



# British and Beninese Agrarian and Land Reforms for a Secured Agriculture and Sustainable Development: a Comparative Analysis

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**Abstract:** *Challenged by the socio-economic and political trends of modernization and globalization, British and Beninese governments have decided a series of change in their agricultural and land fields to reach the goals of preformat agriculture and sustainable development. However, the current level of development in both countries is still to question in various dimensions. The purpose of this analysis is to rethink effective and efficient policies of land and agricultural changes for socio-political and economic sustainable development in both countries. From Marxist and new historicist critical approaches, it is expected to draw from different and similar British and Beninese social, sociological, environmental, political, economic, land and agrarian whole and complex reforms, a modern and globalized sustainable development.*

**Keywords:** *Agriculture, land, reforms, economy, sustainable development.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The twenty first century has brought about many challenges which demand substantial changes in various aspects of the economy worldwide. Both rich and poor countries are challenged by the issues of food security, secured access to land, climate change, sustainable development, and others. In spite of numerous changes in their agricultural and land management fields, Britain and Benin Republic are yet to reach the goals of secured agriculture and sustainable development. This relaunches the debate of the nature of the reforms and their level of compatibility with the present and future challenges.

The aim of this analysis is to unveil the contradictions between the reforms and the goals they are meant to attain, from their historical origins to their implementation in line with the socio-economic, political and environmental aspirations of both British and Beninese peoples. Marxist and new-historicist critical approaches have inspired this comparative analysis for which achieving a long-lasting development for British and Beninese peoples is the central objective. In fact, this analysis has further explained the historical origins of the reforms to better grasp the causes of their failure to reach the set goals. The British and Beninese agrarian and land reforms have been analyzed and used to establish that only reforms inspired by a prospective vision can lead to sustainable development.

To carry out this analysis, books, newspapers, journals, articles, mainly some government or institutional essays and reports, or other documents hard or virtual have been read and used to get adequate data. The bullet points which have been taken into account, in this analysis, are about the historical contexts and the origins of the reforms in both countries, and the gaps between these reforms and the challenges they are intended to overcome. To reach the expected results, this analysis has been structured into three parts. The first part has dealt with the historical contexts and the motivations behind the reforms in both countries. The second part has presented the current agrarian and land reforms with their challenges, and an emphasis on their similarities and differences. The third part has focused on finding new perspectives for agricultural development and land securisation in the United Kingdom and Benin Republic.

## **2. BACKGROUND TO BRITISH AND BENINESE AGRARIAN AND LAND REFORMS**

### **2.1. Historical Contexts of British and Beninese Agricultural Reforms**

The current stage of British and Beninese agricultural history has not come about as a sudden and rapid event. There have been constant changes throughout the years, even though the historical contexts and facts marking the cornerstone of the agrarian trajectory of these two countries are different. In the British context, the history of agricultural reforms goes back to the origins of the English agricultural revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Historians and agricultural economists acknowledge that the first changes in agriculture happened during that period and coincided with the industrial revolution. As pointed out by Clark, 'the industrial revolution had a systematic cause rather than being just an accident' (Clark, 2002). This suggests that agricultural revolution happened before industrial revolution and had impacted its growth.

Basically, the historically recorded facts characterizing this revolution are structural transformation, scientific and technical innovations in farming. During that period, science and art of cultivating the soil, and the ownership of land had significantly changed for the first time. The scientific innovations started with the introduction, by Lord Townshend, of the four crops rotation system from 1730 (Ernle, 1912). It was focused on the introduction of two new crops, turnips and clover. These crops supplied fodder for livestock and replaced the fallow system practiced by farmers hitherto. Clover has the useful property of fixing atmospheric nitrogen into the soil through nitrates released to the plants (AHDH, 2016). These crops were introduced into the field to rotate with two other cereal crops, wheat and barley. The result was an increase in soil fertility and crop yield. In 1700, an English agricultural pioneer, Jethro Tull invented the horse-drawn seed drill. His invention revolutionized the manual broadcasting of seeds because, it helped save time and ensured that seeds were evenly distributed and covered by soil.

In the area of the structural transformation, British Parliament voted a series of Acts on domestic production of grains, and other laws changing completely the ownership of farmland. Hence, the old common use of land known as 'open field system' was replaced by Parliament Acts instituting a private property right system. These were the Enclosure Acts 1730-1780. This was later enhanced with the 1815 and 1846 English Corn Laws restricting home as well as foreign trade in grains. Private property right system had allowed farmers to innovate in various aspects such as selective breeding, improved species of crops and livestock. With the private ownership system, agriculture in Britain took a dimension of real enterprise and had not only changed the methods and practices of farming but, it had also improved the rural history regarding the socio-cultural life of the countryside.

When dealing with agricultural revolution in Britain, names such as Jethro Tull, Lord Townshend, Arthur Young, and others ought to be remembered. These were people who brought instrumental innovation for agricultural development, even though a lot remained to be achieved. Their contribution with the set of legislations voted between the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries had not only helped feed the 'teeming millions British in the new industrial cities' (Overton, 1996) but, they had opened the way for an ascending and constant changes in the current and modern agrarian history of the country.

Contrary to Britain, in the Republic of Benin, the first documented reforms of agriculture happened in a context of colonization. In fact, the Republic of Benin was known as Danxhome, an ancient kingdom located in West Africa. It became French colony in 1894. Political and economic affairs in Danxhome were organized and run according to the objectives of France. In the sector of agriculture, the first reforms focused on the creation of a program to redesign the city and agriculture. This happened through what was known as 'agricultural stations' and 'new town planning' (Juhé-Beaulaton, 2015). This colonial agricultural reform took place in most French colonies of West Africa and operated in three phases. As recorded by Benneuil and Kleiche, the first phase ran from 1880 to 1900. This period was dominated by the introduction of some new crops and the conservation of some indigenous plants through the creation of botanic gardens (Benneuil and Kleiche, 1993).

The second phase covered the period of 1900-1914 and was characterized by the 'emergence of new arrivals of trained engineers at French school of agronomy, and new scientific and technical approaches (ibid.). Hence, the need for acclimatizing some European crops in the colonies to supply

industrial inputs was part of the colonial agenda. Such was the ambition and the motivation of the third phase of colonial agricultural reforms. The third phase happened between the two World Wars during which France embarked on a new development policy called 'colonial development'. Under the new orientation, each colony had to specialize in large-scale production of some priority crops to supply industrial inputs in France. It was in such contexts that 'agriculture stations'<sup>1</sup> were created at Niaouli in Porto-Novo, in Ouidah, and Abomey. These were institutions created to promote cash crops such as cotton, coffee, cocoa, tobacco, and some cereals such as maize (ibid., 24), useful for the economic development of the colonies.

Furthermore, other institutions such as the Service of Agriculture and Forests of the colony of Danxhome were created to ensure a successful production of export crops including cotton, palm oil, cocoa, coffee, and tobacco. Each type of crop was produced in the suitable agro-ecological zone, and technicians were allocated to every zone for that purpose. Native farmers also received training to promote the colonial agriculture. These programs were supported by decrees and orders emanating from the colonial administration. A few of them were the Decrees of 4 July 1935 on forestry system in French West Africa; the Local Order n°414 of 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1937, regulating woodcutting and forestry system in Danxhome; the Decree n°55-582 of 20 of May 1955 related to the protection of forests and territories of Africa. The colonial administration, later allowed some autonomy for the territories by encouraging the creation of some cooperatives. In that framework, some peasant organizations such as the union of the cooperatives of Danxhome were formed in 1947 and 1948 (Tossou and Zinnah, 2005).

It is worth pointing out that in spite of that attempt of autonomy, Beninese agricultural reforms before the country's independence in 1960 was largely characterized by subsistence farming and the production of inputs for French and European industries. It was not until 1960 that national development policies were adopted, initially with the ideology of Marxism and Leninism, and later in the 1990s with the structural adjustment plan inspired by economic and political liberalism. However, in spite of the long trajectory of the Britain and Benin in terms of agricultural history, neither of them has yet succeeded in feeding their populations in quantity and quality. Even with the most recent reforms, including heavy mechanization (in the case of Britain), they are still struggling to meet the challenges of food security and sustainable development.

## **2.2. Historical Context of British and Beninese Land Reforms**

In Britain, the replacement of the Common rights by private ownership between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been the starting point of land reforms. For centuries before then, British farmers had enjoyed free access to common land. In other words, lands were owned by individuals or communities but, people had the right to use them. It was known as 'Common Rights', and the users of land under such conditions were called 'commoners' (UK national Archive). The system under which common rights was exercised was called the 'Open-field System'. This means that commoners could use the arable and meadow lands for growing crops, pasturing livestock, gathering timbers, stone, and coal (Titow, 1965). Progress during that period was slow as there were no issues other than feeding a relatively small population. Also, land had not yet assumed all its economic importance which it has today in the conception of British people, even though land was already considered as a factor of entitlement in the aristocracy.

But, with the enclosure movements of 1700-1870, the common rights system gradually gave way to private ownership rights. Population growth, and demands for industrial inputs had increased, provoking a search of more productive farming methods. Many land owners, therefore, submitted their requests before the British Parliament who examined and approved the private property right, if the process of enclosure was respected. Enclosure has two meanings. It is first an act of Parliament which grants exclusive right of ownership to an individual, and secondly, it is translated into physical act. This means people could fence their land if they chose to. The enclosure acts were therefore a set of British Parliament Acts allowing the enclosure of the open fields through legal property rights. Between 1604 and 1914, over 5,200 individual enclosure acts were granted, enclosing 6.8 million acres of land in the country (British Parliament).

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<sup>1</sup> Agricultural station of Niaouli has become what is now known as 'Jardin des Plants' in Porto-Novo, close to the Supreme Court.

The extent to which the enclosures can be measured as success or failure largely varies whether it is seen from a historian, a socialist, or an economist point of view. In Marx's opinion, the British enclosures Acts were an expropriation of the farming population from their land in order to create larger farms, and turn the masses into proletariat for industrial needs (Marx, 1867). Viewed from Marx's conception, the enclosures were a social failure because they had widened the differences among the social classes. Other economic historians, inspired by the conception of Marx, viewed the enclosures as profitable for the emerging capitalist class to the detriment of poor landless who had to either rent or use the low-value land. These views suggest that those land reforms were not socially viable. However, there are those who saw in those reforms a pre-requisite for intensive system of farming necessary for 'high inputs and high outputs' (Overton, 1996). A view shared by Anthony Clark and Gregory Clark who maintained that the Parliamentary Enclosure Acts of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the major acts of structural and institutional change in British agriculture (2001). Whatever the validity of those arguments they have not changed the historical truth that the enclosures had served as germinating ground for the current and modern reforms of ownership rights and land use in Britain.

In the context of the Republic of Benin, the issue of land reforms emerged under the colonial administration in the 1900s. Even though the attention given to the issue was marginal, it was at least under the colonial administration that public and private lands were formally demarcated for the first time (Delville, 2010). The colonial administration instituted land registration and certificate of ownership by colonial decrees of 1904 and 1906 (Le Meur, 2008). Under these decrees, every unregistered and unoccupied land whether urban or rural became the property of the state who could make use of it if need be. This system had prevailed till the years 1960s and 1980s with parliamentary decrees and laws reinforcing the colonial system. Despite that, rural land tenure in the country has long remained dominated by community regulation based on ancestral tradition from which most land reforms in the world have emerged, even the United Kingdom. Only a few urban lands were registered under that system because, the population was reluctant and preferred the customary regulation.

After the colonial time, the first significant advances in land reforms occurred in the years 1990s. In fact, in 1989 the political and military regime of 1972 ended. Benin has adopted democracy as its new political system. Democracy has given rise to political and economic liberalism. There was need to open the political environment for the emergence of multiparty system, but also the liberalization of the economy in order to attract local and international private investments. To that end, the Bretton Wood institutions, namely the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank have initiated an economic restructuring policy called Structural Adjustment Program made available for the poor countries. In Benin, the policy was implemented through three programs between 1989 and 1999 (BAD, 2003). It required a secure land and financial environment in order to attract local and international private investments.

It was in that perspective that the government carried out some empirical surveys to determine the appropriate legal system for land management issues in the country. The surveys led to the passing of legislations such as the Law n°2007-03 of 16 October 2007 (Présidence de la République du Bénin, 2007), dealing with rural land tenure in the Republic of Benin. The law laid out the rural land sector, while specifying the conditions of access to rural land, emphasizing on the responsibility of actors, the integration of women in the overall activities of the sector, setting conditions for the preservation of the ecological heritage and the promotion of the economy.

### **3. BRITISH AND BENINESE MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY AGRARIAN AND LAND REFORMS**

#### **3.1. Revolution in Agriculture and Land Management in the United Kingdom and Benin Republic**

Since its adoption of the European Union Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in 1973, British agriculture has evolved between two systems. On the one hand there are the texts of the CAP which apply to all member countries, and on the other the laws and acts of British Parliament organizing agriculture. Current reforms in the UK's agriculture and land management address issues related to productivity, food safety, biotechnology, market, and environmental protection. Rural land has also fallen in the scope of the reforms. Between 1973 and 2020, Britain had applied the European

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). During that period, the common agricultural policy has undergone five major changes. The most recent of these were the 2003 reform known as ‘the mid—term review’, the one of 2009 called ‘the health check’ and the 2013 reform referred to as ‘the 2014–2020 financial period’ (European Parliament, 2022). The purpose of these reforms was to provide a multifunctional support system in order to make agriculture a thriving sector in the economy. This purpose was translated into measures such as agricultural training programs, investments in environmental protection, afforestation, promotion of processing and marketing of agricultural products (Gay et al., 2005).

CAP reforms focus mainly on financial support paid to farmers, and agricultural trade protection. The subsidy system is based on financial support programs for landowners and farmers. The subsidy program is divided into two pillars. The first refers to financial support paid to farmers for the production of some crops and the rearing of livestock. The second pillar deals with the maintenance of the countryside and environmental compliances. Many other reforms passed by the British Parliament have also been introduced for the improvement of farming and animal husbandry. A few of them are the Animal Welfare Act 2006, the Animal Regulations 2007, and the Farmed Animals Amendment Regulations 2010. Tenant farming was improved through the Agriculture Miscellaneous Provision Acts 1949, 1950, 1954 and 1976. There were also the Climate Change Act 2008, the Countryside and Rightof Way Act 2000....

These reforms have resulted in a substantial quantitative and qualitative improvement. As a matter of fact, the cereal crops areas had increased by 1.6 % in 2017, and the pig, sheep and lamb numbers have also increased by 2.1% (DEFRA, 2017). In terms of environmental enhancement, between 2000 and 2016, application rates of nitrogen and phosphorous fertilizers to grassland have shown an overall decline. During the same period, estimated agricultural emission of nitrous oxide fell by 13% and methane by 10% (Ibid.). Food related diseases have become an offence under texts such as the General food Law Regulation N°178/2002, and the Food Safety Hygiene Regulation 2013. These regulations have provided enforcement including penalties to protect human health and consumers’ interest in relation to food.

In the context of the Republic of Benin, the turning point of the agrarian and land reforms began with the institutional and organizational transformation of the economy which was induced by the Structural Adjustment Policy. Under this policy, the state withdrew from direct intervention policy and rather encouraged private sectors and peasant organizations in the promotion of agriculture (Adjovi-Ahoyo, et.al, 2003). Since then, the reforms have emerged and encompassed seven main issues. These include the mechanization of agriculture, land gender and agricultural development, agricultural financing, and climate change. The main objectives of the reforms remain among others, food security, alleviation of poverty, and the contribution of agriculture in economic development.

To achieve these objectives, Benin has passed many reforms and policies. In 2003, Benin and other member states of the African Union had endorsed the ‘Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security in Africa’. Several decisions regarding food and farming were made during that declaration. Prominent among them was the commitment of the countries to allocate at least 10% of their national budgetary resources to agriculture and rural development policy within five years (AU, 2003). It was within that framework that Benin adopted its Strategic Plan for the Revival of the Agricultural Sector in 2006. In 2013, Beninese National Assembly voted the Law N°2013-001 of January 14. Through its 543 articles shared into ten chapters, it explores the issues of agricultural holding, land dispute settlement, traditional right of land use, land ownership certificate, gender and natural resources.

In terms of scientific research, many entrepreneurship training schools have been created between 2006 and 2020. By the Decree N°2016-638 of October 13, 2016, four agricultural universities with several thematic schools were created. These include among others, the Agriculture University of Kétou (UAK) funded by order N°213-140 of 20 March 2013, and the National University of Agriculture (UNA) funded in 2016 by the Decree N°2016-628 of 13 October, 2016. The thematic schools making up these universities are numerous. They train agricultural engineers in branches such as crop and seed production, animal husbandry and techniques of wastes management, food processing, agricultural machinery, forestry and natural resources management, and others. In spite of those reforms and the good will of the leaders, many challenges and dysfunctions persist in both countries. This indicates that the reforms are not up to the challenges, and the reasons are addressed in this analysis.

### **3.2. Challenges of British and Beninese Agrarian and Land Reforms**

Agrarian and land reforms in Britain and Benin Republic are hampered by three factors. The first one is the capitalistic model of development. The second is linked to internal policies and problems of each country, while the third one comes from external and natural factors. The capitalistic model of development is the cause of the failure of agrarian and land reforms in the world, and Britain and Benin are no exception to this problem. In fact, international standards governing food production, inputs, energy, mechanization, scientific research, and food trade have often conflicted with national agrarian and land reforms.

As a matter of fact, since its creation in January 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO), through its free trade principles, has weakened the autonomy of the states in the areas of agriculture and land policies. Writing on food security in the world, John Madeley denounced that the rules of the WTO allow rich countries, powerful agro-chemical, and agro-food multinationals to multiply their profits to the detriment of poor countries, and mainly poor farmers (Madeley, 2002). In other words, the rules of the WTO steer agricultural reforms towards trade instead of food self-sufficiency. Of course, there must be food trade because, no country is naturally endowed to produce all the agricultural products it needs. But, when the rules governing food production and food trade benefit only traders and not also consumers, food becomes a luxury that only the rich can afford. Food is one of the basic human rights defended and protected by constitutions and even recognized as such by the United Nation. In the words of Madeley, "human rights begin with breakfast" (Madeley, 1982).

These multinationals companies subject agriculture to a permanent dependence of their seeds and chemical inputs, thus causing a gradual destruction of the seed heritage of the subsistence farmers and their known-how in terms of biodiversity protection. The WTO rules which Britain and Benin have abided with have never allowed ideal reforms taking into account the agro-ecological realities, and the socio-cultural and economic aspirations of the peoples. In Benin, during the last two decades, the government aids have prioritized export crops such as cotton, cashew and pineapple. Meanwhile, legumes, cereals, poultry and small ruminants breeding desperately await for state support. As a result, much farm land is dominated by cash crops which demand heavy quantity of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, with their disastrous externalities on human life and the environment. These crops are yet to be transformed due to the low level of mechanization and industrialization of the country.

The same rules indirectly influence the processes of agricultural land acquisition and its use. Under such contexts, and at the level of each country, the laws remain silent on the quantity of land that an individual or a group can acquire. The texts and regulatory bodies in matters of land lack precision and firmness. In the case of Britain, a real policy of land redistribution has never been applied, and most farming land still belongs to the members of aristocracy, monarchy government bodies and multinationals (Home, 2009). These landowners receive subsidies from the Common Agricultural Policy for the simple fact of owning land. Such inequalities and other economic and political instabilities have caused British people to vote for their exit from the European Union in 2016.

External and natural factors are all unfortunate and unpredictable events such as natural disasters, wars, terrorism, pandemics and diplomatic crises. The COVID 19 pandemic, the USA-China trade war, and the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian crisis are all disruptive events in development efforts. These events hinder people, services, and goods' movements across the countries. They reduce production and cause food and raw materials scarcity. In Britain, the disturbance caused the Brexit and the ongoing political instability of the ruling Conservatives are also factors of blockage to a successful implementation of the reforms.

## **4. NEW PERSPECTIVES FOR THE AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND LAND SECURIZATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND REPUBLIC OF BENIN**

### **4.1. New Perspectives for the United Kingdom**

In the United Kingdom, agriculture contribute less than 1% to the economy but uses 70% of the country's total land area (DEFRA, 2017). In spite of the size of its share in the economy, agriculture has a valuable ability of impacting all other sectors of the economy. These include the production of food, conservation of natural resources, ensuring economic viability through farm incomes

generation, delivering services for the ecosystem, developing rural areas, supplying industrial inputs, and others. For these reasons, and for its omnipresence in every facets of the economic, social and environmental life of the society, Britain should redefine the place of agriculture in its economy and give it a special attention.

To achieve this, new legislations must be introduced to recover agricultural land back from the control of the handful landed gentry. Land must be redistributed to masses. The objective of doing so is to shift from tenant farming system to landlord farming system. Land should not continue to be an asset of high speculation. The issue of massive urbanization should be solved through measures reducing the conversion of farmland to urban areas. Also, population growth and new trends in food habits have to be considered as serious threat to land use, and adjustment must be made. Government should also encourage people into urban farming. This consists of creating small vegetable gardens in backyards in order to grow crops such as lettuce, cabbage cucumber, and others essentials vegetables. Reducing recreation spaces and playgrounds can also help reduce pressure on agricultural land.

#### **4.2. New Perspectives for the Republic of Benin**

The share of agriculture in Benin's economy is the largest among other sectors. It employs 70% of the active forces and contributed up to 40% in the gross domestic product in 2009 (MAEP, 2009). In addition, agriculture brings in more than 90% of export income (ibid.). Given its place in the economy, it is clear that Beninese economy is based on agriculture. For that reason, the sector should be entirely reorganized in order to give its full potentials and contribution to sustainable development. To achieve this, the country should first define an effective plan of agricultural financing. For example, government can devote 20% of its annual budgetary resources to agriculture. The budget will be divided into four parts including research, subsidies, production, and processing.

To process agricultural products on large scale, electricity is needed. Here again, it is necessary to put in place an energy policy based on renewable energy sources. For example, biogas can be produced from septic and livestock wastes. Solar and hydraulic energies are feasible alternatives in this matter. If Benin can achieve its autonomy in generating power from those sources in addition to the conventional ones, industrial transformation will be possible and affordable for investors. Cotton of which Benin is currently the leading producer in Africa can be transformed in the country. This will generate more income and employments.

Further reforms are needed to address the issues related gender equality in land management. This requires equitable and enforceable laws. In the rural communities, women need to have legal rights to land in order to participate in all responsibility to the development of agriculture. A program to encourage the youth to engage in agriculture is also necessary to reduce exodus and prevent terrorism. These measures will be effective when applied in an environment of fairness, equality and freedom.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

Food security and sustainable development have become global issues. In the process of solving these issues, agriculture remains the only driving force for both developed and poor nations. It is in this view that in the current analysis, one of the bullet points was to show the role both rich and poor countries can play through agriculture in meeting those global challenges. However, when dealing with agriculture, land, and food security planning, most countries lose sight of the interdependent relationship between these issues and other areas of the economy. For example it is impossible to make effective agrarian reforms without first developing a coherent policy for road infrastructure, housing, tourism, and leisure sports. Appropriate mechanization and a prospective forecast of population growth are also key factors for land reforms. New trends and ideologies of the peoples also constitute solid basis for developing sustainable agricultural reforms.

In both contexts, some progresses have been achieved. At least, the Malthusian apocalyptic prediction on a possible global starvation has not yet come to pass. Nevertheless, the number of malnourished people in both countries, and the level of natural resource degradation are indicative of the inconsistency and failure of the texts, conventions, and laws regulating agriculture and food trade worldwide. It has come to the stage that people must admit the fact that agriculture is not a mining sector but an area of life and sustainable development. Moreover, it should be noted that the current challenges related to climate change and rapid population growth may increase, and new constraints will arise in the future, making sustainable development more complex. The world must therefore prepare to adapt and adjust.

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