Background to the Problem of Economic Development in Northern Ghana

Author(s): K. B. Dickson

Source: *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Dec., 1968, Vol. 58, No. 4 (Dec., 1968), pp. 686-696

Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd. on behalf of the Association of American Geographers

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2561713

BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN GHANA

K. B. DICKSON

University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana

ABSTRACT. Northern Ghana is Ghana's problem region. It is a large area accounting for about half the total land surface of Ghana, yet it is the least developed part of the country. It would be futile to seek to explain the lack of economic development in the region mainly with reference to the problems of the savanna environment, which indeed are no more serious than in many other parts of West Africa where there has been greater economic development. The reason must be sought primarily in the strategy adopted for economic development, which at first failed to identify the fundamental problems of low productivity in food farming and high transport costs. Later, the solution of the transport problem was made conditional upon the success of the measures adopted for increasing agricultural productivity; yet these measures proved to be partially unrealistic since they ignored long-established local values and preferences.

GHANA may be divided into two broadly contrasting geographical regions: Northern Ghana, and the rest of the country. A study of the genesis of this basic differentiation, valid from the point of view of physical or human geography, explains many of the problems posed by the country's geography. One such problem, and in many ways the most important, is that the economic development of Northern Ghana has lagged behind that of the rest of the country. Northern Ghana covers about half the total land surface of Ghana, yet its contribution to the national economy is relatively insignificant (Fig. 1).

THE ECONOMY IN PRE-COLONIAL TIMES

The pre-Colonial era may broadly be considered to have ended for the whole country at the beginning of the twentieth century, and for most of this period, up to about the mid-nineteenth century, Ghana as a whole derived the bulk of its revenue from trade in products other than agricultural. About mid-nineteenth century export agriculture based on palm oil processing, which had slowly been developing since abolition of the export slave trade by Britain in 1807, emerged for the first time as the principal source of revenue. This was true for southern Ghana where the British Administration exercised its jurisdiction. In Ashanti, where slaves were still kept, gold mining from alluvial sources remained the most profitable economic activity. From about 1850 onward the trend towards greater agricultural diversity and output continued and, by 1902, when the British annexed Ashanti to the Crown, the major occupation for the majority of the population in Southern Ghana and Ashanti-Brong Ahafo was the cultivation of the soil to produce a wide variety of export crops featuring principally cacao, the oil palm, rubber, coffee, and cotton. The reorganization of the gold mining industry after 1876, through the introduction of modern mining techniques, also came to add a new dimension to the economy.

Northern Ghana was not affected by the changes in economy that occurred in the rest of the country. The traditional systems of agriculture, with all their limitations, remained unchanged. Cultivation was on the whole still geared merely towards production for home or immediate local consumption, except that cotton was occasionally produced on a scale large enough to yield a surplus for export. Shifting cultivation, a rudimentary answer to the same challenges of the savanna environment that had been met more effectively in some other parts of West Africa, was the rule nearly everywhere in Northern Ghana. This system of farming, as it was practiced in Northern Ghana, caused serious problems of soil erosion, for it involved the complete removal of the grassland cover through burning and, therefore, the baring of the soil to the torrential rainfall. The cumulative result of soil erosion over the centuries may have been

Accepted for publication January 10, 1968.

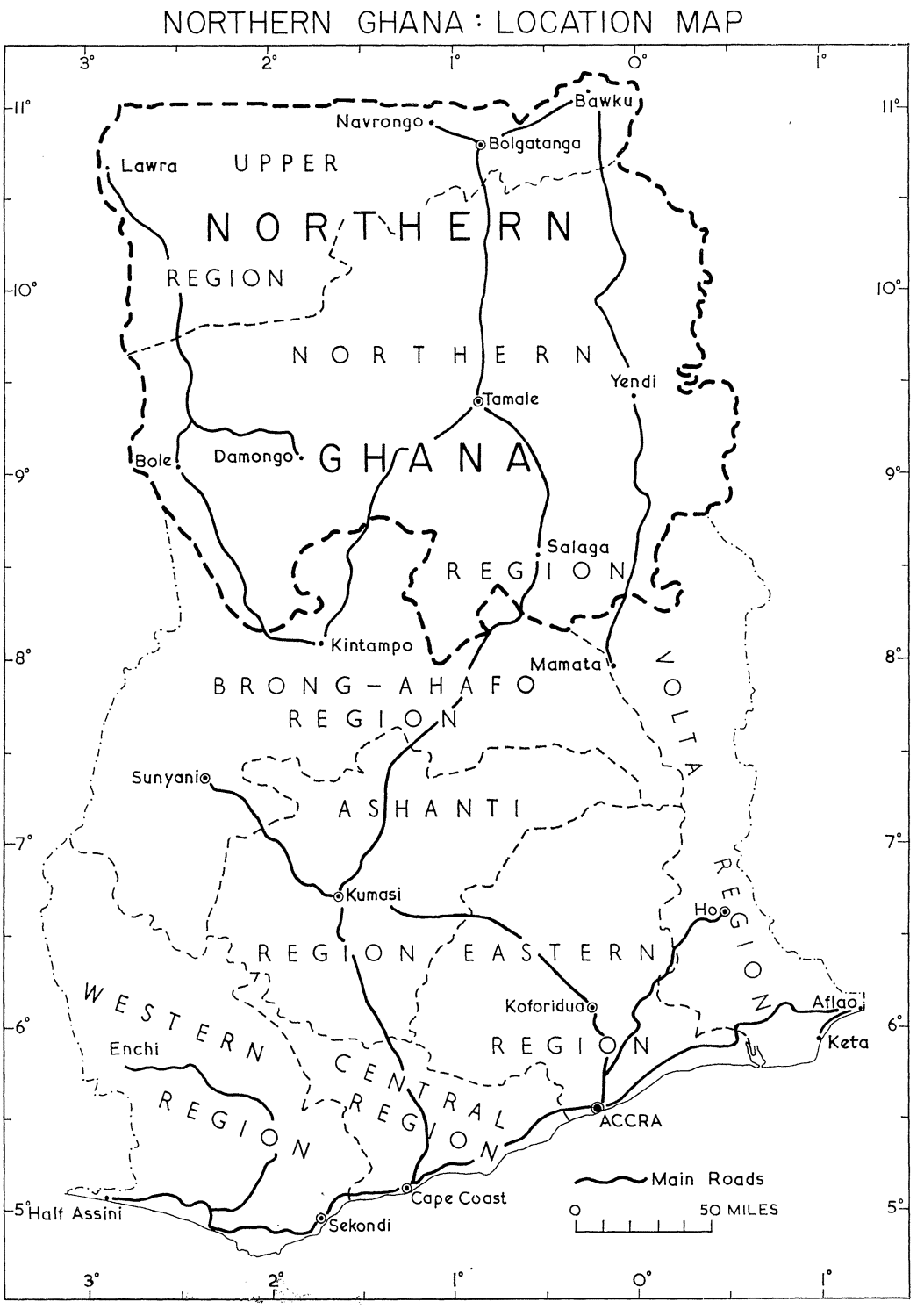

FIGURE 1.

the exposure over extensive areas, as in Gonja, of subsoil lateritic horizons which would have crystallized into agriculturally useless duricrusts or sheets of true concretionary laterite.

There was nevertheless a more intensive system of farming, the "compound type," which was practiced in the northeastern and northwestern corners of Northern Ghana. Under this system the land immediately surrounding the compound house was cultivated continuously without a fallow period. Only a small percentage, perhaps not more then ten percent, of the land was manured, and that was immediately around the compound house; the rest of the area was under an ineffective system of crop rotation featuring mostly cereals. The compound system also involved a farm at a distance from the house, in which cultivation was by means of shifting cultivation.[1]

The compound system of farming, which had evolved in response to shortage of land caused by the great pressure of population, is in many ways superior to shifting cultivation, but it is also beset with problems of declining crop yields, especially in those areas farmed without manuring, and of sheet and gully erosion.

Thus, cultivation did not form a basis for acquisition of wealth in Northern Ghana. Equally unimportant as a basis of wealth were the salt extraction industry at Daboya and the small-scale gold mining industry based on the alluvial deposits at Bole, Dokuripe, Kwe, and Wasipe. In other words, Northern Ghana's economy was not firmly rooted in the soil.

Traditionally, Northern Ghana's economy was rather oriented towards trade. This preeminence of trade over all other forms of economic activity in Northern Ghana was accounted for principally by the region's space relations. Just as Ashanti enjoyed unique trading advantages from its situation between Southern Ghana and the rest of the country, so did Northern Ghana prosper by its entrepot trade between Ashanti and the Western Sudan. Throughout the second half of the 19th century trade in Northern Ghana was dominated by Salaga. Founded not long after 1650 as a *zongo* (strangers' quarter)[2] for Kpembe, Salaga owed its initial growth to its selection by Jakpa, the real founder of Gonja kingdom, to replace Buipe as the center of Northern Ghana's kola trade.[3] Salaga grew even more rapidly after the Ashanti transferred the bulk of the kola trade, which they controlled, from the ancient Kumasi-Kong-Djenne trade route to that through Salaga to eventually Northern Nigeria.[4] By the 1870's Salaga was a large sprawling mass of houses covering several square miles of land and with a population consisting mostly of stranger merchants.

None of the principal commodities traded at Salaga originated in Northern Ghana except slaves, whose supply at any time depended on the prevailing political atmosphere. The most valuable trade article was the kola nut which came directly from Ashanti. This meant that Salaga's prosperity was mainly a function of the good will that existed between the Ashanti Court and the Chiefs of Kpembe-Salaga. Similarly, prosperity in most parts of Northern Ghana depended on the share in the distributive trade in kola nuts and therefore ultimately on the main source of supply, namely, Ashanti.

In 1874 the British defeated the Ashanti in a major engagement and followed up their victory by encouraging rebellion among the member states of the Confederacy against the Ashanti Court at Kumasi. One result of this was the closing of the Kumasi-Salaga trade route along which lay the rebellious Brong at Atebubu and the Juaben, and, consequently, the cessation of kola nut supplies to Salaga. The King of Ashanti, unable to resume trading relations with Salaga, deliberately rerouted

[1] C. Y. Lynn, *Agriculture in North Mamprusi* (Accra, Ghana: Department of Agriculture, Bulletin No. 34, Government Press, 1937). This is the most comprehensive study yet made of the northern "compound system" of farming. Lynn's conclusions are still valid and have been used in a recent study of Northern Ghana by J. M. Hunter: "The Social Roots of Dispersed Settlement in Northern Ghana," *Annals*, Association of American Geographers, Vol. 57 (1967), pp. 338–49.

[2] Many Ghanaian towns include a quarter or a ward set aside specially for immigrants (mainly traders) from Northern Ghana and other savanna countries in West Africa. This quarter is called a *zongo*.

[3] El-Wakkad Mahmoud (translator), "Qissatu Salga Tarikhu Gonja—The Story of Salaga and the History of Gonja," *Ghana Notes and Queries*, No. 3 (1961), pp. 10–31.

[4] T. E. Bowdich, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashantee* (London: Murray, 1819), p. 181.

the flow of kola nuts to Kintampo, which was within the borders of Ashanti.[5] Since possession of kola nuts was the main source of the attraction Salaga held for foreign merchants, the town's trade and, therefore, trade in many other parts of Northern Ghana, declined as rapidly as the trade, as well as the size, of Kintampo increased. When Captain Binger visited Salaga in 1888, the town was but a shadow of its former self. Kintampo on the other hand mushroomed into a large town, thanks to its status as Salaga's successor.[6]

Northern Ghana's economic plight was worsened during the last two decades of the 19th century by the Anglo-German political rivalries in the country which fostered many intertribal battles. Added to these were the slave raids by Samori and especially Babatu, which disrupted orderly economic life particularly in Grunsi.

THE ECONOMY IN COLONIAL TIMES

Britain emerged from the political rivalries as the dominating Colonial Power in Northern Ghana, except in the narrow longitudinal band of land at the eastern end of the country, then known as Northern Togoland and under Germany's control.

Soon the British put an end to the tribal wars and slave raids that plagued Northern Ghana during the previous few decades and thus restored peace, a basic prerequisite for successful economic enterprise. Wherever an administrative station backed by a strong police force was opened, as at Bawku in 1909, the settlement grew rapidly as its trade increased with the surrounding countryside where the safety of life was then assured. Nevertheless, Northern Ghana did not enter into an age of prosperity comparable to that of the period before 1874, for the value of its middleman position between the Western Sudan and Ashanti was largely nullified by the fact that the bulk of the vast output of primary products in Ashanti was directed, not across Northern Ghana to the Western Sudan, but toward the coastal ports for shipment overseas. The only major source of revenue left for Northern Ghana consisted of caravan tolls on cattle and kola nuts passing through. But these tolls were deliberately abolished by the British Administration in 1908 with the object of inducing the cattle traders of Upper Volta to bring down more of the livestock to Ashanti where the Public Health Department had launched a massive eat-more-meat campaign. The removal of the caravan tolls did not result in an increase in the supply of livestock to Ashanti; on the contrary, it reduced the supply, for the cattle traders regarded the payment of the tax as entitling them to Government protection, and were thus not certain of safety for life and property on the highway to Ashanti since "protection money" was no longer demanded from them.[7] The economic situation in Northern Ghana was worse than before, and it became even more imperative to find a substitute for trade as the basis of wealth.

But in tackling the broad problem of economic development in Northern Ghana since the turn of the century, the British Administration did not prepare a coordinated plan; instead desultory efforts were made at developing different sectors of the economy, not with the long term view of benefitting Northern Ghana, but in the hope of winning quick rewards from capital invested.

Since Northern Ghana's gold resources were not such as could be worked commercially, it was only natural that the British Administration should decide to begin by investigating the possibilities of export agriculture, which was to be developed on a peasant basis.

Agriculture

From the point of view of commercial agriculture, cotton appeared to be the crop whose cultivation held the greatest possibilities, and the opinion was voiced in 1902 that the crop

[5] British Parliamentary Papers Cmd. 3386, *Further Correspondence Regarding Affairs of the Gold Coast* (London: The British Colonial Office, August, 1882). This is an official printed collection of all the major correspondence on the Gold Coast (Ghana), conducted between the Colonial Office and the Administration in the Gold Coast in 1881–82. Reference is to Enclosure No. 2 in Paper No. 2: "Report by Captain Rupert La Trobe Lonsdale on His Mission to Coomassie, Salagha, Yendi, etc."

[6] Captain L. G. Binger, *Du Niger au Golfe de Guinée* (Paris: Hachette, 1892), Vol. II, pp. 91–115, 136–42.

[7] *Annual Report on the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, 1919* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press, 1920).

could be cultivated scientifically and extensively in the empty lands of Gonja near the Black Volta. Labor there was cheap, and transport would be no problem since the cotton could be sent down to the coast at a cost of about £1 10/-per ton by those large boats (dug-outs)[8] which sailed down the Volta empty to Ada after disposing of their cargoes of salt and dried fish at Yeji, Longoro, and Daboya.[9]

Belief in the possibility of cultivating cotton on a commercial scale was strengthened by a report by the Department of Agriculture that certain cotton growing experiments it conducted at Salaga in 1903 were completely successful. Three years later the British Cotton Growing Association sponsored experiments with American Black Rattler and Volta River varieties of cotton at Salaga and Yeji, and the results showed that the Volta River variety was most likely to succeed. The British Cotton Growing Association once more sent out to Northern Ghana in 1909 a cotton expert, Mr. Cornish, who reported favorably on the cotton already cultivated by the peasant farmers in Gonja. He also laid out an experimental farm at Tamale for purposes of instructing the local farmers in the scientific methods of cotton cultivation, and announced that the British Cotton Growing Association was prepared to purchase all the cotton the farmers could bring down to Tamale. Lastly, a cotton gin and a press were installed at Tamale and a public demonstration given; this reportedly created quite a sensation and greatly stimulated cotton cultivation. By 1911 more permanent buildings had been completed at Tamale to house new cotton gins, and at Tamale Port, the town created specially in 1908 to serve as the river port for Tamale, a cotton gin was also erected, as well as an hydraulic press to be used to further compress the cotton bales for transport down the Volta. In subsequent years the British Cotton Growing Association continued to distribute improved cotton seeds to farmers throughout Northern Ghana, but especially in Dagomba; it also installed new cotton gins at Wa and Gambaga in order to save farmers in the respective districts the high cost involved in transporting their cotton to Tamale, which was before then the only purchasing station. In 1914 the total quantity of cotton lint exported from Northern Ghana was just over 24,000 lbs., and of this quantity fifty-four percent was purchased at Tamale, twenty-five percent at Gambaga, sixteen percent at Wa, and the remaining five percent outside those stations.

Yet the quantities of cotton exported from Northern Ghana since about 1903 were disappointing in view of the persistent efforts of the British Cotton Growing Association to stimulate production. The Association consequently ended its operations in Northern Ghana in 1916 and handed over its buildings at Tamale to the Government. "Under existing conditions," reported the Association, "cotton growing in the Northern Territories could not hope to become a remunerative industry for export purposes." "The existing conditions" referred to were a compound of several factors. First, the young men in Northern Ghana were more attracted to the gold mines and cacao farms in Ashanti and Southern Ghana than to the cotton farms. Paradoxically, it was the Government, which while seeking to encourage commercial agriculture in Northern Ghana, also tempted the young men to go south. This began in 1906 after a carefully selected group of young men from all over Northern Ghana were taken on a conducted tour of the gold mines, where they were highly impressed by the decent and higher standards of living enjoyed by the mining employees. Secondly, the transport system in Northern Ghana was too inadequate to be an effective instrument of economic development. The third major factor that militated against successful cultivation of cotton on a commercial scale was of fundamental importance: the farmers could not devote all their energies to cotton cultivation when the techniques of farming employed generally made it difficult for them to satisfy their basic food requirements.

It was not until 1928 that the question of developing export agriculture in Northern Ghana was once more raised; but this time the Department of Agriculture understood the nature of the problems involved and en-

[8] "Dug-out" is the name given in West Africa to a boat made from a single tree trunk, used in river trade.

[9] *Annual Reports on the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press), covering the years 1901–1956.

deavored to solve them. It worked along two main lines, namely, the improvement of the existing intensive method of cultivation practiced in the northeastern and northwestern corners of the country, and the provision of water for irrigation. In the 1930's the Department introduced measures to combat soil erosion, such as controlled grass burning in the dry season and ridging across slope contours. After careful trials on experimental farms, the Department also introduced a more beneficial system of crop rotation, but this was not readily accepted by the farmers. Mixed farming similarly had a poor reception.

If the farmers would not accept the measures proposed by the Department of Agriculture, it was not because they were conservative and opposed to change. It was rather because the Department could not demonstrate convincingly the superiority of the new system of crop rotation which, in the eyes of the farmers, was not desirable since its acceptance would lead to reduced production of cereals, their staple food. Neither could the Department of Agriculture prove to the satisfaction of the farmers that they could make quick profits on the additional capital invested in the purchase and caring of the cattle for purposes of mixed farming.

After World War II the most important experiment conducted with systems of food production was one involving the use of farm machines and fertilizer. In 1951 the Gonja Development Company began a pilot settlement scheme in an area of about 30,000 acres near the small settlement of Damongo in the sparsely populated belt of Western Gonja.[10] The farmers encouraged to participate in the scheme came mostly from among the Frafra who faced the serious problem of decreasing crop yields in the home area. Each immigrant was to farm a thirty-acre holding under the supervision of the Company, which also undertook responsibility for at least part of the main cultural operations of tractor ploughing, fertilizing, planting, and probably early interrow cultivation and harvesting. The Gonja Development Company's scheme—the Damongo scheme—failed for several reasons: the poor quality of the land chosen for cultivation, the unreliable nature of the rainfall, the location of Damongo within one of the areas most heavily infested with tsetse (*Glossina morsitans*) in Northern Ghana, and the difficulty of integrating the Frafra tribesmen into the local Damongo community.

Thus, the problem of increasing food production in Northern Ghana through improved farming systems, and on that basis developing export agriculture remained unsolved. The only measure that produced results was the provision of water for irrigation, and this was done by constructing dams across rivers or sinking wells and boreholes. Nevertheless, few areas had streams with enough water throughout the year to warrant the expense of building dams across them.

The success of wells or boreholes depended on the nature of the underlying geological formation.[11] Briefly, the Voltaian formation consisting, over most of its extent, of shale and mudstone, contains little groundwater. Springs are almost entirely absent in the Voltaian sandstone basin; rivers are also seasonal, except the main ones which originate elsewhere. It is only at the western and northern rims of the basin that the massive sandstone escarpments hold, in their widely-spaced open joints, large quantities of groundwater which issue out as springs. The amount of groundwater held in the granites, which underlie much of the land surface of Northern Ghana outside the Voltaian basin, depends on the degree of jointing and fracturing of the rocks and the depth of overlying weathered material. The depth of weathering in the granites is greatest in the northwestern portion of the country, and boreholes there are capable of supplying at least a thousand gallons of water per hour. Birrimian rocks are usually strongly foliated and jointed, and capable of holding moderate quantities of groundwater; but since they are restricted areally, they are not important for Northern Ghana from the point of view of groundwater resources. The exception is North Mamprusi where Birrimian rocks have as much areal extent as granites.

[10] Department of Agriculture, *Annual Report, 1950/51* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press, 1951).

[11] J. B. Wills, *Agriculture and Land Use in Ghana* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), Chapter 4. See also Department of Water Supply's *Annual Reports* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press), covering the period 1950/51–1955/56.

Animal Rearing

As a means of broadening the basis of Northern Ghana's economy, the cattle rearing industry seemed to offer great possibilities since it was already well established in the region.[12] The Government nevertheless realized that one major problem had to be solved before the industry could make any headway. This was the attitude towards cattle, not as animals to be reared for economic purposes but as status symbols and an index of wealth. All other problems stemmed from that. The animals were poorly attended to and were ready victims to such fatal diseases as anthrax and pleuro-pneumonia. The caring of the animals was the responsibility of inexperienced young boys and sometimes, as in Builsa and Kusasi Districts, of Fulani herdsmen whose reward did not depend on the state of health in which the animals were kept. The cattle owners made no efforts to improve the breeds.

The problem of how to improve the breeds of cattle was the first to be tackled by the Department of Agriculture. The experiments were begun at Tamale in 1912 with Mossi cattle imported for purposes of crossbreeding with the local cattle, and were continued by the Veterinary Department which in the early 1930's transferred all its laboratories from Tamale to Pong-Tamale. Bulls of superior breed from Pong-Tamale were distributed for crossbreeding, and between 1933 and 1938 Builsa and Kusasi Districts alone received over 290 young bulls. These efforts were at first nullified by a prevailing social custom which prescribed that only the best young bulls (which naturally included those supplied from Pong-Tamale) should be slaughtered at religious festivals. Native Administration stock farms were also established to facilitate the process of breeding and distributing high grade bulls; the cows to be serviced on the stock farms by the zebu bulls from Pong-Tamale were to be supplied by the local herdsmen. The scheme was completely misunderstood, with the result that the herdsmen supplied only their worst cows. Many of the stock farms were closed down in 1935.

In the case of disease control the Veterinary Department was more successful, although anthrax and pleuro-pneumonia continued to decimate herds. Within about ten years since the early 1920's rinderpest completely disappeared and the number of cattle in Northern Ghana rose from about 70,000 in 1930 to about three times that number in 1938. Elimination of sleeping sickness began in the 1940's, and within a decade the disease had been brought under control in most of the worst affected areas.

Fishing

Fishing had never been an important occupation in Northern Ghana although many of the streams and rivers carried good stocks of fish.[13] In many districts fishing was an annual communal event during which pools of water isolated in the dry season in river beds were completely fished out with wicker basket traps or simply by stirring up the muddy bottoms sufficiently to suffocate the fish. Whatever serious fishing done in Northern Ghana was by immigrants from Tongu villages on the lower Volta who faced problems of overpopulation and increasing poverty in the home area, and their catch was smoked and generally dispatched southward for sale in Ashanti.

The objective of the Fisheries Department in Northern Ghana was to introduce the idea of fishing as a serious occupation, for the food problem in Northern Ghana concerned not only the quantity available but also the quality, and protein was conspicuously deficient in the dietary. The Department initiated two training schemes to teach the local youths to fish professionally, and by 1951 training centers had been set up at Kpalaba and Sabali on the Oti, and at Dikpe and Buga on the Black Volta, with a total student population of fifty-six. The course of instruction lasted a year, at the end of which the trained youths were supposed to demonstrate their skill and encourage others to follow the profession in the home areas. The second training scheme was on a countrywide basis and less formal in nature. Youths everywhere were encouraged

[12] See footnote 9. Also, Department of Animal Health, *Annual Reports* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press) covering the period 1912–1956.

[13] Fisheries Department, *Annual Reports* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press) covering the period 1950/51–1955/56.

to practice angling in dammed-up reservoirs some of which were specially stocked with fish of the *Tilapia* sp. Those interested were supplied with a length of stick for fishing rod, a few yards of light cotton cord for the line, and a piece of calabash for a float. The two training schemes were on the whole unsuccessful, for acceptance of fishing as a major livelihood form demanded a radical alteration of a social attitude. Such a change could have occurred had there been an assurance of suitable market conditions.

Transport

The transport facilities in Northern Ghana which appeared to be sufficient for the needs of the country while it was dedicated to entrepot trade, were clearly inadequate when the country's agricultural resources had to be developed. Of the numerous problems that faced economic development in Northern Ghana, that of transport was perhaps the greatest.

Roads

Before the end of the nineteenth century two principal trade routes linked Northern Ghana with Ashanti and the Volta Region.[14] One from Paga ended at Kumasi through Navrongo, Savelugu, Tamale, Salaga, and Yeji; a branch of it from Salaga went to Kete Krachi. The other trade route went south from Wa through Bole, and across the Black Volta at Bamboi and finally to Kumasi through Kintampo and Nkoranza. These roads as well as those linking up with them "consisted of the merest tracks, along which it was only possible to move in single file. Their narrowness was at all times inconvenient for carriers with bulky loads, and in the rains the long grass blocked them in many places to an extent that made progress along them both slow and difficulty. . . ."[15]

The earliest plans for road transport improvement in Northern Ghana were drawn up by Colonel Northcott in 1898. As British Commissioner and Commandant of the Northern Territories, he instructed all District Commissioners to have the trade routes rebuilt, making them fourteen feet wide, ditched on either side and raised above the general level of the surrounding countryside. The first few roads to be thus improved between 1898 and 1899 were around Gambaga, including one which scaled the steep north face of Gambaga escarpment. Colonel Northcott also planned a transport service based on the use of pack and draft animals, but this was firmly opposed by the Governor, Sir F. M. Hodgson, on the grounds that it was impracticable.

It was not until Northern Ghana's international boundaries were finally fixed in 1904 that the Government began to give more attention to road transport improvement. Tamale, created in 1907 as the new administrative headquarters in place of Gambaga, became the focal point of the road network, and a sixteen foot tarred motor road was begun from there to Yeji, to link up with one to be constructed from Kumasi to Yeji. The new road network nevertheless differed little from that of the nineteenth century, and the mileage of road per square mile was much lower than in Southern Ghana or Ashanti. Most of the existing main roads were converted to motor roads in the 1920's and 1930's, and commercial motor vehicles began to ply on the Kumasi-Tamale road in the early 1920's. Few significant additions were made to the road network between the end of the World War II and Independence in 1957.

The slow pace of road transport development since the beginning of the twentieth century was explained mainly by the fact that road building was undertaken only when the existing commercial traffic was great enough to warrant it; and it happened that commercial traffic in Northern Ghana was small. There are no examples of roads built specially to open up rural areas and to generate greater production and trade within Northern Ghana.

Rivers

The River Volta had for long been an important commercial highway linking Northern Ghana with the coast, and large dug-outs

[14] Binger, *op. cit.*, footnote 6, "Map of Trade Routes in Northern Ghana" to be found in the end pocket of Vol. II.

[15] African (West) No. 585, *Gold Coast: Further Correspondence Relating to the Northern Territories* (London: The British Colonial Office, 1899). This is of the same nature as the British Parliamentary Papers referred to in footnote 5. Reference in this case is to Paper No. 96: "Report on Administration of the Northern Territories, 1898–99," by Colonel H. P. Northcott.

regularly left Ada with salt and dried fish for the river ports in Northern Ghana. It was to give the newly created administrative headquarters of Tamale access to the Volta highway that Tamale Port was built on the Volta in 1908.

Plans for developing the Volta highway for steamship navigation go back to the 1850's, but the most comprehensive plan was that suggested by Colonel Northcott in 1899: the rapids at Kpong were to be circumvented by tramways, and stern wheelers should operate on the navigable stretches up to Wuyima, Gambaga's outlet on the White Volta.[16] Nothing came of this plan. The more modest Volta River Transport Service initiated in 1902 was more successful; it was based on a fleet of dug-outs which plied between Ada and the river ports in Northern Ghana, and the cost of transporting goods from the coast to Gambaga was reduced from £100 per ton to £40 per ton. After the First World War commercial transport on the Volta was killed by the increasing use of motor vehicles on the Accra-Kumasi-Tamale road.

A Northern Ghana Railway

The difference that railways, with their capacity for bulk transport over long distances, had made to cacao cultivation and the mining industry in Southern Ghana and Ashanti prompted a discussion of the desirability of building one to Northern Ghana from Kumasi. The decision to build the railway was announced to the Legislative Council in 1918 by Governor Guggisberg who concluded his detailed statement on this dramatic note: "The career of the Northern Territories as the Cinderella of the Gold Coast is nearing its end: as Cinderella she has done good and unobstrusive work; her reward for that . . . is in sight."[17]

Three possible routes for the railway were proposed: the first from Kumasi to Navrongo and roughly parallel to the motor road; the second route followed the first as far as Naga and then turned off westward to Fian, less than forty miles southeast of Lawra; the third route passed through Bechem from Kumasi to Sunyani, and from there across the Black Volta to Fian through Bole and Wa, then eastward to Naga (Fig. 2). After the economics of operating each of the three lines had been worked out, it was finally decided that the railway should follow the eastern route from Kumasi to Navrongo.[18]

TABLE 1.—COMPARATIVE FREIGHT RATES

	Proposed railway rates	Existing lorry rates
Cattle	£2 per head	–*
Fowls	1/– each	3d each
Sheep and goats	10/– each	3/– each
Passengers	10/– each	8/– each

* Cattle traders similarly refused to use truck transport.
Source: Slater, footnote 20.

The railway was never built, for the Government considered, after further research, that the railway could never be operated at a profit.[19] The estimated revenues from transporting passengers, kola nuts, and livestock, especially cattle, were declared to be gross exaggerations. Indeed, the cattle traders were said to be completely averse to the idea of using the railway to transport their cattle to Kumasi. They argued that the cattle would lose condition badly during the railway journey, something which would not occur if they walked, and that the proposed freight charge of £2 per head of cattle would impoverish them. The Government thus concluded that unless the railway was heavily subsidized, it could not hope to compete with truck transport which was far cheaper (Table 1).

CONCLUSION

Thus failed all the major attempts made, up to Independence in 1957, to revitalize Northern Ghana's economy. The reasons for failure were many, but above all was the fact that the fundamental problems were overlooked.

The greater part of the population in North-

[16] African (West) No. 585, *op. cit.*, footnote 15, Papers Nos. 146 and 179.

[17] Governor F. G. Guggisberg's address to the Legislative Council, in *Minutes of the Gold Coast Legislative Council, 20th October, 1918* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press, 1919).

[18] *Gold Coast Government Sessional Paper*, No. XXIII, 1927–28 (Accra, Ghana: Government Press, 1929).

[19] Governor Slater's address to the Legislative Council, in *Minutes of the Gold Coast Legislative Council, 15th February, 1929* (Accra, Ghana: Government Press, 1929).

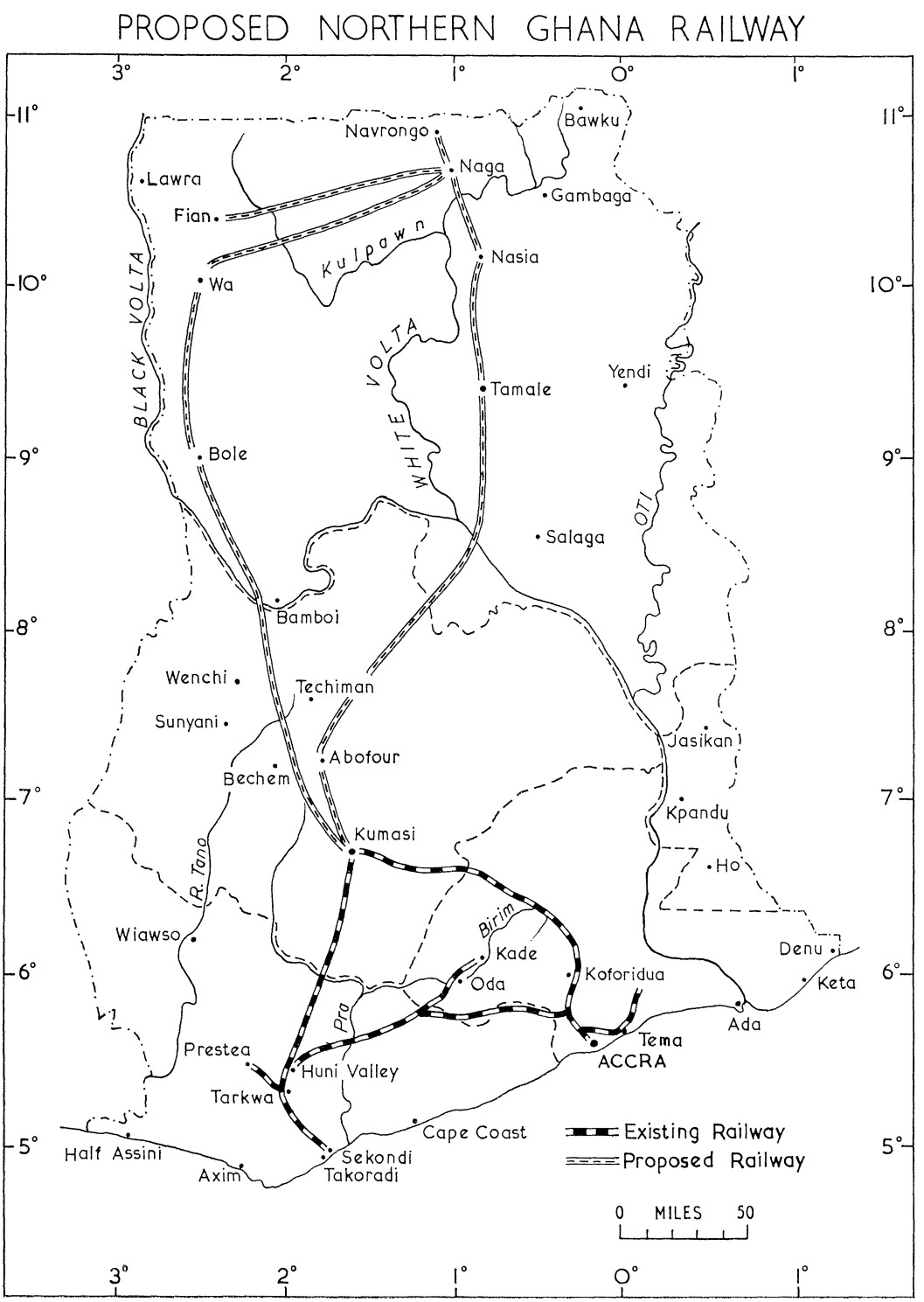

FIGURE 2.

ern Ghana lived at a subsistence level and was obliged, because of the rudimentary cultural techniques in use, to devote nearly all its energy to the basic task of food production. Therefore, the population could hardly respond to the call to cultivate non-edible cash crops for export or direct part of its energy to rearing cattle for commercial purposes. Fish traditionally formed only a small part of the diet in an area where cereals, leguminous crops, and edible leaves constituted the basic food items, so that the efforts to encourage fishing on a large scale could not hope to succeed. Fishing on such a scale would only have reduced the time available for the essential processes of food farming. And so Northern Ghana remained a poor region whose economy, it was argued, would not justify large investments, by a Government without an unlimited supply of capital, in a denser network of roads or in a railway to aid transportation between the region and Ashanti. Yet without improvements in transport, schemes for general economic development in Northern Ghana had little chance of success.

Since 1957 many more schemes for economic development in Northern Ghana have been put into operation. The problems to be overcome are not new; neither has the general context changed, within which the particular problems are found. Yet certain lines of solution followed without much success in the past are still favored. A genetic approach to the study of these problems helps to explain their persistence to the present and, while underscoring the need for attack on a broad front, also indicates a scale of priority against which the problems might be considered.