

VOL. 5, NO. 1 DEC., 2007

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**Journal of the
National Association of Science, Humanities and Education Research**

VOL. 5, NO. 1 DEC., 2007[illegible]

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National Association of Science, Humanities and Education Research**

NASHERJ

National Association of Science, Humanities and Education Research
Journal

Vol. 5, No. 2 December, 2007

ISSN 1597-2410

Published by:

Department of Curriculum and Teaching, Benue State University, Markudi

For

The National Association of Science, Humanities and Education Research
(NASHER)

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A Historical Analysis of the Effect of Technology Transfer on Kwara State Indigenous Technology

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Abstract

Although the power of technology in transforming human society is not debatable, how technology comes to a people has always been problematic. Developing countries including Nigeria believe in short cut root to advance technology transfer; thus indigenous technology is neglected. The paper seeks to analyse the multitude of indigenous technology that sustained Kwara's economy in the pre-colonial days and their viability. It further dissects the concept of technology transfer and the attendant dangers inherent in the approach which include eroding of local initiative, hijacking of the state economy, promoting economic dependence and tightening the hook of poverty on Nigerians nay Kwarans. The paper further evaluates the strength and weaknesses in the two approaches while ultimately advocating the invigoration of the state's indigenous technology as a starting point in the journey of development in Nigeria.

Introduction

Technology has remained the greatest instrument of change in man's society. This assertion stems from the multifarious transformations in socio-economic and political life of human that are direct products of technology. A nation however has two possible strategies in which to have modern technology. It has a choice of either going through the technological life cycle i.e, passing through the four stages of (i) Pre-introduction. (ii) Introduction (iii) Growth and (iv) Standardization, or import standardized technologies and adopt, modify and change them for its own purpose. In any of these strategies however, the local condition of the particular country is a great determining factor of success. Technological development has remained elusive in Kwara states and the country largely due to their pursuance of wrong strategy of technology particularly technology transfer. For instance, since independence over four decades ago, Nigeria has adopted different policies aimed at developing her technology and all did not work. Some of these included the establishment of Technical Schools and Colleges, Polytechnics and universities of Technology.

However, technology transfer appears to be accorded greater attention. It has however been stressed that transformation, which will lead to technological development in any country, must emanate from within the country. Thus the place of indigenous technology in the techno-industrial growth of a nation can not be over emphasized.

The main thrust of this paper is to therefore, examine aspects of the people of Kwara indigenous technology, analyse the concept of technology transfer and evaluate its suitability or otherwise.

Indigenous Technology in Kwara State

Traditional weaving was an activity in which indigenous technology found expression in Kwara state and other parts of the country in the pre-colonial period. It is particularly striking that in the early centuries of trade, Europeans relied heavily on Indian cloths for resale in Africa, and they also purchased cloths on several parts of the West African Coast for resale elsewhere. Morocco, Mauretania, Senegambia, Ivory Coast, Benin, Yoruba land and Togo were all exporters of weaving materials to other parts of Africa through European middlemen (Olaoye,1992:42). This show that the

volume of production and quality of cloth, produced in these societies were great. From time immemorial, indigenous textile technology in ginning, carving, spinning, weaving and dyeing had been a product of the Nigerian people's efforts at exploiting their environment. However, the cultivation of cotton and the use of iron implements, led to a more sophisticated textile technology in the state and order parts of the country.

Two types of looms were particularly in use. These are the horizontal narrow handloom and the vertical broad handloom. While males work the narrow handloom, females work the broad handloom. Weaving is quite popular among many communities in Ilorin, Okene, Nupe, Kabba, Igbaja and Yagba land. These communities turned out quality hand manufactured cloths not only for the local market but also for export purposes to other part of the nation. In the same perspective, Olaoye writing on Ilorin Weaving Industry described Ilorin cloth as that of an enviable standard in spite of the in-road of modern fabrics. In design and colour, scarcely could any two pieces of cloth be identical (Olaoye, 1999). As such, weavers continually strive to turn out something extra or fanciful. In the 19th century, the indigenous fabrics produced included *sanyan*, *etu*, *Petuje*, *alaari* and *kijipa*; while indigo plants especially the local species *indigofera erecta* produced the major dye used (Hopkins, 1973:50)

Pottery represents another significant application of indigenous skills and technique among Kwara people. In Ilorin, the Dada pottery center has been noted as one of the largest ceramic center (ebu) in West Africa. Several other communities like Offa, Igbaja, Okene and Patigi, were renown for their excellent techniques of pot making. Indeed (Cardew, 1950:7) in a preliminary survey of pottery in West Africa attested to the excellence of native potters techniques. He believes that the native potters operate a very ancient tradition, and they know very well just what they are doing and how best to do it, (much better than many 'whites' who call themselves potters. The craftsmanship is usually very good, seldom showing any signs of degeneration, and the same is true of the forms and the decorations. The product is finely adapted, technically and economically, to the needs of village life; any attempt to tamper with the technique used would upset this fine technical and economic equilibrium (Cardew, 1950 5-7).

In some societies in Kwara State, brewing had been an important industry long before the one of modern technology. The distillation from millet (Ogogoro) and palm-wine (Emu) and the fermentation of Burukutu from local corn, were good examples of the people's ingenuity in brewing technology. Important brewing areas included Ganmo, and most Igbomina towns. Indigenous brewing is generally a woman's task, because beer is a local drink, which goes with food. However, from the colonial period indigenous brewing suffered set backs. In fact, the British colonial government in Nigeria and Islam in particular put a ban on brewing by restricting the number of female brewers of pito and burukutu in most Kwara State towns and villages. The westernized elites were again introduced to drinking imported western beer. These led to the gradual decline in the domestic beer brewing technology in the country is general.

Carving like other traditional industries, had been an important skill among most Kwara communities of Oloje area in Ilorin, Ebie, Ajase and Igbaja. There was carving in wood, calabash, ivory, etc. Beautiful decorated calabashes were found in Ilorin, Igbomina, Okene among other areas (Olaoye, 1992:40-49).

From the discussions so far, it is clear that indigenous technologies were highly pervasive in different communities in Kwara State. Although in the technologies discussed, labour constitute a major input in production, the practitioners devised simple tools in response to the need of their industries. Thus it is absolutely erroneous to hold the view that the technology is inferior since it satisfied the needs, demand and economic purposes of the people of that period. Indeed, a careful study of some of the indigenous technologies shows that innovation is visible in their operations. The unfortunate thing being, the shift of focus from local to imported goods toward the end of nineteenth century.

The Concept of Technology Transfer

Technology transfer refers to the diffusion of skills, techniques, ideas and values from the community, which possesses them to the community which lacks them for the purpose of development. (Agnew, 1982). In other words, technology transfer is the importation of already developed technology from the developed countries by the less developed countries. Technology transfer has been pursued by most less developed countries much to the detriment of their indigenous technology. It is important to examine the analysis of various schools of thought on the subject of technology transfer. Three schools stand clear and their positions are discussed as follows. These are the Conventional, Dependency and Supremacist schools (Olaoye, 2003: 135-137). This analysis is essential as a basic foundation for understanding the dangers that are inherent in the programme of technology transfer.

The Conventional school: This school examined the concept of technology transfer in terms of the product cycle theory of international trade where technology owning enterprises in the advanced countries exploit their monopoly advantages in the third world market. This is basically done either directly through the establishment of firms (companies) usually called Multinational Corporations in the less developed countries. Or, when developed nations connive with another enterprise already established in the less-developed countries (Lambo, 1987). These examples are visible in Nigeria. Multinational corporations are though widespread in the country visibly operating in such areas as Construction, Petrochemicals, Automobile, Telecommunication, Food Tech. & Beverages. (Yusuf 1983: 2-6) The hope of technological development through such corporations has remained elusive. Rather than helping Nigeria to achieve technological growth, the nation has been continually taken away from technology. This school therefore sees technology transfer as a support for the international division of labour by which the less developed countries like Nigeria remains a primary producer while the developed countries are secondary producers.

The Dependency school: It focuses on the relationship between the less developed countries and the advanced capitalist countries. The Marxists within this school maintain that dependency is the inevitable result of capitalist development. Other analysis's, however, are of the opinion that, dependency originates from the unequal relationship between the under-developed and developed countries. The focal point of the dependency school, is the center-periphery concept, which maintains that part of the third world is part of the center. This relationship makes technology to remain a problematic issue in the third world countries. Technology has become a sword used by the advanced countries for checkmating the less developed countries. In Nigeria, the story is not different, as the nation's market has been hijacked by the developed nations. Economic dependence has therefore been tied to technological dependence of a nation which lacks technological knowledge. Therefore, forced them to rely on the dictates of the developed nation.

The supremacist school: This relates to racial superiority highly publicized by the west against the rest of the world especially Africa. There is the concept of the supremacy of the Aryan race in which the advanced countries view Africa as "a Museum of Babarism" or "a zone of immemorial stagnation" which needs to be regenerated by an advanced culture" (Lambo, 1987).

Olaoye, making a critique of these schools believes they represent an ideological approach which advocates 'Horizontal Transfer' of technology. By horizontal transfer he meant the mechanism of technology which involves the mere importation of major parts of technology. Indeed, horizontal transfer is predicated on import substitution policy of industrialization. For example, after independence, Nigeria changed from the policy of producing primary products introduced by the colonial masters to that of producing those items originally imported (Olaoye, 2003). The main aim was to reduce over dependence on foreign trade and save foreign exchange. However, what turned out of this exercise was mere assemblage of those items rather than manufacturing. This

negates the original aim, since almost every item needed by the companies was imported. As indicated later, technology transfer syndrome under any guise may not be effective in Africa. This is because, the peculiarity of African culture was either neglected or not study before technology transfer was adopted.

The Effects of Technology Transfer on Kwara State and Nigeria Indigenous Technology

However attractive technology transfer may be painted to appear to the less developed countries like Nigeria, it is in real sense counter productive. In actual fact, the advance countries do transfer only obsolete technology to the less developed countries to reduce their competitive abilities. What is transferred in the real sense, is not the know-how but the colossal economic resources from the less developed and developing countries to the already developed ones. This is what Ohiorhenuan (2000) observes thus:

Technological dependence as the present form of dependence is not merely the massive importation of machines and knowledge. More importantly, it refers to the conditions of being without and unable to develop an indigenous technological capacity. In essence, technological dependence means that technology ... has become the medium through which the centers of the world capitalist system extract surplus from and control the major economic (and therefore political) decisions in the under developed countries (55:109).

Furthermore, technology transfer has been described as an avenue of economic conspiracy by the industrialized nations against the industrially backward countries. This is so because the transfer syndrome is part of the process of wealth transfer, whereby the third world countries like Nigeria sustain the economy of the industrialized nations since the transfer is not free but rather commoditised and highly paid for in human and material resources (Olaoye, 2003: 137). Thus, the capital that would have been invested in the indigenous technology are being shaped abroad by the advanced countries. The multinational corporations play the roles described above as representatives of capitalist interest. They were engine rooms for the outflow of capitals from the less developed to the developed nations. Little wonder that after several decades of operation in Nigeria, Multinational Corporations are yet to have any serious linkages with the local technology, rather they operate like states within Nigeria declaring huge dividends annually while the local economy worsens continually. The country only serves as a dormant host incurring losses in terms of environmental degradation, pollution, health hazards, oil spillage, and deadly toxic waste from the Multinational Corporations. This accounts for constant agitation by the host communities for compensation especially, in the oil rich Niger Delta area of Nigeria.

In the same vein, technology transfer as a strategy serves to slow down local initiatives by shifting attention from indigenous productive efforts to foreign methods. This takes the form of importation of machines and implements which Nigerians do not know their origin. Thus the country is forced to seek foreign expertise for managing the equipments. Through this activities, substantial money is paid for consultancy there by making the achievement of self-reliance a mirage. Indeed, it is hardly possible for foreign technology to work in a society without it being adaptable to local condition. And talking about adaptability, the local productive means has to accommodate the technology being sought after, so that it can be nurtured adequately.

The above conclusion is very appropriate when one consider that, it is such local endowment that enabled countries like Japan, China, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore and

India to successfully imbibed technology from the west. In the case of Japan, its society was already a highly developed feudal society progressing towards its own capitalist forms in the 19th century. It was this local progress that ultimately made Japan to successfully borrow from Europe. One major problem with Nigeria and indeed Kwarans is the inability to decide on the kind of technology that suits her society instead of a whole sale importation of already developed technology.

Though there are different approaches to technology such as low cost, intermediate, modern, high or appropriate technology. The last appropriate technology may seem to be best option for the less developed countries. Appropriate technology is one that represents a particular view of society and technology. It suggests a technology that seeks to accommodate itself to the cultural environment within which it is used.

Technology transfer also results in the lost of market by the indigenous technology due to competition from foreign goods. For example as discussed earlier, indigenous industries such as weaving, iron industry, beads, and other local products became shadow of themselves, to the importation of similar products from outside.

From another perspective, technology transfer has become another tool of globalization in the hand of the developed countries. And since it has been argued that globalization is a mere triumph of the wishes of the powerful nation and their culture, Nigeria and indeed Kwara State stands to loose rather than gain from this relationship. According to the United Nations Conference on Trades and Development (UNCTAD) report released on 18th June 2002, "the current form of globalization is tightening rather than loosening the international poverty trap". The report shows that extreme poverty in developing countries, which is defined using the one dollar-a day international poverty line, has doubled over the past 30 years, to 307 million people; and that more than 100 million people will be added by 2015 (Davies, 1993:147-148).

Going by the argument above, technology transfer certainly cannot be option for Nigeria. In fact, the Europeans deliberately blocked the diffusion of their know how in Africa. As observed by (Rodney, 1972:11), the lines of economic activity attached to foreign trade were either destructive as slavery was, or at best purely extractive, like ivory hunting and cutting cam wood trees. Therefore, there was no reason for waiting to call upon European skills.

Thus instead of economic progress, the state and indeed the nation has been witnessing recession; instead of self-reliance, she has remained ever increasingly dependent and economically stagnant. The Gross domestic product has continued to fall while importation and dependence on foreign manufactured goods have permeated the fabrics of Nigerians. By foreign goods it does not necessarily refer to goods, made in foreign countries alone but also goods made by foreign companies irrespective of the location of the producers. The point to note here is that the returns (profit) goes back to the nations, which own the corporations. Thus, Nigeria may have a proliferation of companies and industries. Its productivity is still low because the companies are only located in Nigeria but are foreign in composition and disposition.

Industrial revolution did not start in 1750 with the advent of Industrial Revolution. Although industrial revolution remains the most radical transformation in the history of manufacturing by man, modern man seem to have given it mystifying connotations. In fact there are other important revolutions in human history. The first was pebble industry, which originated in Africa, over one and half million years ago. It is the genesis of a lithic technological development antecedent of Homo sapiens. It has since undergone complex stages of development and refinement. Technology is therefore the accumulated knowledge of all peoples of the world and does not belong to any one pure race.

The historical analysis above shows that the knowledge of technology has been in Africa since a long time before the industrial revolution. The unfortunate thing being the low level of progress in the continent's technology due to her unequal exploitative relationship with Europe. Therefore if Africa had played such significant roles in the

foundation of technology, the continent can still retrace her steps and forge ahead in technology despite the set backs already recorded.

Therefore instead of embarking on technology transfer, the country should give priority attention to the pursuance of scientific enquiry and inventiveness as a way of transforming its indigenous technology. The British example above is clear evidence. Even socialist sometimes do not leave inventions merely to chance or good luck. For example, in the then German Democratic Republic the youth established a Young Innovators Fair in 1958, calling upon the intellectual creativity of socialist youth, so that within ten years over 2,000 new inventions were presented at that Fair (Rodney, 1972: 114-120). While it is true that the connection between Nigeria and Europe from the 15th century onwards served to block such spirit of technological innovation, it is equally true that political independence since 1960 had given the country the sovereignty to redefine its policies to facilitate technological progress.

Conclusion

This write up has been an attempt to analyze the impact of technology transfer on Kwara State indigenous technology. In the discuss it has been vividly shown that Nigeria pre-colonial economy was sustained by indigenous technology, using the state as a case study. The introduction of foreign ideas and method has however continued to hamper the country's technological progress. This paper sees technological transfer as a tool of neocolonialism-one used by the developed countries to widen the gap between them and the rest of the world particularly Africa. The developed world has never in history been magnanimous to Africa as to relinquish its technology, rather technology transfer has served to increase Africa's and indeed, Nigeria economic dependence, high cost of living, economic stagnation and above all increase marginalisation in a globalised economy. Therefore Nigeria ought to break loose from its ties with the West and recertify its indigenous technology as a way of creating an original Nigeria technology, which can be nurtured in Nigeria by Nigerians.

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