

# TROPICAL AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

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Edited by  
M B Gleave

# **Tropical African Development**

## ***Geographical Perspectives***

Edited by M. B. Gleave



Copublished in the United States with  
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., New York

**Longman Scientific & Technical,**  
Longman Group UK Ltd,  
Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow,  
Essex CM20 2JE, England  
*and Associated Companies throughout the world.*

*Copublished in the United States with  
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158*

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Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London W1P 9HE.

First published 1992

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Tropical African development: geographical  
perspectives

I. Gleave, M. B.

338.96

ISBN 0-582-30147-5

**Library in Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Tropical African development: geographical perspectives/edited

by M. B. Gleave.

p. cm.

Includes index.

1. Africa, Sub-Saharan – Economic conditions – 1960– 2. Africa, Sub-  
Saharan – Economic policy.

HC800.T76 1992

338.967 – dc20

Set in 10/11 Palatino, Linotron 202

Produced by Longman Singapore Publishers (Pte) Ltd.  
Printed in Singapore

## Tropical African Development

# Introduction

This book analyses the major development problems and policies in contemporary tropical Africa that are the subject of geographical research. It does not attempt a complete analysis of development problems and policies in the subcontinent but demonstrates the contribution made by geographers to the study of developing countries in recent decades. In Britain, the members of the Developing Areas Research Group (DARG) of the Institute of British Geographers are active in such work. The Group welcomes new members, both geographers and non-geographers alike. This volume appears under the auspices of DARG as one of a series written by members of the Group and associates. The first, *Latin American Development: Geographical Perspectives*, edited by David Preston, was published by Longman in 1987. The second, *South East Asian Development: Geographical Perspectives*, edited by Denis Dwyer, was published by Longman in 1990. As with the companion volumes, the chapters in this book owe something to discussions and deliberations in the conferences and seminars held by the Group in recent years. As editor of this volume, it is a pleasure to acknowledge the role of Denis Dwyer, a past Chairman of DARG, in creating this series. I should like to place on record my gratitude to my fellow authors for their patience and willing co-operation through what turned out to be a long and difficult gestation period and particularly to Tony Binns, Bill Gould and Edward Simpson who commented on drafts of my chapters.

Barrie Gleave  
January 1991

# Acknowledgements

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The Editor would also like to thank Mrs Jean Bateson and Carol Goddard for their secretarial help in the production of this book.

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# ***The African condition: an overview***

*M. B. Gleave*

Tropical Africa (Fig. 1.1) consists of countries regarded as underdeveloped, less developed or developing, and comprises part of the so-called Third World. Developing countries share many attributes but at the continental scale contrasts are important also. Tropical Africa, for instance, is sparsely populated by world standards, in contrast to the situation in South and East Asia, but it is also much less urbanized than Latin America. Tropical Africa is distinctive from other major parts of the Third World in having the slowest rate of economic growth in recent years; in being the one continental area where growth in food output has not kept pace with population growth; and also in being politically balkanized, consisting of a large number of countries most of which are small, early-stage developers. Consequently, while some parts of the Third World may be seen in a more optimistic light, in tropical Africa encouraging signs may be said to be few and isolated when set against the general picture of internal economic decline and adverse international circumstances.

In tropical Africa, the heady optimism of the independence years has given way to mounting international concern as the development process has faltered. This concern has been demonstrated in several ways, both official and unofficial. At the official level, for instance, the structural adjustment programmes of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (so unpopular with several African governments because of the harsh conditions imposed for support), attempts to reschedule debt or the preparation of four reports by the World Bank in the space of 9 years can be cited as examples (Guitran 1981; Kanasa-Thanan 1981; World Bank 1981, 1983, 1984, 1989). Further, international concern had reached such levels that a special session of the UN General Assembly was convened in early 1986 in order to try to resolve the difficulties arising from conflicting views on the causes of Africa's difficulties.

At the unofficial level, popular support for many voluntary aid organizations, and more spectacularly the rapid rise of such activities as Band Aid, are evidence of individuals showing their own concern in response particularly to what now seems to have become recurring famines in parts of tropical Africa.

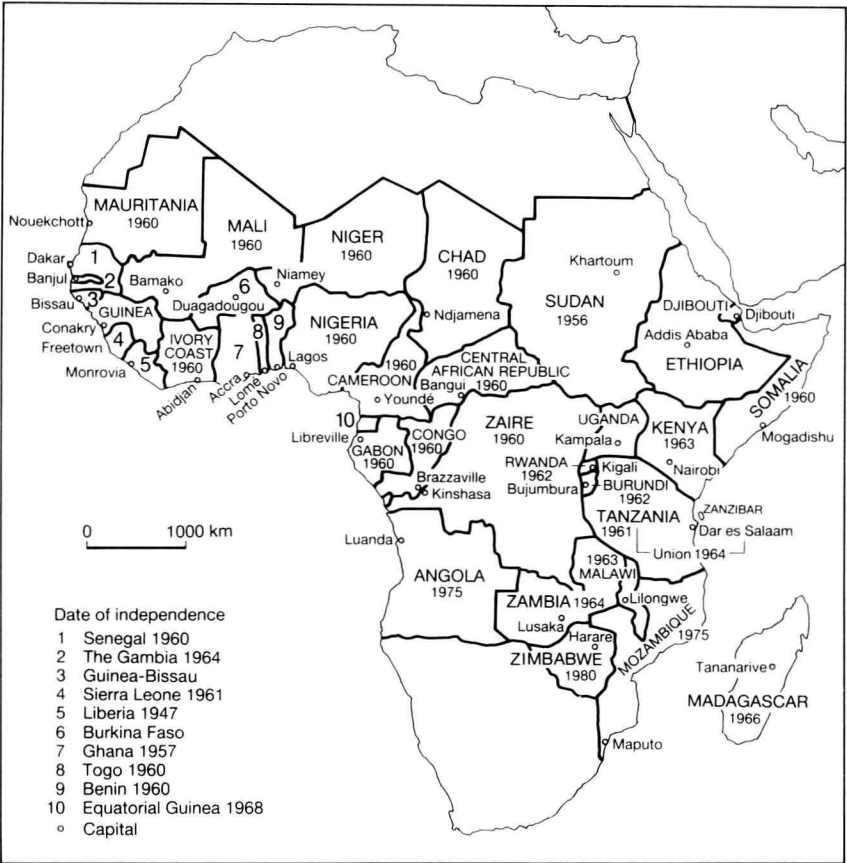


Fig. 1.1 Tropical Africa

Tropical Africa, then, is changing rapidly but not always and everywhere in ways that are considered desirable or progressive. This book seeks to report on the state of knowledge about the principal development issues which manifest themselves in the subcontinent. It is concerned to further understanding the nature of changes that result from the impact of the development process, both for the benefit of Africans and also for all those concerned with the African experience.

### *The development process*

The word 'development' may be used in both a static sense, enabling comparisons of levels of development in different regions at a specified time, and in a dynamic sense to denote the effects of a complex set of economic, social, political and ecological changes which have different

temporal and spatial amplitudes. Not only this, each of these changes is a composite of changes at different temporal scales. For instance, with respect to economic change, the penetration of market forces into areas of subsistence production takes place on a longer time-scale than government intervention in the form of a large-scale irrigation project. Similarly, ecological variables, particularly rainfall, change at several temporal scales, varying from diurnal patterns to secular trends. Further, these changes do not affect all areas at the same time or with equal impact. Thus development is also a process of spatial discrimination as the result of which some areas are winners whereas others are losers. It is, equally, a process of social discrimination with some individuals and groups as winners and others as losers.

The complexities of the development process are not wholly captured by Carol's stages of technology model, but the model is useful in drawing attention to important features of the process (Table 1.1). The relationship between technological advance and economic development is central to the model (Carol 1964). In the early stages, technology is elementary, virtually all members of society are polyfunctional and role differentiation has hardly begun to emerge, although this does not preclude roles for women and men or for different age-groups. Societies in stages I and II are largely homogeneous and may be fairly described as simple. Stage III is characterized by diversification as small but significant groups of specialists emerge. This leads to the beginnings of structural transformation of the economy and to urban growth because tertiary activities and many secondary activities give rise to, and are located in, urban areas. The proportion of consumption that is self-produced falls steeply while conversely the proportion of production that is sold increases markedly. Thus production, consumption and exchange that were formerly socially controlled become subject to market forces and economically determined. The economy is monetized and, as the earning power of activities varies, society begins to become stratified on the basis of wealth and interest groups. New social and political institutions emerge to manage the increasingly complex societies. The processes are accelerated in stage IV as the result of considerable increase in productivity through mechanization of activities in all sectors of the economy, so that in stage V tertiary activities dominate, output is entirely for the market and complex societies have evolved.

At the onset of the colonial period, some tropical African societies were still in stage I (the pygmies of the Zaïre Basin are an example), most were in stage II but some, of which the Hausa states of northern Nigeria are an example, had already emerged into stage III. The colonial impact, therefore, was not impressed on a homogeneous set of economic, social and political conditions. On the contrary, tropical Africa was already richly diversified (for the situation in West Africa see Hopkins 1973). Morgan in Chapter 2 highlights some of the more important features, while other authors refer to appropriate areas of the experience in their chapters. One major effect of the colonial experience was to open up the subcontinent to so-called modernization

**Table 1.1** Carol's stages of technology

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*Stage I: Adaptation*

Human groups adapt to their natural environment

Economy based on gathering, hunting and fishing

Tools are made of natural materials (wood, bones, stones)

Socio-economic groups are small and comparatively isolated

Population density is low

*State II: Domestication*

Livelihood gained from purposely selected and domesticated plants and animals

Natural vegetation partly replaced by cultivated crops

Tools manufactured by chemical as well as physical processes

New handicrafts include pottery and weaving

Larger socio-economic groups which exchange products in local markets

Much higher population densities are possible

*Stage III: Diversification*

Groups are now composed of individuals with diverse ways of life

The majority still live off agricultural and animal husbandry but small minority specializes in governmental, military, commercial, educational, professional and industrial functions

Agricultural surplus created through better use of environment by:

(1) more efficient tools (e.g. animal-drawn plough); (2) irrigation; (3) use of animate and inanimate power (e.g. wind, water)

Urban settlements with permanent exchange of goods and services between them and rural hinterland

*Stage IV: Mechanization*

Productivity increased through machines powered by coal, petroleum and electricity

Small agricultural minority produces sufficient food for large non-agricultural majority

Non-agricultural activities concentrate in urban centres some of which grow into large and complex cities

Communications, market relations and exploitation of resources are world-wide

*Stage V: Automaton*

Complex programmes of production by self-guiding and self-correcting machines or systems of machines

Human labour mainly devises, produces, maintains the automatic machines

Mastery of nuclear energy opens new possibilities

---

*Source:* Based on Carol (1964).



processes or the forces of underdevelopment, depending upon viewpoint (Gould 1970; Soja 1968; Riddell 1970; Rodney 1972). This exacerbated the contra-distinctions between traditional and modern, small- and large-scale activity and 'subsistence' and 'commercial' production, a theme which runs through several chapters in the book. Through the medium of technology transfer the development process was hastened as the colonial period progressed at least in some areas of economic activity and in some parts of the subcontinent. With the drive for development in the dying years of the colonial period and more especially in the early years of independence, the process was intensified.

The distributional pattern of economic activity at about the time of independence has been described as consisting of a number of productive islands often set in vast seas of emptiness (Hance 1977). The islands, some large others small, were areas in which export cropping had progressed furthest, the urban system and transport networks were best developed and population densities were highest. The dominant pattern of these 'islands' was coastal, reflecting accessibility, the coastal location of major cities and relatively favourable environmental conditions for export crops. Inland 'islands' were found in highland situations where the environment is suitable for the production of high-value crops; associated with the exploitation of minerals as for example on the Zambian Copperbelt; and where transport conditions are particularly favourable as for example in the Zaïre Basin where the extended network of inland waterways facilitated the dispersal of such islands. Finally, the Gezira could be considered an 'island', based on large-scale irrigation. The surrounding seas of emptiness were those areas where traditional economic and social conditions and institutions survived more or less intact. Export cropping had penetrated hardly, if at all, the urban system and transport networks were skeletal and population densities tended to be low although they were not universally so.

Thus, by the beginning of the independent period, the remote rural areas were still in phase II of the Carol model, the more accessible rural areas were in phase III and some, such as the cocoa belts of Ghana and western Nigeria and the European farming areas in the settler states, had progressed into stage IV as had the major metropolitan areas, the larger secondary cities and the peri-urban areas around them. Thus the dual structure – traditional vs modern, informal vs formal, peripheral vs internationalized – so widely recognized by commentators – had emerged and, with it, the marked contrasts over very short distances that are such a feature of tropical African landscapes and townscapes.

The drive for development since independence has tended to intensify the structures inherited from the colonial period. There has been limited lateral spread of the more developed areas of the subcontinent and the major trend has been the further development of the more highly developed areas. An important factor in this process has been the increasing significance of the primate metropolitan areas as locations of economic activity and as places from which the economy