

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

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Abstract

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

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

1 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

Africa which used to be, and perhaps is still, the least urbanized continent, has her cities' growth rates close to, if not the fastest in the world. In 1950, for instance, there were only three sub-saharan African cities of more than half a million; in the late 1980s the number of cities of that category increased to twenty-nine (Palen, 1987). Today, in virtually every part of the continent new cities have emerged, while the old ones have drastically expanded, some of which have become mega-cities. And more than half of the sub-saharan Africa's population of 700 million people are projected to be living in urban areas by 2030 (George, 2006). This suggests the reason why Africa is considered the most rapidly urbanizing continent in the world (World Bank, 2009). It has the highest average annual growth rate of 3.3 percent between 1990 and 2000 and 4.5 percent between 2000 and 2005, growth rate, which is, by any calculation expected not to have reduced.

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

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

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

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

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

III.

4 THE TRADITIONAL NATURE AND CONSEQUENCES OF CITY DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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, moderated sized urban centres, all of which are growth centres.

1

Sub-Region	Country	% Urban	Country	% Urban	Average/Remark
Central Africa	Chad	27.6	Angola	58.5	53.61(High)
	D.R. Congo	35.2	Congo	62.1	
	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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The above is pointing to the fact that urbanization of African communities may not be undesirable, but aided, controlled and guided physical and economic development is inevitable. Thus, the promise or ruin of "The Future African City" rests on the shoulders of all stakeholders involved in the planning, management and implementation of policies and programmes affecting city development in the continent.

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