

SECTION

7

**ECONOMIC  
ACTIVITIES IN  
AFRICA**





# PRODUCTION, EXCHANGE AND CREATIVITY

## Economic Activities in Africa

### INTRODUCTION

One major economic activity that took place in Africa long before the arrival of Europeans in Africa was trade. Even though the early Africans engaged in other economic activities such as small-scale farming and rearing of domestic animals, trading became an important economic activity that led to the development of the continent. In section 5, we looked at how people in Africa traded with each other and with people from far away. They used trade routes across deserts and seas such as in the Trans Saharan Trade. In this section 7, we will look at the the origin and development of the earliest domestic and external forms of trade in Africa and further delve into the effects of the Trans-Saharan Trade on African kingdoms.

#### At the end of this section, you will be able to:

- examine the origin and development of the earliest domestic and external forms of trade in Africa.
- Analyse the importance of entrepreneurship and its relationship with self-employment.

#### Key Ideas:

- Trade in Africa started a very long time ago, in fact about thousand years ago.
- People started trading among themselves in their smaller communities by exchanging items or goods they have for what they do not have. A system that was known as barter trade.
- With improved technology, productivity increased, and division of labour took place.
- Trade routes were identified and created which promoted external trade.
- These trade networks helped different groups share resources and ideas, making them stronger and more connected.
- Trade networks led to the development of powerful states, promotion of cultural exchanges, and integrated Africa into global economic systems.

**Recap Task:**

Do you remember what the Trans-Saharan Trade was? Summarise it below.

These trade systems helped Africans to share resources and ideas which helped them to develop. However, in modern Africa specifically Ghana we are not getting enough money from our raw materials because we have failed to add value to them. Therefore, there is the need to go back and see how our forefathers and mothers started trading among themselves and the outside world that led to the rise of powerful states and kingdoms.

## THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE EARLIEST DOMESTIC AND EXTERNAL FORMS OF TRADE IN AFRICA

Trade in pre-colonial Africa was in two forms: internal trade and external trade. Let us take a trip to see how these two types of trade took place, the form it took and the items or things they traded with.

### Internal/Domestic Trade

Early African societies were primarily formed from farmers. People engaged in subsistence farming and keeping livestock. Their main aim was to produce food to feed the family. However, as these communities grew, they advanced in technology and began to produce more than necessary. They also specialised in certain goods, such as ironworking, pottery, and textiles as we learnt in section 5. This specialization and excess food created the need for local exchange, leading to the development of domestic trade.

The most interesting thing is that they did not use money like we do today. Can you think of what they used? Instead of money, they exchanged goods, meaning they would trade one item for another. For example, a person with palm oil would exchange it for yams. This medium was referred to as the barter trade. Barter was used because there was nothing that could be used everywhere as we use money in the modern age. Trade led to the creation of local markets which became important places for trading

goods like foodstuffs, clothes, livestock, crafts, salt, gold etc. People traded these goods locally to get what they needed.



**Fig. 7.1:** Traders exchanging items in barter trade.

Over time, this simple exchange grew into larger trade networks that connected villages, towns, and regions. Villages, towns and regions intensified their specialisations and started producing in bulk, which extended the trade to the entire continent. These trade systems helped different groups to share resources and ideas, making them stronger and more connected. It again helped them to learn about new ideas, stories, and ways of doing things from different parts of Africa. By working together, they built strong communities where they could share what they had and learnt from one another.

## Case Study: Internal Trade in the Ashanti Empire

The Ashanti Empire, located in present-day Ghana, is an excellent example of internal trade in pre-colonial Africa. This powerful and wealthy empire thrived from the late 17th century until the early 20th century, largely due to its vibrant internal trade.

### 1. Trade Routes and Market Centers:

**Kumasi:** The capital city of Kumasi was a major commercial hub, where various goods were traded.

**Provincial Markets:** Other important market centers included Bono-Manso, Begho, and Salaga. Each of these towns specialized in various trades and connected different parts of the empire.

### 2. Goods Traded Internally:

#### **Agricultural Products:**

- **Kola Nuts:** Used both for local consumption and as a trade item with northern neighbours.
- **Yams and Plantains:** Primary food staples cultivated and traded within the region.



### **Crafts and Artisanal Goods:**

- **Gold Ornaments:** Goldsmiths in the Ashanti Empire produced intricate jewellery and ceremonial artifacts, which were both consumed internally and traded.
- **Textiles:** The famous Kente cloth, a vibrant and elaborate textile, was woven and traded within the empire.
- **Pottery and Ceramics:** Everyday household items were produced by local artisans and exchanged in markets.
- **Iron Tools:** Locally mined and forged iron implements including hoes, cutlasses, and other agricultural tools.

### **3. Trade Mechanisms and Institutions:**

- **Market Regulations:** The markets were regulated by local chiefs who oversaw trade practices, mediated disputes, and ensured the smooth operation of trade activities.
- **Caravan Trade:** Within the empire, goods were transported by caravans comprising porters, mule trains, and later, packhorses. These caravans connected distant market centres.

### **4. Social and Cultural Impact:**

- **Cultural Exchange:** The internal trade fostered cultural exchange among different ethnic groups within the empire, leading to intermarriages and shared cultural practices.
- **Wealth Distribution:** The prosperity from trade significantly contributed to the affluence of the Ashanti people, with wealth being redistributed across various strata of society through trade networks.
- **Urbanisation:** Trading activities contributed to the growth and urbanisation of market towns and cities, enhancing the empire's overall infrastructural development.

### **5. Influence on Political Stability:**

- **Strengthening of Central Authority:** The wealth generated from internal trade enhanced the power and stability of the central authority, enabling the Asantehene to maintain a strong army and effective governance.
- **Tribute System:** Conquered territories were often required to pay tribute in goods, bolstering the empire's economy and integrating these regions into the broader internal trade network.

#### **Activity 7.1**

1. Summarise in notes the nature of internal trade in pre-colonial Africa and how it changed over time.
2. Now, share with your elbow partner. Do you have the same answers? What were the benefits of trading internally?

3. As a pair, share to the class: what advantages and disadvantages were there to internal trade in pre-colonial Africa?

### Extension task

Identify one marketplace in your community. Research into it and use it to answer the questions below.

- How did it start?
- What commodities were traded?
- What was the medium of exchange?
- Which people came to trade with your community?
- What benefits has the market been to your community?

## External Trade

External trade developed when African communities began relating with traders from other parts of the world. Two of the most important early external trade systems were the trans-Saharan trade and the Indian Ocean trade but, in this section, we will focus our attention on the trans-Saharan trade.

### Trans-Saharan Trade

You will recall from section 1 that the coastlines and the deserts provided access routes for the people to transport goods from the North to the sub-Saharan states and from the sub-Saharan states to the North. Good! This is how the trans-Saharan trade started. This trade connected West Africa to North Africa and the Mediterranean. One of the earliest causes of the trade was the exchange of gold and salt.

West Africa had large quantities of gold but lacked access to salt. On the other hand, North Africa had abundant supplies of salt but also lacked gold. Therefore, the rulers in North Africa, and the Middle East wanted gold. And because salt is essential in sustaining human life, the West Africans rulers could not also live without it. This lack created the motivation to trade across the severe desert environment that led to the trans-Saharan trade.

Over time, traders began moving wider varieties of goods across the routes. Goods like gold, salt, and ivory were traded across the Sahara Desert using camel caravans. In return, traders brought back items like cloth, horses, and spices. This trade helped the people from both sides to get things they did not have, like salt from the North and gold from the West.



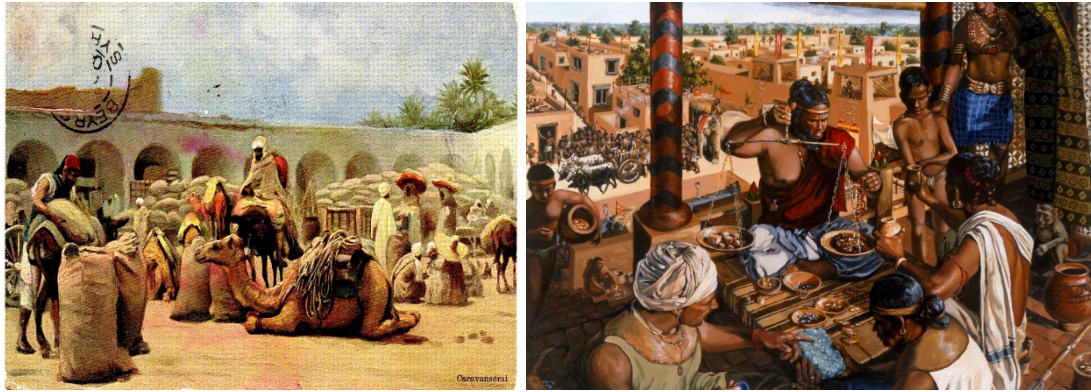


Fig. 7.2: A market scene of the trans-Saharan trade

### Activity 7.1

1. Based on what you have already learned about trade in pre-colonial Africa, what questions do you still have?

2. Based on what you have already learned, what theories or hypotheses do you have about factors that may have influenced trade in pre-colonial Africa? How have you come to these ideas?

My theory about factors that may have influenced trade

My explanation of why I think that these factors may have influenced trade

3. Read the case studies below and then complete the table about the trade in salt and the trade in gold.

## Case Study: Gold Trade in Pre-Colonial Ghana

The gold trade in pre-colonial Ghana, especially during the period of the Ghana Empire (circa 300-1200 AD), played a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic and political landscape of the region.

### 1. Historical Context:

The Ghana Empire (also known as Wagadou) was one of the earliest and most powerful West African states, known for its wealth and influence. The empire's prosperity was largely due to its control over the lucrative gold trade, attracting merchants and traders from across North Africa and the Mediterranean.

### 2. Sources of Gold:

The gold trade centred around the gold mines of Bambuk and other areas along the Senegal and Niger rivers. Local people extracted gold through panning in riverbeds, as well as from shallow pits and mines.

### 3. Trade Routes:

The gold was transported via overland routes to trading hubs such as Audoghost and Koumbi Saleh. From these hubs, the gold was then carried across the Sahara Desert by caravans to reach North African markets like Sijilmasa and subsequently the Mediterranean world.

### 4. Role of Koumbi Saleh:

Koumbi Saleh, the capital of the Ghana Empire, was a significant commercial centre. The city had two sections: one for the native population and another for Muslim traders, showcasing a cultural and economic integration fostered by trade.

### 5. Economic Impact:

- *Wealth and Revenue:* Gold trade generated substantial wealth for the Ghana Empire. The king imposed taxes on all goods entering and leaving the empire, including gold.
- *Expansion of Power:* The wealth from gold enabled the empire to maintain a strong military force, which protected the trade routes and expanded the empire's territorial control.

### 6. Cultural and Social Changes:

The prosperity from gold trade attracted scholars, artisans, and traders from various regions, leading to cultural exchanges and the spread of Islam. Islamic influence brought with it new administrative practices, architectural styles, and educational opportunities, enriching the society culturally and intellectually.



## 7. Decline and Legacy:

By the end of the 12th century, the empire began to decline due to factors such as overextension, internal strife, and the depletion of gold resources. However, the legacy of Ghana as a gold-rich empire laid the groundwork for subsequent West African empires like Mali and Songhai, which also capitalized on the gold trade.

### Conclusion:

The gold trade in pre-colonial Ghana was a pivotal aspect of its history, acting as the backbone of its economy and facilitating interactions with diverse cultures. The wealth generated from gold not only contributed to the empire's prosperity and power but also fostered cultural and social transformations that resonated throughout West Africa. The Ghana Empire's control and management of the gold trade serve as an enduring example of how natural resources can shape the trajectory of a civilisation.

## Case Study: The Salt Trade in Pre-Colonial Africa - The Kingdom of Mali

The Kingdom of Mali, flourishing from the 13th to the 16th century, provides an illustrative case study of the salt trade in pre-colonial Africa. Salt was a critical commodity in the region, influencing the economy, society, and politics.

### 1. Historical Context:

The Mali Empire was founded by Sundiata Keita in 1235 and reached its peak under the reign of Mansa Musa (1312-1337). The empire covered a vast region, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the eastern parts of present-day Mali, and encompassing diverse ecological zones.

### 2. Importance of Salt:

- Preservation and Consumption: Salt was essential for food preservation and flavouring. It was crucial for human health, especially in tropical climates where people lost salt through sweating.
- Economic Value: Salt was considered as valuable as gold. It was traded weight-for-weight with gold in some regions, highlighting its significance.

### 3. Key Salt Mining Centres:

- Taghaza and Taoudenni: These two towns, located in the Sahara Desert, were famous for their extensive salt mines. The mining process involved extracting salt slabs from ancient seabeds, which was labour-intensive and often relied on forced labour or enslaved workers.

#### 4. Trade Routes:

- Trans-Saharan Trade: Salt was transported from the northern salt mines via long, risky caravan routes across the Sahara Desert to the populous and affluent cities of the Mali Empire.
- Camel Caravans: The primary mode of transportation was camel caravans, capable of carrying heavy loads of salt over long distances without the need for frequent water.
- Major Trade Routes: Key routes included from the mines of Taghaza and Taoudenni to cities like Timbuktu and Gao, and further south to the heart of the Mali Empire.

#### 5. Trade Centres and Markets:

- Timbuktu: A major trading and cultural centre where salt was exchanged for gold, ivory, slaves, and other commodities. The city housed bustling markets and attracted traders from across the Sahara and beyond.
- Gao: Another significant hub where salt was traded extensively, connecting the trade routes from the salt mines to other parts of West Africa.

#### 6. Economic Impact:

- Revenue Generation: The Mali Empire profited immensely from taxing the salt trade. It provided a stable revenue stream that supported the empire's infrastructure, military, and administrative functions. Cities along the trade routes, particularly Timbuktu and Gao, grew wealthy due to their pivotal role in the salt trade.

#### 7. Political and Social Influence:

- Control over Trade Routes: To maintain dominance, the Mali Empire exerted control over the trans-Saharan trade routes. They provided protection for caravans, ensuring safe passage in exchange for taxes or tributes.
- Social Hierarchies and Labour: The salt trade influenced social structures. The labour-intensive nature of salt mining often led to the use of enslaved labour, contributing to the social layering within and beyond the empire.

#### 8. Cultural Exchange:

- Spread of Islam: The salt trade helped the spread of Islam into West Africa. Muslim traders from North Africa mingled with local populations, leading to religious conversions and the establishment of Islamic schools and scholars in trading cities.
- Knowledge and Technology: Alongside goods, knowledge and technological innovations were exchanged, contributing to the cultural and scientific advancements in the Mali Empire.

#### 9. Decline of the Salt Trade:

- Shifts in Trade Routes: Over time, changes in political power, the rise of the Songhai Empire, and European maritime trade reduced the dominance of trans-Saharan trade routes.



- **Exhaustion of Resources:** The depletion of some salt mines and changing economic priorities led to a decline in the traditional salt trade.

The salt trade in the Kingdom of Mali is a remarkable example of how a single commodity can influence the economic, social, and political fabric of a region, showcasing the interconnectedness of trade, culture, and power in pre-colonial Africa.

	Similarities between the Salt Trade and the Gold Trade	Differences between the Salt Trade and the Gold Trade
Methods of extraction		
Route of trade		
Source of resource		
Purpose/ use of resource		
Impact and legacy		

## Factors That Influenced the Trans-Saharan Trade

Dear learner, some factors led to the trans-Saharan-trade. The factors have been grouped under geographical, economic, and social. Can you think of one? Good, let us take time and discuss some of them.

### Geographical Features

The huge Sahara Desert acted both as a wall and a link between sub-Saharan Africa and North Africa. Although, the Sahara was difficult to cross, it served as a natural route for **caravans**. The presence of **oases** along the way provided necessary water sources, making long journeys possible.



**Fig. 7.3:** Pictures of geographical features that promoted the Trade.

Also, the different weather conditions on the either side of the Sahara created a natural motivation for trade. North Africa, with its Mediterranean climate, produced goods like salt and herbs while West Africa, with its tropical weather, was rich in different products such as kola nuts and shea butter.

### Activity 7.2

1. How did the following geographical features affect the trans-Saharan trade?  
Use the map of Africa to support your thinking.  
Water-bodies (sea, rivers, lagoons, lakes, streams)  
Vegetation (forest, grassland, wetlands)  
Mountains



### Economic Factors

The economic factor that promoted the Trans Saharan trade was the high demand for commodities like gold ivory, salt and leather. For instance, there was a high demand for gold in North Africa for the minting of coins and other rich items and the only place to get it was to come to West Africa Kingdoms like Ghana and Mali, who were rich in gold. Likewise, the West also lacked salt which was important for preserving food and maintaining health, so they needed to exchange their salt for gold. Beside gold and salt, other goods like ivory, slaves, leather, textiles, and horses were traded across the Sahara. These different products and their changing value in different regions encouraged the Trans Saharan Trade.





**Fig. 7. 4:** A picture of salt and gold. The main commodities of the trans-Saharan trade

## Technological and Logistical Developments

The Trans-Saharan trade rapidly increased after the introduction of camels from Central Asia to North Africa. Arab traders began using camels to cross the Sahara Desert, joining North Africa with West Africa. The camels were used because they were able to withstand the harsh weather conditions of the Sahara and also able to carry heavy loads over long distances with little water. For this reason, they were known as “ships of the desert”

Later, camel saddles were invented, an important technology that allowed traders to use camels to more people and goods. This made large-scale trade across the desert possible. Over time, specific routes across the Sahara became well-established. These routes were carefully planned to connect key trading cities and oases ensuring smooth transportation and safety for traders.



**Fig. 7.5:** Camel Saddle and Camels with their saddles

## Cultural Exchange

Dear learner, since you started schooling you have interacted with friends from different parts of the country and you have learnt a lot from them whilst they have also learnt from you. This was what happened when the Africans traded among themselves. They shared their cultures, which made Africa even more rich with new foods, clothes, music, and ideas. This in the end promoted the Trans Saharan trade.

## Political and Social Factors:

The growth of powerful West African empires, such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai, provided stability and protection for traders. These empires also enabled trade by building infrastructure, starting trade regulations, and providing security along trade routes. Also, the spread of Islam across North Africa and into West Africa also played a key role. Islamic law and customs encouraged trade and provided a common religious and cultural basis that helped the trade. The rise of Islamic states in the region further united West Africa with the North.

### Activity 7.3

1. Work in small groups to answer the following question:

a) What was the main reason for the emergence of the trans-Saharan trade?

Use the framework below to note down your thoughts.

Factor	Explanation
Economic factors	
Technological/ transport factors	
Geographic factors	
Political factors	
Conclusion: what was the main reason for the emergence of the Trans-Saharan Trade	

## Developments Trans Saharan Trade Brought in Trade Internally and Externally

Having finished with the factors that promoted the Trans Saharan trade let us move on to discuss the developments that have taken place from this trade. These developments have promoted international trade.

### Expansion of trade routes over time

Trade routes are like roads or paths that people have used for thousands of years to move goods from one place to another. Over time, these trade routes grew, and more people started using them. As technology improved, new routes were created, even across oceans. Today, trade routes include roads, railways, sea lanes, and air routes.

This has helped to connect the entire world making trade faster and safer. These high-level trade networks helped people get what they needed from all over the world. They also made the world feel smaller, as people from different lands could share their ideas, stories, and cultures.

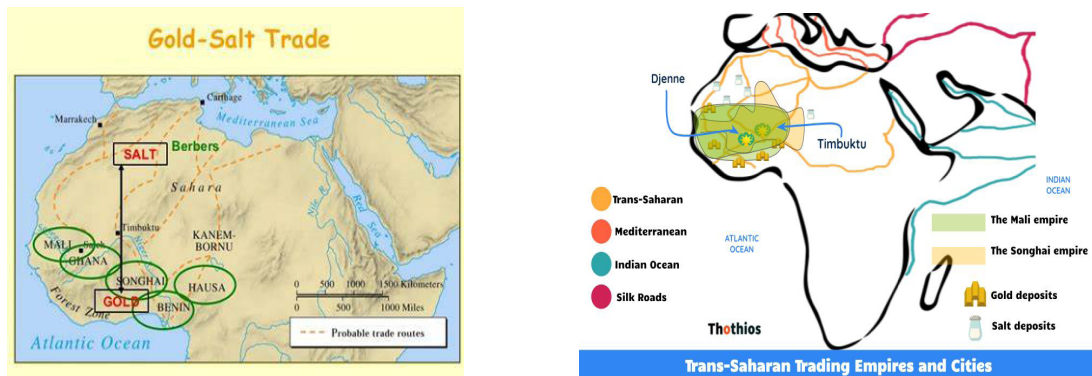


Fig. 7.6: A map showing routes of the Trans Saharan trade

## Trade Networks became Streamlined

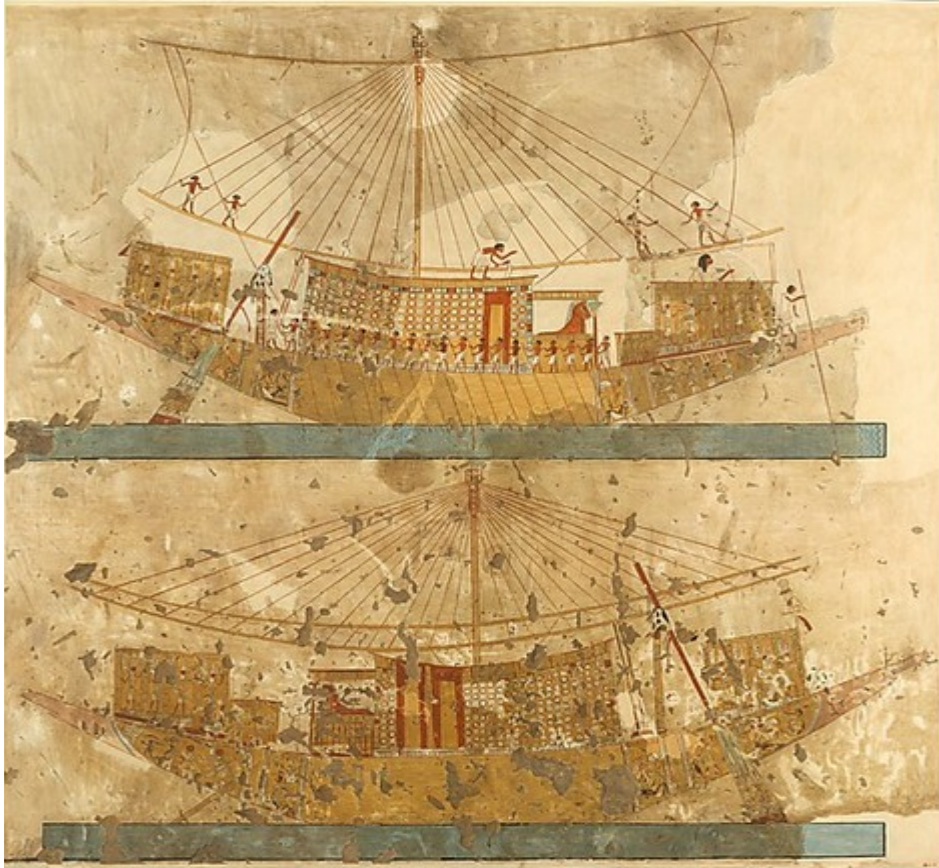
As we have learnt earlier, people traded with their neighbours. They walked or rode on animals to nearby villages to swap items such as food, tools, or clothing. Moving forward, people started travelling and discovered other villages and towns far away. To trade with these new places, they had to travel longer distances. They started using carts, horses, and even boats to carry their goods. Over time, people built roads and bridges to make travelling easier. They also learned to use rivers and seas, sailing ships filled with goods to trade with people in other lands. This made trade simple, faster and safer.

As more people traded, some places became big trading centres, like the cities of Timbuktu and Cairo. These cities grew bigger and became important because of trade. They had lots of markets, schools, and businesses to serve their growing populations. Later, the trade created new jobs. People became traders, builders, teachers, and craftsmen, making things to sell or teaching others new skills. This helped more people to have jobs which made life better for everyone. This in the end promoted economic development.



Fig. 7.7: A picture of a harbour view in present-day Africa





**Fig. 7.8:** A depiction of Ancient Egyptian trade vessels on the Nile.

## Promotion of Cultural Diversity

When Africans traded, they did not just exchange goods, they also met new people from different places. As these people from different cultures met, they sometimes combined their traditions. For example, they mixed styles of clothing or combined different types of music to create something new and special. This combination of cultures made African communities rich in diversity. Trade helped Africa grow in many ways. It made communities richer and stronger, and it also brought people together. By sharing their cultures, people in Africa created a continent full of diversity, with many different languages, traditions, and ways of life.







**Fig. 7.9:** A picture showing diversity in African dressing

## Effects of the Trans-Saharan Trade on African Kingdoms

Finally, we are getting to the last part of the section which talks about the effects of the trans-Saharan trade. Can you think of some?

Effects of the Trans-Saharan Trade

Compare your answers with the below:

### Economic Prosperity

Kingdoms such as Ghana, Mali, and Songhai became very wealthy and powerful. The wealth and power of these kingdoms came from trade across the trans-Saharan trade routes. They did this by controlling trade routes and the collection of taxes from the traders who used those routes. For this reason, these kingdoms' leaders encouraged trade and supported business activities.

### The growth of cities and towns

Increased trade brought more wealth to West Africa. Entire towns and cities grew to service the needs of traders moving along the trans-Saharan trade link, while others turned into market towns where traders would gather and sell their goods. In order to get a place for these large numbers of traders, big markets, good roads, schools and houses were constructed like we have in our big market cities like Accra, Techiman, Kasa, Kumasi Bawku and Aflao.

The growth of the trade led to the rise of urban centers like Timbuktu, Gao, and Great Zimbabwe. These cities served as key centres where traders exchanged gold, salt, ivory, and slaves. Their wealth and planned locations attracted dealers, scholars, and artisans, leading to urbanization and the growth of elegant markets.



Fig. 7.10: Some market scenes Aflao and old Kejetia

### Activity 7.4

1. Read the case study below and discuss the following questions with your elbow partner.

## Case Study: The History of Koumbi Saleh

Koumbi Saleh, the capital of the Ghana Empire, played a significant role in the history of West Africa from approximately the 9th to the 13th centuries. Here is a concise summary of its history:

### 1. Origins and Establishment:

- Date of Establishment: The exact origins of Koumbi Saleh are unclear, but it rose to prominence around the 9th century.
- Location: Situated in the south-eastern part of present-day Mauritania, near the border with Mali.

### 2. Role as a Capital and Trading Hub:

- Political Center: Koumbi Saleh served as the political and administrative heart of the Ghana Empire, housing the king and his court.
- Commercial Hub: It was a major trading centre, strategically positioned on the trans-Saharan trade routes. It was a key point for the exchange of gold, salt, slaves, and other commodities between the West African interior and North Africa.

### 3. Dual City Layout:

- Divided City: The city was divided into two sections:
- The Royal City: This part housed the king, his court, and local inhabitants. It included important administrative buildings and residences.

- The Muslim Quarter: Known as the “town of the Muslims,” this section was inhabited by North African Muslim traders and scholars who settled in the city. It featured mosques, schools, and markets.

#### 4. Economic Prosperity:

- Wealth and Revenue: Koumbi Saleh thrived on the wealth generated from taxing trade. It became one of the richest cities in the region due to the gold trade.
- Infrastructure Development: The wealth facilitated the construction of impressive buildings, including palaces, mosques, and marketplaces.

#### 5. Cultural and Religious Influence:

- Islamic Influence: The presence of Muslim traders and settlers led to the spread of Islam in the city. Many local elites converted to Islam, which influenced the city’s culture, architecture, and education.
- Cultural Melting Pot: Koumbi Saleh became a melting pot of diverse cultures, blending traditional African customs with Islamic practices brought by traders.

#### 6. Decline and Abandonment:

- Factors of Decline: Several factors contributed to the decline of Koumbi Saleh:
- Shift in Trade Routes: The decline of the Ghana Empire and shifting trade routes reduced the city’s importance as a trading hub.
- Invasions: Attacks by the Almoravids, a Muslim Berber dynasty from North Africa, weakened the city’s stability and economic power.
- Environmental Changes: Changes in climate and desertification also impacted the city’s sustainability.
- Abandonment: By the 13th century, Koumbi Saleh was largely abandoned as the political and economic centre shifted to other emerging states, such as the Mali Empire.

#### 7. Archaeological Significance:

- Modern Discoveries: Today, Koumbi Saleh is an important archaeological site. Excavations have revealed much about the city’s layout, architecture, and its role in the trans-Saharan trade network.
- Historical Legacy: The history of Koumbi Saleh provides valuable insights into the early development of urban centers and trade in West Africa.

Koumbi Saleh remains a testament to the complexities and achievements of the Ghana Empire, highlighting its significance in the broader history of West African civilizations.

- a) What does the history of Koumbi Saleh show us about the Trans-Saharan trade?
- b) How did the Trans-Saharan trade change the economy of Western Africa?

## The Spread of Islamic Culture into West Africa

Islamic culture spread into West Africa with the Islamic religion. In the rural areas where most of the population lived, traditional African religious practices remained the most common form of worship until the 19th century. Rulers made little effort to impose Islamic rules onto most of their populations.



With time the Arabic language became the governing and legal language. Wealthy traders also spoke and conducted business in Arabic. Cities such as Timbuktu and Djenne became centres of Islamic knowledge. Schools and universities started studying the Quran. Science and mathematics knowledge from Islamic learning centres in North Africa and the Middle East also found their way into these schools' libraries.



**Fig. 7.11:** Timbuktu Sankore Mosque and University and Laribanga Mosque in Ghana

## Political Influence

One problem that was created was that more wealth increased war in West Africa. Control over the gold fields and trade routes could make or break the riches of a ruler or kingdom, because of this, conflict over wealth and power started which weakened societies from the inside. The once mighty and wealthy Mali was weakened and began to collapse following a civil war. Songhai rose to replace it as the leading power in the region, but by the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Songhai too was weakened by civil war. Morocco took advantage of the internal weakness of both empires and attacked West Africa to take control of the region's resources and trade.



## Increased in Slave Trade

North and West African slavery increased as wealthy rulers in West Africa increased the number of enslaved people they bought, and merchants exported more enslaved people to North Africa. Scholars estimate that slave traders moved as many as nine million people along the trans-Saharan trade routes. Rulers in West Africa and Egypt used slaves in their militaries as highly trained soldiers. Rich families also used slaves as domestic servants or sexual partners. Others mined gold in West Africa or salt in North Africa. this destroyed family relationships.

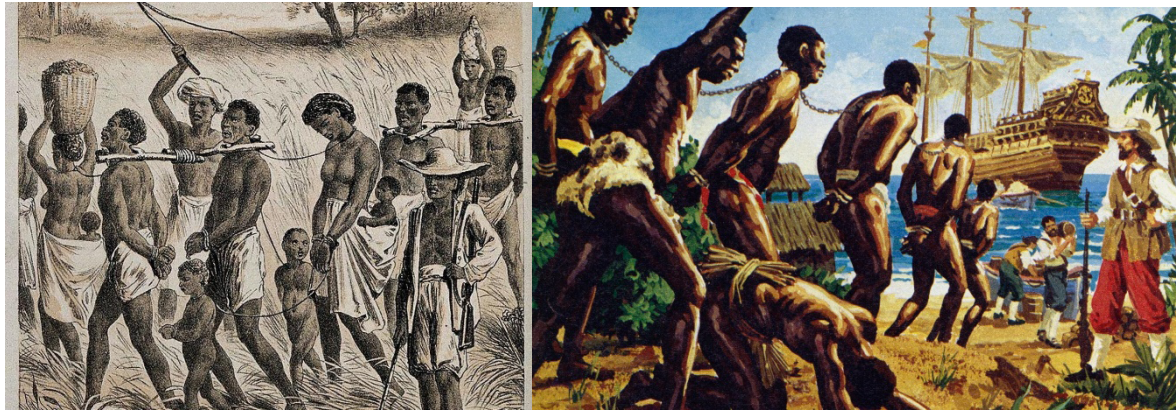


Fig. 7.12: A picture of slaves sold

## Islam Spread into West Africa

Islam spread to West Africa with Muslim merchants who traded in the region. By 1300 Mali's kings had converted to Islam. Mansa Musa (c. 1312 – 1337) made it the state religion in 1324. All the Songhai kings were Islamic. With the conversion of their kings, Mali and Songhai set up Islamic governing and legal systems. Initially, only the elite converted to Islam. Not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century did many ordinary West Africans begin identifying as Muslim.

## Social Change

The last effect of the trade we will be discussing with you is social change. the west African way of life was changed. They began to eat different foods, wear different clothes and practiced different religion, for example, by 1300 Mali's kings had been changed to Islam. Mansa Musa made it the state religion in 1324. All the Songhai kings were Islamic. With the change of their kings, Mali and Songhai set up Islamic governing and legal systems. At first, only the elite changed to Islam but later many ordinary West Africans begin identifying as Muslim.

### Activity 7.5

1. Work in groups to create a role-play of the trans-Saharan trade and its impact on Africa. Make sure you include various characters and perspectives. Some hints are below.

My lines/ script for the role play:  
 What is my position/ role/ job?  
 Where do I live?  
 How does the trade impact me?  
 How do I feel about it?

Character	What would be their role/ thoughts on the trade?
A tribal leader in Morocco living by the	
A salt miner	
A caravan driver in the Sahara region	
An Ashanti chieftain	
A political leader in Timbuktu	

2. Read the outline below of Ibn Battuta and discuss the following questions with your elbow partner.

## Case Study: a Famous Trader in the Trans-Saharan Trade: Ibn Battuta

One notable figure associated with the Trans-Saharan trade, though more famous as a traveller, is Ibn Battuta. While he was not a trader himself, his detailed accounts provide valuable insights into the world of trade during his time. Here are some key points about him:

### 1. Who Was Ibn Battuta?

- Full Name Abu Abdullah Muhammad Ibn Battuta.
- Born: February 24, 1304, in Tangier, Morocco.
- Died: 1368/1369.
- Occupation: Traveller, explorer, and scholar.

### 2. Travels and Involvement with Trade Routes:

**Journey Across the Sahara:** In the early 1350s, Ibn Battuta undertook a journey that took him across the Sahara Desert to the West African kingdom of Mali. His travelogue, known as the Rihla (“The Journey”), provides detailed descriptions of his experiences and the various trading centres he visited.

### 3. Observations of Trans-Saharan Trade:

Ibn Battuta visited notable trading cities like Timbuktu and Gao, and his writings describe the bustling markets, extensive trade networks, and the variety of goods exchanged. His accounts mention goods such as gold, salt, ivory, and slaves being traded across the Sahara. Additionally, Ibn Battuta’s observations show the cultural and religious exchanges created by the Trans-Saharan trade. He noted the spread of Islam and the influence of Muslim traders in West Africa.

### Notable Observations by Ibn Battuta:

- **Kingdom of Mali:** Ibn Battuta provided a vivid account of the wealth and grandeur of the Mali Empire under the reign of Mansa Musa. He was particularly impressed by the ruler’s devotion to Islam and the sophistication of the society.
- **Trade Practices:** He described the well-organized caravans that traveled across the Sahara, the use of camels for transport, and the immense value placed on gold and salt.

While Ibn Battuta himself was not a trader, his extensive travels and observations of the trade practices, routes, and cultures provide invaluable insights into the Trans-Saharan trade’s impact on the regions he visited.

- a) What do you think he would have thought about trade in Africa?
- b) What would have influenced his interpretations of what he was seeing?
- c) Is he a useful source? Why or why not?

3. Create presentation on how trade impacted Africa. Use the table below to plan your presentation. If you have access to a computer, use this to prepare slides. Otherwise, consider using other methods of presenting such as posters or drama.

Factor	Detail
Economic Impact	
Cultural Impact	
Political Impact	
Technological Impact	



# Review Questions

1. How have the coastlines and rivers helped trade in Ghana?
2. How did the Trans-Saharan trade lead to the spread of new ideas and cultures in early Africa?
3. What were some goods traded internally in pre-colonial Ghana?
4. What were some goods traded in the Trans-Saharan trade?
5. What was the name of a notable trading centre in the Trans-Saharan trade?
6. How was gold obtained?
7. How was salt obtained?
8. What was the impact of the Trans-Saharan trade on the spread of Islam?
9. How were goods transported across the Sahara Desert?
10. How did the growth of trade help to increase and integrate communities in Africa?

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## EXTENDED READING

- BBC Bitesize. (n.d.). Trade in early Africa. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/guides/zx9xsbk/revision/1>
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## GLOSSARY

1. **Camel caravan:** desert caravan, is used for travel and transport primarily in hot, dry areas like deserts.
2. **Cultural Exchange:** Trade routes facilitated the spread of ideas, religion (notably Islam), and technology. The trans-Saharan trade, in particular, played a significant role in the spread of Islam across West Africa.
3. **Diversity:** the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc.
4. **Minting:** make (a coin) by stamping metal.
5. **Oases:** a fertile spot in a desert, where water is found.
6. **Specialised:** focus your activity on one activity.
7. **Urbanisation and Infrastructural Development:** The trans Saharan trade promoted the building of big cities. As people traded more, some places became big trading centres and
8. **Urbanisation:** the process of making an area more urban.

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