

AN AFRICAN IS A FLEET OF FOOT: VACCINATION AGAINST SMALLPOX IN COLONIAL TANZANIA, 1920s-1960

By

Musa Sadock

Department of History, University of Dar es Salaam

Abstract

This paper examines the challenges associated with vaccination aimed to prevent smallpox in colonial Tanzania from the 1920s to 1960. While there are few country and regional studies on control measures against smallpox, studies on the science and technology used for the control of the epidemic in a specific county are limited. Thus, this paper redresses the gap by focussing the investigation on colonial Tanzania. It argues that vaccinia uptake faced a number of technological, socio-cultural, economic, political and geographical challenges. By using secondary sources, newspapers, and archival sources collected from the Tanzania National Archives from January to September 2022, the paper has established that the uptake of vaccinia in colonial Tanzania faced many problems including lack of potency, resistance from Africans including running away from vaccinators, high temperature in the tropics, lack of personnel and fund, labour migration, lack of refrigerators, lack of laboratories, transport problems and Africans` washing away of the vaccinia. This paper is informed not only by an African agency perspective but also by the political economy approach. The significance of this paper is that it contributes to a growing body of literature that links science and technology with culture, economy, politics and geography of a given society.

Key words, Colonial Tanzania, Science, Smallpox, Technology. Vaccinia