

***An African Niche Economy: Farming to Feed Ibadan 1968-88***: by Jane I. Guyer. International African Library, Edinburgh University Press 1997. Pp. x+260

***Coming To Life: Biotechnology in African Economic Recovery***. Edited by. Calestous Juma, John Mugabe and Patricia Kameri-Mbote. African Center for Technology Studies (ACTS), Nairobi, Kenya and Zed Books, London 1995. Pp.x-192

In *An African Niche Economy: Farming to Feed Ibadan 1968-1988* the author examines the dynamics of the Nigerian rural economy of Idere in Igbo-Ora in Oyo State of Nigeria. The book is based on research work on the social and agricultural history of Idere, and on the economic, political, social issues of Idere among other topics.

The research on which the book is based is a long-term or longitudinal study centered upon two studies visit spanning a 20 years interval (1968-1988). This is not to say that there were research activities going on during this period as the author maintains a close and extra-ordinary contacts with field associates on site and also with others who provided secondary complementary information. The time span between the author's field works gives the opportunity for comparative analysis of the first and second field research by the author. Through this analysis, the implications for the development of almost all aspects of rural economy of Idere are examined. The book, according to the author, deals with " one small producing community in the supply hinterland of Ibadan" (p3). The study is therefore an example of a small producing community in the southwest hinterland of Ibadan over a period of twenty years of turbulent economic change. The book demonstrates that important achievements on the part of African farmers are often unrecognized by the development community Successes such as presented in this book holds out the promise of a continuing upward trajectory.

The work presented in this book is divided into three parts. Part one of the book deals with the prelude to the study and discusses preliminary issues such as the

background to the study approach and methodology, problems, limitations sociohistorical and socioeconomic aspects of the study area -IDERE. Part one contains discussion of the town which is considered necessary and instructive in positioning and interpreting subsequent narratives on the productive activities of people over the twenty years of the study. To the nonhistorian, this section contains what might be considered as "adequate" social and economic history of IDERE. Part two, which is the main body of the book, details changes that have occurred with major participants in the study area. **The section containing eight chapters with summaries the experiences of participants in Idere community.** Some of the issues are:

- a. The diversity of participants in the economy of the study area.
- b. The oil boom and its impacts on the agricultural economy of Nigeria.
- c. The emergence of mid-scale farmers and agribusiness.
- d. The foothold of corporate agribusiness.
- e. younger generation of men in farming
- f. The Small-scale male farmers.

The author has dexterously brought together in one book issues that are not generally treated or found in a single book. This is the hallmark of this book. In addition, the study of Idere vis-a vis the characterization of the niche economy (p223-234) is also very instructive. It is my believe, as an agriculturist that studies of this nature which are in the domain of social anthropologists are necessary and important to throwing more light on the nature and dynamics of the Nigerian agricultural sector, food and food security. The food and related problems have been in Nigeria longer than expected and attempt at resolving the problems have been elusive. While economic analysis of food and agricultural production is necessary, sociohistorical studies of this type will be desirable

and will go a long way in complementing the search for functional food production policies in Nigeria. Part three of the book discusses the interplay among participants in agricultural production, the analysis of response to forces from the political economy and summaries the cultural foundation of the niche economy.

The niche economy theory on which the book is based generally offers "only partial guides to understanding how overall growth has been managed through. various period of price instability, policy fluctuation and vicissitudes of climate" (227). It pays little attention to certain parameters such as the relevance of price, transportation and the presence of corporate enterprises. In other words, the theory of the niche economy leaves whole range of issues unaddressed including inadequate explanation of issues of market and nonmarket , and the terms of trade under which economic momentum is generated over time. The inclusion of these parameters is an improvement to the use niche economy theory in this book. To illustrate what a niche is, the author used a particular niche definition offered by Sera Berry's (1985) description of motor mechanics (p227) in "which most mechanics specializes in one aspect of motor vehicle maintenance and repair engines, electrical systems, body work tires- so that a customer may have to go to several different shops". Hence, the descriptive characteristic of the niche economy used behavioral and social analysis illustrated by several occupation groups forming niches. However, in respect of this study, the author cautioned on the interpretation out of a limited study of one small place in a large regional economy over short period of its history. The book concludes by placing the niche economy constructs within current developmental concepts and crises usually found in the literature. The book will be of interest to cultural anthropologists, rural development workers, and agricultural officers in developing countries

The second book: *Coming To Life: Biotechnology In African Economic Recovery* is an edited work of ten African writers. The theme of the volume is on the role

of technology in the global geopolitics and trade changes, and their effects on Africa where already there are developmental problem of baffling dimensions. Most of the countries of Africa are already experiencing economic, political and ecological problems which are manifested in declining economic output, increasing debt, high level of malnutrition and industrial stagnation and decline. Other problems associated with aforementioned issues include: institutional decay and disintegration of social, educational and health infrastructures.

The authors argue for technological innovation and associated institutional reform, which they believe are the main problems of contemporary African problems. Geopolitical changes associated with major technological innovation are reordering the pattern of international trade and this will lead to marginalization of African countries as new technologies are changing the structure and direction of world trade. African countries have traditionally relied on export of raw materials which are being displaced from the international market as a result of technological innovation African countries' ability to engage in international trade will in part depend on their ability to have access to international markets and new technological innovation.

The contemporary proposals to address Africa's problems have focused on, for example, macroeconomics reforms, increased external assistance and reparation in connection with historical injustice such as slave trade, the book argues that "Africa's economic recovery programs need to take into account the role of the new technology, particularly biotechnology, in economic development" (p2). The book therefore identifies some of the key public policies and institutions necessary to build the requisite technological capabilities and the application of biotechnology. These include investment in human capital, formulation of long-term technological goals and establishment of relevant institutions to implement policies and undertake technological innovation

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, "Biotechnology and Development," examines the position of Africa in relation to recent global geopolitical,

economic and technological trends and concludes that " Africa can meaningfully deal with its ecological and economic problems by enhancing the application of science and technology (S&T), and by introducing institutional and policy reforms". Each chapter of part one emphasizes different aspects of the development issue. While chapter one examines the problems of economy and ecology in Africa, the second chapter focuses on the political aspect and warned that "advances in biotechnological research requires extensive national and international links '. The second part, "National Biotechnological Assessment" evaluates national biotech Research and Development (R&D) activities in Cameroon, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Uganda. These countries, the book maintains, need to introduce major revision in their policies so as to benefit from technological advancement. The revision must include: improved economic productivity in agriculture, industries and services and environmental management. The second part of the volume further analyzes the orientation of public policies with respect to the promotion of biotech development and examines the nature of institutions established to promote development. The authors aim is to "examine how biotech is articulated in S&T policies and the various institutional and policy factors that limit its development."

The third and the final part deals with the "Policy Making Capacity" of African countries. Most countries, the authors remarked, lack the requisite capacities for formulating and implementing policies that promote S&T in general and biotech, in particular. To address these issues, building technological capabilities for biotech development is necessary. Hence the authors argue that if African countries want to effectively engage in biotech they need to build capacities in specific areas such as genetic engineering, create institutional mechanisms to monitor global trends in the areas of biotech and establish measures that support technology acquisition efforts.

The book is recommended to officials in charge of policies making in science and technology in African nations, students of international economic development and those interested in technology and public policy. However, since the book focused on policy, its

weakness is that it does not deliberate on the though issues of technology acquisition which Africa so badly needs.

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