

Colonialism: Its Effects on Africa

The colonial powers adopted economic policies and practices that would destroy, rather than help, Africa economically, politically, and culturally in the future. The effects of colonialism, in fact, destroyed Africa's traditional lifestyles and culture. The European powers did not have Africa's interests in mind. They were only concerned with their own interests. The negative effects of colonialism became evident after the independence of many African countries.



Africans were forced to accept and serve the Europeans who came to establish colonies in Africa.

The economic policies adopted by the European powers were several.

1. The colonial governments took much of the land away from the Africans for personal or commercial use, such as mining and large commercial farms. The Europeans took the best land and called it their own. It was Belgium and Britain in Central, East, and South Africa who were primarily responsible for this practice—the Belgians in Congo and the British in Kenya and South Africa. Because Central, East, and South Africa had pleasant climates and fertile soil for agriculture, the British and Belgians started to settle and immigrate into these areas.
2. Since the European powers needed manpower to manage their farms and mining companies, they used Africans as cheap labor. The Africans, either having lost their lands or not able to live off their lands, began to move to the towns, farms, or mines in search of work. The working conditions were horrible, often involving corporal punishment, and the wages were low, partially given in the form of cash and partially as food rations.
3. The colonial governments also needed money to pay for running these overseas governments and for services for the settler communities. Their mother countries in Europe gave the colonial governments little financial help, and so they needed to increase their capital by taxing the local Africans. This became a problem after World War II, when Europe was devastated and broke. Taxing the Africans went hand in hand with the use of African labor. Since taxes had to be paid in European currency, the Africans were indirectly forced to work for the Europeans in order to obtain the cash for paying the taxes. The result was that more and more Africans were forced to work for the Europeans.
4. Because of the loss of manpower after the two world wars, the European colonial powers started a new policy of forced labor, starting in the 1920s. Africans were recruited to work and sent to towns, farms, and mines. The results were many: African men were separated from their families, since only the men were used; villages lacked the manpower for food production, which led to famine; male homosexuality and female

prostitution increased among the African communities in the towns; and there was alienation from traditional village life, which led to the declining power of the village chiefs. In addition, immigrant laborers from Asia were employed by the Europeans, who were responsible for the local economy. This created tension between the Africans and the foreign immigrants.

5. The Europeans also changed the economic structure of African society. They introduced commercial or cash crops to meet the industrial demands in their home countries. Cocoa, coffee, tea, and cotton were produced on a large scale, and minerals were mined extensively. This resulted in neglecting the production of food for basic living. In turn, this neglect led to famine among many Africans. In short, the Europeans changed the economy from one where basic foods were produced to an economy based on the production of a few cash crops. All the crops produced were then exported to the home countries at the prices set by the colonies. In addition, there were few colonies that allowed Africans to grow these cash crops for their own benefit. Moreover, trade was not allowed between Africans. As a result, the Africans became producers of cash crops and minerals, which were exported to Europe.
6. The colonial powers had no plans to industrialize or aid in the modernization of Africa. Africa produced the raw materials, which were exported to Europe, re-exported to Africa as final products, and sold at high prices, which the Africans could not afford to pay.

Who benefited, then, from colonialism? Did it help or hurt the Africans? Many will admit that there were many negative results for the Africans, such as the following: resource depletion; labor exploitation; unfair taxation; lack of industrialization; dependence on cash crop economy; no trade allowed; the fragmentation of traditional African society, culture, and values; retarded political development; and ethnic rivalries within countries, since the boundaries were the ones set by Europeans. However, without colonialism, Africa would still today be behind the rest of the world in many areas. Some historians claim that there were some positive results.

1. Western medicine was introduced, which aided in the growth of the African population.
2. Formal education was introduced, which helped broaden the African outlook.
3. Africa's infrastructure was based on the European one with regard to the road system, railway, water, electricity, and communication systems.
4. The introduction of Christianity promoted literacy and health care through the work of missionaries. It created a basis for all Africans to come together and assist one another. Christianity made African spirituality simpler, such as in issues concerning life after death and the quest for salvation. There was no need for sacrifices and rituals, which were traditionally required. It made individual progress possible because it destroyed the traditional fabric of the African community.
5. The boundaries, as established by the different colonial powers, made state formation easier in the process of independence.