
A Developmental History of Yam Economy in Tiv Land of Central Nigeria, from the Pre-Colonial to the Post-Colonial Era, 1900-1970

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Abstract: *A developmental history of yam economy in Tiv land of central Nigeria, from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial epoch, i1900-1976, historicizes the process of yam production and marketing specifically in Tiv land from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial times. The study is a brief but careful examination of the original of the process of yam production, methods of production and trade in the Tiv area under the study period. It further examines the impact of the colonial economic policies as well as the post independent Nigerian policies including the caters trophic civil war of 1967-1970 on yam economic. Briefly the study also touches on socio-political and economic consequence of yam production and trade in Tiv land to include among others; the emergence and expansion of market Centres, the growth of western education and socio-economic developments. The write-up basically employs the historical methodology of narrative analysis to obtain information from oral archival, written as well as internet sources. In the end, the study argues that despite the traditional inhibitions, yam production and trade progressively continued to develop and expand in Tiv land, and also brought about the socio-economic and political turn around in Tiv land and indeed the Nigeria state.*

INTRODUCTION

The present study is intended to historicize the development process of yam economy from the pre-colonial era, through the colonial period, to the post-colonial epoch, in Tiv land for additional knowledge, about yam economy of the Tiv people. Yam is a staple food crop and an economic main-stay of many Nigerians especially the Tiv people, who form the largest ethnic group in central Nigeria with about 93% of its population living on yams in one way or the other.

The present historical discourse is for the purpose of easy understanding into three stages. The first stage begins with the inception of the yam crops on Tiv land during the pre-colonial era. The inception was done through the accidental discovery of the crop from a nearby forest by a desperate orphan who went into the forest in search for food during a drastic famine period. The second stage deals specifically with an increasing development of its production and trade under the instrumentality of the economic transformational policies of the colonial administration. The third stage handles the increasing development of yam production and trade during the post-colonial epoch, induced majorly by the Nigerian civil war and other related factors.

In the very ancient time of the pre-colonial era, yam crop was introduced into the Tiv agricultural farming system to augment food supply of the Tiv people. After a long period of fashioning out the appropriate mode of its cultivation, there evolved the lineage mode of yam production purely based on Tiv traditional systems and beliefs. The lineage mode of production was characterized with the use of communal ownership of land. Hoe and cutlass were the major tools of effecting labour force of the individual families.

The reception of the yam crop on their Tiv land had as a safe landing because yam food crop was found suitably tasteful and satisfying to the traditional eating habits of the Tiv people. It provided the energy required for the traditional hard working spirit of the people for hard jobs like farming, hunting, fighting wars and others. In addition, yam tubers were later discovered as good items for exchange (trade) gifts, ritual performances and others.

Against the above background, yam farmers in Tiv began to devote more attention to yam cultivation on their land, more than other crops such as millets, beans, maize, corn and benniseed which were already in existence on their land. Yam cultivation became the leading crop in their yearly cultivation circle.

At the beginning of their yearly seasonal cultivation, the compound head (Orya) would choose a piece of land for yam farm and allocates individual plots to his subjects within the compound. Labour force for yam production was carried out in five distinct stages and shared between women and men on the farm. Land clearing was jointly carried out by women and men (Hyande I huran). The second stage of hoeing heaps (Sule kahan) was exclusively done by men. The third stage of planting yam seeds (Akôr a loon) on the heaps was exclusively done by the women fox. The fourth stage was weeding of the bushes out of the farms (Sule Huran) and was done by the women only. The fifth stage was yam harvesting (Akôr agberen) and was only done by women.

This system of yam production was well accepted and encouraged on Tiv land for two main reasons, namely, their natural hard working spirit of the traditional Tiv people to produce their most favorite food and the availability of massive farm land at their disposal during the pre-colonial period.

It is argued elsewhere that apart from war fighting, traditional Tiv people preferred doing the hardest jobs of tilling land or farming yam mounds on their land.

Traditionally the less taxing aspects of farming were shared to women in the Tiv society. P. Bohannam affirmed that traditional Tiv farmers enjoyed farming more than any other job on their land and were always farming wit joyful chants in Tiv that “..... Is work a bad thing? No! Work won't kill a man”. Tiv work hard and agree that hoeing fields is the most important work.

Apart from the natural endowment of hard work, there was massive farm land for yam production in Tiv land. This explains why shifting cultivation was used for reactivating the fertility of the soil for massive yam production. Many Tiv farmers were attracted to large scale yam cultivation to increase their yam products yearly.

This development shortly brought about land exhaustion and shortage especially in the southern and central parts of Tiv land as previewed by Tseayo that:

Going by the 1963 Nigerian Population Census, the whole of Tiv land has roughly 126 persons per square mile (PPSM). But southern and parts of Central Tiv land have 200 PPSM while densities as low as 25 PPSM existed in Northern and North-Eastern Tiv land. Shortage of farm land in parts of Central and Southern Tiv Land is unavoidable.

Suggestively, traditional Tiv people were greatly induced by the natural endowments of hard working spirit and availability of farm land to embrace and annually increase yam production on their land during the pre-colonial era. This factual analysis shared the view point of D.C. Doward

when dismissed the Euro centric Myths of indolent leisure preference Africans. That African, it is false hood to argue that the African maintains a personal balance between truly the type of crop to disturb his life style, yam crop is said to be the most-taxable but valuable food crop in Tiv land during the pre-colonial era. G.W.G Briggs affirmed that:

Yam is the staple food crop and a family's well-being depends entirely on the success or otherwise of this crop. Grains are also used for food but as a rule only when yams are not available.

Product from the farm were shared among members of the family for consumption and the little left over was used for exchange by barter, gifts and ritual performances. With the use of lineage system of yam production for over a long period, surpluses were increasingly being generated all this while. With increase generation of surpluses in the course of production, there arose the need to exchange them for other goods and services to meet up with other utility needs of the Tiv people thereby venting out the surpluses. With time the exchange system developed into what was then known as trade by barter. Trade then combined with production during the pre-colonial era in Tiv land to give birth to an eventful phenomenon of producing yam purposely for sales. This development of the yam economy was sustained all through the pre-colonial period in Tiv land. Evidently, writing in 1907, Boyal Alexander confirmed that yam was sold at the international level during the pre-colonial era by the Tiv farmers:

The supply of benniseed which is an important produce in the trade of the Niger company i.e entirely depended on the Muche (Tiv) who bring it in or not as they choose; the same is the case with yams in the markets along the river (Benue)

During the colonial period, 1915-1960 which marks the beginning of the second stage of our analysis, Tiv traditional lineage mode of production was disarticulated and transformed to the capitalist mode of yam production. A situation which introduced a social system of allowing certain Tiv farmers to own more wealth and use it to acquire land and labour force on other farmers to further augment wealth through yam production and sales (trade).

The colonial administration employed economic transformational policies such as monetization, taxation, commoditization, wage labour, imposition of cash crops production, provision of infrastructures and others to transform the traditional lineage mode of production to the capitalist one during the colonial era.

On the surface, these policies were not intended to promote or encourage increased yam production on Tiv land. Unknown to the colonial administration initially, these policies in a long run turned to favour and increase yam production more than other crops in Tiv land-during the colonial epoch in Tiv area. A brief analysis of source of these colonial economic policies below reveals their hidden implications on increase yam production and trade in Tiv land.

TAXATION: The policy was introduced in Tiv territory by the colonialists to achieve two key issues. The first of them was to raise funds (Money) for payment of wages to the Tiv labourers and other public services rendered on Tiv land. The second reason was to exercise the colonial, supremacy over the resistant and nagging Tiv people against the colonial authority on their land. Prompt payment of taxes therefore implied the general acceptability of the colonial government

over Tiv territory and their total submission to the colonial authority. In as much as these cardinal objectives of the colonial administration were successfully attained the policies also impacted positively on yam production and trade increase in Tiv area. For instance, Tiv labourers were compelled to work extra hard, in order to produce the required cash produces and other public services.

They therefore needed extra energy to fulfill these obligation and their main sources of energy was pounded yam, food, eaten three times daily, to acquire the required energy and keep fit for all manner of hard jobs. In the final analysis, increase in the amount of public services and increase in cash crops production was dependent upon the increased availability of yams to energize the locals to effectively perform these assigned duties. In directly, prompt payment of taxes invariably depended on increased yam production in the colonial Tiv land.

LABOUR WAGES: Labour fees paid to Tiv labourers was designed to cater for their general well-being and that of their family members. Coincidentally, these very policy makers also abolished the Tiv traditional exchange marriage system in the 1927 and replaced it with the Bride Price policy. The noble idea was to make it possible for Tiv adults born with no sisters or related females to get monies through wage labour and pay dowry for their marriages. Wage labour became a veritable source of money to marry many wives in Tiv land. Increased numbers of wives by Tiv farmers in those days implied increased number of labour hands on yam fields and indeed increase in large yam farms on Tiv land. Traditionally, as earlier mentioned in the present study, the labour force divide between women and men for yam production shared all the aspects of labour to the women hood heaving only tilling of yam mounds alone to the Tiv men. Invaluably more wives in the traditional Tiv society increased yam outputs from their farms.

PREFERENCE TO CASH CROP PRODUCTION: This policy was calculatedly formulated to raise or increase cash crops production mainly benniseed and cotton for export to feed the hungry industries in Europe at that time. This objective was achieved; however, this same policy also played the role of increased yam production in the colonial Tiv land. As earlier stated, Tiv labourers who farmed bennised and cotton needed yam food for the extra required energy for these cash crop production. It therefore became inevitable to first of all increase yam production to in turn induce cash crop production in the colonial Tiv land.

As a matter of facts, increased yam production became an engine-room for any increased production of all crops and other services in the colonial era.

PROVISION OF INFRASTRUCTURES: C.C Jacobs provided the under stated statistics on labour force Recruitment during the colonial period thus:

| S/N | Year | No of Tiv labourers |
|-----|------|---------------------|
| 1. | 1923 | 15,583 |
| 2. | 1924 | 17,610 |
| 3. | 1925 | 14,050 |
| 4. | 1926 | 12,900 |

| | | |
|--|---------|----------------|
| | 4 Years | 60,145 workers |
|--|---------|----------------|

Source: C.C. Jacobs (1998)

As provided on the above table, a total of 60,145, Tiv workers who were recruited as labourers to work on the railway line from Enugu to Makurdi in 4 years only. As earlier argued, the amount of labour work executed by these Tiv labourers depended so much well and satisfactory on yam food, their most preferred food. Therefore yam production inevitably was increased to feed this high number of Tiv labourers working on the railway construction from Enugu to Makurdi during the colonial era.

Reasoning along the same line, Varvar also argues that:

From 31st May to Mid-July 1942 the Resident had failed to Mine 246 tons of yams which were specifically required for 4000 Tiv Labourers recruited and sent to the Plateau.

Apart from Tiv labourers, being fed majorly on yam food to warrant increase production of the yam crop on Tiv lands. The construction of the railway also impacted positively on increase production of yams in Tiv land. The railway transport system also boosted yam trade beyond the Tiv area, thereby increasing yam production to meet the increasing market demands of the food crop. D.C Dorward argued that:

They railway opened Tiv land to the Igbo traders who established canteens at the railway labour camps at Taraku Kungeru, Makurdi etc, helping to transform them into pertinent settlements, supplemented the Hausa traders and helped to fuel the Tiv demands for consumer goods.. In addition, Igbo traders brought a new dimension to the long established internal trade in yams and other food stuff by exporting by rail. The trade in yams became perhaps too popular.

It was actually under the colonial era in Tiv that yam crop was transformed into a commodity product. This transformation elevated yam to a position of a ‘commodity Product’. As a commodity Product, yam began to frame-work the combined functional developments of its products and trade from this point till date in Tiv land and even beyond. Such combined functional development included the likes of (i) yam marketing began to overwhelm yam consumption (ii) yam began to intensify its dual role of food and cash crop in Tiv land (iii) increase yam production became synonymous with increased yam trade (iv) yam marketing began to assert a veritable source of wealth creation in Tiv land (v) yam trade also began to replace benniseed export as an economic main-stay of the Tiv people and others. All these functional developments were properly anchored on yam commodity product and sustained all through in Tiv land during the colonial period, and were later fast-tracked and trajected into the post-colonial Tiv land.

Under the post Independent Tiv land, inspite of political impediments such as the ‘Nande Nande’ of 1962 the ‘atemigyough’ of 1964 and the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 as well as the underdeveloped nature of farming equipment and methods, high cost of farm inputs, land

wars and others, Tiv-yam production and trade kept on progressively developing and expanding till date and even beyond. Tiv yam production and trade boosted more than before, after the war due to various reasons including the individual desires of the people to recoup their lost wealth during the civil war, the need to re-sustain the food security situation of the entire country as well as rebuilding the socio-economic and political architecture of the Nigerian nation.

Following the exit of colonial rule, characterized by political crisis as a result of general elections which eventually led to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970, Tiv land experienced the dwindling effects on yam production. Since crisis is a process and violence is the means of achieving it, the 1962 and 1964 political crisis which degenerated into the political violence of 1967, called "Nande Nande" in Tiv and 1967 also called "Atem Itough" in Tiv, became sources of insecurity and the attendant population displacement, which temporarily had negative results on yam production. These violent situations disrupted yam production activities including its trade routes, personnel and momentum.

In Nigerian Civil War, followed as a result of persistent political upheavals in Nigeria from 1967-1970. The civil war suddenly took away very many yam producers into the military service, temporarily slowing down, or reducing the rate of yam production activities in Tiv land. Yam trade also declined at this time, because the Igbo stakeholders suddenly left for their land to fight and the fear of unknown, apart from some yam trading routes to Tiv land being closed down. With time, gradual make-shift arrangements were put in place and the civil war became a boost to yam production and trade in Tiv land. The boost in yam production and trade during the period of the civil war, made others to believe that yam trade started during the civil war, an obvious over-sight of its initial progressive effects on Tiv land. Truly, yam production and trade only boosted up during the Nigerian civil war period. This gave rise to Ninga's misconceived affirmation that:

However, yam marketing proper started during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970. With the ever expanding war demands and money incentives plus the availability of transport, yam production doubled its pre-war volume by 1970.

It is important to recall from the onset of this conclusion that statistical data and figures were lacking to justify and authenticate the rate of increased yam production and trade in our analysis from the pre-colonial to the colonial periods. This was because the colonial government was more interested in the export trade of cash crops than the local trade of the African food crops. Justifications and authentication in all the analysis, during the two periods in the study were anchored on recorded testimonies, facts and oral information. However, starting from the post-colonial period to date, such statistical data, figures and information became available to strengthen the analysis as demonstrated in the last segments of the study.

After the civil war, demands for yam continued to rise as a result of socio-economic exigencies arising from the aftermaths of the war and the general situation of economy in the country, with the return of peace and tranquility after the war in the country coupled with the incidence of ex-service returnees in Tiv land, more yam farms were increased on Tiv land. At the same time, Igbo yam traders resumed yam trading. Empirically both Tiv and non Tiv trader's were engaged in yam trade in and outside Tiv land. The non Tiv traders in particular sourced yam in Tiv land for onward trade in areas outside the Tiv land like Enugu, Aba, Port-Harcourt, Lagos,

Calabar and other cities across the country.

There are available statistical data that present a clear picture of increase in yam production and trade by displaying the external distribution of yam from Zaki-Biam yam market in Tiv land to various destinations across the country after the civil war, 1971-1976.

Beginning from the 1980s some form of mechanization crept into yam production techniques in Tiv land. These methods included the use of herbicides, insecticides in weeding farms as well as control of yam-destroying insects and rats. In addition, both the Federal and Benue State Governments deliberately enforced different policies of encouraging yam production and trade. These include improved road network and transportation: government subsidy and distribution of fertilizers; provision of agricultural extension services to rural farmers; and facilitating soft loans or credit facilities to Tiv farmers. Empirically the result, increased yam production and trade as reflected in the available statistical data elsewhere.

The study has also shown that yam production and trade in Tiv land during the period of analysis has led to the growth of Tiv economy in particular and Nigeria at large in three stages namely: pre-colonial, the colonial period and the post-colonial era facilitating food sufficiency in this nation. Yam serves as both food and cash and promotes the volume of food in circulation in Tiv land and by extension, Nigeria at large especially during the post-colonial era. Tiv yam is consumed across the length and breadth of this country. In the same manner, yam production and trade provide the revenue base for capital formation, which is a critical requirement for economic development of any society worldwide. Yam production and trade in Tiv land also enhanced political developments in the area as it creates viable and sustainable sources of revenues thereby qualifying the areas to merit more Local Government Councils, such as Ukum, Logo and Katsina-Ala Local Government Councils as beneficiaries in this regard.

In addition, yam production and marketing facilitated the development of education and the setting up of market centres in and outside Tiv land. The Zaki-Biam yam market in Ukum, Benue State, Dan-Anacha yam market in Taraba State, Port-Harcourt yam market among many others are classical examples. So also was the issue of urban development. Some small settlement grew into semi-urban areas due to the massive assemblage of immigrants for yam marketing activities that took place in them. For instance, Zaki-Biam, Dan-Anacha, Ugba among others. On the negative side, yam production and marketing brought about land conflicts which in certain cases graduated into full blown land wars. There has been persistent violence between Tiv farmers and other elements in Dan-Anacha and other areas in Nasarawa, Plateau and Taraba States including Wukari. These which reoccurred in many years since the 1980s and boiled down to land contestation. Yam production and trade as well promoted the growth of social vices including prostitution, theft and house breaking, alcoholism among others.

CONCLUSION

In spite of the seeming positive impacts of yam production and trade on Tiv land and Nigeria at large, progress in yam production and marketing are made less than required in order to attain sustainable levels. This was as a result of some of the following factors:- Yam production in Tiv land was largely embarked upon through traditional methods. The mechanization process in production was minimal. Similarly, there was virtually the total absence of mechanized system of processing yams in order to add value to it. Storage facilities were also absent. On the other hand, many farmers and potential entrepreneurs in the yam economy lacked the required financial capital to engage in high level productive ventures in yam, among other constraints,

including ecological ones.

All in all, the conclusion drawn from the analysis in the study suggests that yam production and trade in Tiv land, from the colonial to the post-colonial period impacted both positively and negatively on the socio-political and economic life of the Tiv area. These include improvement in the security system; emergency of entrepreneurship; urbanization, creation of Ukum and Logo Local Councils and the development of Western education, Negative impact include, land degradation and exhaustion leading to conflicts and wars, and increment of social vices such as thefts, drug abuse, prostitution and others. Comparatively, positive impact overwhelm the negative ones, drawing a conclusion that yam production and trade impacted more positively on the socio-political and economic upliftments/ developments in Tiv land and beyond especially from the colonial to the post –colonial era.

ENDNOTES

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