



From Wild Palm to Plantation System: A Trajectory of Colonial Policies on Palm Oil Production in Annang, Nigeria, 1900-1960

EMMANUEL TOBY, JOSEPH I. OSAGIE
University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria

Abstract. This paper examines colonial economic policies and the oil palm production in Annang, of Calabar Province of Nigeria from 1901-1960. Before the establishment of colonial rule, the people of Annang were engaged in the production of wild oil palm for domestic use. The colonial period witnessed the introduction of plantation system for the cultivation oil palm trees and production of palm oil for export. Annang produced large quantities of palm oil and thus contributed greatly to colonial economy. In spite this, the contribution of Annang to colonial economy has over the years been treated as an appendage to the Ibibio colonial historical experiences. The neglect is what this article attempts to correct. Oil palm tree, has a long history in Annang, especially as most its byproducts served both domestic and commercial needs of the people. This article examines Annang unique experiences during colonial period in the light of the fast-developing interest in micro studies in Nigerian historiography. It therefore focuses on the colonial policies on palm oil production, especially the various measures formulated and implemented in Annang from the inception of British colonial rule in Annang in 1901 to 1960 when Nigeria attained independence. It adopts the historical method, relying extensively on primary sources obtained from oral interviews and archival sources to interrogate palm oil production in Annang during the period under consideration.

Keywords: Oil palm Trees, Palm Oil, Plantation System, and Colonial Policies.

1. Introduction

The oil palm is an indigenous plant not only to the people of Annang of Nigeria but to the people of West Africa. The pre-colonial Annang had a viable economy in which palm oil production was major

parts that met the needs of the people and the society. When the British colonial rule was imposed on the people, this indigenous economy was however, altered by the colonial economic policies which emphasized the production of cash crops for export to metropolitan markets and importation of finished goods. Of all the export crops during the colonial period, palm oil was the major agricultural commodity exported from Annang. Palm oil became important to the European industries with the abolition of slave trade and the introduction of legitimate trade. Major reasons were that, European industries required palm oil as lubricant for industrial machine and for the manufacture of soap, candles, margarine and a cooking fat. What emerged from these was a new economic structure that was a blend of the indigenous and nascent colonial economic systems in which the people of Annang derived some benefits. This article focuses on the development of palm oil industry in Annang during the colonial period and the involvement of the indigenous people in the palm oil industry and the impact it made on their life and society.

1.1 Overview of Annang Society

Annang people occupied the North-Western part of the present-day Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria which lies within the Cross River Basin, between latitudes $40^{\circ}.25'$ and 70° North and longitudes $70^{\circ}.15'$ and $90^{\circ}.30'$ East. Pre-colonial Annang was made up of thirty-five clans (*Aduk*), each of which had its own independent political institutions headed by a clan head (*Akuku*). Therefore, there were thirty five clan heads in Annang. During the colonial period the Annang were constituted into the Ikot Ekpene and Abak Divisions in Calabar Province, with some other sub-set occupying 150 square miles in the north of Opo Division in Rivers Province. These communities had a cultural bond and they all looked up to Afaha Obong

where the Annang supreme deity was situated, as their place of origin and traditional headquarters. To the North, Annang is bounded by Ini and Ikono Local Government Areas and to the South by Ikot Abasi Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. To the West, Annang is bounded by Ngwa and Azumini communities of Abia state and Ndoki community of Rivers State and to the East, by Uyo and Mkpatenin Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State.

Geographically, Annang lies almost entirely in the rain forest belt of Southern Nigeria. The area has a level landscape, covered by relatively low vegetation and myriad of palms. There is a mean annual rainfall of 2,030-2,540mm. Annang has a tropical climate with wet and dry seasons. The wet season spans from March to October when the monsoon winds blow from the South-West, while the dry season spans from November to February when the harmattan (*ekarika*) blows from the North-East. The landscape is generally flat and low-lying, with no part rising above 300 feet and no part less than 100ft feet above sea level. It has a level landscape covered by relatively low vegetation with abundant palm trees. Annang with a population of more than one million is the second largest ethnic group in present-day Akwa Ibom State of Nigeria. The Annang are constituted into eight Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State, namely; Abak, Essien Udim, Etim Ekpo, Ika, Ikot Ekpene, Obot Akara, Oruk Anam and Ukanafun. In spite of this, the people are culturally homogenous.

The Annang people put in place political and socio-economic structures that encouraged every member of the society to contribute to the growth and development of the society. From the family through the villages to the clan council, institutions were established for effective administration of Annang. In this regard, every political level of the society such as family (*idip*), extended family (*Ufok*) lineage (*Ekpuk*), village (*Idung*) and clan (*Aduk*) had its area of influence and this helped in the smooth running of the communities. Decision at each political level of administration was taken after due consultation with the people concerned. In this way, the people were represented at each level of the decision-making bodies. This helped to minimize conflicts in the society and thereby encouraged peaceful coexistence of every member of the society. This paved way for the people to carry out their economic activities in a peaceful atmosphere, leading to high level productivity. In this regard, the people were engaged in farming, craft industries and trade. The effects of all of these were the emergence of an economically viable society that was not only self-sufficient but also had surpluses to exchange with their immediate and distant

neighbours. The subjugation of Annang to British colonial control at the beginning of the twentieth century have in several ways radically disrupted and transformed the traditional political and economic structure of the people.

1.2 Conquest and Imposition of Colonial Rule

British political intervention in Annang began in 1901 when one of the columns of the British expedition forces passed through Ikot Ekpene village while pursuing the Obinkits-Aro westward. The expedition was the “severest single blow” that the British military patrol dealt to the Aro oligarchy in Annang. The punitive expedition was justified on the grounds of stopping slave raiding, abolishing the fetish practices and stimulating legitimate trade in Annang which the Aro were seen as obstructing. This expedition had serious political consequences on the Annang people. For instance, after raiding Arochukwu, the four columns of the British expedition forces led by Lt. Col. Morrison launched war of conquest against Annang which swept through northern Annang clans with the aim of bringing the people under colonial rule. The people’s reaction to this aggression by British forces was one of surprise and resolve to protect their land and sovereignty from foreign forces hence they did not easily succumb to British ‘maxim Gun’ without stiff resistance.

The people thus resisted the British forces for about ten years (1901-1912), before the whole of Annang was brought under the control and influence of British colonial authorities. As a result of such resistance from the people, British subjugation of Annang was initially confined to such clans in the southern parts. The resistance put up by the people was enhanced by the fact the people did not belong a single clan ruled by a single King (*Akuku*). So, the British expedition forces had to fight and defeat each of the thirty-five clans of Annang before the people were finally subjected in 1912. With the subjugation of Annang and imposition of colonial rule on the people, the British government was set to exploit the human and natural resources especially palm palm produce which abound in the area.

1.3 Palm Oil Production (Pre-Plantation Era)

In the traditional Annang society, oil palm trees, *Elois Guinensis*, grew wild in the Annang forest. The palms trees were public property and, so, were commonly owned. In this case, the fruits from the tree could be harvested by anyone when it ripened. The only exceptions to that practice were those within someone else’s farm and could not be harvested by anyone except the owner or by his permission. The palm tree

was highly rated due to the fact that all by-products of the tree were useful to the people. Palm oil constituted the most important cash crops exported from Annang during the colonial period. But before their contact with the Europeans, it had been utilized domestically by the people. The oil extracted from the pericarp of the fruits was a valuable source of fat and edible oil for cooking all types of food. The oil obtained from the kernel when heated in clay pot was widely used as body lotion and for treatment of some diseases such as cough. With the increased demand of palm oil in Europe, the Europeans directed their attention to Nigeria as source of palm produce. The peasant farmers were, therefore, forced or persuaded to increase production of palm oil export. The palm oil exported at the early stage was obtained from the trees that grew wild in the forest. In order to ensure protection of wild oil palm trees, especially felling, the Ikot Ekpene District Council in 1912 promulgated some rules and regulations among which were:

- The felling of oil palms trees for the purpose of obtaining palm wine is prohibited; and
- No oil-bearing palm tree shall be felled for any purpose whatsoever or tapped for palm wine without the consent of the Native Council within the area of whose jurisdiction it grows.

Any breach of the above rules was punishable. For the first offence, a fine not exceeding five pounds was paid and for the second offence a fine not exceeding five pounds or imprisonment with hard labour for a period not exceeding six months. For any subsequent offence, a fine not exceeding twenty-five pounds and or imprisonment with hard labour for a period exceeding twelve month was prescribed.

With these rules established, the peasant farmers in Annang were constantly under pressure or coercion from British authorities to engage in harvesting fruits from wild oil palm trees and the production palm oil for export. This was due to the fact that palm oil became highly demanded in Europe as lubricant for keeping the wheels of industrial machines turning and as raw materials for soap making. Writing on the importance of palm oil to the European industries during this period, Oluwasanmi (1966) posits that: *Economic conditions in Europe in the nineteenth century were favourable to the reappearance of the produce of the oil palm in international trade and to the development of other vegetable oils. The demand for lubricating oils and greases expanded with the rapid expansion of industries. The traditional sources of animal and fish fats were inadequate to cope with increasing demands for crude oils. Palm oil slowly replaced animal fats in the manufacture of soap.*

The survival of industrial production in Britain, therefore, depended on a constant flow of palm oil from all parts of palm oil producing areas in Nigeria of which Annang was a part. To expand the scope of oil palm exploitation from Annang, the people were encouraged by the colonial authorities to cultivate oil palm trees in plantations. In order to achieve this, the colonial authorities supplied the people with improved oil palm seedlings. This and among others were to ensure maximum production of palm oil hence every available means to boost production was encouraged. In Annang, women were the main producers of palm oil and like in the past, the men did the climbing of the trees and cutting the oil palm bunch. European firms especially United Africa Company (UAC) and John Holt, through their agents were the main buyers of palm oil in Annang. The table below show wild palm oil exported from Annang between 1912 and 1919.

Table 1: Palm Oil from Wild Palm Trees

Palm Oil	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920
Tons	2,112	1,986	1,820	1,447	56,784	37,295	2,2682	19,273	19,054

Source: N.A.E. (C.S.) CSE 1/85/6495, A Report on the Annang Groups, p.13

These figures did not represent the actual tons or quantity of palm oil in Annang during the period under consideration as palm oil was highly consumed locally. It was only the surplus after meeting local demand that was sold to the trading firms for export to Europe. It should be emphasised that the initial palm oil that was exported from Annang was obtained from the trees that grew wild in forests. When this source was no longer generating sufficient quantities of palm oil for export, the colonial authorities introduced plantation system for the cultivation of oil palm trees.

1.4 Plantation Era and Palm Oil

The cultivation of oil palm plantation in Annang was initiated by the colonial Department of Agriculture from 1929. Before this period as mentioned earlier, palm oil that was produced and exported from Annang was derived from wild oil palm trees. However, this source became inadequate due to high demand of palm oil in Europe. The reasons for these inadequacies were many; first the wild palm trees were communally owned as such was not properly taken care of. Second the quantity of palm oil produced from wild palm

became insufficient to meet local as well as export demands. Third, there was the need to introduce varieties of palm trees that could produce high quality palm oil. So, by 1929 the peasant farmers were persuaded to cultivate oil palm with improved seedlings which were brought in from Calabar and distributed free initially to the farmers by the colonial authorities. At the initial stage, only a few peasant farmers embraced the plantation system for the cultivation of oil palm tree as most of them did not see the need for cultivating the trees that were readily available in the forests. Notwithstanding this challenge, strenuous efforts were made by the Agricultural Departments to stimulate its cultivation of plantations. Accordingly, a number of experimental

farms with palm nurseries where oil palm seedlings were supplied to farmers freely were established in some communities in Annang. Agricultural Department also dispatched agricultural extension service personnel to the various villages to enlighten the farmers on the method of cultivation of oil palm seedlings in plantations. The introduction of individual plantation system was to ensure regular inflow and good quality of palm oil. Thus, in 1929, in Ikot Ekpene District Council area, about 3,000 improved palm seedlings were produced and distributed to farmers. In April, 1952, the following persons were supported by the colonial extension workers in Ikot Ekpene to cultivate oil palm seedlings in their plantations as show in the table below:

Table 2: Individual Palm Oil Plantations in Ikot Ekpene Division, 1952

S/N	Name	Locality	Total Stands	Date
	Mr. Iyoho Ekerete	Ntak Ikot Akapa	132	8/4/62
	Mr. E. U. Essen	Obiakpe	40	15/4/53
	Mrs O. A. Basse	Afaha	290	16/4/52
	Mr Ukpong	Ikot Ekpene	50	18/4/52
	Mr J. P. Inyang	Uwa West	60	19/4/52
	Mr E. U. Akpan	Afaha Ikot Offiong	85	21/4/52
	Mr U. U. Etefia	Ndiya	20	24/4/52
	Mr U. U. Udo	Ukana	12	24/4/52
	Mr Uom Umo	Ukana	21	25/4/52
	Mr J. Ukpong	Nyiara Enyia	24	28/4/52
	Mr J. Udofia	Ukana	48	28/4/52
	Mr J. U. Ineme	Nyiara Enyia	24	29/4/52
	Mr O. A Essen	Ibong	18	29/4/52
	Mr K. Udom	Ikpe	12	29/4/52
	Mr J. O. Essen	Ikot Aka	12	29/4/52
	St Michael School	Uyo Road	72	29/4/52
	Mr U. A. Ekpe	Ukana	36	30/4/52

Source: N.A.E. (I.D.) IKOTDIST 13/1/583, Agricultural Asst. Monthly Reports, 1952,

To further enhance the widespread cultivation of oil palm trees in plantations, the Agricultural Department the Agricultural Department trained several agricultural officers as extension workers and deployed them to the villages to enlighten local farmers. For example, in 1952, the Agricultural Officer in Abak reported that visits were made to several oil palm plantations in the area and that the owners were instructed on the care and maintenance young oil palm plant. These efforts by the Agricultural Departments to stimulate large scale individual cultivation of oil palm trees in plantations however, attracted a few peasant farmers. These farmers adopted the recommended spacing of about 25 feet apart which allowed about 50 oil palm trees per acre as suggested by the extension workers. At the early stage of introduction of cultivation of palm trees, most farmers, as stated earlier did not embrace the cultivation of oil palm plantations mainly due to the fact that there were abundant wild oil palm trees in the forests even though the colonial authorities thought that this source was not enough to meet the high

demand of palm oil in Europe. Again, the wild oil palm trees were not properly maintained by the farmers because they were communally owned, hence there was need to explore other sources such as individual oil palm plantations. Some other challenges that hindered the oil palm plantation system at the initial stage were local habits, customs and land tenure system of the Annang people. Land tenure system did not encourage individual acquisition and ownership of large portion of land in one location. Besides all these, the initial government indifferent policy of not forcing the farmers into plantation cultivation also accounted for the slow pace of adoption of oil palm plantation system by farmers in Annang. Lastly, local farmers were of the view that cultivation of oil palm plantation system was too demanding in term of cost and labour.

In order to solve the challenges arising from individual ownership of oil palm plantations, the colonial authorities in Abak and Ikot Ekpene Divisions, began to arouse the interest of school children - as a way of catching them young.¹² As such, schools were visited

from time to time by Agricultural Officers and extension workers and lectures delivered on the importance subject oil palm plantation system. Teachers were instructed by colonial officials to establish and maintain oil palm plantation in their schools where school children would imbibe the method of cultivation of oil palm trees in plantation. They were also encouraged to mobilize their pupils to use oil palm trees to fence their school compounds against any encroachment. It was expected that the knowledge acquired by pupils and students from their school's oil palm plantations would be transmitted to their parents. Some of the schools that established oil palm plantations included, Methodist School, Afaha,

Methodist School, Ukpua, S. M. School, Uqot, C. S. School, Mbiabet, St Ignatius School, Adiasim, Convent School, Nto Nsek, Convent School, Ukana, Convent School, Itak, St Michael School, Uyo Road, St Michael School, Okon, Jnr. Primary School, Ikot Edon, Jnr. Primary School, Ifuho, Jnr. Primary School, Ninya, R. C. M. School, Adiasim, C. S. M. School, Ibahehit, R. C. M. School, Ibahehit, R. C. M. School, Urankpan, Q. I. M. School, Abiakpo, R, C. M. School, Uradetobo, and A. C. M. School, Ibam Edet. Apart from schools' oil palm plantations, the colonial authorities also set up several "demonstration oil palm plantations" in strategic locations in Annang out of which seven were located in Ikot Ekpene Division

Table 3: Demonstration Palm Plots In Ikot Ekpene Division

Localities	Established (year)	No. of Trees	Acres
Nkalu	1928	36	.6
Mbiabong	1928	72	1.2
Obot Akara	1928	57	1.0
Ikot Abia	1928	57	1.0
Ududu Ikpe	1929	57	1.0
Nung Ukim	1929	43	.7
Ikot Ama	1929	57	1.0

Source: N.A.E. (C.S.) CSE1/85/5261, Annual Report Ikot Ekpene Division-Agricultural Department.

These efforts coupled with the distribution of free oil palm seedlings to farmers, the efforts of the colonial authorities yielded positive results as a large number of farmers in Annang embraced oil palm plantation system. By 1930s, several in Ikot Ekpene Division had established large scale oil palm plantations and some of them became known as "big time oil palm farmers". In fact, there were about forty of such big-time oil palm farmers in Ikot Ekpene Division in 1930 with each of them cultivating about fifty acres of oil palm plantation.

2. Palm Oil Processing

The colonial authorities were against the crude method that was used in the processing of palm oil by the people which resulted in low quantity and quality of palm oil. So, to ensure high quality and quantity of palm oil, they introduced simple mechanical means of pressing the fruit to enhance higher oil production. This attempt by the colonial authorities to influence oil production amounted to the introduction of rudimentary industrialization into the indigenous oil palm industry in Annang. With the introduction of the oil press machines, agricultural officers were deployed to oil producing localities to arouse the interest of the people on the new method of palm oil production and to also demonstrate to farmers how to operate the oil processing machine. The machines yielded a higher percentage of oil per fruit as indicated in the table below:

Table 4: Percentage of Palm Oil to Fruit in some Places in Abak and Ikot Ekpene

Place	Press Machine method	Traditional Method
Ekparakwa	17.8	15
Abak	16.7	13.3
Ikot Ekpene	17.5	13.5
Nung Udo	17.5	11

Source: N.A.E. (C.S.) CSE 1/85/4734, Palm Oil Presses.

From the table, the percentage of oil extracted from the new method was higher than that of traditional method in all the centres where demonstration took place. The new method enjoyed a superior technical advantage in efficiency, quality and quantity of oil produced. It further had the advantage of eliminating the delay and waste associated with the traditional method. Even

with this obvious advantage, the attempt to introduce these oil press machines was not very successful largely because of their high prices.

While the big oil palm farmers could purchase the oil press machines, the smaller farmers could not and so, obtained them through from the District Councils at a

high price of eighteen pounds each which they paid by instalment – hire purchase. The high price of the machine-made majority of the smaller farmers uninterested in the new method. This became a source of worry to the colonial officials who believed that if something was not done, the quantity of palm oil from the area would drop. In a letter by the Resident, Calabar Province to the Secretary, Southern Province, he stated that “there is now a demand in this area for palm oil presses, but the natives are unable to pay the full purchase price.” In suggesting solution to this problem of affordability of the press machine, he proposed that oil presses machines should be bought by the Native Administration and sold to local farmers on the hire purchase system. In approving this proposal, the Secretary, Southern Provinces laid down some conditions, among them were:

(a) it should be ascertained if the Native Authorities is in favour of the proposal; (b) no profit or loss should be incurred in the re-sale; and (c) presses should not be bought by the Native Administration unless there is a prospective purchaser.

With this approval, the numbers of oil press machines increased although the actual number of the machines was not known as there were no records in both Ikot Ekpene and Abak Divisions. In spite of its advantage, the mechanization of the processing of palm oil did not completely displace the traditional method, as both methods coexisted. This was due to the fact that majority of the small-scale farmers depended on the traditional method due to their inability to purchase the oil pressing machines.

The decision by the colonial authorities to industrialize (or mechanise) palm oil production sector of the economy was not essentially founded on a desire to

alleviate the working conditions of the local producers, neither was it aimed at transforming the character of the economy through some form of Industrial Revolution. Fundamentally, the efforts of the colonial authorities at introducing the plantation system in Annang was designed in line with the plantation economies of the East Indies which protected imperial economic interest. The mechanize technique of processing palm oil was perceived to be the dominant factor that increased palm oil production in Belgian Congo, Malaya in the East and the Dutch East Indian Colonies. For example, the export of palm oil from the Belgian Congo and Malaya stood at 26,000 tons and 1,000 tons respectively in 1928. Ten years later, exports from the Belgian Congo and Malaya were 69,000 tons and 54,000 tons respectively. Similarly, the export of palm oil from the Dutch East India colonies of Sumatra and Java rose from 28,000 tons in 1928 to 217, 000 tons in 1938; a rise of approximately 165 per cent. In contrast, Nigeria’s export from palm oil producing areas declined from 127,000 tons in 1928 to 110,000 tons in 1938.

The decline was attributed mainly to the waste caused by the traditional method of processing and also partly to the inadequate labour in the labour-intensive indigenous method. The hand oil press machine was therefore introduced in Annang to solve these problems. The fluctuation in palm oil and palm kernels production in Annang as shown in the table below marked a turning point in colonial authority’s attitude towards the plantation system as the initial indifference exhibited by the colonial authorities had changed in favour of calculated interference through mechanisation as the best means of increasing yield and improving quality.

Table 5: The Comparative Figures of Grade Palm Oil and Kernels for Ikot Ekpene and Abak, May-July 1942 and 1943

Area	Year	Month	Kernels in Tons	Oil in Drums
Ikot Ekpene	1942	May	3,047	632
Ikot Ekpene	1942	June	3,045	386
Ikot Ekpene	1942	July	2,887	315
Ikot Ekpene	1943	May	4,444	478
Ikot Ekpene	1943	June	4,217	347
Ikot Ekpene	1943	July	3,996	101
Abak	1942	May	1,259	945
Abak	1942	June	1,211	755
Abak	1942	July	1,150	353
Abak	1943	May	905	864
Abak	1943	June	928	580
Abak	1943	July	1,150	353

Source: N.A.E. (C.S.) CSE 1/85/8650, *Palm Oil and Kernel Production, 1943, p.35*

From the table, a decrease in production in both Ikot Ekpene and Abak was particularly noticeable in the month of July. This development partly triggered the introduction of the mechanised approach by the colonial authorities to boost the quantity and quality of palm oil produced in the area.

3. Impact of Second World War on Palm Oil Production

On the outbreak of the war, the Resident of Calabar Province sent the following circular, Ref. No. D.A. 14/252, to all the District Officers on the war instruction of the Secretary of State to Agricultural Department on the urgent need to intensify efforts on maximum production of export crops which included palm oil.

War instructions were issued by the Secretary of the State that the agricultural Department should start every possible effort to obtain maximum production, and particular emphasis was laid on the question of export crops. And that if we are to obtain maximum production, we cannot afford to relax any effort which will help us to maximum production.

This war instruction changed was totally implemented in respect of the production of palm oil in Annang. The intensification of the demand for palm oil from the Annang and other areas in Nigeria was necessitated by the shortages which was due to the blockade by German forces in 1942 of the Far East Asia countries which were hitherto, the major source of palm oil to world market. According to Kehinde Faluyi, “since the East Asian market had been lost, efforts were geared towards ensuring maximum production of palm oil and other commodities which could sustain the allies throughout the duration of the war”. It was against this background that the British officials in Annang embarked on aggressive propaganda to ensure that the people sustained or increased the production of palm oil.

In this regard, aggressive propaganda was carried out to encourage oil palm planting and production. Agricultural assistants were sent to plantations at Abak and Ikot Ekpene, while improved seedlings were also distributed free of charge to farmers. However, these efforts did not make much impact in palm oil production as several able-bodied men either migrated to the cities in search of white-collar job or drafted into the military to fight on behalf of their colonial overlords. The consequence of these was that seedlings distributed to farmers in Abak Division decreased as there was decline in able bodied farmers willing to go into the cultivation of oil palm plantation. For example, in 1944, the number of new oil palm farmers in Abak Division was 40, 50 acres of plantation and 3,430 seedlings distributed to farmers while in 1945 number of palm tree farmers was 26, acres of plantation and 1,350 seedlings distributed to farmers. The decrease in the number of planters and acreage also led to a reduction in palm oil production in Annang as shown in the table 6 below:

Table 6: Comparative Figures for 1944 and 1945 for Grade Palm Oil Graded in Ikot Ekpene Station

Months	Palm Oil	Palm Oil
	1945	1944
Jan	2,028	2134
Feb	2514	2460
Mar	3736	3378
April	3716	3766
May	4408	4291
June	2740	3318
July	1496	1897
Aug	860	1897
Sept	611	1092
Oct	711	1165
Nov	861	1561
Dec	1025	1543

Source: N.A.E. (C.S.) CSE 1/85/5261, Annual Report Agricultural Department, 1945, p.6

From the above table, the decrease in palm oil production was particularly evident in the second half of 1945. This however, did not discourage the colonial authorities from sustaining propaganda with a view to stimulating the people to produce more palm oil. In doing this, the colonial authorities discouraged the farmers from focussing more on food crops production. The men, their wives and children were put under constant pressure to go to the bush to harvest palm nuts and process them into oil, for according to a war propaganda slogan, “each bunch of palm nut that

could be cut was equivalent to cutting down a German soldier, and each tin oil produced could help to ruining a German gun or aeroplane on the battle field. Churches were not spared in the campaign to stimulate higher production of the essential commodities. The clergymen were instructed to preach to the congregation in their respective churches on Sundays of the need to produce palm oil as the victory of the allied forces depended on the availability of the commodity.

The intervention by the colonial authorities in Annang to increase palm oil production was also supported by financial and business enterprises in the area such as Lever Brothers which had muscled its way into the produce buying. These enterprises lent their weight in favour of government intervention in the oil palm industry through mechanisation of the process which would result in increase of production. It was as a result of such intervention that, after the War, funds were made available under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act for the implementation of the mechanization scheme of the palm oil industry. As a result, the construction of the pioneer palm oil mill commenced in Annang in 1946. Palm oil mills were subsequently established in some important palm oil producing centres of Annang such as Abak, Ekponyond and Ikot Ekpene. The establishment of these mills had profound impact on palm oil production in both Abak and Ikot Ekpene Divisions as it increased palm oil production in the areas. This was seen in the numbers of drums that was bought by United Africa Company (U.A.C.) at Ikot Ekpene buying station in 1947 which amounted to 48 drums weighing 21 tons. This number would have been more than this, if all palm oil produced in the area were brought to the buying station at Ikot Ekpene. According to Agricultural Officer, Ikot Ekpene,

If all the oil produced in the district were to be sold here the tons of oil bought by U.A.C. would have been greater than what we have. But oil from Ududu Ikpe goes to Itu by canoe and a good quantity of oil from non-river areas of the district goes to Nwaniba by Lorries and cycles daily.

The introduction of palm oil mill which was an advancement over the indigenous method of palm oil production came with its challenges. It triggered socio-economic crises among the women who felt that they were negatively affected when palm fruits were taken to the mills for processing. Traditionally, women had property rights in palm oil production and processing. Such rights, reduced to monetary terms, provided them with a source of social security while sustaining their economic and financial autonomy within the household. Consequently, women claimed and appropriated the right to process palm oil after their husbands had harvested the palm nuts. Since the traditional process of milling oil, using relatively crude methods, now had to compete with the oil mills which produced better quality oil, the women felt that they were gradually being displaced in the palm oil industry. Although the initial aim of the introduction of the oil mill did not target the small-scale producers, they were later encouraged to bring their palm fruits to the mills in order to increase production. It is not

surprising, therefore, that even when the idea of the palm oil mill was first mooted and up to its inception, it encountered vigorous opposition and outright hostility from women who felt their social and economic interests were threatened. It was as result of this that that the anti-mill riots occurred in Annang.

Although the introduction of oil mill in Annang, did not, eradicate the traditional method of palm oil processing, local protests continued throughout the late 1940s until it was clearly articulated in 1949 by women who dispatched protest letters to the Assistant District Officer in Abak who, in his response in 1952, conceded reluctantly that “[m]ill system have not fitted into the social fabric of Annang society”. He argued that women will always be suspected of the mills system until such a time when it shall be accepted by them. He concluded that “in the meantime the colonial authorities can only keep up propaganda to encouraged them to accept the mill system”.

This type of mind set by colonial officials resulted in the citing of a few mills, even in the most hostile villages, especially, between 1949 and 1950, although such an accomplishment did not detract from the fact that women were reluctant to patronize the mill. The women had argued that they did not trust the palm oil from oil mills because according to them, it was not good for preservation and consumption and so they continued with their protests. Not willing to back down on the establishment of the mills, the colonial authorities attributed the protest to the handiwork of local agitators and interested oil middleman. But the fact remains that the protests over the establishment of the palm oil mills by the women were the direct result of colonial authorities’ failure to study closely the dynamics of the peasant economy as a necessary step to implementing the mill programme. Apparently, the colonial authorities were more interested in quantitative and qualitative increases in the total export output than in taking corresponding interest in the socio-economic dislocations which would come in the wake of mechanisation.

Unwilling to learn from history, the regime conveniently forgot that women’s property share in palm oil processing did not end in palm oil alone but also extended to the unrefined part of the oil, kernels, and other residue of production which together provided them with some capital when sold. Under the mechanised process, however, some sources of income by the were lost as they succinctly articulated in the letter by the women to the District Officer in Ikot Ekpene. In the said letter they argued that, “oil palm processing had customarily been their duty and their

means of livelihood, therefore any attempt to deprive them of this right would incur their wrath”.

The continued fluctuation in the expected output of the palm oil mills in the post Second World War period was directly connected to their inadequate supplies of oil palm fruits due to the hostility to the very idea of their establishment which resulted in the unwillingness of the farmers, especially the women to supply them with fruits. Instead, such women and small producers preferred to process the fruits using the traditional method. This rendered the mills uneconomical and confirmed the dominance of the traditional methods of processing. These factors coupled with other structural problems of the War period and post War challenges counter-balanced the technical superiority of the mill against traditional methods which were not subject to such limitations. Thus, while the colonial authorities placed their hope on the indigenous oil palm industry both as a source of revenue and a source of raw materials for imperial industry, it failed to take into cognisance the reaction of the local Annang women to this technological innovation which threatened to undermine their economic wellbeing. The vestiges of this experience still subsist even in contemporary time, as the bulk of the palm oil produced in Annang comes through the traditional method with only a small proportion from modern mills.

4. Conclusion

The paper stresses that prior to the imposition of colonial rule, oil palm trees grew wild in the forests and were communally owned. The oil extracted from the pericarp of the fruits was a valuable source of fat and that from the kernel was widely used as body lotion and for the preparation of some traditional medicine. With the imposition of colonial rule and the expansion of export of palm oil to Europe, this source became inadequate due to high demand of palm oil in Europe. The reasons for these inadequacies were many; first the wild palm trees were communally owned as such was not properly taken care of. Second the quantity and quality of palm oil produced from wild palm became insufficient to meet up the demand of the European enterprises. There was therefore the need to introduce improved varieties of palm seedlings that could produce high quality palm oil for European markets as palm oil was the necessary lubricant for industrial machines and for the manufacture of soap, candles, margarine and a cooking fat while palm kernels were raw materials pharmaceutical industries in Europe. To meet the demands for palm oil, the colonial authorities introduced plantation system and palm oil mills to ensure regular inflow and high-

quality palm oil. In order to achieve this, a number of experimental farms with palm nurseries were established in some communities in Annang. The paper there reveals that the plantation system was not totally successful in the Annang as only a few farmers embraced the policy for several reasons among which were one, many farmers did not see the need to cultivate in plantations, oil palm trees, that were abundantly available in the forest and two, the process of cultivation of oil palm trees in plantation was cumbersome as it required modern input which was not readily available to them.

The paper also revealed that palm oil mill system which was to ensure the modernization of the traditional method of palm oil processing was also not successful in Annang as it triggered socio-economic crisis among the women, who felt that they were being negatively affected by the mechanisation processing. Consequently, the introduction of palm oil mill in Annang, did not succeed in eradicating the traditional method of palm oil processing as majority of the women still stuck to it throughout the colonial period. Even in contemporary time, only a small proportion of total Annang oil output is produced from the mills, even though they provide more efficient means of extracting oil against the traditional method. The paper has been able to articulate in detail some colonial policies as they affected the oil palm industry. The basic argument in this paper therefore is that the introduction of palm plantation system did not totally displace the production of palm oil from wild oil palm trees in Annang and that the women who were the main producers of palm oil, were not favourably disposed to the introduction of palm oil mills because of the negative effect it had on their socio-economic wellbeing.

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