

THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC INSTITUTIONS IN WEST AFRICA FROM 1945-1960

Harrison Obi Ibude

Abstract

This work focuses on the Evolution of Socio-economic Institutions in West Africa from 1945-1960. "The period after the second world war" (the post world II year) brought a change in the economic and social policies of the colonial masters in the West Africa colonies. These new policies were articulated in the development and welfare Act in the British West African Colonies and the "Fonds d'Investissement pour le Deve Oppement Economique at Social" in the French colonies. Walter Rodney had however argued that contrary to the general opinion, these so called developmental funds for Africa went almost exclusively into the building of economic infrastructures and also into the provision of certain social services. From the above illumination, it is quite clear that the period after the Second World War (the post world II years to the year of independence, 1960) was an era of change, but, it is also clear that the change taking place were not an all-rounded change. Therefore, in this paper, attempt will be made at analyzing these changes which will inform us on how much the social-economic institution evolved from 1945-1960.

Scholars are unanimous in agreeing that post world war 11 years saw the gradual transformation of the West African colonies. The post world war 11 years released forth a new set of internal and external dynamics that eventually led to political, economic and social changes that culminated into the independence of the Anglophone and Francophone West Africa colonies (Isichei 1977:221-225).

The post world war 11 years brought a change in the economic and social policies of the colonial masters in the West Africa colonies. These new policies were articulated in the development and welfare Act in the British West Africa colonies and the "Fonds d'Investissement pour le Deve Oppement Economique at Social" in the French colonies. Rodney (1972) had however argued that contrary to general opinion, these so called developmental funds for Africa went almost exclusively into the building of economic infrastructures and into the provision of certain services.

According to him, out of the entire outline "C.D. and W. grants" between 1946 and 1956 less than 1% was allocated to industries, and that in the case of "Fonds d'Investissement pour le Deve Oppement Economique at Social" from 1949 to 1953, the corresponding figure was less than 0.5%. He further argued that agriculture which was the main stay of the economy fared little better, as far as the Africans were concerned. (Rodney, 1972:232-235).

In looking at the Post World War II years up to the independence year of 1960, Isichei, (1977) argued that the changes experienced in this era was due to the booming prices for West Africa's exports and a tremendous expansions in their quantity which earned a substantial surplus for development. She however, went further to state that, the so-called development was not actually development, as so much money was used wastefully, she opined that the development embarked upon in West Africa was concentrated in establishing social economic development such as agriculture and industries were not embarked upon. (Isichei 1977:224).

From the above illumination, it is quite clear that the year of independence, (1960), was an era of change but it also clear that the changes taking place were not an all rounded changes. Therefore, in this paper, attempts will be made to analyze those changes, which will inform us how much the social-economic institutions evolved from 1945-1960.

This will be done under the following subheadings:

- (a) The Evolution of social institution from 1945-1960.
- (b) The Evolution of Economic institution from 1945-1960.

"Scholars observed that the Nationalist ferment was the agitation for infrastructural facilities like schools comparable to those of the European in the metropolises" this ferment desire became preponderant in the West African colonies during the era under review which was articulated in the demand for more schools, not just more schools but institutions that will produce educated elites compared to the standard in the metropolises. In the Francophone West Africa, the Post World War II years experienced a gradual evolution of its social institutions, due to the increase of the number of educated elites. These changes led to the abolition of forced labour in 1946, here, it would be fair to argue that the evolution of the social institutions was a response to the yearning need of the Africans to control their own material destinies. Rodney (1972) commenting on the gradual extension of these social institutions, saw it as a correlation between the process of learning and social acculturation and the pattern of work in the society. (1972:262).

From the year 1945, there were profound social and economic changes which became more observable as new nationalist leaders emerged with a demand for responsible governments in terms of the need to build more hospitals, more schools, more social infrastructures and higher institutions for the training of West Africans. The establishment of more social institutions led to the mobilization of new forces and as the years went on, a radically different climate of opinion and a setting more congenial to the development of a positive African empowerment became a reality. It needs to be sustained that the post war II years saw the expansion of educational institutions as the colonies moved towards independence. Therefore, facilities for higher education were established dramatically to satisfy the increase in demand for them by the educated elites. In 1948, the University of Ibadan was founded. More scholarship schemes enabled increasing number of West Africans to study abroad. In 1950, an institute of higher studies was established in Dakar, which became a full-fledged university in 1957. (Akintoye, 1976:163-165). In the statistics furnished to us by Rodney (1972) it was discovered that in the ten year plan for development from 1946-1956, the total of £1,820,000 was voted for agriculture out of a total

The Evolution of Socio-Economic Institutions in West Africa from 1945-1960

of £53,000,000. Most of that agricultural grant was to be consumed for constructing an agricultural school and for providing salaries for British experts. (1972:233).

At this point, it would be instructive to analyse developments brought about by the Second World War which in turn, generated a level of social transformation. Many Allied Forces passed through West Africa during the war and many West Africans were conscripted into the Allied Armies. In the process of prosecuting the war, they had acquired some skills and technical know how which increased their consciousness. The fact that many of the Allied Troops were stationed temporarily in the West African colonies, brought another angle to the acculturation of the West Africans, as levels of commingling were popular rendezvous during the war. These new impetus added to their acculturation process which led to an increase in the mobilization of the Africans as a vast majority of them migrated to growing urban centres for jobs in the colonial establishments. Coleman (1958:253-257).

The demand for more schools and other social institutions were determined by the driving force of social re-stratification of classes as it became clear that induction in to the colonial economic institutions, was anchored on the attainment of Western education. Therefore, the appurtenance and trappings of the new status involved a level of acculturation, hence, more schools and more hospitals and other social -infrastructures were demanded. Coleman 1958:253).

The new urban centres become centres of attraction for job opportunities which in extension, meant opportunity for class mobility. This centres gradually pulled more Africans from the rural areas. Another stimulus to the evolution of social institutions was the enlargement of the colonial bureaucracy for the war fronts. This impetus further generated dynamics that continued to sustain the process of class re-stratification. Therefore, in the post world war 11 years, the steady wages being earned by the West Africans enabled them to mobilize and undertake programmes for community development which to the Africans, meant the establishment of schools, churches, brothels, drinking bars and so on (Rodney, 1972:233).

It is however, a disappointment to note that in comparing with the evolution of economic institutions from 1945-1960, we are confronted with the situation of limited development as it was realized that the economic institutions never evolved better than prior to the period under consideration. Rodney (1972:234)

The Evolution of Economic Institutions from 1945-1969

According to Rodney (1972) "the high proportion of the development funds went into the colonies in the form of loans for ports, railways, electric power plants, water works, engineering workshops, houses etc. which were necessary for more efficient exploitation in the long run". He went further to sustain us with the argument that the development funds were raised on the European money market by the governments of the West African colonies concerned and in effect, the national metropolitan government were providing their own bankers and financiers with guaranteed profitable outlet for their capital.

Scholars here argued in Rodney work that the Import and export trade, mining, banking, shipping, and so on were still being dominated in this era from 1945-1960 by number of large expatriate firms. There were the government monopolies of the marketing boards and other agricultural produce monopolies as was the case in the French colonies. There was the big multinationals like the UAC, John Holt, the Bank of British West Africa, and the Barclays Banks, while Elder Demster controls shipping and Lloyd took care of Insurance. In the Francophone West Africa. The two pre dominant monopolies still were the *Companigne francaise de l'Afrique Occidentale* and the *Societe Commerciale de l'ouest Africain* while their Banking was dominated by the *Banque de l'Afrique Occidentale*. These transnational companies continued their monopolistic control of the West Africa economies during the period under study. (Isichei 1977:242).

The so-called Colonial Development and Welfare Fund in the British West African Colonies and the "Fonds d'Investisement pour le Deve Oppement at Social" in the French West African colonies were ostensibly for the development of West African economies. This have led to the evolution of modern economic institutions for the effective economic integration of West African but this unfortunately, became a hoax, as subsequent developments later proved.

Rodney (1972) stated that instead of it being a stimulus for developments centred at the level of the colonies, the funds became centred at the metropolises. In the case of the British West Africa, the C.D. and Welfare Fund were controlled by the Colonial Secretary ably assisted by a council to help him in allocation of grants. This council was dominated by very powerful members of the British bourgeoisie, including the directors of Barclays Banks, while in the French West Africa, their colonial masters created an institution called SDOM (an acronym for the development of financial societies for the development of oversea territories) which was an association of private capitalist (Rodney 1972:242-244).

The following observations only went further to prove that there was a continuous exploitation and expropriation of the Africans productive surplus overseas at this period. Therefore, it is very clear why there was inadequate economic integration of the Africans despite the growing numbers of trained manpower. Rather than for the evolution of economic institutions in the West African colonies, the funds that were earmarked for the development of these colonies became easy means of making profit for the European capitalist. Rodney (1972:242).

According to Isichei, (1977), "although the growth of cities was so striking, the total proportion of West Africans involved in the modern sector was very low indeed. By the early 1960s, it was estimated that the population of West Africa was 88,000,000; and that only 2,000,000 of these were in wage employment. In all West African countries, the government was the main employer".

Conclusion

The post World War II to the independence era in 1960 was a period of remarkable changes as many internal and external forces were released forth in the West African colonies. These forces led to social changes as Africans became conscious of the material realities of the new social order. This era saw an increasing numbers of Africans who had acquired western education becoming increasingly very influential in the mobilization process of the African societies. This new social forces were channeled towards bringing more social benefits to the people. The growth of new cities and the increase in social activities during and after the war also called for new developments leading to a high level evolution of social institutions in the West African colonies which gradually became independent in 1960.

Compared to the high level of social activities which led to the evolution of more social institutions, the economic institutions never responded to these internal forces of social mobilization as such, the economic institutions never evolved to modern institutions to cater for the need of economic integration of the Africans, rather, the governments continued their control of the economies with their monopolies. Another feature of West African economy was the continuous ugly domination of their economies by the European Transnational corporations. The perpetuation of their dominance of the West African economies despite the increasing process of social mobilization, succeeded in stifling the evolution of modern economic institutions that would have led to effective integration of the West Africans.

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