

1 Urbanization and Future of Cities in Africa : The Emerging 2 Facts and Challenges to Planners

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7 **Abstract**

8 This article unveils the circumstances surrounding urbanization and city development in
9 Africa. With histo-demographic antecedents as background and specific examples from
10 different parts of the continent, the article describes the trend, reasons, pattern, and
11 consequences of city development in Africa. It opines that the future of African cities may not
12 be bleak as orchestrated by a certain school of thought if the planning and management of
13 physical environment is made to curtail urban sprawl and encourage a system of
14 moderate-sized urban centres and urban villages with relatively diversified rural or semi-urban
15 economies, and if the urban economy of the continent is made to be less marginalized in the
16 global economy.

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18 **Index terms**— Urbanization, histo-demographic, sprawl, marginalized.

19 **1 INTRODUCTION**

20 In the future the population of the developed world will stop growing and the population of the rural areas of the
21 developing world will soon stop growing as well. That means the next three billion people added to the planet
22 are mostly going to live in cities in poor countries. And most of those cities don't have the resources or ability
23 to absorb this large influx of people. Many of these people will therefore end up living in slum areas with poor
24 housing and limited services and infrastructure. - Bongaarts(2001) As pessimistic as the view above may appear
25 to the patriotic Asian, Latin American and African -the developing world -it is a general and popular view in the
26 literature, and therefore constitutes a hypothesis and important background for the analysis and discussion in this
27 paper. This is in recognition of the myriad of socioeconomic, demographic, political and environmental problems
28 facing the African continent, as in other poor sister regions of the world, and which have become evident in, or
29 fueled by her ever increasingly growing cities. This paper, however, is aimed not only at unveiling the ugly and
30 interesting circumstances surrounding the increasing trend of city development in Africa, but also projecting into
31 the future to see what it holds, and more importantly identifying what measures to avert undesirable effects of
32 urbanization; and what to be done to enhance positive results of city development. Some peculiar but interesting
33 dramatic turnaround in the pattern of urban development in Africa is also examined. Of particular importance
34 is the fact that attention of Author : Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, Ph.D,
35 MNITP, RTP. E-mail : jelmisi@yahoo.com planners in the continent is called to the emerging issues and the
36 need to address them as well as the roles to be played by planners for a better urban development in Africa.

37 **2 II. URBANIZATION IN AFRICA : HISTO-SPATIO- 38 DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES**

39 Urbanization shall be defined simply here as referring to the process of increasing agglomeration of people in
40 a human settlement such that the settlement graduates from a particular level of complexity (economic, social,
41 etc) to the other. Around the world, populations are experiencing unprecedented demographic changes. The

2 II. URBANIZATION IN AFRICA : HISTO-SPATIO-DEMOGRAPHIC ISSUES

42 world population, which stood at 1billion in 1800 and grew slowly to 2.5 billion in 1950 is observed to have
43 reached 6.1billion in 2000 ??Bongaarts, 2001: 53). And going by the projections made by the United Nations,
44 World Bank, and other international agencies, the growth will continue, reaching about 7.5 billion in 2020. The
45 disheartening thing about this analysis is that the future growth is foreseen to occur in cities in the developing
46 world (of course, including Africa) with an estimate of 80 percent of the total world urban population in 2030.
47 By this time, Africa and Asia will include almost 7 out of every 10 urban inhabitants in the world (UNFPA, 2007:
48 8) while the developed world, including Australia, Europe, Japan and North America, is expected to have its
49 population relatively stable. More so, it has been observed that developing countries as a whole would account for
50 93 percent of the increase in urban population in the 21st century, while Asia and Africa only would account for
51 80 percent of the total population increase for the period (Pieterse, 2010:9) Figure ?? : Inter-Regional Analysis
52 of Global Population Distribution ??1950 ?? -2010, in Million), in Million).

53 It is clear from figure ?? above that: (1) population is highest in Asia, (2) it has been increasing at different
54 rates for different regions, (3) the gradient of the slope is highest (very steep slope) for Asia, followed by that of
55 Africa and Latin America (developing countries) occasioned by their high growth rates, while Europe and North
56 America have relatively gentle slopes explained by their comparatively low growth rates, and relatively stable in
57 Oceania.

58 Africa which used to be, and perhaps is still, the least urbanized continent, has her cities' growth rates close
59 to, if not the fastest in the world. In 1950, for instance, there were only three sub-saharan African cities of
60 more than halve a million; in the late1980s the number of cities of that category increased to twentynine (Palen,
61 1987). Today, in virtually every part of the continent new cities have emerged, while the old ones have drastically
62 expanded, some of which have become mega-cities. And more than halve of the sub-saharan Africa's population
63 of 700 million people are projected to be living in urban areas by 2030 (George, 2006). This suggests the reason
64 why Africa is considered the most rapidly urbanizing continent in the world ??World Bank, 2009). It has the
65 highest average annual growth rate of 3.3 percent between 1990 and 2000 and 4.5 percent between 2000 and 2005,
66 growth rate, which is, by any calculation expected not to have reduced.

67 As in other regions of the developing world, the demographic changes over time in Africa have resulted into
68 growth of cities; and the trend is expected to continue regardless of the fact or fallacy that the region is seriously
69 affected by the AIDS epidemic. These demographic changes and city growth, whose pattern across the continent
70 may interest one, is also observed to be influenced by such general factors as increased and uncontrolled birth
71 rate, incessant rural-urban migration, poor infrastructural and/or economic base of the rural communities, among
72 others.

73 It is important to mention here the regional variations in the levels and rates of urbanization and city
74 development in Africa. The North Africa, as the most urbanized, with countries bordering the Mediterranean
75 Sea, has close to three-fifths (59.4%) of its population in cities ??Palen, 1987:381; Table 1). This could be as a
76 result of trade opportunities and concentrations of populations in available small areas to avoid less habitable
77 desert and mountainous areas of the sub-region, and promotion of farming, particularly growth in the production
78 and marketing of cash crops in the fertile region of Nile Valley. Towering well above average in the region are
79 such countries as Libya, Tunisia, and Algeria, in that order, with 77.9%, 67.3% and 66.5% respectively as the
80 proportions of urban population Central Africa is next in the descending order of urbanization, especially with
81 such countries as Gabon, Saotome Principe, Congo, Angola and Cameroon with percentage of urban population
82 of 86, 62.2, 62.1, 58.5 and 58.4 as against the average urbanization level of 53.61 percent for the sub-region.
83 Of particular interest here is the relative large range between the least and the most urbanized countries of the
84 sub-region, Chad (27.6%) and Gabon (86%) respectively. The reason for the pattern is not far-fetched; coastal
85 cities of such countries as Gabon, Saotome Principe, Cameroon and Angola have made use of their economic
86 importance to attract population and urban development, as against those in the landlocked ones such as Chad
87 and Central Africa Republic.

88 Southern Africa is next with an average of 42.64% as urban population. With a highly skewed population
89 distribution, most highly urbanized countries in this region are South Africa and Botswana in that order
90 with 61.7% and 61.1%, while Swaziland, Lesotho and Namibia have percentages of urban population to be
91 as comparatively low as 25.5, 26.9 and 38. The reason for the wide disparity may not be unconnected with
92 the industrial base of particularly South Africa, which has established itself as industrial headquarters of the
93 sub-region, and which has had more than half of her population as urban dwellers even as of late 1980's (Palen.
94 1987) The East Africa is observed to be the least urbanized part of the continent. For example, only Zimbabwe
95 and Zambia had, as of late 1980s, as much as one-sixth of their populations in cities, while only fourteen percent
96 of Tanzanians lived in cities. The development of relatively a few cities in East Africa may not be unconnected
97 with growth of tourism in the subregion. The Republic of South Africa is a bit different from other sub-saharan
98 countries. Being a relatively industrialized nation in the continent, more than half of her population is urban
99 dwellers even as of late 1980s (Palen, 1987).

100 The pattern and distribution of major cities in Africa notwithstanding, two broad categories of cities may
101 be observed in the continent. These include the pre-colonial cities, which had developed before European
102 colonization and post-colonial cities, which developed during and/or after imperialism. While the pre-colonial
103 cities' development could be attributed to sub-Saharan trade, post-colonial ones are products of either or both of
104 colonial road and rail development in their quest to ease movement of major cash crops and discovery, exploration

105 and exploitation of mineral resources, leading to major development projects in the affected settlements, new or
106 old, which later grew rapidly into cities.

107 **3 III.**

108 **4 THE TRADITIONAL NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES**
109 **OF CITY DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA**

110 Much has been said on the circumstances that surround city development (urbanization) in Africa in the literature
111 (Hammer and Linn, 1987; ??ardoy and Satterhwaite, 1986; ??abogunje, 1968; ??yesiku, 1992; ??orld Bank, 1993;
112 ??tc). Common to all the views expressed is the fact that, city development in Africa, as in other regions of
113 the developing world, is a product of such factors as: (1) increasing birth rates and decreasing death rates, (2)
114 uncontrolled rural-urban migration, (3) change of attitude in favour of "urbanism", (4) creation of more state
115 capitals and local government headquarters, industrial towns and other related growth and service centres, and
116 (5) comparatively low attention to the rural areas and rural economies on the part of the government, among
117 others. All these have had serious consequences, not only for the deprived rural communities, but also, and more
118 importantly, for the seemingly "favoured" cities, some of which are better described as rural cities, for the lack
119 of "strength" necessary to absorb or cater for the increasing populations.

120 Just as in cities of the sister regions of the developing world (including Pune and Saharanpur in India, Buenos
121 Aires in Latin America, among others), African cities, for example, Lagos and Kano in Nigeria, Nakuru in
122 Kenya, Luzaka in Zambia, and Cairo in Egypt, have witnessed unprecedented growth rates and the resultant
123 urban problems over the years. For example, Lagos whose population rose from 267,407 in 1952 to about 665,246
124 in 1963 and about 1.5 million and 4.5 million in 1975 and 1984 respectively (Onibokun, 1986), and is observed to
125 have grown much faster, is described as one of the dirtiest cities in the world (Adedibu, 2004). It is a mega-city
126 where inadequate infrastructure and services, housing shortage, traffic problems, thuggery, violence and other
127 social vices are highly pronounced.

128 In the same vein, the dramatic increase in Nakuru's (Kenya) population has presented several challenges,
129 especially the falling standard of urban services. The city, which according to Mwangi (2000), used to be "the
130 cleanest town" in East Africa is observed to have metamorphosed into a home of diverse environmental maladies.
131 The story is not different in Cairo in Egypt and Luzaka in Zambia. Cairo is perceived as a giant city choked
132 by over-population due to uncontrolled influx of "fallahin" (peasants), which has triggered "urban ruralization",
133 "social disease" and "abnormal behaviour" (Bayat and Denis, 2000). Luzaka, whose population is observed
134 to grow at the rate of 4.9 percent per year, is besieged with such problems as inadequate housing and social
135 infrastructure and increasing population of squatters and slum dwellers (Olokesusi, 1987). Similar situations are
136 observed in most, if not all, other African cities.

137 What has been evident in the foregoing analysis is the fact that city development in Africa has been associated
138 with diverse and multi-faceted urban problems, ranging from housing shortage, inadequate and mal-functioning
139 infrastructure and services to the resultant environmental problems of waste management, crimes and related
140 social problems, traffic and transportation management, and unsustainable physical and economic development.
141 Thus the central role of cities, as observed by Drakakis-Smith (1966), while amplifying the work of Brooks
142 (1990), as "bringing about sustained development within the context of expanded or continued economic growth"
143 is undermined in Africa.

144 All the above may be observed, in consonance with Agbola (1987), to have resulted from: (1) lack of concern
145 for physical planning, (2) lack of formal physical planning tradition (3) absence of urbanization policy, (4) neglect
146 of rural areas, and (5) unstable leadership and poor attitude of the same in implementing appropriate policies
147 and programmes.

148 It is important to mention that several attempts, as obtained from the literature and as evident in cities,
149 have been made to reduce urban problems in Africa. These range from various urban renewal, environmental
150 management and community development programmes to diverse urban sustainable programmes of local, national
151 and international initiatives. While some of the programmes are fruitless exercises that appear to have worsened
152 the situations meant to be rescued, others have yielded positive results to a reasonable extent. The rates at which
153 urban problems mount on daily basis in African cities, however, suggest that they have defied solutions, and unless
154 something drastic is done, African cities in the latter half of this century will be homes of no peace-loving persons.

155 Suffice it to say that the pessimistic thinking above will promote a desperate search for not only how to make
156 African cities more livable, but also how to make rural communities more vibrant, productive, enjoyable and
157 attractive. This article observes that the process has begun, and may be enhanced if the associated elements of
158 urbanization are put under control. This is idealized in the following section to reflect the view that creation
159 of more moderate-sized cities or "urban villages" with enhanced and relatively diversified economies is more
160 desirable for Africa than uncontrolled expansion of the existing cities in the quest for provision of more housing
161 units and infrastructure and services which may not be sustainable.

162 IV.

5 NEW DIMENSION TO CITY DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

It has been observed in the foregoing analysis that African population will continue to increase in the future. The future of Africa has also been foreseen that the proportion of urban dwellers will increase tremendously with time. This implies that the associated negative consequences of urbanization, which are predicted to be out of hand in the near future, are closer to reality than theory. In contrast, however, city development is inevitable, as the economic future of the developing countries, according to Urban Foundation (1993), lies in the productivity of its cities.

African governments cannot, therefore, discourage city development. They should rather be pre-occupied by how to have and maintain urban centres of moderate sizes whose negative tendencies are controllable, but large enough to ensure a well diversified economy, buoyant enough to meet their populations' needs, including housing, infrastructure and services. The future of African cities, therefore, lies in their ability to attain equilibrium between negative consequences of urbanization and economic growth and development. What is the new trend to or turn around in urban development in Africa?

Today, two processes of city development are observable in Africa. These include: (1) increase in sizes and complexities of the existing large towns and cities, (2) increase in sizes and decrease in simplicity of certain rural settlements with development potentials. Although there is no clear-cut, in terms of population size or spatial extent, between a village and a small town and between a large town and a city, a growing village is easily identified and distinguished from a large town or city by its resource and/or economic base, which is usually agro-based. Some of them are satellite towns serving larger cities while some others are local government headquarters or rural market centres. These growing rural communities do or could be made to attract populations from the existing over-sized urban centres with over-stressed infrastructure and services. In Egypt, for example, Bayat and Denis (2000) observe that contrary to the prevailing idea of a continuous rural-urban influx, the urbanization process has been both stabilized and diffused. They report that the increase in Egyptian population of 23 million between 1976 and 1996 (which is equal to the total population of Egypt in 1956) is interestingly associated with an end to urban polarization. They describe the new pattern as "urbanization" of large villages and rapid growth of small towns. This, as Bayat and Denis observe, has resulted into loss of proportions of populations of such cities as Cairo, Alexandria, Tanta and Mansoura, among others.

While much documented evidence on similar experience of declining proportions of cities' populations in Africa is not available, the emerging trend of "rural urbanization" is not a new phenomenon in other African countries. Evidences from rural service centre programmes or rural local government headquarters (as the case may be) in such countries as Cote De Voire, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Zimbabwe suggest that that they are growing rural communities with relatively diversified and thriving economies. Odo-oba in Oyo State and the satellite settlements of the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, and Uhuru in Tanzania, are good examples of thriving, "urbanizing" rural economies. The growth of such rural economies, as observed in the literature and in reality, may be associated with: (1) provision of basic infrastructure and services, (2) rural poverty reduction strategies (3) coordination of economic growth, (4) redress of existing regional imbalances in development potentials, and (5) decentralization of administration, among others.

The future of African cities, therefore, may not be bleak as predicted by Bongaarts (in the opening quote) and other scholars. It depends on the ability of respective governments to put in place policies and programmes, and implement same to prevent the existing cities and emerging ones from continuing uncontrolled urban sprawl, and encourage revitalization of the rural economy. This may be achieved through what is described here as controlled "urbanizing or diversifying rural economies" and guided, moderate-sized urban centres, all of which are growth centres. ^{1 2}

1

Sub-Region	Country	% Urban	Country	% Urban	Average/Remark
Central Africa	Chad	27.6	Angola	58.5	
	D.R. Congo	35.2	Congo	62.1	53.61(High)
	C. Afr. Rep	38.9	S. Principe	62.2	
	Cameroon	58.4	Gabon	86	

[Note: Source : Adapted from UN-Habitat, 2007; Parnell and Simone, 2010.]

Figure 1: Table 1 :

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207 The above is pointing to the fact that urbanization of African communities may not be undesirable, but aided,
208 controlled and guided physical and economic development is inevitable. Thus, the promise or ruin of "The Future
209 African City" rests on the shoulders of all stakeholders involved in the planning, management and implementation
210 of policies and programmes affecting city development in the continent.

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