



An ERSA Research Workshop
27 to 29 May
Stellenbosch

Longitudinal data in African history



In association with the Economic History Society of Southern Africa

Longitudinal data in African history

The study of African economic history has reached a tipping point. With few exceptions, quantitative investigations into Africa's economic past were limited to the study of aggregated macro-economic variables – production, taxation and exports – published in colonial reports and available in the archives of the colonizer. These contributions were – and are – certainly important, but they also present limitations. One of these is that, because the figures are aggregated, often at the country level, they lack regional variation. For a country like the Congo, for instance, with a land area larger than Western Europe, this is problematic. Another limitation is that they provide only one observation annually, which very rarely allow for testing strategies to identify causal effects. This is because usually lots of confounding factors are at work at the national level.

The emphasis is now shifting towards understanding the colonial experience from below. Economic historians of the continent are increasingly turning to African archives – in Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria and South Africa, to name a few – to extract microdata – large datasets at the individual or household-level. These are not survey data in the typical sense. Often, information was collected for administrative purposes entirely orthogonal to its use for current researchers. Attestation records of soldiers and police officers, for example, provide information on the heights or other biographical information, used as proxies for investigating living standards. Or marriage records kept at mission station archives provide insights into the age-at-marriage of converts, offering researchers a glimpse into the changing demographics and social trends, such as urbanisation, during colonial times.

This workshop brings together the latest research projects using African microdata. William Collins (Vanderbilt) and Jason Long (Wheaton) are the keynote speakers. The workshop forms part of a pre-conference for the session on African micro-data at the World Economic History Congress in Kyoto during August 2015.

Date: 27 to 29 May 2015.

Place: Stellenbosch, South Africa.

Funding: Travel expenses in South Africa will be covered and accommodation for the duration of the workshop will be provided by the ERSA Economic History Working Group.

Domestic Flights: To Cape Town.

Requirements: Each attendee will be expected to present their current research using longitudinal data. Sessions for full-length papers as well as shorter, work-in-progress papers will be available.

Applications must be submitted to workshops@econrsa.org by May 4 2015.