

Colonialism and Agriculture

Information: During the 1800s, several European countries divided up the continent of Africa in order to colonize it. These countries expected to get both money and raw materials from their colonies. This caused serious problems for African people. They had already established systems of agriculture, trade, government, and so forth. The colonial system forced changes in these cultures and institutions. This activity shows how colonial governments forced a change in agriculture in many African societies.

Assume you are a Tanzanian farmer in the times before colonialism. You devote most of your land to growing crops to feed your family.

As the colonial power takes over, the colonial government tells you that you will have to pay a tax to the government. How could you get money to pay your tax?

The colonial government tells you it will buy cotton if you grow it, and you can use the money to pay your tax. What are you probably forced to grow now?

If you decided to grow cotton, you would have to use some of your land for it. How would this affect the amount of food you have for your family?

Assume you decided to grow the cotton on part of your land, and you sell it to pay your tax. Next, the colonial government decides to raise the tax. What will this force you to do?

How will this affect the amount of food you will have for your family?

Little by little, more of your land is used for cotton. Before long, that is about all you grow. Now you will have to use the money you earn to do two things:

1. Pay:
2. Buy: