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PATTERNS OF ECONOMIC CONTROL IN SUBSAHARAN AFRICA

The following pages represent a summary of some aspects of economic control in traditional African societies, some problems associated with economic change in such societies and a brief description of emergent patterns of economic authority.

The author's intention is to use this material as part of a longer analysis of economic change in Africa. In this longer study the ideas here presented will be preceded by chapters dealing with the physical environment, the nature of productive activity and the application of economic analysis in the traditional contexts, and the economic impact of colonial rule. It is to be followed by an analysis of two-sector growth models, capital accumulation models and foreign trade models--all applied to the African situation.

Economic Control in Traditional Societies

In traditional African cultures the economic efforts of most individuals are devoted to the production of subsistence goods for themselves and their immediate kin. In this effort they are ordinarily directed by their family head who is usually the eldest male. These economic units often include more than just a nuclear family (a man, wife and immature offspring). There are frequently several wives, and one or more adult offspring with their children may remain. And these may be joined by other kin as well.

The family head allocates land and cattle and gives general direction as to times of planting and harvesting. He directs movements of the homestead and settles disputes which arise between members. Within such general authority bounds, individual members are likely to function with considerable autonomy.

Such family groups are subject to outside "political" authority. Land is allocated by a chief or by some other individual with political power or, in some societies, by a group of elders or an assembly of all adult males. Though ultimate ownership of land is generally viewed as communal, the right of individuals to peaceful possession is ordinarily not disturbed.

Such societies usually operate with no formal market for labor. Those working outside their immediate family units do so to fulfill kinship or marriage obligations or else are engaged in short-term projects to be repaid in kind on a reciprocal basis. When individuals need the assistance of others as for the construction of a new house, neighbours lend a hand.

They receive a meal and beer for their efforts and expect reciprocation from the persons whom they help when the need is reversed. Long term agreements to provide labor for another are usually associated with kinship or marriage ties and might involve adoption or (in former times) slave status.

There are in the traditional societies individuals who devote part of their time to basketry, weaving or dying, and there may be full-time blacksmiths or canoe makers. But relatively little of the total output is produced by individuals who are occupational specialists. Trade with outsiders--as for iron or salt--involves only a small part of the total economic endeavor and terms of exchange may remain fixed over extended periods of time. Even in those societies in which markets are large and formally constituted they tend to relate only to the marginal needs of people. An Ibo market has been described thus:

A stranger going round to a number of Ibo markets is apt to have the impression that thousands of people are buying and selling minute quantities of the same things. Rows of women seem to have trays or baskets with more or less the same miscellaneous collection of small objects--little leaf packets of mashed oil bean, a few red peppers, half a dozen matches, some sliced cassava. But in fact the markets are to a certain extent specialised in the sense that one is reputed good for meat or livestock, another for pots, another for yams and so on. There is a constant flow of food stuffs such as yam from the less densely populated areas in to those with a heavy population, the return being partly in palm oil.

The women are the great petty traders, spending much time and energy for what must often be a very small profit. But even a few heads of cowries are worth having a profit when life is on a modest scale, particularly when the gaining of them involves the pleasures of the market. (Green, 1947, pp.38-9).

Institutionalized patterns of gift-giving based on kinship, marriage or friendship are common and supplement the efforts of individual families to provide for themselves. Generosity is widely condoned; selfishness is frequently condemned. Patterns of gift giving are supplemented with ceremonial obligations. In the past goods were not infrequently acquired by raiding.

In those societies in which the holders of political authority were specialized as such, the rules of the society provided for transfers of goods and services to them. The system for gathering tribute might be simple and direct or might involve an elaborate and hierarchically arranged network of assessment and collection. The holders of political power sometimes amassed

substantial wealth. It was frequently similar in kind to that possessed by their subjects, though in larger quantity. Often the wealth of the political leaders was viewed as being held in trust for the use of the entire society in time of need. There was a wide variety of social limitations placed on political power holders and these and the personalities of the office occupants affected the use or abuse of their economic power.

Where there were no political specialists, though affluence might be widely regarded as desirable, accumulations tended to be institutionally proscribed.

Restrictions on Economic Change Inherent in Traditional Controls

Given the prevailing conditions of resource availability and technical knowledge, economic growth in the traditional context would appear as the process of increasing output which accompanies population growth. This was likely to occur with no appreciable increase in per capita capital formation or in individual productivity. Changes in the relative wealth positions of participating families were limited by institutionalized demands for redistribution and by obligations to share with varying numbers of others.

The traditional societies often evidenced suspicion and hostility toward strangers and there was considerable stress on the maintenance of group solidarity and internal integration. This was compatible with social emphasis on military strength, respect for established authority within the family, and, sometimes, with respect for designated holders of political or religious power.

European contact meant that alternative goals became attainable including many related to economic performance. But economic change could not occur without the modification of established social institutions which were intricately interconnected with traditional goals. Militarism and entrenched attitudes of suspicion and hostility toward neighboring societies remained. These could impair trade, joint undertakings and the acceptance of

innovations long after ultimate political control had been assumed by the colonial administrators.

Traditional institutions which functioned to implement political authority patterns could impose obstacles to economic change. For the new forces which offered a potential increase in economic productivity necessarily altered the prevailing distribution of inter-personal power. Links between political authority and economic power were common. Thus wealth and a dominant position in trade could provide the basis for the power of an Ashanti king (Manoukian, 1950, p.18) or a Duala chieftain (Ardener, 1956, p.79). Before European rule the Oba of Benin held a monopoly of the exportation of slaves, ivory, palm kernels and pepper from his kingdom (Bradbury, 1957, p.25). And the chief of the Yao exercised exclusive control over the exchange between his people and coastal traders. (Tew, 1950, p. 15).

Similarly there were political rules which restricted certain members of a society from designated types of economic activity. A subordinate caste might, for example, be prohibited from possession of productive cattle as in Ankole (Taylor, 1962, p.106). And attempts to preserve elements of traditional power could reduce the availability of physical resources for economic purposes. Thus the transfer of land is reported to have been impaired by the power of tribal chiefs among the Bunyoro (Burke, 1964, p.93.)

But traditional institutions functioning to implement established political power were not the only impediments to change. Attitudes toward wealth accumulation could interfere with the development of a commercial psychology. Among the Congolese Lele the traditional system of selection for social rewards on the basis of seniority was said to continue to dampen individual achievement motivation long after contact with outside influence (Douglas, 1963, pp.2, 51). And of the Bemba of Northern Rhodesia it was said: "The purely possessive attitude to property with all its concomitant virtues, such as thrift, foresight, or self-reliance, are not inculcated in the Bemba child and would probably unfit him for life in his society" (Richards, 1939, p.200).

Thus it is not surprising to find in Africa evidence of retarded response to economic motivation despite the introduction of improved currency systems which could supply both a media of exchange and a store of value and despite the multitude of new opportunities which to varying degrees were being made available. There are examples of low levels of consumer wants; newly available supplies failing to generate new demand; money acquired only to satisfy specific wants; rising output prices not stimulating increased productive efforts; and customary prices prevailing despite changes in conditions of supply and demand. These characteristics are evidenced, for example, in accounts of the Fulani, Arusha, and Zande in Bohannan and Dalton (1962, pp.359, 441, 553) and comparable statements regarding Ankole (Taylor, 1962, p.113), the Bwamba (Winter, 1955, p.43), Chiga (Edel, 1957, p.107)

Nuba (Nadel, 1947, pp.73-6) and Wolof, (Gamble, 1957, p.74).

The Disruption of Traditional Institutions

Insofar as new economic opportunities were adopted, they were accompanied by strains on the institutional fabric of the traditional societies. This could result for example, from the acceptance of a new productive technique as when the introduction of the plow and its requirement of male labor disrupted traditional patterns of work allocation among the Ndebele (Kuper, 1959, p.59). And opportunities to find employment outside the confines of the traditional society weakened dependence upon one's father and hence the father's authority as reported for the Chiga (Edel, 1957, p.35), the Fulbe (Hopen, 1962, pp.117-8), the Kipsigis (Peristiany, 1939, p.95), the Nuba (Nadel, 1947, p.511), and the Toro (Taylor, 1962, pp.67-8).

Economic changes also affected established patterns of political authority. The prohibition of warfare reduced the importance of military prowess as a means for achieving status and reduced dependence on militarily strong leaders who had previously insured the safety of the people. This has been reported for the Bwamba (Winter, n.d., p.241), the Ngoni (Gann, 1953, p.73), and the Kipsigis (Fearn, 1961, p.227). The commutation of tribute payments from labor to cash limited the political power of Bunyoro chiefs (Burke, 1964, p.103), and new sources of economic wealth were used as a basis for power to challenge traditional authority as among the Chiga (Edel, 1957, p.109). Sometimes African populations were moved by the expatriate administrators from their traditional homelands to "native reserves" as, for example, in South Africa, the Rhodesias and Kenya and the impact of disruptive forces was thereby intensified.

In general there seems to have been a difference evidenced in susceptibility to social disintegration between societies with formalized and those with informally organized political structures.

In those societies which lacked political formalization, political power was in the hands of individuals or groups who were not political specialists. These traditionally acted on a non-hierarchical basis to define social goals, allocate prestige and resources to facilitate attainment of the goals, and control deviant behavior. When the colonial administrators introduced new social objectives and new channels of administration and adjudication, such innovations necessarily disrupted the fragile balance previously maintained in the traditional patterns of power limitation and authority distribution. The apparatus whereby political power was exerted from within kinship, village or age-set structures was interfered with and ultimately destroyed. Individuals were deprived of rights, duties and powers. Other individuals (indigenous or foreign) were appointed to wield power and administer new procedures. These others sought to attain new objectives through new means. Hence the scope and character of their authority could not be tailored to fit compatibly with the complicated web of

interrelated social structures of the traditional societies. The fragile pattern of traditional institutional interrelationships which had been based on common acceptance of social values rather than on formal legal sanctions underwent widespread and thorough disruption. (See Fortes and Evans-Pritchard, 1940, pp.15-6; Middleton and Tait, 1958, pp.25-6; Leyy, 1966, p.311.)

In purely economic terms the result of such disruptive contact was likely to prove advantageous. The extensive destruction of traditional institutions could remove major impediments to the acceptance of new educational standards, the adaptation of new techniques, and the acquisition of new goals for occupational performance, status, and consumption. This might be evidenced from accounts of rapid economic change among the Ibo (Forde and Scott, 1946, p.74), the Iteso (Burke, 1964, p.124), the Kipsigis (Manners, 1962, pp.500f) and the Tonga (Colson, 1962, p.219).

On the other hand there are examples of politically uncentralized societies which maintained militant resistance to the intrusion of European culture. When permitted by circumstances to remain in relative isolation, such societies represent some of the most economically backward communities on the continent (see Schneider, 1959).

Those societies with greater formality in their political power structures had greater ability to withstand the political innovations. Individuals that possessed recognized political power in the traditional context were nearly always utilized to facilitate the work of the expatriate administrators. The disruption of traditional behavior patterns was lessened in those instances in which the colonial administrations were intentionally solicitous of the institutions which they encountered as when the concept of "indirect rule" was successfully implemented.

The Continuation of Traditional Patterns of Control

Several emergent patterns of economic control might be identified in African societies following contact with European culture. In the first place there are widespread instances of the continuation of traditional economic controls with relatively minor modifications to accommodate a limited number of new products, techniques and channels of distribution.

Often new crops could be produced and new systems of marketing utilized involving techniques which were long familiar in the cultivation of traditional food crops and which required a minimum of contact with outsiders. Most cocoa production in Africa provides evidence of this type of agricultural change. The industry was developed on the continent since the last decade of the 1800's almost entirely by African labor and initiative. In an extended account of the development of cocoa farming in Ghana, Polly Hill notes that the origination of the cocoa farms evidenced a high degree of purposeful activity aimed specifically at the creation of economically productive capital. Moreover, the farmers showed themselves

innovating in the development of institutional structures to facilitate the extension of credit and the expanding purchase of real property. But the ties with the traditional culture were strong:

"the migratory process derives much of its strength and impetus from the fact that it is firmly based on 'traditional organization.' Jural corporateness and mutual 'insurance' for the whole group are provided by the lineage structure Ties with the past were not broken and the structure of society in the homeland remained, I think, basically unchanged."
(1963, pp. 2-3)

Similar developments took place in various regions of the continent in the production of coffee and cotton. In addition there was often an expansion of traditional crops--oil palms, groundnuts, maize--as commercial outlets developed. Thus much of Africa's economic growth and much of her capital formation has taken place through agricultural expansion which involved little change in productive method and few institutional modifications. When the process of commercial expansion occurred in this way within the general context of the traditional culture, forces tending to disrupt the established way of life might be considerably softened as individuals were confronted with a relative narrow range of new experiences.

In terms of prospects for growth of per capita income in Africa, change via this route had disadvantages. The economic potential is largely dependent on export prospects which have proved to be unreliable in the short run and which in the long run are probably not adequate in themselves to provide a rising standard of living for a rapidly expanding population. Moreover, expansion by this means involves a minimum of subsidiary benefits from the adoption of new technology since the techniques employed are generally similar to those previously in use. Finally, such changes have engendered only a relatively slight multiplier effect since there was little potential for expanding the domestic output of consumer goods in response to an increase in purchasing power.

To the extent that such an expansion from the traditional sector might provide an impetus to the development of processing industries and trade facilities, these would offer greater opportunities for the employment of new techniques and would thus provide a greater potential for productivity gains in diverse areas. Such, however, involves the cost of a more complete break with the traditional cultures.

Economic Control by Expatriates

Expatriates in Africa have directed economic activity by virtue of their holding economic power on the one hand and by virtue of their holding political authority on the other.

Expatriate administrators in their political capacity were in a position to settle disputes and shape new goals for the societies which they governed. In large part these goals were economic.

Thus the colonial administrators directed the use of indigenous labor for the erection of administrative buildings, schools and hospitals. They supervised the construction of roads, bridges and dock facilities. In response to an expanding market for agricultural output, they encouraged the use of more productive crops and cultivation techniques and directed the disposal of outputs. They hired workers on wage contract in some instances and used forced labor conscriptions in others. When labor was supplied according to contract they applied various indirect pressures to encourage participation.

The use of forced labor for railway construction occurred in various parts of colonial Africa including the Belgian Congo, French West Africa, French Equatorial Africa, the Cameroons, Togo, Nigeria and Kenya. The high mortality rate among the displaced workers used in railway construction evidenced the worst abuses of the system of forced labor in Africa. (See Hailey, 1957, pp.1546-73.) Compulsory labor was utilized for other activities--especially for road building and portage--but was administered with greater legal restraint and for shorter periods. As railway construction declined after the opening decades of the century, and as voluntary labor became more readily available, the use of forced labor contingents became less common. It remained for use in emergencies and for special communal activities and was resorted to in a fairly wide variety of situations during the Second World War. The Portuguese administration remained subject to criticism for its misuse of forced labor longer than the other metropolitan powers.

Various agricultural projects were sponsored by the colonial governments. Research was conducted to find high yielding varieties of crops and livestock, more productive cultivation and fertilization techniques, and improved methods for fighting insects and crop diseases. In some areas members of the indigenous communities were required to participate in promising lines of agricultural activity and private companies sometimes were granted concessions to assist in the furtherance of the schemes.

Thus in French West Africa and French Equatorial Africa the production of cotton and rubber by native workers was made compulsory. Companies holding monopoly rights for distribution and export directed cultivation practices, compelled crop rotation and experimented with the use of mechanized equipment. The system was subject to abuse, especially in the early years of its application, and was the object of international condemnation. Similar events occurred in the Belgian Congo in respect to the cultivation of coffee, oil palms and cotton. The use of forced labor gradually lessened in response to public criticism and as the need declined

due to the growing effectiveness of commercial incentives. Cocoa, which was introduced into French West Africa under government compulsion, soon became an economic success and was expanded voluntarily. (Thompson and Adloff, 1958, pp.318, 484; 1960, pp.12-16, 177, 190, 195; Hailey, 1957, pp. 1370ff.)

Some agricultural development schemes sponsored by the colonial governments involved the resettlement of agricultural workers and their families. Some included major irrigation efforts as in South Africa, Rhodesia, Sudan and Mali. Some proved only questionably successful in terms of income generation, and some such as the Tanganika groundnut scheme were rather spectacular failures. Many, however, have been continued in expanded and modified form in post-independence situations.

Economic control not ^{directly} associated with political power was provided by expatriates as well.

European settlers in Africa established farms of varying size producing maize, wheat, sugar, fruit and livestock in South Africa; maize, tobacco and tea in Rhodesia; various field crops, coffee and livestock in Kenya; coffee in the eastern sections of the Congo and in the Central African Republic; bananas in the Ivory Coast, Guinea and Cameroon. European settlement in Angola and Mozambique, encouraged by the government of Portugal, has tended to be comprised principally of small holdings of relatively low productivity. They produce a variety of crops including sugar, coffee, sisal and tea.

Larger plantations directed by commercially employed European administrators have been widely important in African agricultural production. Large scale plantings of oil palms, coffee and cocoa have been undertaken in the Congo under the auspices of large expatriate companies including Unilever. Extensive rubber producing capacity has been developed by the Firestone Corporation in Liberia. And a single company accounts for about one quarter of Angola's coffee output. Large commercial ventures are involved in the production of sisal in Tanzania, tea in Uganda, oil palms, rubber and bananas in the Cameroons.

New varieties of outputs, new techniques and organizational methods, and new opportunities for the employment of indigenous labor have accompanied these efforts. The contacts weakened the ties of the African participants to their traditional environments. But much of the work required of the Africans required little new skill attainment, and to the extent that work on the European- or Asian-run farms was technologically similar to that on the traditional farms the impetus to economic change was reduced.

In mining, manufacturing and commerce European and Asian immigrants to Africa tended to assume positions of organizational control and administrative dominance as new opportunities developed. They possessed the psychological attitudes and the knowledge of productive and distributional techniques which were most needed for economic expansion on the continent.

Their rapid acquisition of commercial power was almost immediately accompanied by their efforts to erect barriers to the entry of potential competitors. The erection of barriers applied both to fellow expatriates and the indigenous population. But with respect to the latter the economic motive to restrict was reinforced by differences in language, culture, observed productivity rates and by racial prejudice. The will to erect barriers to the entry of competition is a problem which inevitably accompanies free enterprise. The problem for Africa was aggravated by the fact that ultimate political power frequently lay in the hands of individuals who often proved willing to reinforce the barriers rather than to limit them.

A second disadvantage of expatriate control lay in the tendency for profits to be sent overseas and thus made unavailable for local investment. The shortage of investment capital remains a major impediment to economic growth in Africa.

Indigenous Private Enterprise in a Non-traditional Environment

The goal of economic maximization and the will to establish productive capital can be acquired by the members of a society even where pre-existing institutions and capabilities have been associated with different social goals.

The establishment of new social goals is facilitated when individuals are removed from the influences of their traditional environment. This may occur, for example, when migration from a rural village to a commercial, urban setting involves a more or less complete severance of traditional ties. The degree of severance varies widely with the length of time involved, the distance moved, the nature of the traditional authority patterns, the degree of reinforcement from associates, the nature of the employment secured, the personalities of the migrants, etc. The degree to which the traditional background provided familiarity with commercial exchanges and economic incentives doubtless affects the pace of adaptation to economic modernization as well.

When improved techniques are available to individuals operating in an environment of private property rights with economic opportunities subject to little central political direction their efforts may be accompanied by rapidly rising productivity rates.

In reference to contemporary Africa the wisdom of reliance on private initiative to generate economic growth has been questioned. It has been suggested, for example, that the rate of capital accumulation under conditions of "free enterprise" may be inadequate to sustain even a minimally acceptable rate of national economic growth.

In Africa today the flow of savings forthcoming from the private efforts of individuals undergoing the transition from traditional to more "modern" patterns of living is likely to be small. When one's level of

consumption spending is well behind others of whom one is informed, there will be considerable motivation to expand consumption expenditures as rapidly as income rises. The problem is made more critical by the fact that a large part of the investment which does occur under these circumstances is likely to take the form of improved residences which contribute little to increased economic productivity.

Under such circumstances the rate of capital formation accompanying the process of "modernization" may be less than that accomplished by indigenous agriculturalists in a traditional or near traditional environment.

Other serious problems have been identified as associated with economic growth under a system of private enterprise. The distribution of economic rewards under such a system will tend to be in accordance with the effectiveness of the productive contribution of the factors over which various individuals exercise control. But these contributions will be determined not only by personal skill, strength and merit but by the caprices of economic fortune. And the long recognized problems associated with monopolies and trade restraints are widely evidenced on the continent. There is some suggestion that the distribution of rewards forthcoming from economic growth under a capitalist system may not be socially acceptable in contemporary Africa. And many political leaders have pronounced the need for government action to guard against excessive distributional inequality.

A third problem is associated with economic growth which takes place through individual initiative accompanied by the the legal rules of private property rights. This is the fact that many traditional institutions will be subjected by such a process to a maximum degree of destruction and this implies a high level of psychic costs to be borne by the participants.

Governmental Control of Economic Effort

A considerable interest in the control of economic activity by governmental units exists in most African countries. This is not surprising given the nature of political direction during the colonial era, the widespread need for social overhead expenditures including education, and the fear of reliance on private enterprise.

Whereas the shortage of technical and administrative talent comprises the most serious obstacle to Africa's economic growth, governments have the best opportunity to negotiate for the services of knowledgeable individuals from overseas. Moreover, African governments frequently have important advantages in securing the services of indigenous personnel as well.

Whereas shortages of savings and capital equipment constitute obvious economic handicaps, governments can "force" saving through exertion of their tax powers. Similarly the government has an obvious advantage over most private business units in the negotiation of foreign loans.

Governments can devise redistributational schemes in accordance with the social will. And it has been argued by many that central direction of

investment and of the production and distribution processes will result in greater efficiency of factor use, quicker access of economies of scale and hence an accelerated growth rate.

However, the extent to which a government can direct a country's economic activity is determined by the breadth of its control over the society's resources. Table 1 attempts to suggest the extent of governmental control over economic resources in 16 countries. It shows general government revenues as a percent of gross domestic product for the six Sub-Saharan countries for which data were available in the 1966 Yearbook of National Accounts Statistics. High and low percentages are given for the period 1958-65, or for the part of this period for which data were available. Corresponding percentages for six South American countries and for France, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States are also included.

The data suggest the fact that in low-income countries it is difficult for governments to appropriate a large proportion of the nation's income. Much economic activity is not commercialized and many of the people are extremely poor. In low-income countries, moreover, the need for spending on social services--including education--for a rapidly growing population demands most of the resources which the governments can assemble. These factors suggest that direct participation by African governments in economic activity is at present subject to important financial limitations.

Table 1. General Government Revenues as a Percentage of Gross Domestic Product: High and Low Percentages for the Period 1958-1965 (or as Indicated) for 16 Countries

<u>Country</u>	<u>Range</u>
Nigeria (1958-62)	11.8 % - 14.5 %
Togo (1963-4)	12.7 - 13.3
Sierra Leone (1963-4)	13.3 - 14.4
Zambia	14.5 - 26.7
South Africa	16.0 - 19.5
Rhodesia (1958-63)	19.1 - 22.0
Colombia	10.5 - 12.0
Peru	12.2 - 16.0
Bolivia	13.3 - 15.4
Chile	20.0 - 24.0
Ecuador	20.2 - 23.8
Uruguay	23.0 - 27.8
United States	24.0 - 26.9
United Kingdom	25.7 - 29.3
France	33.1 - 37.9
Germany	34.9 - 36.7

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