, 1920-1921.

form of cement culverts and semi-permanent bridges in the years that followed. The Ikare-Ogbagi-Irun Road was built and opened to traffic in 1927. Unlike the Owo-Kabba-Lokoja road via Ikare and Ikaram, the culverts of this road were of temporary construction.<sup>20</sup> It is important to note that both roads served as a boost to communication, trade, and commerce around the Akoko-Ekiti axis. In particular, the opening of the roads inspired a significant change in the direction, volume, and nature of the trade in Irun cloth and cocoa from Ekiti Division.<sup>21</sup>

The Ikaram-Idoani road that passes through Isua was opened in 1930. This road, which had semi-permanent culverts and was free from difficult slopes, served as a vital communication link, particularly from the administrative perspective. And with the completion of the Oka-Isua Road, it became possible to cover extensive areas including Oka, Owo, Isua, Ikare and Ikaram via motor transport. The construction of the Arigidi-Okeagbe-Omuo road commenced in 1928 and was opened for vehicular use in 1931. The Oka-Epinmi-Isua road was opened for motor use in July 1932. The road comprised cement/dry stone culverts all through and a 40-foot semi-permanent bridge near Epinmi. Similarly, the Okeagbe-Oyin-Omuo road was constructed during the same period. It is necessary at this juncture to mention a significant aspect of British colonial rule in Akokoland, the use of forced labour. According to evidence, *curvee* was initially operated in form of supply of human portorage, but later deployed for the building of infrastructure like roads, Native Administration blocks, etc. To be specific, forced labour accounted for the construction of the Okeagbe-Oyin-Omuo road,<sup>22</sup> mentioned earlier. The use of *curvee* can be explained by Britain's reluctance to commit British funds to Akoko's development in line with her imperialist motive in the area.

However, in 1949, the colonial administration declared its readiness to aid the tune of 50% of total cost of feeder roads in the province. This came on the heel of a programme of roads and feeder roads earlier drawn up, with the hope that financial aid would come from surplus funds of the Cocoa Marketing Board towards its completion by 1955.<sup>23</sup> Under this

<sup>20</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. 26/2, 11874, Annual Report, Owo Division, Vol. 1, 1923, 62.

<sup>21</sup> M. A. OGUNYEMI, *Local Migration in Irun: An Outline of the Movements of Irun People Since 1900*, B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 1964, p. 18; BEELEY, pp. 13, 15–16.

<sup>22</sup> OGUNDANA, p. 71; BEELEY, p. 14; N.A.I. Ondo Prof. 4/1,16, Annual Report, Owo Division, 1932.

<sup>23</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 23 March 1949.

project, roads such as the Epinmi-Ugbe, Ifira-Afo, and Erusu-Okeagbe feeder roads were completed.<sup>24</sup> By this time too, the Isua-Ibillo-Osse Bridge had been constructed, while plans were already in place to tar Owo-Ikare Road and construct a bridge, the Omuo-Igbagun Bridge, over the stream which separated Akoko and Yagba territories.<sup>25</sup> In its entirety, colonial Akoko road network was largely rudimentary by modern-standards. However, it marked a clear departure from the pre-colonial road system in terms of reach, sophistication, and socio-economic utility value.

### Health Services

Health services in Akoko suffered severe neglect by the colonial authorities, especially during the first three decades of colonial rule. The Lokoja Hospital (the only one in the Northern Provinces at the time) devoted its services largely to the British political officials and European traders to the detriment of the indigenous population. During the period when Akoko was under Kabba Province, there was no single medical officer throughout the province. In fact, this sort of official neglect of provision of health services was principally responsible for the large number of deaths recorded during disease epidemics in Akoko territory and other areas of Kabba Province during the 1910s.<sup>26</sup> Even when Akoko joined the Southern Provinces, the entire Ondo Province (which included Akoko District) had no medical officer. However, in 1922, Archdeacon Lennon and his wife established the first modern health service delivery facility in Akokoland, the Faith Dispensary, at Ikare, to serve the entire area. In 1930, a dispensary was created in Owo and was visited periodically by the Medical Officer of Benin. In 1932, the colonial administration established additional dispensaries at Omuo, Ikaram and Oka.<sup>27</sup> By 1952,

<sup>24</sup> Oba F. OLADUNJOYE, 75 years, the *Ajana* of Afa (Personal Communication), *Ajana's* Palace, Afa-Akoko, [2014–06–04]; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, 14 October 1950; N.A.I. Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 5 May 1951; see also, B. O. ADEWUMI, *Erusu: The Histories of Our Times*, 2009, p. 29.

<sup>25</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 9 March 1951; N.A.I. Ondo Prof. Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, 26 May 1951.

<sup>26</sup> National Archives Kaduna (further NAK), Loko Prof. 7/11, 3646, Quarterly Report, Kabba Province June 1910; NAK. Loko Prof. 10/3, 112P, Annual Report, Kabba Province, 1914.

<sup>27</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. 4/1, Annual Report, Ondo Province, 1930; N.A.I. Ondo Prof 4/1, 16, Annual Report, Owo Division, 1932.

a dispensary and maternity centre had been opened at Akungba and Ikare respectively. An Infectious Diseases Hospital had also been established at Ikare, while the government had initiated steps to build a rural health centre in the town,<sup>28</sup> and in 1960 a dispensary was opened at Erusu.<sup>29</sup> However, the aforementioned public health facilities suffered from poor funding, infrastructure and management. There is evidence to show that even in the closing decades of British rule, dispensaries in Akoko District did not receive adequate medicines and other medical supplies and did not get the required administrative supervision by the Medical Officer supposedly in charge of the area.<sup>30</sup> Not surprising, therefore, the overall performance of the colonial administration in terms of public health service delivery in Akokoland during the period under study was poor.

### Economy

Akoko indigenous economy, that was principally agrarian and subsistent in nature experienced significant transformation during the period under study. One of such changes was the emergence of an export-based (cash crops-oriented) and monetised economic system around the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Two related factors largely accounted for this development: first, was the contact with Christian missionaries, and second, the activities of British colonial authorities. With the entrenchment of *Pax Britannica* and British rule since about 1897, new cash crops such as cocoa, cassava, coffee, kolanut and tobacco began to receive increasing patronage and cultivation among the people, while the production of pre-existing ones like palm produce and rubber also expanded.<sup>31</sup> While information regarding crops like cassava, coffee, tobacco, and rubber remain scanty, evidence suggests that by 1928, through the pioneering

<sup>28</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. 172B, 1/1 Touring Notes by CLARK, S. C. Health Superintendent, Ondo Province, 12 January 1952; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, 2 May 1950; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 4 November 1950. NAI, Ondo Prof.172B, 1/1, Inspection Notes of CLARK, P. L. S. Health Superintendent, Ondo Province, 10 January 1951.

<sup>29</sup> ADEWUMI, p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 23 March 1949; NAI, Ondo Prof. 1723, 1/1, Touring Notes of CLARK, S. C. Health Superintendent, Ondo Province, Akure, January 1952.

<sup>31</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. 11874, 26/2 Annual Report, Ondo Province, 1936.; J. Evert, Report of an Expedition to Ekiti, Akoko, Kukuruku – and other Countries by His Excellency Sir Gilbert Carter (1896), NAI, 147/105; F. LEIGH and T. DAWODU, (1897). Letter to Acting Resident, Ibadan. NAI, 147/114.

efforts of farmers such as Olupona, Asaoye and Adeosun (who had worked as labourers at Ibadan) cocoa and kolanut production and trade was in full swing among many Akoko communities. In places like Irun and Ikare, migrant Hausa elements increasingly participated in these economic activities either as traders or labourers in the plantations. By 1933, the stream valleys in the forest areas were already flourishing in young cocoa trees, while the upper slopes were full of kolanut trees.<sup>32</sup> The choice of plantation locations in respect of these two crops was based on the appropriateness of the soil types: the relatively fertile soil of the stream valleys were appropriate for cocoa, and the stony soils of the upper slopes suited kolanut trees.

During the years that followed, largely due to the expanding activity of the Cooperative Produce Market Society, nearly every family possessed a cocoa and kolanut plantation in the town forest. Increasing pressure on the town forest compelled a gradual switch to the outer forest areas that were though far off, were more fertile. Indeed, farmers in many Akoko towns such as Ogbagi, Oka; Isua, Ikare, Irun, Supare, etc embarked on a massive drive for plantations in the outer forests. Given the expanding demand for labour on the cash crop plantations, even women had to play an increasingly active role in agriculture, including joining their husbands to harvest cocoa and kolanut proceeds; thus, diverting their attention and commitment away from traditional activities like spinning and weaving of cotton, as well as long distance trade.<sup>33</sup> The bulk of the produce were sold in the local markets. However, some of the cocoa farmers sold their products to traders at Ise and the cooperative stores at Ikare, while their counterparts in kolanut production sold theirs at Agenebode in the defunct Bendel State.<sup>34</sup>

Oil palm production and trade also expanded significantly during the period. Historically, Akoko soil (especially the forest areas) was reputed to be very rich in oil palm. The palm trees grew wild in the bush, although

<sup>32</sup> OGUNYEMI, pp. 26–29; I. OLADELE, 99 years (Personal Communication), Ikun-Akoko, [2012–02–26].

<sup>33</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. 11874, 26, Annual Report, Ondo Province, Vol. xv, 1938; OGUNYEMI, pp. 42, 29; I. AJIBOYE, 96 years, farmer (Personal Communication), Igbede Quarter, Ipe-Akoko, [2013–04–15].

<sup>34</sup> Oba A. MOMOH, 76 years, the *Olukare* of Ikare (Personal Communication), *Olukare's* Palace, Ikare-Akoko, [2013–06–02]; E. AYODELE, *Change in Agricultural Economy of Ipesi, Ifira, Sosan and Isua-Akoko of Ondo State*, B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 1979, p. 15.

only those in the cultivated areas were tended. However, the arrival of Urhobo groups from former Delta Province around 1930 occasioned a radical change in Akoko palm oil/kernels industry. Overtime, waves of Urhobo migrants built isolated hamlets in different parts of the Akoko forest where they leased oil palm grooves from the indigenes. It is important to point out that palm trees in the plantations and in yam plots were never leased out but tended by the indigenes.<sup>35</sup> A plausible explanation for this is that oil that accrued from the plantations served the vital purpose of meeting the demand of local consumption.

Nonetheless, a substantial volume of palm oil and kernels from both the Urhobo farms and Akoko plantations were exported. Some portion of this was sold to middlemen from Ibadan, Ilesha, Oshogbo, and the North, among others. But of greater significance was the participation of British companies such as Messrs John Holt and Company Ltd, Messrs Miller Brothers Company Ltd, and the Niger Company Ltd. etc who dominated the Akoko oil palm produce trade for the most part of the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>36</sup> In response to the twin-problem of competition from the southern traders (earlier mentioned) and adulteration of palm kernels by them, the British companies engaged the services of some indigenes as trade agents within the Akoko territory. The agents were required to inspect the palm kernels put up for sale by the middlemen in order to identify and avoid the purchase of adulterated produce. In addition, they were mandated to work for the growth of British commerce within their various domains. Indeed, from the fourth decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, production, and prices of cash crops, especially palm kernels, palm oil and cocoa experienced a phenomenal rise.<sup>37</sup>

The evolution and growth of cash crop economy in Akoko district was complemented by the introduction of British silver and copper money during the early phase of colonial administration. This had several impor-

<sup>35</sup> I. B. AJIBOYE, 96 years, farmer (Personal Communication), Ipe-Akoko, [2013-04-15]; OGUNYEMI, p. 26; R. GARVIN – W. OYEMAKINDE, *Economic Development in Nigeria since 1800*, in: O. IKIME, (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan 1980, pp. 498-499.

<sup>36</sup> OLADELE, 99 years (Personal Communication), Ikun-Akoko, [2012-02-26]; A. A. SANNNI, 83 years, Retired Public Servant [Personal Communication], Isalu Quarter, Epinmi-Akoko, [2013-05-13].

<sup>37</sup> *High Chief* PT. OGUNTIMHIN, the *Arua* of Ogbagi (Personal Communication), [2012-03-17]; J. OKEREJI, 100 years (Personal Communication), Isalu Quarter, Epinmi-Akoko, [2013-05-13]; See also NAI, Ondo Prof. 11374, 26/2, Annual Report, Ondo Province, 1936.

tant effects on the economy and society. First, the widespread acceptance of the new medium of exchange further heightened the cultivation of cash crops by Akoko farmers. Second, it gave rise to a new commercial *elite* of Akoko middlemen who increasingly acquired wealth through the purchase of cash crops, particularly cocoa, kolanut and palm kernel from the farmers.<sup>38</sup> Third, the increased purchasing power offered by the new money, which intensified the desire for various socio-economic utilities brought about considerable expansion in trade between the Akoko and other people in places like Lokoja, Osogbo and Kabba. It was from these places that important materials like sewing machines, nails, corrugated roofing sheet, bicycles, wristwatches, among others, first reached Akokoland. Fourth, given the very limited access to motor transport, the danger and other challenges involved in human portorage to distant territories (some of which were mentioned earlier) compelled many people from various Akoko towns to travel in groups thereby broadening their outlook, and also serving as an integrative factor. In addition, the increased cash flow and purchasing power accruable from cash crop production and commerce transformed Akoko architecture considerably. By the closing years of colonial rule, nearly all the old thatched roof houses had been replaced by modern buildings roofed with corrugated iron sheets.<sup>39</sup>

The new emphasis on cash crop economy, however, generated some negative developments. Unlike in the pre-colonial era, frequent occurrence of land disputes between Akoko towns became widespread because of the intensive drive for cash crop production and the attendant scarcity of land. Food crisis also emerged. Due to the increasing attention devoted to cash crop production, food crop production (especially yam) suffered considerable neglect such that by the post-second World War years the latter had become secondary to the former. Indeed, by 1949, food scarcity had become so severe that the authorities resorted to several urgent steps to ameliorate the situation.<sup>40</sup> In 1949, both the President

<sup>38</sup> G. B. OGUNJEMIYO, 88 years, Farmer (Personal Communication), Igbede Quarter, Ipe-Akoko, [2013-04-15]; KINSMEN of *Chief* ADEBAYO (Personal Communication), Isua – Akoko, [2013-04-16].

<sup>39</sup> A. OLOWOOKERE, [2012-05-13]; NAI, Ondo Prof. 11874, 26/2, Annual Report, Ondo Province, 1923.

<sup>40</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 21 and 22 October 1949; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 15 November 1949.

and District Officer admonished the farmers to devote greater attention to cultivation of yam and other food crops as nobody could eat money. In 1950, the Akoko Federal Council initiated a proposal to make Friday a school farming day during which all children would have to work on their plots of land allocated to them under the supervision of the school's Agricultural Science Teacher. Also, in 1950, Local Agricultural Committees were introduced to encourage the people to produce more food crops. As a follow up to this, a Group Farming Scheme was established in the Ikaram- Akunnu axis in 1951. Under this scheme, the colonial government was to lease out land to between 500 and 600 farmers for cultivation under the supervision of an Agricultural Officer. This was meant to be a pilot scheme to be replicated in some other parts of Akoko District.<sup>41</sup> However, there is yet no evidence to ascertain the degree of success achieved by these measures within the remaining period covered by this study.

### **Conclusion**

This paper explored the transformatory impact of British rule upon Akoko society between 1897 and 1960. It illustrated the significant changes in the social, cultural, and economic organisation of the people during that period. In the sphere of religion, the introduction and subsequent entrenchment of Christianity had a revolutionary impact on socio-economic developments in the area. Although Christianity made significant contributions to Akoko society, particularly in the fields of education, health, and other social services, it led to an enduring destruction of the people's traditional norms, values, and institutions. The new religion set many of the people against their indigenous belief system, moral and civic responsibilities. The overall impact of colonial educational policy in Akokoland was a mixed blessing. The introduction, management and development of western education fostered cooperation and collaboration within and among the Akoko communities. Western education provided valuable technical and professional training to Akoko indigenes in such vocations as tailoring, carpentry, and bricklaying. It also equipped the people with the required training for employment in the local

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<sup>41</sup> NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 23 March 1949; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Akoko Federal Council Meeting, 30 November 1950; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council with the Resident, 22 September 1950; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of Meeting of Akoko Federal Council, 9 March 1951; NAI, Ondo Prof. Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, 30 June 1951.



administration establishments. Nevertheless, the new type of education promoted a negative perception of indigenous social values among the newly literate Akoko elements. It brought about a decline in the labour force available for farm work because many pupils became averse to agricultural work. Moreover, the newly acquired literacy caused labour migration to cities in quest of better opportunities.

In the area of public works, British rule brought about significant changes across Akoko territory. Although the area suffered a dearth of capital projects during the first two decades of colonial rule, a network of modern roads soon replaced the old caravan routes. Though the new road network facilitated improved communication, transportation, economy, and general living conditions among the Akoko, construction of some of the roads were in some cases achieved through the extraction of forced labour from the people. Health services, like road construction, also suffered initial neglect by the colonial authorities. From the 1920s to the end of colonial rule, modern health service centres were established in several Akoko towns. Nonetheless, the overall performance of the colonial administration in terms of public health service delivery in Akokoland was poor. Akoko indigenous economy underwent transformation under colonial rule. The introduction and growth of a cash crop oriented and money-based economy significantly affected the society. The new medium of exchange (British coins) heightened cash crop production by Akoko farmers. A new commercial *elite* emerged from the ranks of Akoko middlemen who increasingly acquired wealth through the purchase of cash crops from the farmers. The increased purchasing power facilitated by the new money intensified the desire for socio-economic utilities and caused considerable expansion in trade between the Akoko and other people in relatively distant territories. The extensive commercial interactions broadened the outlook of many Akoko indigenes and also served as an integrative factor among Akoko people as a whole. However, cash crop economy resulted in some negative developments such as food crisis and frequent land disputes.

