

Full Length Research Paper

The impact of colonial rule on the agricultural economy of Mbaise, Imo State, 1500-1960

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At present, there is no reasonably full account of the economic history of Mbaise in Imo State, Nigeria. The reason for this is obvious. Among others, enough attention has not been given to economic and social developments of mini-polities that dot Igbo land, east of the Niger. Existing historical studies in the area though valuable, are politically biased as early scholars on African past concentrated on documenting political developments in 'mega states'. This has inevitably left a yawning gap in our knowledge of economic developments especially in the agricultural economy sub-sector. No doubt, this present study has helped to narrow the gap and consequently revise the trend whereby political history gained importance, which for quite a long time, remained the focus of historical studies and scholarship. It is against this backdrop that the article examined the impact of colonial rule on the Mbaise agricultural economy and argues that alien influences did not do much to transform the traditional economy, but rather concentrated on improving cash crops that aided the metropolitan economy and wellbeing.

Key words: Mbaise, agriculture, historical, colonial economy, development, political and Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Theorists throughout human history believe in the inevitability of change. Most also believe that change is not mono-causal but multi-causal. The concept of change and continuity is as vast as the whole wide-world; for changes are taken place in all parts and facets of the world society as arrangements, organizations, institutions and management continue to transform year in year out. The idea of change and continuity in the context of this paper shows through available evidence that change, growth or development is intrinsic to any group or society whether traditional or modern. However, these changes may be facilitated and nourished by external agencies. Changes should therefore be viewed as belonging naturally or drawn from within and outside that society. In

this regard, in the case of Mbaise, continuity and change here signify that some agricultural and farming systems have continued to exist in their pre-colonial forms despite colonial and other external influences that introduced significant changes in the 19th and 20th centuries.

The choice of the period of study stems from the fact that through generational age, Mbakwe (2005:56-63) had concluded in a study that the first set of immigrants settled in the Ahiara Clan of Mbaise about the 16th century, hence the choice of the baseline 1500. The colonial era began in earnest in the late 19th century, when Britain consolidated its rule over Nigeria. In 1914, the British merged northern and southern protectorates into a single state called the colony and protectorate of

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Nigeria. Nigeria became independent of British Rule in 1960. For the people of Mbaise, Imo State, the period between 1500 and 1960 was one of immense socio-economic changes.

Identification of area of study

It is important to briefly look at the location and geography of Mbaise. This is necessary because according to Hopkins (1973:11), the geography of an area influences the cause of human history and development. He has also argued that Africa's economic past is the record of a continuous dialogue between geography and history—from the very beginnings of agriculture to the introduction of modern industry. It is in this sense therefore, that the location and geography of Mbaise society has influenced its agricultural economy overtime.

Geographically, Mbaise formed part of the Ohuhu Ngwa sub-section of the southern Igbo, located within the extensive deciduous Forest Belt of West Africa. It is located within the present Imo State, the heart of South-east geo-political zone of the present day Nigeria. It is situated within latitude 5-6 degrees north of the Equator and longitude 7-8 degrees east of the Greenwich Mean Time (G.M.T). Mbaise falls within the Orlu section of the Awka - Orlu uplands with a land area of 404 square kilometers, an official population of 532, 147 and with a population density of 1317 persons per square kilometer (see 2006 Nigerian population census figures). This high population density has a lot of implications. In the first place, it is seen as a major cause of deteriorating fertility of the soil. However, lack of improved agricultural technology has worsened the situation, resulting in effect to decreased agricultural output. In the face of decreased agricultural output, the tendency has been for the people to migrate to agriculturally more endowed areas or seek white collar jobs in urban areas (Olusanya and Pursell, 1981). This may explain partly why Mbaise indigenes are found virtually in every corner of the globe in so far as human beings exist there - in search of greener pastures and genuine means of survival.

Pre-colonial agricultural economy

Before 1900, the economy of the Igbo, like that of virtually every other West African community centered mostly on agriculture. Yet, most economists and even historians took its existence for granted. It is argued that the

domestication of plants and animals, the Neolithic revolution as it is sometimes called, was one of the greatest events in world history and one of the greatest achievements of man (Agwu, 1993:61). It is believed that the peoples of West Africa like the peoples of many parts of the world developed their own agriculture independently thousands of years before the birth of Christ. But over the years, no doubt, a lot have been borrowed outside the borders of West Africa in the development of agriculture.

The place of agriculture in pre-colonial Mbaise economy can be appreciated in the fact that the vast majority of the people were engaged in agricultural pursuits and there were very few members of the society who did not have their farms and herds. In the words of Afigbo (1981:6), "in the pre-colonial Igbo society, agriculture was the most important economic activity with regard both to the number of people engaged in it either on full-time basis or the prestige attached to it". In the same vein, Uchendu (1966:30), appropriately described farming as the basis of the life of the Igbo. According to him, an Igbo was easily humiliated when reminded that he is "ori mgbe ahia loro"; one who eats only when the markets holds. This does not definitely imply that traders were relegated to the background in the people's economic life. This significantly implies that the Igbo saw farming as their main occupation and trading as subsidiary, not a substitute.

Furthermore, the place of agriculture in the culture and cosmology of the Igbo can also be captured in the words of an ex-celebrated Igbo slave boy, Olaudah Equiano:

Agriculture is our chief employment, and everybody, even children are engaged in it. Everyone contributes to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggars. We have plenty of Indian corn, and vast quantities of cotton and tobacco. Our pineapples grow without culture; they are about the size of the largest sugar-loaf and finely flavoured (Quoted in Afigbo, 1981:125-128).

The Mbaise attitude to agriculture resulted in almost every Mbaise person becoming a farmer. Most families in Mbaise produced well enough of such staples as yam, cocoyam, cassava, and varieties of vegetables. It cannot be compared with some communities in Igbo land whose soils were very fertile and who gave so much of their time to farming to the extent that they also produced for outside markets. This is not to state that production for supply outside the immediate environment was completely non-existent in Mbaise. The fact remains that Mbaise was never among the few Igbo groups that

produced foods in abundance to the extent of satisfying her immediate needs as well as exporting the surplus to other areas in need. Production for outside market on a fairly large scale had been hindered appreciably as a result of deteriorated soil fertility occasioned by over-cropping and population pressures.

Rather than engaging in export of her products, Mbaise even benefited from the surplus products of her eastern and riverine neighbours like Ngwa, Etche, Owerri, Ngor Okpala and Umuahia to supplement her local productions. Isichei (1976:27) writes on this deficiency as aptly as possible:

Mbaise men and women struggled to wrest a living from inadequate and infertile plots; a situation common to most communities in the Igbo heart land areas of Orlu, Okigwe and Owerri. The Nguru clan, in what is now Mbaise, worked leached-eroding land from which no industry or skill could wrest good harvest. Many of its people were forced to work as migrant labourers for the Etche clan, or eked out a living by various crafts...

However, the fact still remains that Mbaise, like other pre-colonial Igbo groups, cultivated varieties of vegetables, food crops such as cassava, yams, cocoyams, beans, plantain, bananas, maize and others. There is no doubt that some of the crops mentioned or cultivated may not be indigenous to the people. Some may have been introduced into the area by the process of diffusion. For instance, cassava has been identified as one of the alien-introduced crops. This may help to explain the reason why cassava, which today is a common complement to yam, was not popular in the past. Cassava was not only unpopular in Igboland, but throughout the entire West Africa before the turn of the 20th century, (See Mbakwe 2005:119).

In the traditional Mbaise society, agriculture was sufficiently intensive and efficient as evidenced by the fact that using such simple tools as the machet and small hoe, the people reduced to either grassland or palm-bush vegetation what most authorities think must have been originally tropical rain forest. It is also seen in the system of land tenure under which firstly, there was no free-born (*amadi*) who had no piece of land over which he enjoyed *usufructuary* rights; and secondly, there was no piece of land, not even that over which stood "bad-bush", without an owner. "An owner" in this sense may mean either the whole community or the founding fathers of the lineage or great ancestors.

In spite of its long history and the importance attached to agriculture, the Igbo and of course the Mbaise agricultural economy continued to be categorized as

subsistence. It was characterized by small holdings whose role was to produce food for the immediate household consumption and the small balance for local market. According to Esse (2011:42), the small-holding system of farming was marked by the use of family labour to work in the farms; the use of little capital, simple tools and farm implements like hoe and machet. In pre-colonial Mbaise, land was deemed to have belonged to the ancestors, the present generation and the generation yet unborn (Mbakwe Oral Information). It was basically the role which agriculture played in the life of the people that determined the great importance which the people attached to land as well as the key place which land and its spirit-force occupied in their lives.

Agriculture was highly ritualized in the traditional Mbaise society. The beginning of the farming season was a formal occasion marked by a festival and a ritual. The case of the Nguru Clan is very apt. The traditional *Ituaka* festival was very remarkable in this regard. No farmer began the season without a sort of "go-ahead order" by holders of the traditional yam title *ndi ezeji*. The festival was marked by special prayers and pouring of libations to their ancestors to protect and reward the farmers with bumper harvest during a particular farming season. During this festival, some sacrifices were offered before any section of the village farmland was cleared for cultivation. The objects for the sacrifice included a sheep, fowl or tortoise. The sacrifice was performed by the yam elders or title holders led by a priest specially ordained for this purpose. During the *Ituaka* festival, farmers were shown or directed to the approved farming areas for cultivation. In recent times, the festival has undergone several changes. An intellectual talk called *Igwo Owa* lecture now heralds the occasion. More importantly, the festival has been purged of all fetish events and beliefs that formally characterized it (Mbakwe, 2013).

The beginning of harvest season was also celebrated and ritualized (Ajaebili, 2002:36-38). A series of harvest thanksgiving offering called "New Yam" festival in Igbo land always marked the commencement of yam harvesting. There must be no harvest of new yam until the ceremonial rituals were over (Aguwa Oral information). In the modern Mbaise society, the new yam festival is celebrated every 15th day of August. The purpose of the festival, in its contemporary form, is to show gratitude to God for the first "fruits" of the farm and to ask for forgiveness of past misdeeds. The care and divine protection of the various farm-families is also sought. Today, the new yam festival is characterized by merriment, public lectures and traditional dances (Njoku, 2003:115-117).

Yam, the backbone of Mbaise agriculture was highly

ritualized. It was believed to have a spirit-force *Arusi* which laid down the specific code of conduct for its cultivation, harvesting, cooking and even eating. It was regarded as the king of Mbaise crops. The spirit-force *Njokuji Ahianjoku* was not only powerful but widely feared and venerated not only in Mbaise but throughout Igboland. Those who broke the rules for handling yam stood the risk of being inflicted with dangerous illnesses like diarrhoea and swollen stomach – *Afotoro* (Ohanele Oral information). The more serious taboo forbade people from fighting or defecating in the yam farm. Also, once yams had been planted, *Njokuji* forbade anybody from cracking palm-nuts at night. The other crops-different species of beans, cassava, cocoyam, banana and others were not thought of as possessing any spirit force except in the general sense that the Igbo saw every individual thing as possessing a spirit force (Agwu, 67).

The pre-colonial Mbaise indeed exercised very great care in agricultural matters. Every young man and woman was well tutored in the art of crop cultivation. Many beliefs were also associated with plant life and growth. Certain crops for example, corn, might not be planted by a lean person. It was believed that the stalk would be leaned also. There was also this belief among the people that corn planted with an empty stomach would also have empty cobs. Another belief was that if alcohol was taken before planting was done, the plants would have white leaves and no chlorophyll. Proponents of these beliefs that the emotional appearance of the person planting affects crop yield. These beliefs were mere superstitions as the writer agrees with an informant who strongly argued that even when planted with empty stomach, corn still did well.

Traditional Mbaise agricultural economy cannot be complete without mentioning of some important tree crops which served as pillars in the peoples' economic life. The oil palm tree, an indigenous tree crop, is very popular in the tropical rain forest areas of West Africa (Ekanem, 1957:169). This crop is a blessing of inestimable value to the people of this region. Almost every part or product of it is economically useful. The tree mainly grew naturally from self-sown seeds. Research has however promoted the domestication and expansion of various species of this plant; making it possible for farmers to plant various seed species in line with modern technology for maximum yields. The kernel derived from oil palm could be eaten raw as it has a very pleasant taste especially when it is fresh. The palm oil is used for cooking almost every meal and supplies the much needed vitamin A (Nwosu, 1979:3-5).

The rise of palm oil trade in the 19th century had in no small measure increased the value and importance of

palm tree in the overall economy of Igboland and Mbaise in particular. In this connection, Mbakwe (2011:2-3) has argued that: "In Mbaise, the only and perhaps the most important crop was oil palm tree. The attention it attracted in the colonial economic calculation increasingly came to determine the peoples' economic development. This attention was increased following the abolition of the slave trade by Britain in 1907 when palm oil exportation assumed increased dimension" Writing in the case of the lower cross River Region, Abia (1998:6) submits that: "between 1907 and 1960, the economy of the region witnessed developments geared towards the enhancement of the trade in palm products". The economy of Mbaise, no doubt, witnessed similar progress within the period in question. Ardner (1952) had noted earlier that: "The most important single source of income in Mbaise... is the sale of palm produce". It is important to note that the production and sale of palm produce were very widespread since nature liberally spread the crop through the length and breadth of Mbaise.

Palm wine is also obtained at times from palm tree. Even though the practice of tapping palm tree for wine making was not popular in Mbaise, this *local* wine had and has continued to serve as an important source of alcoholic drink and indeed a source of income for some communities and families in Mbaise. The popular palm-wine in Mbaise is obtained from *Raffia* Palm tree *Ngwo*. Sometimes, some form of herbs or special additives are inculcated to give raffia palm wine a special taste and to extend its shelf life. This explains why today, Mbaise palm wine is a "hot cake" in the palm wine market as people visit the area to have a taste of this drink from all over Igboland (Anyanwu, LA, 2001, Oral Interview).

The coconut, though not quite an indigenous crop, was also cultivated in Mbaise. Almost every family had some cocconut trees. The "milk" produced by fresh nut is extraordinarily sweet. The nut is eaten, not essentially as food but rather because of its pleasant taste as well as its nutritional value as a source of essential vitamins and minerals (Ekanem, 1957: 169-170). It could be eaten as relish with dry or fresh corn or with specially sliced cassava *Akpumiri*. It was also customary in Mbaise, for a grand-mother to plant coconut for every grand-child. The planter was always advised to sit on a kitchen stool while planting. This was to ensure that the coconut plant yields fruit before growing to a great height. According to an informant, the planter must not also bend down while panting. If she did, the coconut tree would grow to a great height and bend before yielding fruits (Akakwam, C.A, 2002, Oral Information).

The family and household were considered the main source of labour for agricultural production in Mbaise.

Sometimes, this was supplemented with other labourers from neighbouring communities who did not necessarily receive wages for work done. The utility of household labour has been attributed to it being "costless"; that is, in the formal sense of family members not being remunerated financially as well as its ability to be used to the point where its marginal return was zero (Hopkins, 1977:22). In the Mbaïse traditional agricultural production, men, women and children were fully mobilized in every family during either cultivation or harvesting. It is in this regard that the idea of marrying many wives and possessing of large family were not only considered as an index of wealth, but also as a potential source of labour for agricultural production (Agwu, p. 71). The ancient practice of communalism arose essentially to solve the problem of labour inadequacy. Another fundamental factor that enhanced this practice has been linked to the lineage system in which a highly evolved sentiment of attachment to the kin group could make each person his brother's keeper.

Furthermore, labour also resulted from the system of clientele. Clients were those who had either taken yams or money on loan and could not pay back or were required to pay back in labour given on stated days of the week for a specified period, until the loan was repaid. They could also be people who enjoyed the support and the protection of the rich farmers generally and in return, gave their labour to him (Afigbo, p. 130). Other sources included the trading of labour amongst the members of an age-grade or the reciprocal exchange of labour *igba-onwo-oru*, which normally took place between persons and families linked by marriage and kinship. Livestock keeping or animal husbandry and hunting were other aspects of traditional Igbo agricultural economy. At present, hunting is losing its importance understandably as a result of the great dimensions assumed by animal domestication. Hunting has also continued to diminish in the scheme of traditional economic activities for other reasons ranging from reduction in the duration of fallow periods to large-scale deforestation with the consequent destruction of the natural habitat and the entire ecosystem. Apart from serving a source of proteins, livestock such as fowls, goats, sheep and dogs also served a ritual purpose. Pre-colonial Mbaïse believed that livestock formed a buffer between the inhabitants of a household and malignant spirits out to destroy life (Njoku, 1990).

There was the practice in some clans in Mbaïse whereby a man might deliver an animal (especially fowl, hen and goat), to a friend or kinsman to rear. The offspring of the first two rounds of birth became the property of the owner (donor) of the animal, while the offspring of the third round of birth became the undisput-

able property of the bearer (donee). This practice is no longer popular among the Mbaïse when compared to the situation in the pre-colonial times. For the reason that scientific upbringing of domestic animals was lacking and no immunization of the modern types existed, pests and various diseases took the lives of many domestic animals. However, the introduction of modern veterinary drugs and services especially in the twentieth century did reduce the death rate of many domestic animals and consequently, enhanced the income of many farm-families in Mbaïse.

It is also argued that between 16th and 19th centuries, the level of technology for agricultural production remained relatively low not only in Igbo land but in Nigeria in general. Though, this condition should not necessarily imply backwardness as some commentators would like to impute. Traditional technology was a phenomenon not just merely determined by geographical factors but also by socio-cultural elements that may never lend themselves easily to quantitative and unbiased analysis using other standards (Amadi, 1999). It can be said therefore, that the traditional farming implements were efficiently used both for domestic need for food and at times for exchange purposes. The surplus needed for trade and exchange would not have been feasible in the so called backward system. However, looking at the prognosis of change in the agrarian economy of Mbaïse, the 19th century according to Hopkins, could be seen as a decisive watershed, because that was when the slave trade was replaced by the exports of primary agricultural products (Isichei, 1987:417-418).

Even though agriculture was the mainstay of the Igbo economy and constituted the main source of income for the rural dwellers, not much effort was made by the colonial administration to modernize and commercialize agriculture, especially in the area of food crop production. Rather, their emphasis was on cash crop production for export purposes. Emphasis on cash crops production made many farmers to abandon food crop production. Rodney (1972: 48) points out that; "in the centuries before the imposition of colonial rule, the dominant agricultural activity was food crop production" The colonial interest in cash crops stemmed from the serious need to keep the British and European industries running. Some of the cash crops especially palm oil and allied products were the major primary commodities that featured prominently in the Igbo-Anglo commercial relations, and this necessitated the European penetration of the Igbo hinterland and subsequent British military escapade in the early 20th century. It must therefore be pointed out that the economic exploitation of the resources of the Igbo hinterland was the prime *raison d'être* of colonialism.

It must be noted that the colonial government did not make appreciable effort to modernize the traditional system of agriculture in Mbaise because their view was that the peasant farmers were backward, unchanging, conservative; and was fearful of abandoning the methods of their forefathers (Philip, 1981:503). Recent studies in agricultural history have shown that African farmers are never unchangeable, stagnant and unthinking traditionalists. They were usually willing to change, and even anxious to change in so far as the incentives and appropriate methods and techniques were made available by the colonial masters, who had hitherto claimed to have modernized Africa. The most convincing evidence as to the superficiality of the much talked about colonialism being responsible for the "modernization" Africa is the fact that the vast majority of Africa went into colonialism with a hoe and came out with a hoe (Rodney, 239).

Another important element of change that affected agriculture during the colonial era was in the area of land holding or land tenure system. Firstly, land was revalued and this brought about an enhanced sense of value and the economic resources therein. Afigbo, (1981:335) had argued that:

By introducing the idea of deliberately experimenting with the plantation of new cash crops for instance, cocoa, the colonial regime created among the Igbo the new desire to acquire land on free hold terms. Hitherto, all land, whether family or community owned, could not be alienated in perpetuity from the unit in question.

In Mbaise, a crucial factor that gave land enhanced economic value was the huge population which created an unprecedented pressure on the available land in the area. With the activities of land speculators, land gradually became a commodity that could be offered for sale to individuals which would then confer on such person freehold titles. Today, the outright alienation of land by either gift or sale has become a common feature not only in Mbaise but also in the whole of Igbo land (Nwabueze, 1980).

As in other communities in Igboland, Mbaise land witnessed the influence of new and exotic crops following the advent of colonialism. Exotic crops such as cassava, potatoes, plantain, pineapples and oranges appeared in the area as a result of European intrusion. Amadi (2000:1-7) has however, argued that "without colonial influence, these crops would still have found their way into Igbo land". He further argued in this direction that the spread of food crops from one area to another is a common phenomenon in human history and does not

require colonization or sale of human beings. After all, Europeans were not enslaved by the American - Indians from whom they adopted potatoes and other crops. One would therefore add that the spread and recognition of these crops were virtually due to the social and economic exigencies of the 20th century. Whatever is the case, the fact still remains that the introduction and development of these crops no doubt, had far-reaching consequences on the domestic agricultural economy of Mbaise in the late 20th century.

One of the most significant changes brought into agriculture in the 20th century was the introduction of a special scheme for the training of agricultural assistants in Umuahia and Ibadan in the 1940s and 1950s. This eventually brought about the popularization of the teaching of agricultural science in schools. The agricultural assistants training programme followed the establishment of the Department of Agriculture by the colonial government in 1910 (Agwu, 1998:133). The training focused mainly on the production of cash crops especially palm produce. The impact of this scheme was seen in the expansion of palm plantations not only in Mbaise but also in other areas in Southeastern Nigeria. No doubt, this development attracted the participation of so many people who had already been empowered from the skills acquired through the training offered by the agricultural extension personnel to the palm oil and related businesses.

It could be argued at this point that almost all the innovations in the oil palm sector of the Igbo agricultural economy were made possible by colonial government through their agents and firms. For instance, in 1928, Agricultural Department began to encourage local farmers to replace existing groves with small palm plots, with a view to introducing a high yielding strain of palm and adopting more up-to-date methods of cultivation and maintenance. Abia (1998:173) has argued that this task was never easy firstly due to the African's resistance to spend time and money on cultivating palms, the returns on which is differed for some years, whereas the wild palms can be cropped for nothing; and secondly, due to the paralyzing impacts of land tenure laws and customs.

Another important effort by the colonial regime towards the improvement of the oil palm industry was in the area of loan scheme for interested producers. In 1929, for instance, under the scheme, the amount to be granted to anyone individual farmer was £20. But before it was granted, applicant would show proof of title to the land which he proposed to "plant up". Though, the loan repayment with its accruable interest, commenced as soon as the young palms begin to bear fruits possibly, in their third or fourth year. However, most of the men who

embarked on palm plots were at one time, wealthy men to whom small loans on the lines suggested, would not be of much use. Furthermore, there was the fear that any person who accepted financial assistance was being bribed to allow the government to control and eventually to possess his palm trees (Abia, 172-175).

The establishment of Produce Inspection Department by the colonial government was another innovative change introduced into agriculture and produce trade. In a more significant way, this innovation helped in no small measure to depress the economy of local farmers and traders. In Mbaïse, for example, many palm produce farmers and traders gave up the production and trading on this crucial cash crop and eventually turned their attention to food crop production, especially yam and cocoyam. This among other reasons undermined the various innovations introduced by the colonial regime.

Finally, it must be noted that the oil palm industry helped in subverting the authority of the local chiefs and eventually resulted in the imposition of colonial rule. For instance, during the period of the slave trade, it was reported that the Europeans spent a relatively short period on the coast of Africa. In this regard, it was difficult for them to intervene unnecessarily in the political activities of the people. But the trade in palm oil witnessed an unprecedented intervention in the local politics by the Europeans (Mbakwe, 2009:7-10). This was because unlike slave, palm oil was more or less a seasonal commodity. Where the Europeans arrived before or after the season, they had to wait for the next season; the more they stayed in the region, the more they were drawn into local politics. Therefore, the authority of the local chiefs became greatly subverted.

Summary and concluding remarks

In spite of its long history and the importance attached to it, the Igbo agricultural production continued to be categorized as subsistence. The small-holding system of farming, the use of family labour to work in the farms, the use of little capital, simple tools and farm implements, and more importantly, the long established methods of production have not undergone any significant changes. As far as farm techniques are concerned, nothing much changed in Mbaïse within the period of study just like in many areas in Igbo land. The people still engaged in subsistence agriculture as the hoe and matchet, which constituted the basic farm implements and the household, an important unit of farm labour remained the major elements in the production process in the period of our study.

The pre-colonial agricultural economy of Mbaïse might have been underdeveloped but was nevertheless, not lacking in dynamism. The economy was basically dependent upon the efforts of peasant farmers and craftsmen who were ready to embrace innovations and effect relevant changes where and when necessary. The intruding colonial regime, whose intent was the exploitation of the hinterland economy, did not do much to modernize the Igbo and of course, the Mbaïse agricultural sector. It rather channeled available resources, incentives and techniques towards large-scale production of cash crops with the aim of exporting same to promote the metropolitan industries in Britain and other parts of Western Europe.

It has to be stressed that the advent of "Mbaïse agricultural economy" was characterized by an increased awareness on the importance of land as a factor of production. This period also witnessed a marginal improvement in the system and techniques of food and cash crop production. These were made possible by the increased knowledge of iron works which made crop cultivation easier not only in Mbaïse but the whole of Igbo land.

Even though Mbaïse agriculture is still based on the use of simple tools such as hoe and matchet, this is not to say however, that the traditional Mbaïse economy did not undergo significant transformation as a result of colonial influences. However, the drudgery which accompanied the use of these simple agricultural implements, in addition to the poor returns from farming discouraged young people from embracing agriculture and related investments. This no doubt, constitutes the bane as well as impediment to the development of agriculture and economy not only in Mbaïse but the entire Igbo land. More importantly, the Igbo and indeed Nigeria had an agricultural economy but now depended almost entirely on the production of petroleum and importation food to feed its teeming population.

Conflict of Interests

The author has not declared any conflict of interests.

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