Pre-Colonial Evolution of Agricultural Practices in Yorubaland: The Owo Experience

By

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Abstract

The study examines the pre-colonial evolution of agricultural practices in Owoland. This study is aimed at exploring the evolution of agriculture in Owo from the traditional period to contemporary times, examining how various socio-economic, political, and technological changes have influenced agricultural practices in the region. By understanding the historical trajectory of agricultural development in Owo, this research seeks to provide insights into the opportunities and challenges that shape the future of agriculture in the town. The study adopted both descriptive and narrative approaches using primary sources, which were archival materials and oral interviews. Secondary sources were also used such as; books, long essays, dissertations, magazines, thesis and journal articles. In the contemporary period, from the 1990s to 2023, agriculture in Owo has experienced further transformations. The advent of globalization, technological advancements, and the rise of agribusinesses had impacted agricultural practices in the town. While traditional farming methods persist in rural areas, modern techniques such as irrigation, mechanized farming, and the use of genetically modified seeds have been introduced to improve crop yield and sustainability. This paper is deemed necessary as a result of the urge by indigenes of the town to recognize the indigenous agricultural practices of the people and to separate such from the influence of western agricultural system as well as the need to develop along line the western type of agricultural practices without prejudicing their cultural past. Also, this paper is a scholarly attempt to unravel the uniqueness about the impact of pre-colonial agricultural practices on the people of Ipele-Owo.

Keywords: *Agriculture, Development, Practices, Owoland, Pre-colonial*

Introduction

Agriculture has been a fundamental aspect of human civilization, serving as the backbone of economies and the primary source of sustenance for societies throughout history. In Nigeria, agriculture plays a crucial role in rural livelihoods, contributing significantly to national development.[1] The town of Owo, located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, is one of the regions where agriculture has evolved significantly over time. The study of the evolution of agriculture in Owo offers insight into how socio-political, economic, and technological factors have shaped the agricultural landscape from the traditional period to contemporary times.[2]

The history of agriculture in Owo can be traced to the pre-colonial period when subsistence farming formed the primary occupation of the indigenous population. During this era, traditional agricultural practices were dominated by the cultivation of staple crops such as yam, cassava, maize, and various vegetables.[3] Farming techniques were largely rudimentary, relying on simple tools like; hoes, cutlasses, and digging sticks, and agricultural production was primarily for local consumption, with surpluses sometimes traded within neighboring communities. Agriculture during this period was closely tied to the social structure of the Owo people, involving a strong communal system where land was owned collectively, and farming activities were carried out through cooperative labour systems.[4]

The colonial period marked a significant transformation in the agricultural practices of Owo. The British colonial administration introduced new crops, including cash crops like cocoa and rubber, which altered the agricultural landscape.[5] Owo, like many parts of southwestern Nigeria, became a hub for cocoa production which contributed to the region's economic growth. The introduction of cash crops facilitated the shift from subsistence farming to commercial agriculture as farmers were encouraged to cultivate crops for export.[6] This period also witnessed changes in land tenure systems with the gradual transition from communal land ownership to individual landholding. However, colonial agricultural policies were primarily aimed at serving the economic interests of the

British Empire often leading to the neglect of food crop production, which affected local food security.[7]

Post-independence Nigeria witnessed further changes in Owo agricultural sector, driven by national policies aimed at promoting agricultural development. The introduction of programs such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976 and the Green Revolution in the 1980s sought to modernize agriculture and improve food production across the country.[8] In Owo, these programs encouraged the adoption of improved farming techniques, mechanization, and the use of fertilizers and pesticides. Despite these efforts, agricultural development in Owo faced challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, poor access to markets, and inconsistent government policies. The oil boom of the 1970s also diverted attention from agriculture to the petroleum sector resulting in the decline of agricultural productivity in many regions including Owo.[9]

In the contemporary period, from the 1990s to 2023, agriculture in Owo has experienced further transformations. The advent of globalization, technological advancements, and the rise of agribusinesses had impacted agricultural practices in the town. While traditional farming methods persist in rural areas, modern techniques such as irrigation, mechanized farming, and the use of genetically modified seeds have been introduced to improve crop yield and sustainability.[10] Additionally, agriculture has become more diversified with the cultivation of both food and cash crops alongside livestock farming. The involvement of youth and women in agriculture has also increased driven by government initiatives aimed at reducing unemployment and poverty.[11]

However, contemporary challenges such as climatic changes, land degradation, and inadequate access to credit and technology continue to affect large scale agricultural productivity in Owo. The shift towards urbanization has also led to a reduction in available farmland, as many rural dwellers migrate to cities in search of better economic opportunities.[12] Despite these challenges, agriculture remains a vital part of Owo's economy and culture, contributing to food security, employment, and rural development.[13]

This study aims to explore the evolution of agriculture in Owo from the traditional period to contemporary times, examining how various socio-economic, political, and technological changes have influenced agricultural practices in the region. By understanding the historical trajectory of agricultural development in Owo, this research seeks to provide insights into the opportunities and challenges that shape the future of agriculture in the town.[14]

Historical Background of Owo

Owo is a prominent town located in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, within Ondo State. It lies between latitude 7°11' N and 7° 23' N and longitude 5°35' E and 5°45' E, covering an area of approximately 636 square kilometers. Owo is situated near the northern fringes of Ondo State, serving as a key historical and cultural link between the Yoruba-speaking regions to the west and the northern ethnic groups of Nigeria.[15]

There is no society, tribe, or clan that exists without an origin or root. Owo is an ancient town in Ondo State, Nigeria, and also one of the earliest towns in Yoruba land with the Olowo of Owo as the supreme ruler of the Kingdom. Owo is regarded as one of the most respected kingdom in the ancient Yoruba Empire being a town founded by one of the sons of *Oduduwa*, the progenitor of the Yoruba race.[16] It is historically affiliated with Ile-Ife, the spiritual spring head of the Yoruba race. Owo has many versions of historical background, but the most significant and generally accepted part of those various versions is that Owo people derived some essential part of their culture from the great Yoruba Kingdom of Ile-Ife. Owo's origin could be traced to Ile-Ife like most of the Yoruba towns e.g. Oyo, Akure, Ondo, Egba, Akoko and others.[17] Owo came into being in the year 1019AD under the leadership of *Ologho Ojugbelu* otherwise called *Omalagbaye*, the first *Ologho*, and one of the descendants of *Oduduwa* the ancestor of the Yoruba race. *Ologho Ojugbelu* was one of the sixteen kings that migrated from Ile-Ife to found their own kingdom in which *Ologho Ojugbelu* happens to be the youngest among them.[18]

Pre-colonial Owo Agricultural Activities

The pre-colonial period dates back to decades before the advent of the colonial administration in Owo. The people of Owo whose occupation were majorly

farming produced commodities in their localities, and did the distribution and consumption in their regions especially with other neighbours such as Akure, Akoko and Benin.[19] However, they relied on traditional techniques and equipments in their production of goods and services. An economic survey of Nigeria reveals that one of the commonest occupations in the Southwestern part of Nigeria is farming. Traditional forms of farming range from patch cultivation to various kinds of extensive and intensive systems. The bush fallow system is practiced in some form or other by virtually all Nigerian farming peoples especially in Owo.[20]

All over the world, farming provides assured supplies of food, stimulates a high degree of urbanization and specialization and encourages an increase in population. According to Evans Pritchard, "the first revolution that transformed human economy gave man control over his own food supply. Man began to plant, cultivate and improve by selection of edible grasses, roots, and trees"[21]. Among the pre-industrial societies, production of food was crucial to the survival of a community. In such a case, farming was localized and an incidence of famine would lead to migrations and even death. Indeed, an essential factor for selecting a settlement was availability of rainfall and fertile land suitable for cultivation or grazing.[22] The entire productions and distributions in Owo during the pre-colonial period relied much on the available natural and human resources. Indeed, farming activities depend on the quality of land that is available in a particular place.

Pre-colonial Owo's agricultural system was predominantly based on **subsistence farming,** with the primary aim of providing food for family consumption. Agriculture in Owo, like other parts of Yorubaland was organized around **communal and family labour systems.** The major crops grown during this period included yams, cassava, maize, and vegetables, with **yam** being considered the most prestigious crop. Yam cultivation was tied to cultural and religious practices, playing a central role in traditional festivals like the **Yam festival** which is still observed in many Yoruba communities today.[23] The primary farming method was **shifting cultivation,** where land would be used for farming for a few years and then left fallow to recover its fertility. **Slash-and-burn** techniques were common, as farmers cleared forests or bushes before planting crops. Livestock rearing, though minimal, was also part of the agricultural system, but animals like goats,

sheep, and poultry were mainly kept for domestic use rather than for commercial purposes.[24]

The area is blessed with green vegetation, thus, the major occupations of the inhabitants are farming and hunting. Rainfall is spread through the months of March and October yearly. The historical origin of the town is connected with two notable forest region kingdoms of Ile-Ife and Benin. All over the world, farming provides assured supplies of food, stimulates a high degree of urbanization and specialization and encourages an increase in population. Among the pre-industrial societies, production of food was crucial to the survival of a community. In such a case farming was localized and incidence of famine could lead to migrations and even death. Indeed, an essential factor for selecting a settlement was availability of rainfall and fertile land suitable for cultivation or grazing.[25]

The entire productions and distributions in pre-colonial period relied much on the available natural and human resources in Owo. Farming depends on the quality of land that is available in a particular place. In the pre-colonial period, land in Owo belonged to the various communities or lineages. The members of each lineage did not own specific land as it was left to fallow and did not contain perennial crops. However, the right of an individual to farm was inalienable. If there was conflict regarding the use of particular piece of land, the head of the lineage would settle the matter.[26] The basic agricultural or farming tool is the hoe, and this varies based on the type of farming and people's preferences. Usually, different hoes were employed for tiling heavy or light soil, for making yam mounds, for digging and cutting roots and for sowing.

Owo community during the pre-colonial period cultivates crops such as yam, cocoyam, cassava, tomatoes, pepper and corn in abundance. Farming is mostly practiced by Owo men, thus, wives and children serve as labourers in the farm, resulting to the polygamous lives of most farmers in Owo. They married many wives, produced many children that provides labour on farms and in the production and increment of farm poduce.[27] However, a small population of the farmers' hired-paid labourers who assist in the large or surplus production of farm goods and services. Farmers in Yorubaland during the pre-colonial period are rich

and well respected in the society which included Owo.[28] However, long before the advent of Nigeria's colonization, Owo ancestors were sustained primarily on farming as the major occupation with the use of crude implements compared to what is obtained today. Yet, they produced enough food crops to feed themselves like most other societies and also produced cash crops which were used for trade by barter system. Indeed, considerable emphasis was placed on research and extension services during the period of colonial administration in Nigeria.[29]

In Owo during the pre-colonial period, land was the only natural resources that seemed to be in abundance. Land was accessible to family members to use for a long period of time, though he did not have outright ownership of it, the farmer was entitled to whatever family land was available in his place of birth.[30] If he migrated to some other area, he could assume temporary tenancy over such land that he needed or he could at least function as a share-cropper. Although, there was hardly any technological knowledge with which to redeem waterlogged or otherwise unsuitable land resources, farmland was plentiful enough not to create a constraint on development in pre-colonial period. Apart from the need to keep women longer in child bearing, or in fact, the practice by women and their husband to continue child rearing till it would be impossible for them to produce, there was the vogue, among men, for polygamy apparently to have as many children as possible and indeed to use both the labour of the wives and their children particularly in the busy periods of planting and harvesting which seemed to be their solution to the problem of labour shortage which featured prominently during the pre-colonial period and even till now.[31]

Family labour was convenient, not only because it was relatively available, but also because it was easily disciplined. For instance, the extended family system had inherent sanction which compelled co-operation with the family head if not obedience to him.[32] Also, it was the responsibility of each of the wives of the farmer to ensure that her children worked enthusiastically for their father in his farm to earn her as well as them his favour for which the other wives were deemed to be competing for. Besides, since the father legacy or belongings would be shared by his children after his demise according to their maternal groupings, children's labour could also be administered and controlled through their mothers.[33]

Similar industrial tranquility seemed to feature both with the mutually transacted labour and the communally recruited workmen in the traditional economy. However, people in the same age grade organized themselves to clear one another's farm together by rotation until the circle was completed when each member's job would have been done. The case of communal labour arrangement often involve the whole community in public service like sinking a well or erecting a structure such as the temple for housing the village shrine.[34] The chief's town would summon able bodied men to such duty, while the women and the children would be busy preparing the food with which to feed the returning workers.

However, in the pre-colonial period, shifting cultivation was perharps the most effective method that was devised for the maintenance of soil fertility and the eventual regular supply of agricultural products. This system supported the people of Owo for centuries and helped them to attain a high level of special organizations through this technique.[35] Yams, cocoyam and other large tubers or corns, staple foods were mostly harvested by the farmers which are usually processed and cooked after prolonged soaking and washing to remove their acidic content. For storage, they were sliced and then dried in the sun; these slices were soaked when required, washed, boiled and eaten, or mashed and pounded. Also, plantain another staple food in Owo is eaten boiled, baked in ashes, fried in oil, prepared into pottage, cut and dried in the sun, or smoked and made into flour. Several kinds of fruits from trees were prepared by soaking in water to extract the seeds which are then cooked and ground into a metal generally used in soup, or else they were fried in oil, boiled or roasted.[36]

Another farming activity that was practiced during the pre-colonial period by the people of Owo was permanent cultivation. In this system, the farmers use his land more intensively resulting in crop rotation. This was as a result of higher density of population and cash crop cultivation. For social and security reasons, people tended to congregates pressure on the available land in the area which in turn meant intensive use of land. Although, land pressure occurred among the people of Owo, many other areas have no density populations. It was then possible for shifting cultivation to take place among some communities while others had land pressure problem for settlement to contend with.[37]

The cultivation of cash crops during the colonial period brought about a change in the pre-colonial land tenure system. The cultivation of kolanut, cocoa and palm oil required permanent occupation of land. This meant a large reduction in the expanse of land required for food production. The forgoing demonstrates the important point that the farmers in Owo were responsive to changes. The main basic farming tool is the hoe, and from the Iron Age to relatively recent times, hoes were fashioned by local blacksmiths using iron smelted from ferruginous concretions. The handles of hoes were, and still are, made from the wood of trees, such as the ebony and Shea butter trees which are preferred for their strength.[38] However, there were both nearby and distant farms. For the former, garden-like farms would be kept around the settlements for the cultivations of more immediate food crops like maize, yams, cassava and vegetables. The latter could be four or more kilometers away from the village while extended farms could be quite some distance away, sometimes around village or another town altogether. Such farms would be for both food and cash crops but more particularly for the latter. The farther the farm, the greater the need for establishing a temporary home in its neighbourhood so that the farmer and his working family could work for several days away from home and the attendant social demands. Particularly during planting and harvesting seasons a lot of effort would be needed on the farms and considerable urgency would be required.[39] For instance, all planting should be completed before the rains stopped for a while just as all harvesting should be effected before insects and rodents eroded the basis of the farmers' hope.

A variety of structures and methods have been employed by Owo people to store crops from their farms. Some of these were permanent, while others were not. In Owo, yams and roots crops are commonly stored in racks shaded and sheltered by palm leaves and the foliage of live poles. The yams are arranged such that maximum ventilation is ensured. Maize is stored in well ventilated grass bins. Sometimes smoke is used to keep away insect, pests, particularly weevils, whilst the heat of a fire is employed to dry the grain.

However, productions of non-edible crops such as cotton were also of great importance, because, in Owo, cloth-making was an essential occupation particularly for the women. Indeed, almost all occupations were agro-allied. It

meant that all economic activities hung mostly on farming activities. It was hardly necessary to give up farming activities for other economic activities. Apart from long distances trades which took traders far away from their homes, non-agricultural jobs were often undertaken on part time basis during periods that farmers could relax.[40]

There is no doubt that farming activities in Owo during the pre-colonial period was characterized by low agricultural technological levels when compared with agricultural in more advance countries. However, it is futile to talk of an advance technological development in farming activities in a situation where output was highly limited by the extent of market which in turn was restricted by the low purchasing power of the people, transportation system and the currency.[41] As a result of the above mentioned limitation, the farmers in Owo relied much on simple implements such as hoe, cutlass sickle and digging stick. It is crucial to note that though the farmers use these simple farm implements for cultivation, they were however efficient.

The traditional economy in Owo during the pre-colonial period went beyond subsistence farming to commercial farming. Though, it is true that all forms of productive activities were geared towards the satisfaction of basic and intimate needs initially, nevertheless, the demand for locally produced goods and services from elsewhere still needed to be met. The production of more farming goods and services or foods necessitated increase in the production which led to the emergence of market in Owo. The first market in Owo was established in 1894 by *Olowo Ojugbelu* named *Oyarugbulem* market.[42]

There were trading activities between the people of Owo and its neighbours such as Akoko, Benin and Akure during the pre-colonial period. Activities in Owo in the pre-colonial period must have been virile or the rising population would have required quite a dynamic economy to support the people during pre-colonial period. Indeed, the traditional economy went beyond subsistence to accommodate exchange does not necessarily mean that proper exchange economy featured in the pre-colonial period.[43] Exchange transactions were limited by such factors like cumbersome currency, problem of inadequate transportation and other obstacles.

On the whole, it is important to note that the traditional economy in Owo in the pre-colonial period was in reality not as rudimentary as to be described as subsistence economy.[44]

In the pre-colonial period, farming in Owo range from patch cultivation to various kinds of extensive and intensive systems. The bush fallow system is practiced in some form or other by virtually all Nigerian farming peoples including Owo farmers. It represents the best known solution to a most critical feature of agricultural in the wet tropics which helps in maintaining the fertility and structure of rather fragile soils.[45] During the pre-colonial period, both paths and local roads aided trade and communications. The economy of pre-colonial Owo thus rested on three legs, agriculture, trade and manufacture. Agriculture was the main economy activity with trade and manufacturing coming as subsidiaries, while, traders distributed the products of agriculture and manufacture within their localities.[46]

Labour was an essential factor of production is no doubt, a major wealth creation. Even as Yoruba economy in pre-colonial era was wholly subsistence farming, yet, labour played a significant role. The labour services in Owo land then was an amalgam of physical services provided by workers on daily wages, and those of individuals whose expertise produced both farm and house-hold items required to make life easier, better, and sustainable. However, as commercial activities grew in Lagos, cooperative societies such as *Esusu* were formed by Owo commercial intermediaries, who encouraged safe-deposit through money contributions, an improvement on traditional underground safe-keeping method. Monies contributed by cooperative members are returned on agreed date, after the depositary has taken his commission.[47] Cooperative members have the opportunity to borrow money on interest from association's coffer, and to make loan re-payment on an agreed dates; failure always have dire consequences of property confiscation with or without return. Notwithstanding, changes and transformation of Owo economy had undergone over the decades; yet, the micro-finance system (*Esusu*) is still in practice, and embraced by all-young and old, literate and illiterate. From all indications, farming activities was central to all women's occupational guilds in Owo in the pre-colonial period. In fact, all the guilds depended on the farmers' products for their survival, and thus the guilds were all directly or

indirectly connected to farming. However, Owo women in the pre-colonial period took active part in farming activities as many of them owned farms, grew varieties of crops, and even belonged to the farmer's guild in their respective settlements. The two notable women's guilds in Owo in the pre-colonial period were *Egbe Alajapa*, which traded in inanimate objects, especially food items, fruits and medicinal herbs, and *Egbe Alarobo*, which traded in animate objects like fowls, sheep, goats, and so on.[48] Apart from these, there were other specialized guilds of women traders usually named after their profession. Such include; *Egbe Alata* (guild of pepper traders), *Egbe Alaso* (guild of cloth traders), *Egbe Elepo* (guild of oil traders), and several others. The farmers' guild, of which several Owo women were members, held its meetings every nine or twenty-one days in connection with traditional market cycles. The guild offered advice on methods of cultivation, how to improve the yields of agricultural produce, maintenance and harvesting, processing, and the storage and sale of products. These various guilds were later known as *Esusu*, and through the system, members of the farmers' guild, like other guilds in Yorubaland, helped themselves with loans which greatly enhanced their economic status in the traditional society. The members also assisted one another especially during periods of drought or bad harvest.[49]

It should be stressed from the onset that Owo women unlike the women among the Igbo of eastern Nigeria were less involved in the rigorous aspects of farming especially curing, hoeing and weeding. While farming was by far the most important occupation of women among the Ijaw, Owo women only took part at times in planting, and in most cases in the last stages of farm work especially harvesting, processing for final consumption and storage. Women and children were also involved in carrying farm produce on their heads when market centers were close to the farms or when the produce involved was perishable, For instance, Banana, Oranges, Pepper, Tomatoes, and Vegetables. But in most cases, the women usually carried their farm produce to towns and villages after harvest. Both men and women with children participated in harvesting. There were occasions when some products from the farms could not be sold immediately, there were farm products that had to be preserved.[50] The women in Owo always kept such products inside calabashes, nets and baskets, while products like pepper of different types could be wrapped in clothes or leaves, and yams tied together with ropes and kept

in bans. There were items that were fried, smoked or tied in the kitchens where they could be heated.

Apart from the fact that Owo women were directly involved in the production of food crops, they were wholly involved in the processing of such crops into finished goods and their sale. Thus, Owo women processed raw farm produce to their final form, whether it is chips, flour, liquid or paste. Most Owo women labored as weavers, traders or dyers, had their farmlands, and either cultivated on their own land or their husbands family lands to grow a variety of crops, especially grains, yams, and vegetables. Indeed, the women directly sold their agricultural products of yams, beans, vegetables, cotton and fruits, or they turned them into manufactured articles before being sold.[51] For instance, *epo* (palm oil), *ikete* (palm oil butter), and *adin-eyan* (palm kernel oil) were manufactured from oil palm fruits. *Ori* (shea-nut butter) was manufactured from shea nuts, *iru* from locust beans, *ororo* (vegetable oil) from melons, *elubo* (flour) from both yams and plantains, while *eko* (maize beer) were both manufactured from maize.

We should also note that apart from the food crops and vegetables, the women, like their male counterparts, grew cotton, silk cotton trees, shea-nut trees, locust bean trees, palm tree and kola-nut trees. The process of harvesting and selling of the produce from such trees was also largely undertaken by women with children in pre-colonial period. Women also stored farm products so as to preserve them till they were needed to be sold, consumed or planted. In the same vein, there were Yoruba women who kept gardens, located very close to their homesteads where vegetables, pepper, fruits and other products were grown.[52]

Socio-Economic Impact

Agriculture has always played a very prominent role in sustaining the economy of Nigeria, in fact, it was the mainstay of the nation's economy before the discovery of crude oil.[53] Even with increased attention given to oil sector, agriculture is the base of Nigeria's economy and the main source of livelihood for most Nigerians. In 2015, the agricultural sector contributed about 23% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP), having ca. 75% share of non-oil exports earnings.[54] Recently, the agricultural sector contributed 24.6% of the GDP in the second quarter

of 2020, according to National Bureau of Statistics. Agriculture remains a crucial sector in the economy of Nigeria, being a major source of raw materials, food and foreign exchange; employing over 70% of her labour force, and serving as a potential vehicle for diversifying her economy.[55]

Considering the roles of agricultural sector to the economic development of the country, Nigerian government had been able to introduce and implement some policies and programmes with a view to increasing land access through reforms, providing rural infrastructure, enhancing credit access and granting input subsidies that would boost agricultural productivity.[56] Despite these diverse interventions, the Nigerian agricultural sector is still under-developed. The sector faces many challenges, including an outdated land tenure system that limits access to land (1.8 ha per farming household), a very low level of irrigation development (< 1% of cropped land under irrigation), limited adoption of research findings and technologies, high cost of farm inputs, poor access to credit, economic and political challenges, inefficient fertilizer procurement and distribution, inadequate storage facilities and poor access to markets have all combined to keep agricultural productivity low (average of 1.2 metric tons of cereals per ha) with high post-harvest losses and waste.[57] Modern agricultural transformation and productivity in Nigeria depends on the availability and adequacy of inputs. Agricultural productivity is one of the key determinants of high and sustained agricultural growth over long term. However, for developing countries, agriculture share in relation to gross domestic product is low.[58]

Therefore, improvement in crop production in agriculture is an important avenue to sustain life, protect and maintain the medical well-being, as well as psychological and aesthetic comfort of the populace. The agricultural sector was able to make significant progress by increasing output in staples such as maize, millet, sorghum, cassava, rice, and yam as a result of the presidential initiatives. Despite these sporadic achievements, inadequate infrastructure, agricultural inputs and overdependence on imports affect the state of agricultural productivity.[59] Over the years, the government has been making considerable expenditure on the provision of subsidized farm inputs (especially agro-chemicals) in the state which led to the establishment of an input supply body or agency, for

instance, Ondo State Agricultural Inputs Supply Agency (OSAISA) in Ondo State and other states in Nigeria. The agency was formerly known as Ondo State Agricultural Inputs Supply Company (OSAISC) which metamorphosed from the erstwhile commercial division of the Ondo State Agricultural Development Project (ODSADEP); a world bank assisted programme designed to revolutionize agriculture in the State. Ondo State Agricultural Inputs State Company was thus registered as a limited liability company in 1991 and formally commenced business in May, 1992 with farm service centres in each local government area of the state and headquarters in Akure.[60] Ondo State Agricultural Inputs State Company was later renamed as Ondo State Agricultural Inputs Supply Project (OSAISP) in May, 2002 to make it more vibrant and the name was also later changed to Ondo State Agricultural Inputs Supply Agency (OSAISA) in 2010 by the State government. The mandate of OSAISA was to ensure that genuine agro-inputs and allied products effectively reach the grassroots farmers thereby affecting the lives of the people positively and prodding the state economic potency.[61]

Source of Livelihood

Agriculture has played a pivotal role in the socio-economic development of Owo, contributing to both the livelihood of the people and the overall growth of the region. Over the years, from the traditional period to contemporary times, agricultural practices in Owo have evolved, reflecting changes in technology, governance, and global economic trends. This evolution has impacted not only the economy but also the social structures, cultural practices, and political dynamics of the town.

Agriculture which has long been the primary occupation of the people of Owo, and the agrarian nature of the town is reflected in the fact that the majority of its population has historically been involved in farming activities. Subsistence farming, which involves the cultivation of crops such as yams, maize, and cassava, as well as the rearing of livestock has sustained the people for generations. The abundance of fertile land in Owo allowed the town to produce enough food for its population with surplus often exchanged or traded with neighboring communities.[62]

The economic activities centered on farming created a robust local economy in which both men and women participated. While men typically engaged in clearing land, planting, and harvesting, women contributed significantly through processing crops and selling them in local markets. This agricultural economy laid the foundation for socio-economic stability in Owo with families depending on farming not only for food but also as a means to secure income.[63]

Trade and Commerce

Agriculture also fostered the development of trade and commerce in Owo. The town became known as a major agricultural hub in the region with crops like yam, palm oil, and kolanut being produced in large quantities. These products were not only used for local consumption but also traded with neighboring communities such as Akure, Ikare, and Benin. The trade of agricultural goods allowed Owo to establish long-distance commercial networks, leading to increased interaction with other regions.[64]

The surplus of agricultural produce, particularly palm oil which became a major cash crop in the 19th and early 20th centuries was exported to other parts of Nigeria and beyond. This export-driven agricultural economy contributed to the rise of a wealthy class of farmers and traders in Owo who became influential in both social and political affairs. As trade flourished, it also brought external influences to Owo, introducing new technologies, farming techniques, and cultural exchanges with other parts of the country and the world.[65]

Social Cohesion and Cultural Practices

Agriculture in Owo has not only contributed to economic development but has also played a key role in fostering social cohesion. The agrarian lifestyle encouraged communal labor practices, where groups of farmers would work together during planting and harvesting seasons. These collective farming practices helped strengthen community bonds and fostered cooperation among different families and social groups.[66]

In addition, agriculture has been intertwined with cultural practices and religious beliefs in Owo. Traditional festivals, such as the *Igogo* festival which is held to

honor the goddess of fertility are linked to the agricultural cycle. These festivals serve both religious and social functions, bringing the community together to celebrate harvests and offer thanks for agricultural prosperity.[67]

Political Influence and Power Structures

The economic power generated through agriculture also influenced the political landscape of Owo. The wealth accumulated by successful farmers and traders allowed them to gain prominence in local politics. These individuals often held leadership positions in the community such as chiefs or members of the council advising the *Olowo* (king). Their wealth and influence made them key decision-makers in both economic and political matters, further solidifying the role of agriculture in shaping the socio-political framework of Owo.[68]

In addition, agricultural land ownership was a critical determinant of social status and political influence in Owo. Large landowners often wielded significant power within the community as land was the primary means of production. Control over land not only ensured economic stability but also granted political leverage, allowing landowners to shape governance policies and influence the distribution of resources.[69]

Modernization and Technological Advancement

In the contemporary era, agriculture in Owo has seen significant changes due to modernization and technological advancements because of the introduction of mechanized farming, improved irrigation techniques, and the use of fertilizers which have increased agricultural productivity. These advancements have enabled Owo to compete in larger markets and contribute to the regional and national economy. Additionally, the Nigerian government's efforts to promote agriculture as a means of economic diversification have led to more investment in the sector, further boosting agricultural output in Owo.[70]

Moreover, the rise of agro-industries in Owo such as palm oil processing and cassava flour production has provided new employment opportunities and contributed to the economic diversification of the town. These industries have attracted both local and external investors leading to the growth of small and

medium enterprises (SMEs) and enhancing the overall socio-economic development of Owo.[71]

Challenges and Opportunities

Despite its contributions to socio-economic development, agriculture in Owo faces several challenges including land degradation, climate change, and limited access to modern farming tools. These challenges have affected productivity and also led to rural-urban migration, as many young people seek employment opportunities outside agriculture. However, there are opportunities for growth, particularly through government initiatives aimed at supporting smallholder farmers and improving agricultural infrastructure.[72]

Conclusion

It is pertinent to note that the traditional farming activities in Owo served its purpose, though, the indigenous farming relied much on simple implements for the production of goods and services, it was however effective. Also, the skill and organization involved in agricultural practices during the pre-colonial period were efficient and effective. Changes have to occur in farming activities when there are needs for them just as farmers changed from shifting cultivation to fallow cropping. Imported products shifted indigenous ones because they were found cheaper, less laborious to adopt, and encouraged diversion of interest to other occupations. It is interesting, however, that even in the 1980s traditional and imported productions competed side by side. Farming activities in Owo however was influenced towards the end of the 19th century as a result of the European penetration into West Africa which later extended to Owo.

Endnotes

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30. Oral interview held with Banwo Janet, Farmer, aged 57, at Owo, on 13/11/2025.
31. Oral interview held with Tomison Kolawole, Farmer, aged 60, at Owo, on 14/11/2025.
32. Oral interview held with Titilayo Kolawole, Trader, aged 54, at Owo, on 14/11/2025.
33. Oral interview held with Gbenga Tolani, Teacher, aged 51, at Owo, on 17/11/2025.
34. Oral interview held with Foluke Tolani, Trader, aged 69, at Owo, on 17/11/2025.
35. Oral interview held with Felix Banwo, Farmer, aged 57, at Owo, on 06/12/2025.
36. Oral interview held with Bukola Banwo, Trader, aged 68, at Owo, on 06/12/2025.
37. Oral interview held with Tolulope Tijani, Farmer, aged 57, at Owo, on 10/12/2025.
38. Oral interview held with Bolanle Esther, Teacher, aged 60, at Owo, on 10/12/2025.

39. Oral interview held with Tunbosun Daoda, a Civil Servant, aged 52, at Owo, on 11/11/2017
40. Oral interview held with Olorunda Felix, Farmer, aged 52, at Owo, on 13/12/2025.
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66. Oral Interview held with Aladesunkan Adebayo, Farmer, 76 years, at Aralepo Owo, on 20/01/2026.
67. Oral Interview held with Aladesukan Agnes, Farmer, 66 years, at Aralepo Owo, on 20/01/2026.
68. Oral Interview held with Oshuporu Fadekemi, Trader, 68 years, at Okedogbon Owo, on 20/01/2026.
69. Oral Interview held with Adafin Bolaji, Farmer, 70 years, at St. Andrew Anglican Church, Uso-Owo, on 20/01/2026.
70. Oral Interview held with Olayemi Margret, Trader, 63 years, at Owo, on 23/01/2026.
71. Oral Interview held with Olajide Mariam, Trader, 69 years, at Owo, on 23/01/2026.
72. Oral Interview held with Babalola Tolulope, Farmer, 61 years, at Owo, on 25/01/2026.