

Colonial Infrastructural Investments in Oyo North, Southwestern Nigeria, 1929 – 1956

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Abstract

British colonial rule in Nigeria began in 1900 when the Southern Nigeria protectorate and Northern Nigeria protectorate passed from Royal Niger Company to the British Crown. By 1916 it had spread to Oyo North. The Okeho – Iseyin Rising of 1916 which typified an indigenous protest against colonialism in Africa attested to the presence of colonial rule in the agrarian border region of Oyo North since around 1916. Provision of basic infrastructural amenities like road networks, hospital facilities, wells/bore-holes, electricity, were important variables of colonial enterprise, most especially in Oyo North, Southwestern Nigeria. Between 1929 and 1956 aggressive policy of infrastructural investment was pursued by the British colonial government in Oyo North, connecting the region to the capitalist world, but only to appropriate the resources of the region to the advantage of the European World. The colonial past thus became the problem of the region's post-colonial present. It then became evident that economic purpose of foreign direct investment, more than serving the interest of the targeted or host community, was often intended to satisfy the private interest of the investor. This study, using historical methodology, examines colonial system of infrastructural investments. It also analyses the philosophical underpinning of the colonial infrastructural investments in Oyo North. Data are sourced from both primary sources such as National Archives Ibadan and Secondary sources, which include books and journal articles as well as internet source materials. The work suggests *inter alia* that provision of infrastructures should be done towards community development.

Key Words: Colonial, Foreign Direct Investment, Infrastructural amenities, Oyo North, Southwestern Nigeria.

Introduction

Infrastructure is a key to development.¹ Provision of infrastructure is desideratum to the future growth and development of any society. It is a distinguishing feature that is supposed to attract attention. However, contrary is the case in scholarly attention on the border region of Oyo North, Southwestern Nigeria. There is almost total absence of literature or scholarly work on colonial infrastructural investments in Oyo North border region despite great colonial efforts on the provision of basic amenities to appropriate the resources of the area for the development of the European world and for the purpose of the colonial interest. It was not because there were no colonial records and evidence to establish huge colonial infrastructural intervention in Oyo North, perhaps scholars on Yoruba history are not all that interested in this aspect because the region concerned was very far from the centre and perhaps it has been an underrated agrarian society which has been erroneously conceived as insignificant in the process of national economic development.

However, it suffices to state that the Oyo North, according to available evidence appeared to constitute a very historic important economic region for the thriving of colonial rule in Nigeria and the successes of western global projects. It is important to however state that this study is conceived not so much as an attempt at making any significant original contribution to historical epistemology of the region, but as a critical review and synthesis of some of the most outstanding contributions recorded in the past and as a pointer to the enormous gaps in the present knowledge, which can then be filled by the result of more systematic and comprehensive archival research.

It is also the intention of this work to highlight, on the basis of available evidence,

the remarkable economic importance of the region of Oyo North as being exploited under colonial rule. In broader context of the colonial history of Nigeria therefore the study of the colonial economic activities is vital for the modern day government towards embarking on holistic approach in the process of national economic development. It would also help in appreciating the relevance of agrarian societies in sustainable national economic integration. It sufficed to point out that this study is situated within the matrix of the colonial historical events experienced by the Oyo North during the colonial rule in Nigeria.

Colonial rule is conventionally defined as a tool of executing the expansionist foreign policy orientation of the strong against the sociological weaker societies by the strong and for the sole benefits of the strong. It is an epochal enterprise whose echo would continue to reverberate in Africa historical scholarship. This is because it actually formed an important element of state formation in the modern African society. Given the above, it is instructive to state that post-colonial African citizenship and state formation, including Oyo North, owed much of their histories to colonial rule.

Geography and Administrative Division of Oyo North Region

The geographical landscape of Oyo North in pre-colonial times belonged to the western province (Ekun Otun) and partly Eastern province (Ekun Osi) administrative arrangements of the famous old Oyo Empire. By the 16th century, the whole of Oyo homeland was conceived as comprising four provinces namely Ekun Otun, Ekun Osi, Ibolo and the Epo provinces. These four provinces constituted the metropolitan heart of the Empire of Oyo.²

During colonial rule, Nigeria was arranged into three principal administrative units namely Eastern, Northern and Western Provinces. Oyo North was part of the Western provincial colonial arrangement, This Western province was, according to colonial

administrative schedule, made up of five provinces, which were in turn sub-divided into eighteen divisions. A Division comprised Districts. Oyo Province was the largest among the Western Province. In the process of further devolution of powers, Oyo Province was sub-divided into three Divisions: Ibadan, Ife/Ilesa and Oyo. There were seven District Councils under Oyo Division. These included: Oyo, Iseyin, Okeho, Iganna, Ikoyi, Saki and Kisi. But in 1966 the Western Region Government carried out a reorganization of its councils by which process Oyo Division was split into Oyo North Division comprising Saki District Council, Irepo District Council and Okeho/Iganna District Council.³ In contemporary times, Oyo North Division is made up of ten local government councils namely Atisbo, Irepo, Iseyin, Itesiwaju, Iwajowa, Kajola, Olorunsogo, Oorelope, Saki East and Saki West. The Map below shows the current location of Oyo North and its ten local government areas:

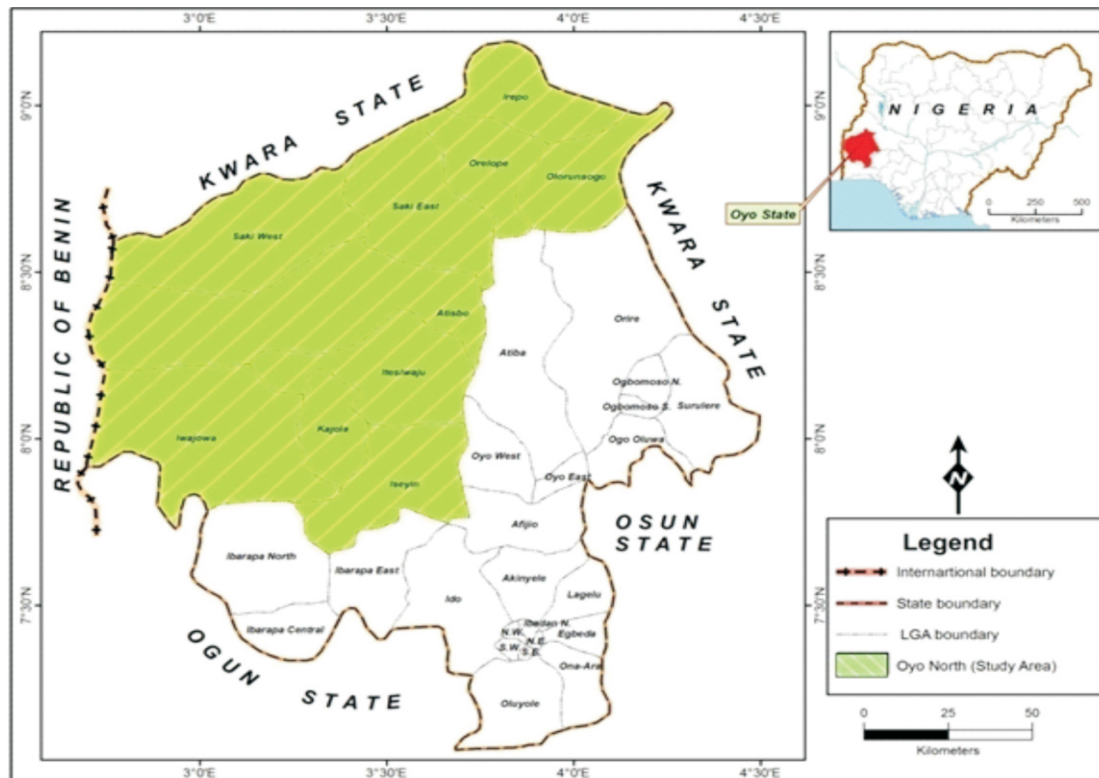


Figure 1: Map of Oyo State showing Oyo North Region

Source: Department of Geography, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

Advent of Colonial Rule in Oyo North

The Yoruba civil war of the 19th century facilitated the penetration of colonial rule in Yorubaland. As the 19th century drew to a close, the hope of resolving the Yoruba internecine war, which had started in the early part of the 18th century dwindled. Against this background of serious and debilitating civil war, Abraham Fasina, a C.M.S. agent based in Iseyin, advised Alaafin Adeyemi I in 1881, to avail himself of the close relationship that existed between the Christian missionaries and agents of the British Government.⁴ Led by missionaries of Yoruba origin – Reverend Daniel Olubi Mr. (later Reverend) Samuel Johnson, the Alaafin sent his letter of appeal on October 15, 1881 to Lieutenant – Governor W.B. Griffiths in Lagos to come to his assistance with regard to the weakening Dahomean raids as well as the ruinous Yoruba civil wars.⁵

The British imperialist, who were desirous of peaceful atmosphere in their areas of commercial operations, in 1893 took advantage of the ending of Ekiti-Parapo war

of 1877 – 1893 and earlier Alaafin invitation, to bring the Yoruba hinterland under their political influence. A treaty was, therefore, signed with the Alaafin in 1893. Thus, according to the terms of the treaty the Yoruba hinterland came under the British 'protectorate.' Hence, British colonial rule began with appointment of Captain R. L. Bower, as Resident of Ibadan and political officer in charge of hinterland of Lagos colony.

By 1916 the colonial rule had spread to Oyo North when colonial government in order to entrench the colonial rule effected reorganization of the native socio-political system in Iseyin and Okeho. These changes reflected in the centralization of the socio-political system of the region.⁶

Colonial Infrastructural Investments in Oyo North

Road Infrastructure

Road infrastructure constituted an important variable for driving colonial economic practice, but late provision of road

networks in Oyo North slowed down the pace of colonial economic exploitation in the region. Up to the early part of the year 1929 the communities in the region of Oyo North were not connected with one another and neighbouring communities by motorized roads. This had greatly hindered colonial rule, work of evangelism and trading activities. Consequently the colonial economic control of the region was seriously hampered. By May 1929 the colonial officers in charge of the Oyo North began a serious effort at constructing road networks to facilitate colonial missions in the region. This became noticeable in the memorandum sent by the Senior Resident of Oyo Province to the District Officer, Oyo. Part of the Memorandum reads:

I am anxious that a road be built from Okeho to Iganna and from Iganna to Iwere.... I should like to see a road built from Otu to Komu....⁷

Okeho, Iganna, Iwere, Otu and Komu were important communities in Oyo North. They were very strategic for intra-regional trade and trade across the international border in the region.

By June 1929 plan had been spelt out by the colonial administration to construct road from Oyo to Wasinmi, Dahomey frontier.⁸ This marked the beginning of serious colonial road infrastructural investment in Oyo North. By July 1929 approval was given for the construction of Okeho – Iganna and Ilero – Iganna roads. In June 1939, the road from Iganna to Iwere was under construction. In the same year the following roads were proposed for construction by the colonial Native Authority:

- I. Shakito Ilesha (Borgu Division)
- ii. Ikoyi to Igbeti
- iii. Saki to Irawo
- iv. Ofiki to Agunrege
- v. Otu to Igbojaye and Komu⁹

The road from Iganna to Iwere, which was under construction, was to provide access to the villages of Iwere, old and new Idiko,

Ijio, Aiyetoro, Ilaji and Itasa which had a total taxable male population of 1570.¹⁰ The proposed road from Saki to Ilesha Ibariba was one of the main routes to the Northern part of Nigeria and was extensively used for foot traffic at the time. It was a road that was to benefit Shaki and trade generally in the West of Oyo Division. By January, 1941 Iganna – Iwere road formation had been completed. However, the Shaki – Ilesha, Ikoyi – Igbeti, Shaki – Irawo, Ofiki – Igbojaye and Komu roads were indefinitely postponed.¹¹ The suspension of these roads might be connected to lack of funds or that they are considered as strategically dangerous, constituting a military danger.¹²

In March 1945 recommendation and approval was made by the Resident, and the District Officer of Oyo Province respectively on the feeder roads in Oyo Division. These feeder roads included: (I.) Okeiho – Adoawaye road, (ii.) Agunrege – Ofiki – Irawo road, (iii.) Otu – Komu road.¹³ In September of the same year construction of the Shaki – Ilesha road was approved by the British colonial government of which 500 pounds was made available to that effect.¹⁴ Also a decision was reached by the colonial government that financial assistance should be given from colonial development funds for the Ikoyi – Igbetti. The sum of 2000 pounds was therefore released to execute project.¹⁵

In 1945, for administrative convenience, and proper financial maintenance of these roads, process of roads classification into Trunks A, B and C was perfected, such that Trunk A, B and C roads were classified under Provincial, Regional/ Divisional and Native Administrations respectively.¹⁶

However, in 1950 amendment was proposed relative to the purpose to which these roads, particularly Trunks A and B roads, were to serve. This was contained in a letter from the Secretary of Western Province to Residents of Benin, Warri, Ondo, Oyo, Ijebu and Abeokuta. It stated as amended that:

Trunk Roads A, were to serve the purpose of providing inter – regional communication between the central and Regional capitals

and other large towns and to also provide international links with important centres in neighbouring territories.¹⁷

Also Trunk B roads, according to the letter, were the roads:

connecting provincial or divisional capitals and other large towns or important areas of population or trade, with the skeleton Trunk road system, or with one another or with a point of convenient station on the railway...¹⁸

Electricity Supply

The British colonial infrastructural investment was also directed at provision of electricity in the agrarian border region of Oyo North. The region in 1949, featured prominently in British colonial development plan.¹⁹ The interest in the provision of electricity was basically hinged on the availability of wood fuel in quantity sufficient for a large power station. According to the colonial government

economic supplies of wood fuel for small plants at the various centres of population would entail plantations.... It would have the important advantage that the cost of the fuel (mainly labour) would be related to conditions within the consumer area.²⁰

The above was true of the Oyo Division to which Oyo North belonged during the colonial times. The power station was proposed and approved to be sited in Iseyin, outside the Upper Ogun Native Authority Reserve.²¹

Water Supply

In 1952, the attention of the colonial administration was also directed at rural water supply.²² This perhaps was necessitated by the importance of water to farm projects which the colonial government had embarked upon since 1939.²³ A dam was dug, each in Saki,

Igboho and Aha communities.²⁴ In the same 1952 money was made available by the government for the construction of a concrete apron around the existing water supply. In continuation of the project of water supply, fifty-seven (57) new wells were proposed for various Oyo North communities in 1952 in addition to the already existing twenty (20), which needed to be deepened.²⁵ The table below shows the list of the various communities for colonial rural water supply in 1952:

S/N	PLACE	NEW WELLS REQUIRED	EXISTING WELLS TO BE DEPEENED
1	Okeiho	3	2
2	Iganna	3	3
3	Ilero	4	3
4	Out	4	
5	Okaka	4	
6	Ijio	2	
7	Iwere	3	
8	Ago-Are	2	2
9	Aha	2	2
10	Saki	3	
11	Irawo	3	
12	Ogboro	2	
13	Okeamu	3	
14	Komu	3	
15	Adoawaye	4	
16	Kishi	4	
17	Igbope	3	4
18	Igbeti	4	4

Source: NAI Oyo Prof3, 1434, 1952.

Funding the Projects: A Financial Analysis

The funds committed into the execution of the infrastructural projects portrayed the seriousness of the colonial government's economic exploitation of the region. The sum of 500 pounds was released up front for the construction of Shaki – Ilesha Ibariba (Ilorin) road. Also 2000 pounds was approved for Ikoyi – Igbeti road. Meanwhile, 6000 pounds was allocated for the road in the then current

Oyo Native Administration Estimates. Moreso, 10,000 pounds was approved as government grant for the construction of Shaki – Ilesha – Yashikera – Chikanda Nikki road. In 1955, 2,180 pounds was released for the construction of Ilero – Komu road.²⁶

For instance, the amount estimated to be spent on the provision of three (3) new wells in Okeho was 95 pounds, while 105 pounds was estimated for three (3) new wells in Iganna.²⁷

For the construction of a concrete apron around the water supply in Sepeteri, the cost was £47 and was also funded by the colonial government.²⁸ The funding of these infrastructures was premised on their economic importance. The monies were drawn variously from different colonial accounts such as Colonial Community Development and Welfare Accounts.

Philosophy of the Colonial Infrastructural Investments in Oyo North

Colonial activities in Nigeria, particularly in Oyo North, were highly influenced by the then global occurrences. Two important global events namely Great Depression of 1930s and World War II, which happened between 1939 and 1945, were important global happenings that provided impetus for colonial activities in Nigeria and impacted tremendously on infrastructural investments in Oyo North between 1929 and 1956.

The 1929 collapse of the Wall Street Stock market in New York commenced the plunge into the Great Economic Depression which, seriously ravaged countries of the World.²⁹ The Depression worsened the post-World War I economic situation of many European countries, production declined not only throughout the industrial world, but the economic meltdown also severely affected agriculture. There was serious shortage of food supply to Europe. Countries such as Argentina, Brazil and Cuba or Australia and New – Zealand whose economies were dependent on their export of food and raw material to the industrial nations were seriously devastated by the Great Depression. Furthermore, the World War II was another event that impacted colonial aggressive policy of infrastructural investments in Oyo North. Though the war ended the Great Depression, but the economic crisis created by the Depression dove-tailed into the period of World War II. There was particularly problem of shortage of food supply, which hampered adequate feeding of her soldiers at the battle front. The armies must be well-fed if the war was to be effectively managed.

To respond to this situation, Great Britain, which was the colonial master in the region of

Oyo North had to invest in agriculture for the purpose of meeting her food requirements as orchestrated by these global happenings. According to a memorandum of October 26, 1939, written by the Director of Agriculture (Central Government), Mr. J. R. Markie, to all provinces in Nigeria, where the Director stated that “it is his job to see that the British public is supplied with an adequate quantity of food at the cheapest possible price”.³⁰ The Oyo North area did not disappoint this colonial ambition and desire to get cheap food supply. Also, the memo stated the duties of the Agricultural Department in war time were that “it should be ready to help the imperial government by the production of such crops as it may ask for.”³¹ Indeed, agriculture was considered as the ‘life- blood’ of the colonial territories.

Consequently, the British colonial government exploited the opportunity provided by the suitability of the Oyo North for that purpose, embarked on several farm projects in the region. Demonstration, trial and unit farms as well as nurseries were established in various communities of Oyo North, Southwestern Nigeria, where food crops like rice were cultivated. Therefore to facilitate the cultivation of the crops, water was needed, hence the digging of wells and construction of dams. Also, to facilitate the movement of the crops from the hinterland to the convenient points for onward transportation to the final destinations, construction of roads became imperative.

Conclusion

It is safe to conclude in the light of the fore-going that the British came with a new concept of governance which involved financial commitment towards formulating policies and executing projects with envisaged appreciable economic benefits. This was unlike the African traditional method of communal engagements in undertaking projects. In concluding this piece, it could be argued that colonialism was a major aspect of Nigerian history. It had its contributions to the present day socio-economic practices of the regions that had

direct contact with the reality of the colonial economic practices. It could generally be argued, taken a cue from the fact of African history, that colonialism ravaged and disarticulated the economies and demobilized the indigenous development process to lay a very strong foundation for contemporary developmental challenges of the African society. Hence, the societies particularly the agrarian regions became seriously backward and not seriously reckoned with in the process of national economic development. Oyo North in the contemporary age, despite its great contributions towards sustaining economic viability of colonial rule, typified a backward agrarian economic region of a developing economy. The complex colonial past has thus left the border region with complex contemporary socio-economic irregularities like smuggling activities which seriously cause national economic sabotage.

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