

The Shift from Subsistence Economy to Cash Crop Economy in the Gold Coast 1870 – 1920

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المخلص

أواخر القرن التاسع عشر وأوائل القرن العشرين جلبت تغييرات جذرية في اقتصادات المستعمرات البريطانية بإفريقيا، و ساحل الذهب لم تكن استثناءً. ولقد أدى تحول المزارعين المحليين إلى إنتاج المحاصيل النقدية و التخلي عن إنتاج المحاصيل الغذائية إلى انعكاسات سلبية على الاكتفاء الذاتي الغذائي للسكان المحليين. سنحاول من خلال المقال معرفة الأسباب التي أدت إلى تحول اقتصاد ساحل الذهب إلى اقتصاد نقدي وحيد المنتج وتحديد درجة المسؤولية عن الوضع الجديد لكل من المتعاملين الأربعة في القطاع الزراعي وأعني بذلك المزارعين المحليين، البعثات التبشيرية، التجار الأوروبيين و الحكومة الاستعمارية البريطانية على المستويين المحلي والمركزي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ساحل الذهب، المحاصيل النقدية، الاكتفاء الذاتي

الغذائي، التبعية، المركز والمحيط، السياسة الاستعمارية، بريطانيا

Abstract

The late nineteenth century and the early twentieth brought radical changes to the African economies, and the former British colony of the Gold Coast was no exception. The shift of the local farmers to the production of cash crops resulted in an abandonment of the production of food crops, which had a serious impact on food self-sufficiency of the local people. This research attempts to find out the reasons which transformed the Gold Coast from a food exporter to a food importer, and to determine the degree of responsibility for the new situation of the local farmers, the missionaries, the expatriate firms, and the colonial government at both the local and metropolitan levels.

Keywords: subsistence economy, cash crop economy, the Gold Coast, local farmers, expatriate firms, missionaries, colonial government

Introduction

The Africans had been achieving food self-sufficiency under subsistence economy until the establishment of cash crop economy, and the Gold Coast which is the chief concern of this research work was no exception. Records and written sources such as '*Africans and Europeans in West Africa*' by Harvey Feinberg show that before the arrival of the Europeans in Africa, the African states, and kingdoms had no contacts with the outside world, so they depended on themselves to provide food, and sometimes on their neighbours through commercial relationships. The only contacts of the states and kingdoms in sub-Saharan Africa with the rest of the world were with North Africa through trans-Saharan trade, and the main imported commodities did not include food. The same sources confirm that the Gold Coasters used to sell the surplus of food, mainly cereals to Europeans on board the ships on the coast to feed the slaves during their journey to the Americas.

This situation began to change as a consequence of the abolition of slave trade and the British attempts to integrate the economy of the colony in the economy of the Empire. Then, by the late nineteenth century, the Gold Coast began to lose its food self-sufficiency relying gradually on imported food provided by the Europeans. This dependency grew bigger during the first two decades of colonial rule until the colony became almost entirely dependent on imported food. This situation persisted in the whole colonial period, and even in the post-colonial period in spite of several attempts to promote the production of food crops to reduce dependency on foreign markets.

Geography Climate and Physical Features

The Gold Coast covers about 237,873 square km, divided into the northern territories, the Ashanti land and the southern territories. The central parts of the colony are known as the Volta Basin. The coastline is mostly a low, sandy shore backed by plains crossed by several rivers and streams (See Map 1). Its topography is characterised by low physical relief except in the east. More precisely, there are five distinct geographical regions: low plains inland from the Atlantic coast; northern plateau stretching from the western border to the Volta River Basin averaging 450 metres in height; mountainous uplands along the eastern border; bisected in the south by Volta River Gorge; the Volta River Basin in the centre; and dissected plateau up to 300 metres high in the north. The streams and rivers that flow northward crossing the tropical rain forest belt provide good conditions for growing a large variety of crops.

The climate in the Gold Coast is tropical, the eastern coastal belt is warm and relatively dry, the western region, hot and humid; and the north hot and dry. For a tropical country the rainfall is not high, in the eastern coastal belt it is only about fifty centimetres a year; it reaches one hundred and twenty to one hundred and ninety centimetres in the forest and about one hundred and fifteen centimetres in the open country. There are two rainy seasons: the greater rains, from April to August; and the second rains, from December to March. The average rainfall in the southern region was about 200 centimetres. Generally, the total rainfall and length of the wet season diminish as we move northward from the coast and the reliability on rain in irrigation decreases. At the beginning and the end of the rainy seasons, strong winds are common and sometimes do much damage by blowing down trees. The physical features of its geography made it a farming area, which attracted people to settle therein.¹

¹ - R. Miller, *Africa*, (Aylesbury Bucks : Hazell Watson & Winey Ltd., 1967), 140.

Map1: Physical Regions in the Gold Coast

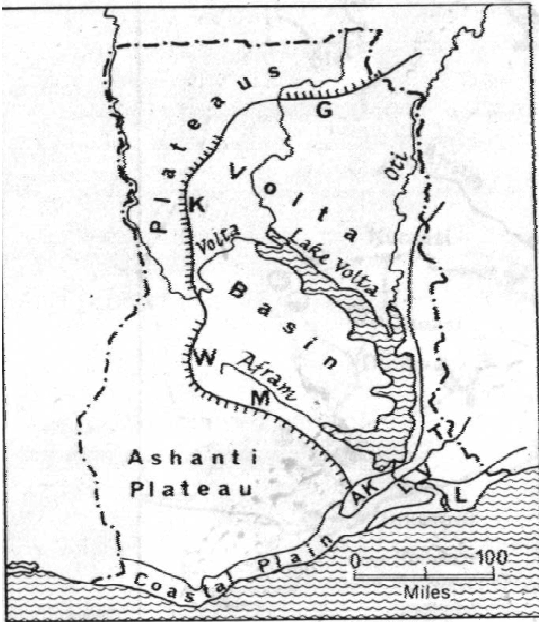


FIG. 89. — Ghana. Physical regions. Scarps:
 G = Gambaga;
 K = Konkori;
 W = Wenchi;
 M = Mampong.
 Other features:
 AK = Akwapim Hills;
 T = Togoland Mountains;
 LV = Lower Volta Plains;
 L = Lagoon and swamp coast.

Source: H. R. Jarrett, *Africa*, (London: MacDonald & Evans Ltd., 1970), 282.

It is important to note that the subsistence economy which had existed in the Gold Coast before the arrival of the Europeans could satisfy not only the needs of the local people but also the Europeans' demands for food in the trading posts along the coast. Feinberg says: "Company officials bought grains, animals and other foods from Gold Coast Africans for the company ships which traded along the west coast of Africa."¹

The expansion of food farming and the development of an export trade in agricultural commodities (maize, coffee and cotton) was a foremost concern among a number of Accra merchants. Between 1818

¹ - Harvey M. Feinberg, *Africans and Europeans in West Africa*, Vol.79, Part 7, (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society 1989), 17.

and 1822 several merchants of 'British' and 'Dutch' Accra encouraged the establishment of 'Indian corn' plantations to produce for export markets. In these years, several of these merchants exported a total of 150,000 bushels of maize to Madeira and the West Indies. In 1823 a large maize plantation was laid out at Frederiksborg, and already by 1824 American and British ships purchased the first maize harvest at Christianborg, and transported the produce to Madeira and the Caribbean.¹

It can be argued so far that, thanks to a subsistence economy, the people of the Gold Coast, used to be self-sufficient in their needs in food. Furthermore, they used to sell the surplus of their produce to the Dutch and English in the trading posts along the coast to feed their cargoes of slaves. In the context, Kea says that during the early nineteenth century, the Gold Coast exported a total of 150,000 bushels of maize to Madeira and the West Indies.² However, this system of production was to undergo some change in the direction of the export economy.

Context of change

Throughout the three centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it is estimated that about 20 million Africans were uprooted from their homes and taken to the Americas. Curtin and Fage estimated the number of slaves who landed in the Americas at 9,300,000 and 11 million respectively.³ This important human flow in the history of Africa, in general, and of West Africa in particular, affected labour and had a serious impact on the local subsistence economy. In front of this situation, marked by a frightening rate of slaves transported from Africa to the Americas, the British decided to prohibit this activity through the Abolition Act of 1807. The latter generated divergent reactions and interpretations; in the official discourse, the British declared that the Act was adopted for humanitarian and philanthropic reasons. Other scholars and politicians gave it an economic

¹ - Ray A. Kea, "Plantation and labour in the south-east Gold Coast from the late eighteenth to the mid nineteenth century, From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce," in *African Studies*, ed. Robin Law, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 131.

² - Kea, op. cit., p. 131

³ - J. D. Fage, *A History of West Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 82.

interpretation. Brigadier de Cunha Matos, Deputy of Nina Gereas, for instance, had demonstrated to the Brazilian Chamber of Representatives in a series of debates that the British government intended to build a commercial monopoly behind humanitarian and philanthropic considerations.¹ In the same context, Boahen wrote: "The British industrialists who needed raw materials and markets contented that instead of enslaving and exporting the African, he should rather be encouraged to produce more raw materials and consume manufactured goods at home."² T. R. Batten confirms the Boahen's view about the British intentions on the abolition of slave trade. He argues: "Industrial countries not only needed customers for their manufactured goods, they also needed many raw materials for their factories and also foodstuffs for their peoples."³

By the second half of the eighteenth century, Britain witnessed the birth of the Industrial Revolution which made the demand for raw materials in a steady increase. The British thought that it would be more profitable to stop the slave trade, and keep the Africans working on farms and in mines at home to supply agricultural and mineral products needed by the metropolitan economy. Thus, the British were compelled to take such a measure to secure a regular supply of raw materials from their colonies in Africa. Furthermore, they were forced to press the other European nations to do the same; otherwise their colonies would become uncompetitive. Hence, in such circumstances, the abolition of the slave trade was an unavoidable measure. However, it is unfair to neglect the role the philanthropist groups led by Granville Sharp, Philip Quaque, William Wilberforce, and Thomas Buxton, who led an active anti-slavery campaign which resulted in the Abolition Act in 1807.⁴ It is believed that the anti-slavery campaigns influenced, to a large extent, the public opinion in Britain to exert more pressure on the British government.

¹ - J. Forbes Monro, *Africa and the International Economy 1800 – 1960*, (London : Aldine House, 1976), 42.

² - AduBoahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (London: Longman, 1975), 89.

³ - T. R. Batten, *Tropical Africa in World History*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 83.

⁴ - Godfrey N. Brown, *An Active History of Ghana*, Vol. 1 From the Earliest Times to 1844, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1961), 72.

The abolition of slave trade left an economic vacuum, which was gradually filled by the promotion of agriculture. Foreign entrepreneurs with the help of missionaries introduced new technologies into the means of production to improve and increase productivity. They gradually carried off with the existing subsistence economy and involved local farmers in the production of cash crops. For instance, during the second decade of the nineteenth century, the Danes tried to establish an agricultural export enterprise to produce maize, coffee and cotton.¹

The measures adopted to fill this vacuum brought radical changes in the economy of the Gold Coast. The years that followed the abolition witnessed the development of legitimate trade, that is, cotton, palm oil and kernel, groundnuts, timber, rubber, and coconuts. During the nineteenth century, the missions worked hard to promote agricultural products in the Gold Coast. They encouraged farmers to produce crops for export to replace the export of slaves. The Basel Mission, for instance, introduced cocoa into the Gold Coast in 1857,² it also encouraged the plantation of palm oil and cotton. Similarly, the European merchants tried to adapt the crops to be promoted to the needs of the metropolitan markets. For instance, the wide use of machines and the expansion of the railway mileage in the world made the demand for oil greater. At first, the main source of oil was whales, but as the demand for raw materials and cash crops had been growing hand in hand with the expansion of industry and railways, it became necessary to look for other alternatives.³

In short, the ultimate objective of the Europeans, regardless of their origin, status or position was the establishment of an agricultural sector that fit the international markets' needs; in other words, a flexible agricultural system able to shift from a crop to another according to the world market's demands. This flexibility is dealt with within the context of the advent of the Industrial Revolution and the rise of new economic and political concepts, such as capitalism and imperialism which had a deep impact on the economies of the colonies. The introduction of capitalism brought changes to the factors of production, particularly on land tenure. The latter witnessed

¹ - Kea, op., cit., 131.

² - Boahen, op. cit., 82.

³ - Batten, op.cit., 84.

important changes after the shift of authority from traditional chiefs to the colonial administration after the establishment of colonial rule. It is worth noting that the changes brought by the different land bills in the late 19th century triggered intense reactions and protests amongst the local people, mainly the elite organised under the Aborigine Rights Protection Society.

The new economic structure of the Gold Coast was the outcome of a number of factors which contributed, at different extents, to transform the traditional economy, based on providing food to a capitalist economy positioned at the periphery of the world economy, whose main role was to supply cash crops to the economies of the centre. It is important to mention that the intervention of the colonial government was limited to land tenure and to supervising concessions because the British adopted a state non-intervention policy based on the *laissez-faire* economic principles. This does not mean that they did not promote and encourage the production of cash crops, particularly during the rule of Governor Guggisberg. In the following paragraphs we examine the role and attitude of the different agents involved in the agricultural sector; the local farmers, missionaries, foreign entrepreneurs and expatriate firms, and the colonial government to determine the degree of responsibility of each for the establishment of the new economic structure, which transformed the economy of the colony from a subsistence economy based on food production to a cash crop economy based on export production.

1. The Attitude of the Local Farmers

The transition from the cultivation of food crops to the cultivation of cash crops took place over a period of time and through a number of steps in which different cash crops were produced following the changing demands of the external markets. This transition from an economy based partially, as mentioned by the British anthropologist Daryll Ford, on collecting crops to cultivating land was a direct consequence of the abolition of slave trade. Consequently, local traders, whose income relied on the slave trade, got involved in export produce which was demanded by European merchants who themselves found trading in cash crops a lucrative economic activity after the abolition of slave trade. The number of farmers who were dependent on the international market was gradually increasing

throughout the early colonial period. This was partly due to the incentive prices suggested for export crops by foreign companies.

It is worth noting that the expansion of cash crops was not due to mechanisation of agriculture because most of the cocoa plantations were controlled by local farmers, who were at the beginning unable to introduce machines because of lack of enough capital and trained labour. They resorted to intensive labour to increase cash crop productions in order to increase their income; however, this measure tightened their dependence on foreign markets. This favourable attitude of the local farmers considerably helped a smooth transition from a subsistence economy to cash crop economy. It can be assumed that the new system would not have succeeded without a favourable attitude on behalf of the local farmers.

By the early 1910s, the Gold Coast witnessed noticeable structural changes in its economy. More and more farmers got involved in the new system of production tightly bound to the world market. The encouraging measures suggested by the European merchants coupled with the technical assistance guaranteed by the missionaries encouraged local farmers to keep pace with the changing needs of metropolitan markets. It can be assumed so far that the foreign entrepreneurs, on the one hand, and missionaries on the other, managed to introduce the seeds of capitalism in African societies. Therefore, local farmers became automatically involved in the new system, but as agents in peripheral economies. The local farmers were not aware of the insidious tactic of the foreign merchants who were tricked by the incentive prices suggested by the European merchants for their cash crops, and attracted by the low prices for imported food. This made locally produced food less competitive and therefore not profitable which led the local farmers to abandon it. In this context, Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins state:

Perhaps the most insidious tactic to ‘lure’ the peasant away from food production _ and the one with profound historical consequences _ was a policy of keeping the price of imported food low through the removal of tariffs and subsidies. The policy was double-edged: first, peasants were told they need not grow food because they could always buy it cheaply with their plantation

wages; second cheap food imports destroyed the market for domestic food and thereby impoverished local food producers.¹

In January 1915, the local newspaper *The Nation* warned that the farmers were showing too much interest in cocoa production to the detriment of local food crops. In an editorial in 1915, “Our Food Production” the same newspaper mentioned: “corn, plantains, palm oil and groundnuts as the staple foods suffering neglect.”² Similarly, *The Leader* noted in 1916 that The cocoa industry has out-paced food production.³ “The same newspaper blaming famine in the Gomoa District of the Central Province on over-reliance on cocoa noted that before the introduction of cocoa, the region used to satisfy its needs in food and to export the surplus to the districts of Accra and Winneba.”⁴

In this respect, Grier confirms that: “In a subsistence village economy, each family or household constituted for the most part, a self-sufficient economic unit, producing and consuming its own food, housing, clothing and tools... even the chief in Ghana cultivated his own food crops.”⁵

After the outbreak of the First World War, the stimulating prices, which dragged numbers of farmers to the productions of cocoa, began to decline. The Gold Coast knew the first cocoa shock where the average annual price of cocoa dropped from £61.5 in 1913 to £46 in 1914 to reach £34.5 in 1917.⁶ The expatriate firms justified the low prices suggested for the peasants by the new charges and high transport commissions in the wartime. Producers reluctantly accepted the prices fixed by the foreign merchants to avoid the damage of their

¹ - Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, “Food First: Beyond the Myth of Scarcity,” *Institute for Food and Development, San Francisco*, (1977), 110

² - Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, “Untold Difficulties: The Indigenous Press and the Economic Effects of the First World War on Africans in the Gold Coast, 1914-1918,” *African Economic History*, No. 34 (2006): 61.

³ *The Leader*, July 3, 1916, quoted in Akurang-Parry, 61.

⁴ - Ibid.

⁵ - Grier Beverly, “Cocoa Marketing in Colonial Ghana: Capitalist Enterprise and the Emergence of a Rural African Bourgeoisie,” *A Journal of African Studies*, 10 (1-2), (1981), 91.

⁶ - Akurang-Parry, op. cit., 56.

crop because of the poor storage conditions. Some peasants felt that they were being cheated by the foreign merchants (British in the majority) in the absence of loyal competition after the exclusion of the German merchants because of the War.¹ In some areas like Abwasi in Ashantiland, Assin and Agona in the Central Province, the local farmers refused to sell their produce at low prices. Moreover, the chief of Agona threatened to fine any farmer who would sell crops to expatriate merchants. This led to the intervention of the local government by instructing the chiefs to force their people to sell their crops to the expatriate merchants.² The situation of the local people worsened after the rise of the imported commodities including food. The local newspaper *The Leader* proclaimed: "The price of imported goods have risen over and above hundred percent, but we feel to see why the people's natural produce should be bought for such a little value."³

2. The Role of Missionaries

The missions contributed to a large extent to the development of cash crops through their technical assistance to the local farmers. They paved the way for the establishment of a cash crop economy in agriculture by the foundation of botanical stations⁴ to create an agricultural sector relying on scientific bases. These botanical stations took in charge the introduction of new technologies in agriculture, the improvement of the quality of seeds, in addition to fighting against eventual diseases which might damage crops and cause a disaster. In this context, Boahen states: "There is no doubt one of the main preoccupations of the missions in Ghana during the nineteenth century was the promotion of agriculture and legitimate trade with a view partly to putting an end to slave trade... and partly to promoting western civilization."⁵

¹ - Ibid.

² - Ibid, 58.

³ - Ibid, 59.

⁴ - The botanical stations or gardens were established by the Basel Mission during the second half of the nineteenth century to promote agriculture in the Gold Coast. The most important of them were the Aburi Gardens specialized in importing cocoa seeds from Sao Tome. Boahen, op. cit., 81-82.

⁵ - Ibid., 82.

The first attempt to promote the production of cash crops began by the 1840s when the missionaries tried to promote the cultivation of cotton and coffee.¹ It is important to note that the British industrial textile sector relied on American cotton within the context of what was known as the Triangular Trade. Yet, the British market suffered from a shortage of cotton because of the American Civil War,² which led the British to look for new suppliers. The British entrepreneurs' attempt to introduce cotton in the Gold Coast failed because of unfavourable climatic conditions. They resumed the Danes' attempts to establish export crops in the Gold Coast which began by the early nineteenth century and tried other cash crops, putting forward the economic interest and the suitability of the geographical and climatic conditions as well as the organic properties of the soil in the colony.

It is worth stressing that the missions encouraged farmers to produce commodities for export to replace the export of slaves. The measures adopted to fill the economic vacuum left by the prohibition of trade in slaves brought radical changes to the economy of the Gold Coast. The years that followed the abolition witnessed the development of legitimate trade, that is, trading in cotton, palm oil and kernel, groundnuts, timber, rubber, and coconuts. The introduction of cocoa beans in the Gold Coast by the Basel Missions in 1857 showed impressive results.³ This cash crop became, within a short time, the lifeblood of the colony's economy. This implied the reformulation of a strategy involving a number of issues, among which land ownership, labour, financial investment and returns, training and markets.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the Basel Mission established a botanical garden in Akropon to promote the cultivation of both food crops and cash crops such as local vegetables, bananas, coffee, tobacco, cotton and sugar cane. Subsequently, legitimate trade involved a wide list of minerals and crops. Actually, the best achievement in this field was that of Rev. Simon Suss who was the

¹- Ibid., 91.

²- The Civil War in America (1861- 5) affected the production of cotton severely. This led the British to look for new suppliers. Peter Duignan and L. H. Gann, *The Pre-Colonial Economies of Sub-Saharan Africa: Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, Vol. 4, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 51. and A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1975), 137.

³- Boahen, op. cit., 82.

first to manufacture palm kernel oil in 1861 and to suggest its export.¹ This encouraged local farmers to grow cash crops as being the main lucrative activity. Consequently, the plantation of palm oil and kernels knew considerable expansion. It was grown on the Pra banks in the western region; and around Kadi and Kibi, in the eastern region; and in the inland in Krobo and Akwapim.

3. The Role of Foreign Entrepreneurs (Expatriate Firms)

The European merchants worked to promote the crops needed in the international markets. For instance, the wide use of machines, and the expansion of the railway mileage in the world made the demand for oil greater. At first, the main source of oil was whales, but as the demand grew, it was necessary to look for other sources.² The Europeans had to take into consideration a number of factors that could help to determine the crops to be promoted among which, first, the economic interest, second, suitable climatic conditions, an adequate soil and the necessary means of production, that is, land, labour and capital.

The expansion of food farming and the development of an export trade in agricultural commodities (maize, coffee and cotton) was a foremost concern among a number of Accra merchants. Between 1818 and 1822 several British and Dutch merchants in Accra encouraged the establishment of 'Indian corn' plantations to produce for export. In these years, several of them exported a total of 150,000 bushels of maize to Madeira and the West Indies. In 1823, a large maize plantation was laid out at Frederiksborg, and already by 1824 American and British ships purchased the first maize harvest at Christianborg, and transported the produce to Madeira and the Caribbean.³ During the second decade of the nineteenth century the Danes, for instance, tried to establish an export agricultural enterprise to produce maize, coffee and cotton.⁴ The British entrepreneurs worked hard to promote certain cash crops that were suitable to the Gold Coast's climate, and which responded at the same time to the British market's needs. From 1910 to the Second World War, the

¹ - Ibid.

² - Batten, op. cit., 84.

³ - Kea, op. cit., .131.

⁴ - Ibid.

European companies, with the help of the colonial government sought to maintain the peripheral import-export mono-crop system which they found so profitable.¹

4. The Role of the Colonial Government

The abolition of a very lucrative economic activity, slave trade, declared officially in 1807, left an economic vacuum, which led European capitalists to look for other profitable commercial alternatives. This led to intensive explorations with a view to locating, establishing and developing the local marketable resources to satisfy the increasing European demands for cash crops and raw materials. The economic emptiness left by the prohibition of illegitimate trade was gradually filled by the promotion of agriculture. Palm oil and kernels constituted, as Rhoda Howard put it, the main exports of the Gold Coast after the abolition of the slave trade which “compelled indigenous entrepreneurs to search for something new to sell to the new European industrial manufacturers.”²

According to Milburn, the British business in the Gold Coast was insane, the spectrum of views about it included that of conspiratorial nature, and that these views were frequently expressed in writings.³ In the context, Samuel Rohdie in an article about the Cocoa Hold-up of 1930-31 argues that the colonial administration served the interests of European companies by providing them with up-dated information about the crop in the world markets. Such information was not available to the local producers whose requests were often ignored.⁴

The role of the colonial government at both the local and metropolitan levels came to complete the process of shifting from subsistence economy based on producing food crops to a cash crop economy based on producing monetary crops, which had already started by missionaries and European entrepreneurs before the establishment of colonial rule. Locally, Gareth Austin argues that the position of colonial government to the cocoa ‘take off’ was largely limited to the provision of a railway which was opened in

¹ - Howard, op. cit., 79-80.

² - Rhoda Howard, *Colonialism and Underdevelopment in Ghana*, (London:Croom Helm, 1978), 69.

³ - Josephine Milburn, *British Business and Ghanaian Independence* (London: C. Hurst & Co Ltd, (1977), 2.

⁴ - Samuel Rohdie, “The Gold Coast Cocoa Hold-up of 1930-31”, *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 9 (1968): 107.

1903.¹ Nevertheless, the successive local colonial governments took a series of measures to encourage European entrepreneurs to invest in cash crops. At the central level, a number resolutions were taken through the imperial conferences to integrate the economies of the colonies into the economy of the Empire within a global policy aiming at subjugating all the economies of the colonies to the economy of the Empire, in other words, to put the first steps towards the establishment of a tight dependence of the former on the latter.

The process faced some challenges, the most important of which, land tenure as being the major factor in the production process. By the late nineteenth century, that is, before the official establishment of colonial rule land was under the control of the local chiefs who began granting concessions to European entrepreneurs. However, after the establishment of colonial, the local officials were compelled to intervene with a series of measures aiming at protecting local chiefs from suspicious deals by introducing new bills on landownership which would, at the same time, encourage investing in agriculture. The intervention of the local colonial government also included opening training schools to provide skilled labour for the agricultural sector as stated in colonial reports. According to the Colonial Report for 1901, "... most of them in the interior having small plantations attached where the scholars receive useful instructions in the cultivation of cocoa, coffee, sisal, ..."² Besides, the colonial government established the Department of Agriculture to supervise the agricultural sector for a better management of its resources.

The 1928 Report of the Committee on Agricultural Policy and Organisation's (Seasonal Paper XVII, 1927-29) states that the Department of Agriculture had gone through four phases during the period from 1889 to 1922; these comprise the following: 1889-1905; 1905-1915; 1915-1922 and 1922 -1928.³ The first phase was limited to the introduction of new plants such as cocoa which was brought to Africa from Asia, and the study of their behaviour under local climatic

¹ - Gareth Austin, "The Emergence of Capitalist Relations in South Asante Cocoa-Farming, C. 1916-33," *The Journal of African History* 28, No. 2 (1987): 261.

² - Colonial Reports-Annual, No 375, Gold Coast, Report for 1901, December, 1902, 27.

³ Yao Graham, "Law, State and the Internationalisation of Agricultural Capital in Ghana: A Comparison of Colonial Export Production for the Home Market" (Ph D thesis, University of Warwick, School of Law, December 1993), 53

conditions. Its purpose was, to a large extent, similar to the botanical stations established by the missionaries. The second phase (1905 – 1915) was marked by a change in the structure of the staff of the Department of Agriculture, that is, the existing experts who had been working on the ground under different organisations were given an official status. The third phase (1915 -1922) saw changes in the organisation and the functions of the Department. The work had been organised on a provincial basis according to the crop produced and supervised by specialists. The changes brought about gave the local government wide prerogatives on the agricultural resources. The fourth phase began by 1923 onwards, and during this period the status of the director of agriculture changed into the Head of the Department of Agriculture.¹ Stephen Hymer sums up the role of the Department of Agriculture in the following: “The Department of the Gold Coast colony was particularly concerned with three facets of the cocoa industry: the choice of the production techniques, quality control, and over-specialization.”²

A general policy to deal with agriculture in West Africa was drawn by Ormsby-Gore in 1926.³ It was essentially based on a scientific staff, including agricultural chemists, botanists, entomologists and mycologists,⁴ working in laboratories and research centres in West Africa, East Africa and Trinidad, in collaboration with the director of agriculture. Due to its varied soil and climate, as previously developed, scientists and researchers worked on the ground in collaboration with the native producers in the different districts through experiments to determine the crop that fit each district. For instance, sisal plantation made great success in the district of Accra.

¹ - G. B. Kay, *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghanaa collection of documents and statistics, 1900-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 199.

² -Stephen Hymer, “The Political Economy of the Gold Coast and Ghana,” *Economic Growth Centre, Yale University*, (1968), 20.

³ Harlech George Ormsby-Gore sat as [Member of Parliament \(MP\)](#) for [Denbigh Boroughs](#) from 1910 to 1918 and for [Stafford](#) from 1918 until 1938 and served as [Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies](#) from 1922 to 1929 (with a brief interruption during the short-lived Labour government of 1924).

⁴ - Kay, op.,cit., 204.

Similarly, coconut plantations made excellent results in the district of Cape Coast.¹ This central policy recommended the promotion of shea² and groundnuts in the northern districts. The committee of experts estimated that the 192 million shea trees in the Northern Territories could produce over 250,000 tons of shea butter annually.³

Concerning the palm oil industry, the southern districts showed great potentialities according to the committee of experts who argued that this industry could be an alternative to the cocoa industry in case the crop was ravaged by a disease. Kola plantation in the southern districts of the Ashanti showed significant results, but due to the high cost of transport to the shipping areas, the produce was less competitive than the one produced in the neighbouring French colonies. The two last crops mentioned in the report of the committee of experts, tobacco and cotton were not recommended in the Gold Coast because of strong competitors in northern Nigeria for cotton and the British East African colonies for tobacco.

In addition to the series of measures and regulations taken at the local level to develop the agricultural sector, in 1919, the Gold Coast benefited from an ambitious economic development plan known as the Ten-Year Plan. It was initiated by Governor Guggisberg, and had important long-term consequences on the economy of the colony. The Plan revolutionised transportation and helped, to a large extent, in boosting the cocoa industry in the Gold Coast resulting in the new mono-crop economic structure in the colony. A new economic structure, in which indigenous farmers became forcibly incorporated in the international capitalist system.

Conclusion

The Gold coast had been food self-sufficient under subsistence economy during the pre-colonial period. Furthermore, records prove that the Gold Coasters used to sell their food surplus to the European

¹- Ibid., 202.

²- Shea butter is a slightly yellowish or ivory-colored [fat](#) extracted from the [nut](#) of the African [shea tree](#) (*Vitellaria paradoxa*). It is widely used in [cosmetics](#) as a [moisturizer](#), [salve](#) or [lotion](#). Shea butter is edible and is used in food preparation in Africa. Occasionally the chocolate industry uses shea butter mixed with other oils, as a substitute for [cocoa butter](#), although the taste is different. en/Wikipedia.org/wiki/shea-butter, Viewed 28/7/2012

³- Kay, op.,cit., 203.

traders on the Coast. However, after the abolition of slave trade, various factors contributed to the gradual transition from traditional economy to cash crop economy, namely, the need for an economic activity to fill in the economic vacuum left by the abolition of slave trade, and the integration of the economy of the Gold Coast in the imperial economic pattern which led to the formation of a peripheral economy dependent on the economy of the Empire. To satisfy the needs of the European's markets, foreign entrepreneurs with the help of missionaries and the support of the colonial government, at both the local and metropolitan levels, introduced new crops and modern technologies to improve and increase the production of cash crops. They stimulated local farmers to abandon food crops for cash crops by offering incentive prices and technical assistance. It can be argued that the new system succeeded thanks to the favourable attitude of the local farmers who were not enough aware of the ultimate consequences of the shift from food production to cash crop production on the local people's food self-sufficiency, and the high risk to which the income of the colony would be exposed in case of a crop failure or falling prices.

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