

Urban Development in West Africa

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Introduction

One of the most important demographic phenomena of our time which promises to loom even larger in the future, is the rapid growth of towns and cities in the developing nations. The alarming levels and projected trends in urban population growth in the developing world were vividly revealed in the 1978 United Nations survey of population policies in the world (United Nations 1978).

As part of the Third World, the countries of West Africa are also undergoing massive urban migration. The overall rate of population growth in Africa since 1950 has been unmatched by that of any other major region in the world. The increase in its urban sector has been consistently higher than that of any other region since then. The process of growth and development which these countries have experienced since independence has been characterized as the process of differentiation. In a spatial sense, employment opportunities and development changes have been extremely concentrated in a few areas, especially in the cities (Gugler *et al* 1978).

Population shifts of comparable speed and magnitude did occur in today's industrialized countries at the transitional phase of their development. In their case, however, there was an intimate interplay of the shifts in industrial structure, urbanization and in the character of economic and social organization. In contrast, the urban movement in West Africa does not appear to have been part of a total process of structural transformation; rather, it seems to have evolved from factors largely autonomous in character (Gugler *et al* 1978).

Massive population shifts under such conditions obviously involve a series of implications of an economic and social nature. They place a heavy burden on already insufficient social overhead facilities, particularly in areas such as housing, education and health, and combine with other factors of dissatisfaction to generate a state of social intransigence pregnant with political and socio-economic implications. The rural areas, which dominate both in terms of population numbers and areal extent, have either undergone little growth or have remained underdeveloped. This situation has created spatial imbalance in both economic and welfare opportunities within these countries. Employment and income opportunities, and educational, health and social facilities tend to be concentrated in urban areas.

In this context, by moving to urban areas, people are making rational decisions in the face of sharp and mounting urban-rural differentials and strongly limited rural opportunities. The result of this process, unfortunately, has been a dramatic rise in unemployment and numerous social problems. The researcher's 1987 summer experiences in Nigeria indicate an inexorable rise in crime. People have resorted to illegal means in order to obtain the basic necessities of life.

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Moreover, the rapid migration to urban centers of an unskilled and ill-adapted rural labour force contributes to labour disquiet, depressed wages and low productivity. It poses the fundamental problem of creating efficient urban employment opportunities and providing job training facilities at the rate required by the rapid flow of newcomers. It provokes distortions of the economic structure such as the emergence of a swelling service sector disproportionate to the growth of directly productive activities. It tends to depress yields per person in all occupations while boosting price levels both directly, through the inflated demand for consumer goods and insufficient facilities, and indirectly, through the increase in current public expenditures which it induces. These factors and the fast rate of urbanization tend to undermine the efficient allocation of scarce resources. They also slow down the process of capital formation in situations where all efforts should tend toward a systematic mobilization of every available means for a lasting solution of fundamental development problems.

Consequently, through recognizing the importance of the overall demographic growth in the region, the critical issue which is addressed in this paper is the degree to which national governments can formulate population and development policies that can have an impact on trends in urban growth within the next decade.

Urban Growth

The term "urbanization" has taken on many meanings in social sciences. In this case, they range from the demographic (increases in the number of people or in the proportion of a population living in urban areas) to the characterizations of individuals (the extent to which they are economically, socially, and culturally anchored in urban areas) to social organizational changes related to the transition from rural to urban society (e.g., the growth of bureaucracy) (Gugler *et al* 1978). A significant shift from agricultural-based rural societies to nations which are quickly urbanizing has only begun in West Africa during the recent decades.

Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa is largely a 20th century process. One percent of the population lived in cities at the turn of the century. In 1950, the region was about 15 percent urban, one of the least urbanized regions of the world. By 1985, it had increased to more than 30 percent urban. Over 40 percent of the 277.5 million population of West Africa is expected to live in urban areas by the year 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau 1985, 1987).

Since the mid-1930s, West Africa has experienced the urban expansion that has given its cities and towns their present status. Although overall growth has been remarkable throughout the period, many observers argue that the rate of urban growth since the 1950s has been alarming. Between 1950 and 1970, the urban population increased by a factor of 3.5. West Africa thus holds the dubious distinction of having undergone the most rapid urban growth in the world (Gugler *et al* 1978).

Most of this growth is associated with Africa's industrial revolution and has taken place within the past four decades in what has been described not as a population shift, but as an explosion. Africa's cities, particularly the larger ports and capitals, are doubling in size every ten years, making Africa's urban growth the most accelerated of all the regions of the world today.

The rapid growth of cities in West Africa has been largely due to the influx of migrants who come seeking better opportunities than are available at home, but who usually maintain contact with that home. The urban migrants are a product of a rural, small scale environment who must adjust to new and large scale levels of human interaction. They are therefore, developing a lifestyle of their own as the changes they make are different from the changes new city dwellers make in developed societies.

Rapid growth is the most readily apparent feature of West Africa's urbanization. The United Nations figure of 20,000 and above is used to define an urban centre. Since the 1970s, Sub-Saharan Africa has generally had the highest population growth rate of any region in the world. It is estimated to have increased steadily from 2.1 percent annually in the 1950-60 period to 3.0 percent in the 1985-6 period. The Sub-Saharan African share of world population will have increased from 9 percent in 1985 to an expected 11 percent by the year 2000. Growth rates of 3.0 percent or more mean that the population doubles every 24 years. The population of Africa in 1986 stood at 583 million (U.S. Bureau of Census 1987). Rapid urbanization is not in itself a disadvantage. It only becomes a problem when the rapid growth outpaces the development of equivalent services for all urban dwellers and when socio-economic disparities result from population concentration.

Early Urban Development

Throughout history, cities have generally been recognized as playing a vital role in nation building. Ancient empires such as the Greek and Roman, have been noted as both products of expanding urban power-centers and immense city-building enterprises. Cities and empires in Africa have both played a similar role in nation building. The kingdoms of the Old Sudan, Ghana, Mali and Songhay, were the result of expanding urban power-centres. Due to their superior technology, they were able to control the flow of gold to the Mediterranean (Gugler *et al* 1978).

A succession of Sudanese empires, Hausa states and Fulani emirates developed urban systems as vehicles for the trans-Saharan trade with North Africa as well as for governmental purposes. Thus arose towns or cities such as Kano, Katsina, Zaria and Sokoto. The towns of the forest belt developed later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as political-centers and as trading centres with intricate market systems between the towns and their rural hinterlands.

Early Portuguese explorers reported they discovered Benin, which was prosperous, peaceful, orderly and devoted to the working of metals and woods. There are, indeed some indications that Benin was not the only city within the Benin City-State to advance toward urban development at a relatively early date. Another city, Udo, is said to have rivaled Benin during the same period (Davidson 1959).

Presumably, the great mass of the African population, as well as those of other regions of the Third World, has always been rural. This lack of urban growth was due principally to low level technological development and the numerous indigenous social organizations which did not require urban centres. Nevertheless, West Africans had traditionally lived in large, densely populated regions of the continent. Thus, there can be no question concerning the existence of cities in the region before the advent of the European. For example, there were historical cities like Abomey,

the capital of Dahomey (now Benin Republic) in 1772, which had a population of about 24,000 to 25,000 in 1980 (Gugler *et al* 1978 from Freeman 1844).

A number of Yoruba towns had populations over 100,000 in 1931, 28 percent of the Yorubas lived in nine cities with populations of 45,000 while 34 percent of the population was in cities of over 20,000 inhabitants. Kano, in 1932, had a population of 97,031 (Bascom 1955). As Bascom (1962) indicated, not only was there extensive urbanization among the Yoruba at a fairly early period, but population density was very high. Population densities of 87,000 per square mile for Lagos in 1950; 55,555 for Ibadan in 1960; and 43,372 for Ogbomosho, 13,914 for Oyo, and 5,720 for Abeokuta in 1931, compared with 24,697 for New York City, 18,850 for Chicago, 15,743 for Philadelphia, and 5,451 for Los Angeles, the four largest urban centers in the United States in 1960.

The pre-industrial African city was a market place, a city of feudal power which was based largely on agriculture. For example, in Yoruba City, farms were situated on a belt of land surrounding the city. There were also specialized groups of weavers, dyers, and ironworkers who provided all other members of the city with their particular goods and services. The city specialized to an extent that made each individual economically dependent on it, even though it lacked the degree of specialization and dynamism which are of vital importance when considering urban development in relation to social change in Africa.

The social systems of the pre-modern city were, in some respects, similar to those of its modern counterpart. Schwab (1965) indicated that Oshogbo, a precolonial Yoruba urban center, had a semi-autonomous legal system, and institutionalized exchanges of agricultural surpluses for goods and services in social differentiation based upon occupation, skill and/or political position. Kinship was the primary determinant of behaviour in every aspect of community life. The economic life of the pre-modern city was in the hands of the craftsmen who were kinsmen and organized in guilds. Bradbury (1957), who studied Benin, indicated that most of the important indigenous crafts of the city were in the hands of special wards called guilds. There were guilds of blacksmiths and brass-smiths, wood and ivory carvers, leather workers, weavers of special embroidered cloths, drum-makers and locksmiths. In fact, the vital role of guilds in the pre-modern city has provided a clue to the nature of social organization of these early urban centres. Kinship provided the basis for social organization, and it played a most vital role in social stratification and power structure. Those who governed the society were members of various kinship groups. Miner (1965) concluded after studying Timbuktu that it had developed into a city independent of Europe's industrial revolution, capitalist economy and democratic ideas.

Today's West African cities are different from the cities which existed before the advent of westerners. Greenberg (1965) indicated that post intervention urbanization differs quantitatively and qualitatively from its earlier counterpart, with such contrasts as the size and number of new towns as well as new or radically different functions they perform. The new cities in West Africa are the products of intense migration into cities and new urban development on traditional social organization and culture of city dwellers.

The modern city is, therefore, a product of forces external not only to itself, but to West African society in general. Consequently, it has grown in response to the

emergence of the market economy. People have migrated from the hinterland and settled in the city to sell goods and services. McCall (1955) argued that the typical new city did not grow out of needs of service to its own hinterland. Accordingly, a large urban population depends on the labour market for a living, the actual extent varying with the degree of industrialization.

Foreign technology has transformed the physical and ecological organization of the pre-modern city and has given birth to a modern city. The result of the impact of foreign technology has been a specialization of land use. Consequently, land has acquired an economic value. The city is now characterized by new patterns of building construction kept within the frame of the economy of an industrial city. Streets are laid out in accordance with rational plans, and the introduction of city facilities, such as the wage system, are attributes to the rationalization and secularization of life which is associated with modern social organization.

The most important social and economic changes in West Africa are taking place in the cities. This pattern of change seems to attract populations from the rural areas. The cities are the places where ideas and ethnic/linguistic groups mix. Reissman (1964) asserted that centres of decision and triggers of social change are located in the cities and that urban societies control the world's destiny. This also applies to West Africa. The social consequences of a money economy which has introduced a new set of evaluations are most clearly evident in the city.

Characteristics of West African Urbanism

Urban growth has an uneven distribution which takes numerous forms. At the local level, growth rates within metropolitan areas differ to the extent that central growth is relatively minimal while peripheral growth increases. At the national level, there is an unevenness in countrywide urban growth in that populations tend to concentrate in the largest cities. In fact, large cities of over 100,000 inhabitants grow one and one-half times fast than smaller urban areas. The large urban centres, known as primate cities, contain more than half of all Sub-Saharan Africa's urbanites. Peil and Sada (1984) maintained that the primate city takes on all high-level functions for the country as a whole and inhibits the development of smaller cities. Also, at the international level, the proportion of urban dwellers throughout the region varies markedly.

High mobility is a very common phenomenon in West Africa due to a search for a better life style, and as a result, West African urban dwellers are highly mobile. These urban dwellers are recent arrivals from the rural communities. Being unemployed, they travel to other towns in search of employment. Many of these urbanites maintain strong ties with the rural villages that they consider to be their home. Their main reason for living in the urban area is to participate in the urban economy, but they remain loyal to the rural community.

Migrants maintain regular contact with their place of origin by frequent visits, and they maintain traditional customs. The exchange of money, goods and services is usually between members of extended kinship groups, but hometown support also takes in wider community interests. Mutual aid provides a security net for individuals and helps to equalize rural-urban differences.

Characteristics of Urban Environments

The economic structure of West African cities differs markedly from that of the industrialized nations. The occupational structure is characterized by high rates of unemployment, child labour, and self-employment – particularly petty entrepreneurship.

Development is controlled by the political structure in West African countries. This means that the bureaucracy of the political sector is more powerful than that of the economic sector. This claim is evident when one examines the proliferation of governments headed by military leaders and those that are governed by one party systems.

Another prominent characteristic of urban settlements in West Africa is the steady increase in economic inequalities. There is a growing despiritry between the rich and the poor people. The vast majority of West Africa's urban dwellers have a relatively low income. This makes it very difficult for them to obtain the basic necessities of life: food, clothing and shelter. This leads to overcrowded rooming apartments and undernourishment. The marked differences between the rich and poor people has given rise to class consciousness in West Africa. The middle class population is very small and in some countries it is completely absent.

The major differences between the inhabitants of the cities are still based on ethnic pluralism. Most residents continue to be absorbed into the social fabric of a city through ethnic, homeplace, and kinship ties rather than through those of common occupations or lifestyles.

Demographic imbalances offer stark contrasts within the population. The ratio of males to females in the cities is often 2 to 1. There is a surplus of able bodies makes in the cities between the ages of 15 and 35. The drain on rural manpower these figures represent is all too obvious (Muya *et al* 1988).

When translated into social terms, the demographic statistics indicate that there is a separation of city migrants from their home, families, and the immediate psychological, social and economic support that kinsmen provide. Interactions in the small homogeneous community are replaced with interactions of the multicultural and multilingual nature. The wider range of values and accepted behaviours which newcomers must learn in the urban situation is often overwhelming. This is best supported by the thesis that the cessation of direction social control as exercised by the family land home community gives rise to greater freedom in the city and, hence, higher levels of delinquency and crime.

The problems of West Africa's relatively youthful cities reflect the negative side of many of the characteristics outlined earlier. First, the problem that urban areas are leaching much needed manpower and revenue from the rural sector is of vital concern. In short, it is widely agreed that one of the most urgent and far reaching consequences of urbanization has been the stifling and neglect of the rural sector.

Poverty is a second concern. Associated with poverty is an alarming rate of unemployment in the cities. It is estimated that up to three million high school graduates were out of work in Nigeria in 1988 (Muya *et al* 1988).

Another aspect of urban poverty is the growing disparity between income levels of the elite and of the masses. In the struggle for urban resources it becomes increasingly clear that the highly educated elite are in a far better position to dominate resources and resource allocation than is the general public.

The provision of amenities and services has been insufficient to keep up with growth levels. Health care, sanitation, refuse collection and sewage treatment are inadequately developed. Utilities cannot expand fast enough to meet demands. Streets are congested. Educational facilities cannot handle student demand, and public recreational facilities are minimal.

There is a great demand for housing. From the point of view of health, houses are dangerously overcrowded. Crime and delinquency are inadequately controlled. There is a lack of policy making mechanisms and a severe shortage of coordination between those administrative bodies that do exist.

The supply of urban land is generally scarce, and in many areas competition is bitterly intense. Furthermore, legal codes have not kept pace with land development needs. There are inadequate title registration procedures, taxation codes and zoning ordinances.

Urban Strategy

Despite that breadth and seriousness of problems, there is a wide-spread feeling that West African cities offer rewarding opportunities for development. The fact that about three-quarters of the continent's population is not urbanized, the fact that most of the cities are relatively young, the fact that the need for more secondary cities exists, and the fact that industrial expansion is in its infancy suggest that it is not too late for planned and creative urban growth.

Aside from meeting this challenge with all possible speed, two underlying principles should also guide decision-making. The first in Europe and the United States. This can be done with projects that reach the very lowest strata of the socio-economic scale – the poverty stricken sectors – and which improve the quality of daily life and the urban environment. The second principle is to provide assistance which is basic enough to have lasting effects. With these general principles in mind, the following guidelines for urban development are offered.

First, urban development should be part and parcel of regional and national development. Industrialization in Europe, the United States and Japan was preceded by the development of agriculture. In fact, urbanization and industrialization depended and was built upon an agricultural base. The size of most African markets depends on farm income since agriculturalists constitute the bulk of the population. The fact that West Africa's urban population is tied to the rural sector should facilitate rural development, to say nothing of the possibility of some return migration. However, only the possibility of equivalent economic reward will sufficiently enhance the rural way of life and stem outward migration of a continuing high magnitude (Berg *et al* 1986).

Second, urban development must be spread throughout the new nations and secondary cities developed. The agreement in favour of decentralized urbanization is much the same as the argument for rural development.

Third, employment opportunities must be increased, although there is the accompanying danger that this will stimulate increasing immigration. This can be alleviated if West African governments take into account the structure of urban income in relation to rural income. One alternative is to favour labour intensive production over capital intensive activities.

Another alternative is to stimulate the informal employment sector where individual entrepreneurship and craftsmanship abound. Here, too, is an opportunity to develop apprenticeship programs through local entrepreneurs. These programs accept young people and give them valuable on the job training and contacts with which to begin their own careers. The young people spend five or more years in training.

Conclusion

Overall, for the foreseeable future, the centre of gravity of West Africa's space economy will continue to remain in the urban centres. The population growth rates of cities will continue to be far in excess of current labour absorption capacities. Despite high rates of urban unemployment, as long as urban wages continue to rise faster than rural incomes, so will the tide of rural-urban migration persist and add further to the naturally increasing urban population. According to Riddell (1980), the real problem is the difference in employment and income opportunities between rural and urban areas. As long as these remain in favour of the urban areas, migration will continue. It can be argued that unless very positive policies are followed to encourage the development of the rural areas in their own right and on a sufficiently substantial scale, urban areas may simply function as further magnets of attraction for the neglected rural population. The ultimate solution to urban development problems, therefore lies, paradoxically, in rural development.

The problems of great cities in the Third World, states Hauser (1957), derive not so much from "urbanism as a way of life", but from the problems of the nation at large, especially low productivity and mass poverty. Urban policy, therefore, can be viewed as the adoption of those measures most likely to alleviate the worst aspects of urban problems caused by the national state of affairs.

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Introduction

If the argument about post-colonial exploitation of Africa by speculators requires empirical examples, the current trade in African art is an excellent one. While the issue of the art trade in general, and stolen art in particular, may seem secondary to the immediate condition of the peoples of modern Africa, the role of the various institutions in the core-capitalist states and the international art market bear witness to the ongoing despoliation of Africa's resources for the benefit of capitalists in the West. This problem is not unknown to the nation-states of Africa. That the problem is relatively obscure in the West, and even in Western art circles, is more the product of beneficial ignorance on our part than a mere oversight.

It is estimated that sixty percent of the antiquities on the market is illegally excavated, largely from underdeveloped nations in Africa, Latin America and Asia. (Burnham, 1975). One can quibble over percentages or the certainty of the numbers especially given the fact that the trade is an underground affair and access to and the existence of records is limited. But such quibbling does not deny the truth that it is a major source of the exodus of African artifacts and a source of lucrative business in the West. Some people maintain that next to the drug trade, the art trade is the most significant illegal activity in the world. (Arts and Antiquities, 1986). A recent auction of African artifacts in New York was expected to gross over one billion dollars! (Reif, 1989).

However, much of the literature neglects discussion of this problem as it relates to the poorer nations of the world (especially in Africa). Rather, they decry the theft of a few valuable paintings and sculpture from Western museums. Perhaps even more telling is the fact that most reports of the theft of African artifacts discuss their removal from Western museum.

This paper is primarily attempting to analyze the current international trade in African artifacts and demonstrate how this situation is a manifestation of the broader political and economic system that perpetuates the underdevelopment of Africa. In this system "entrepreneurs" from both Africa and the West make huge profits out of artifacts by stealing or smuggling them out of customs in Africa. After being smuggled, they are sold at high prices in the West. The result of this process is that African who have ownership rights to such artifacts part with little or no artifacts. All of this is but a manifestation of a broader, and perhaps more significant, pillage of African resources and products based on unfair terms of trade and other methods of exploitation by Western nations.

How the Illegal African Art Trade Works

The central character in the trade is the middle man. He is the person who gets the art from indigenous sources. Once it is purchased or stolen, he either smuggles the

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