

Urban growth, migration and development perspectives in Sub-Saharan Africa

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Growing urbanization

Though still predominantly rural, Africa¹ is experiencing the most rapid urban growth among all the regions of the developing world. According to the United Nations, (2003), between 1975 and 2000 the urban population has more than tripled, from 70 millions to 222 millions. This rapid urbanization process will continue unabated in the next years: it is estimated that by the year 2030 the urban population will be 609 millions, representing 54 percent of the total population of the region, up from 34 percent at the turn of the century. As a

way of comparison, the percentage of the urban population in Latin America will increase by only 9 percent over the same period of time, Asia by 17 percent.

As far as Western Africa is concerned, the rate of urbanization will grow from 40 per cent to 59 percent, up to 253 millions urban residents from 91 in the year 2000, the highest increase among all sub-Saharan Africa regions.

Though approximately half this growth will take place in Nigeria, several other Western African countries will record quite significant increase in the number of their urban residents (Table 1).

Table 1 – Urbanization trends in Western African

Country	1975	2000	2030
Benin	0.7	2.6	7.7
<i>Burkina Faso</i>	0.4	2.0	9.2
<i>Chad</i>	0.6	1.9	7.5
Cote d'Ivoire	2.2	6.9	14.1
Ghana	3.0	8.6	19.0
Guinea	0.9	2.6	8.2
Liberia	0.7	1.3	4.3
<i>Mali</i>	1.3	3.6	15.4
<i>Mauritania</i>	0.3	1.5	4.4
<i>Niger</i>	0.5	2.2	12.5
Nigeria	12.8	50.6	134.4
<i>Senegal</i>	1.6	4.5	11.3
Sierra Leone	0.6	1.6	4.8
Togo	0.4	1.5	4.4

Source: World Urbanization Prospects: the 2003 Revision, UN, New York

Note: italic for Sahelian countries

¹ Excluding Northern Africa, but including Sudan.

Rapid urbanization has inevitably changed the regional distribution of the population, as well as the spatial organization of cities, generally increasing the disparities already existing between rural and urban areas, as well as between small, secondary and large cities.

As in other developing countries, in most Western African countries urban growth is taking place essentially in only one city, usually the capital, producing what is referred to as the primacy condition, i.e. the presence of one city with a population several times larger than the second most important one. In Cote d'Ivoire, 45 percent of the urban population lives in Abidjan (2.8 millions), 43 percent in Dakar (Senegal) (2.2), one third of the total urban population of Burkina Faso lives in Ouagadougou (0.8) and of Niger in Niamey (0.9), while in Bamako (Mali) (1 million), the percentage is only slightly lower. By the year 2000, the Greater Accra Metropolitan area had more than 2.7 million inhabitants, with an annual growth rate of about 4 percent. Governments have tried to encourage the growth of medium- and small-size cities, in the conviction that a more balanced urban system is crucial for national development.

However, implementing effective spatial decentralization policies to hinder population as well as economic and social disparities between the capital city and the other urban centres is quite problematic. In the past most of them have not been able to provide sufficient momentum to draw the public and private resources necessary to actually set in motion a self-supporting process. As a matter of fact, it is all but evident that globalization and the related liberalization policies under way only add to the central role of the main cities, the only ones where the infrastructure and services necessary to attract foreign investments exist and may work.

Over the last few decades, cities in Western Africa, namely the largest ones, have grown severalfolds: Ouagadougou from 165 thousands in 1975 to 870 thousands in 2005, Abidjan from 960 thousands to 3,5 millions, Kumasi

(Ghana) from 262 thousands to 862 thousands, Bamako from 0,38 millions to 1,4, Niamey from 187 to 997; Dakar from 0.77 to 2,3 millions. Although initially the main growth component was rural migration, due to the current size of the urban population particularly in the largest cities, natural growth has now become the major factor in most cities.

While African cities continue to grow, their economies situation is hardly improving so that the supply of basic infrastructure and services is thoroughly insufficient. It follows that the living conditions of increasing parts of the urban population are rapidly deteriorating, while lack of maintenance is affecting also significant parts of the infrastructure in place. Existing figures have to be looked at with caution since collection methods, almost by definition, are not accurate and are different from country to country. However, all evidence shows that housing provision is utterly insufficient to respond to demand, particularly for the low-income population. The mismatch between "formal" housing supply and housing demand by the urban population results in the growth of what have come to be known as "informal" settlements or slums², i.e. overcrowded and unserved areas, often located on marginal and dangerous public as well as private land, occupied illegally or seized outright.

The United Nations estimate that slum dwellers in Sub-Saharan Africa currently amount to approximately 1,7 million people and that, given current urban growth in the region, their number will inevitably grow in the future.

However there is now a general agreement on the importance of cities as "engines of growth" (World Bank, 1991). Everywhere urban economies contribute disproportionately to GDP: in Sub-Saharan Africa, though the percentage of urban population represents approximately 35 percent of the current total population of 257 millions, urban economies account for approximately 60 percent of the region's GDP. Though difficult to define, there is an all too evident link between urbanization and GDP: as

² Though there is no official definition of a slum, there is a general agreement that it is an area that "combines, to various extents, the following characteristics (restricted to the physical and legal characteristics of the settlement, and excluding the more difficult social dimensions:

- Inadequate access to safe water
- Inadequate access to sanitation and other infrastructure
- Poor structural quality of housing
- Overcrowding
- Insecure residential status.

Table 2 - In-house connections. Selected West Africa cities (% households)

	Piped Water	Sewerage	Electricity
N'Djamena	42.0	n.a.	13.3
Ouagadougou	30.0	n.a.	47.1
Abidjan	26.3	14.6	40.7
Kumasi	65.0	n.a.	95.0
Bamako	38.4	1.5	61.2
Niamey	33.2	n.a.	51.0
Dakar	77.0	43.1	89.3

Source: United Nations Human Settlements Programme, *The Challenge of Slums*, Earthscan, London, 2003

the rate of urbanization grows so does the GDP and vice-versa, the higher the GDP the higher the percentage of the population living in urban areas. Most manufacturing and services are concentrated in cities, where they can benefit from agglomeration economies, higher productivity, the concentration of services as well as from the presence of larger consumer markets. In addition, urban economies have strong financial, fiscal and economic linkages between the local and the national levels. Thus, the central role of cities in development can hardly be underestimated.

As one of the outcomes of globalization, all developing countries, including in Africa, have set up a process of institutional and political decentralization entrusting local governments with an array of responsibilities. By now in most countries municipalities actually constitute a core urban stakeholder, often significantly more important than the central government. However, despite the growing economic and political importance of cities, the policy and institutional framework for managing urban growth remains weak. Though in charge of the provision for an increasing number of urban services, municipalities continue to receive only a small percentage of GDP – US\$14 per capita on the average. The result is a growing disparity between the demand for housing, basic infrastructure and primary urban services on one side, and the capacity to directly or indirectly supply them by local governments. (UNCHS-Habitat, 2001).

All over the past decades sub-Saharan Africa has recorded negligible average economic growth, in many countries falling into pervasive stagnation and even decline. Even so, migration

continued into the larger cities, where income opportunities were disproportionately higher than in the rural areas or in smaller cities. Even though most income opportunities were created in the informal sector, this allowed many wage-earners to take on supplementary activities or previously non-earning household members to enter the petty commodity sector, thus contributing to the family income. It should be stressed that the notion of informal urbanization, used by some literature when referring to urban growth in his part of the world, has little meaning if any. The idea that since in sub-Saharan Africa cities grow “without a formal economic base” (Peter Hall and Ulrich Pfeiffer, 2000) produces a sort of “abnormal” urbanization is fallacious. What should be clear is that, under current international resources distribution, the present nature of African cities is the only answer large and increasing shares of the population are left with. Referring to the urbanization process in Africa as “informal” is not only misleading in terms of what policies can be adopted; it is also wrong in essence inasmuch it fails to acknowledge that a more “formal” urbanization, i.e. similar to what happened in the advanced economies at the time of their urban growth, in sub-Saharan countries as well as in most developing countries cannot be conceived.

From rural-rural to rural-urban migration

In sub-Saharan Africa the movement of people, following trading routes or employment opportunities, particularly in agricultural, has been a long time phenomenon prompted by a

strong labour demand in the agricultural export-oriented economies: national as well as foreign unskilled workers were employed in cocoa and coffee plantations in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. Moreover, with independence nation state borders were superimposed to such movements so that the difference between internal and international migration is somewhat blurred. However, since the eighties the migratory flow has changed significantly and currently migrants head essentially towards cities. The lack of reliable statistics makes it impossible to have even an approximate picture of the numbers of rural-urban migrants. Notwithstanding, since the difference in living conditions between rural and urban areas continues to widen, the phenomenon remains significant though slowing down compared to previous decades. In cities, particularly the larger ones, income opportunities exist not only in the expanding informal sector, but also in the many low-paid jobs created by the enhanced role cities have acquired in the context of globalisation. At the same time, migration is one way of coping with the growing disparities between rural and urban conditions by reducing the number of people living on low-productive agricultural activities while fostering positive economic rural-urban linkages by exchange of processed and unprocessed commodities, with cities becoming increasingly important markets for agricultural production.

Adding to the rural migrants is the increasing number of international migrants. Though in recent years the international migration flow in West Africa has significantly declined following the political instability in the region, according to the latest estimates there are more than 14 million international migrants in sub-Saharan Africa, excluding refugees, or 2.3 per cent of its total population. Senegalese communities are reported in many capitals of West Africa, from Praia to Bangui, while Dakar in turn hosts important communities from Guinea-Conakry and Cabo Verde. In Bangui (Central Africa), the well known market at *Kilomètre 5*, the city largest market, most traders are from Senegal. Even after the return to their country of origin, due to the recent turmoil, of many migrants from Burkina Faso who had come to work in Abidjan, the capital city of Côte d'Ivoire hosts more than 1 million foreigners, or 30 per cent of its population .

Migration is an increasingly complex process, driven mainly but not only by economic reasons, since the social and cultural changes Sub-Saharan countries have experienced in the past years have affected also the nature of migration flows. Current migration streams consist of not only workers, but also students, women migrants for family reunion purposes, highly qualified professionals, temporary workers, refugees and undocumented migrants. It is all but obvious that in this context the pivotal role the main cities in sub-Saharan Africa have always played in the context of migration is increasing, be it as places of destination for the migratory flow or of transit for migrants heading from the rural areas or from secondary cities to the more advanced economies of the North (Traoré, 2001).

Ethnic ties play a crucial role in helping migrants in their search for a dwelling or a job and, more generally, in promoting their integration in the city life. The spatial concentration of migrant communities within many West-African cities is not necessarily the result of segregationist trends, but may derive from the necessity to settle within their community and close to the places that can give them the special assistance they need and that the State or the local government cannot provide. In fact, this is the reason why in most African cities (but not only) the labour market is strongly segmented with distinct ethnic or international migrants communities taking up specific activities, such as the water trade by the Burkina Faso or Nigerian migrants in distinct areas of Abidjan, or in Dakar the migrants from Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde employed essentially in the construction sector and for domestic help or the Mauritians who are slowly regaining control of the retail trade after the 1989 conflict between Senegal and Mauritania.

The increasing number of foreign migrants in urban areas is often perceived as a social problem by local people (particularly where tribalism is strong) and anti-foreign sentiments are reported in many countries. In 2000, a wave of xenophobia forced many Sahelian immigrants to leave Côte d'Ivoire, and again in September 2002, after a failed coup attempt.

Migrants and the city.

Abidjan and Dakar

As mentioned, the Côte d'Ivoire capital city is host to a very large number of migrants not only from throughout the country, but also from Burkina Faso, Mali, Guinea and Ghana. The attraction of the capital city is easy to understand. Following the unabated growth after independence until the 1980s, Abidjan accounts for 18 per cent of national employment and 52 per cent of secondary and tertiary urban employment and 50 percent of GDP (Appessika, 2003).

As a result, in the past decades Abidjan has increasingly become a prime pole of attention throughout the whole of West Africa and primarily for the populations of the Sahel, affected by successive droughts. At the end of the seventies, only one third of the residents had been borne in the city; at the end of the nineties more than 38 percent of the inhabitants of the Abidjan agglomeration continued to be originally from outside Côte d'Ivoire. The largest share of international migrants is from Burkina Faso, Malians being approximately 180,000 together with 30,000 residents from Senegal and a similar number from Nigeria.

As in most West African cities, the rapid growth of the urban population has resulted in the production of large irregular settlements. According to recent estimates, the population of Abidjan currently living in slum areas such as Treichville, Zoe Buno, Vridi Canal, Zimbabwe and Bligue, where housing conditions are precarious and the level of infrastructure provision significantly lower than in the rest of the city add to between 20 to 30 percent of the total urban population (UN-Habitat, 2003). A large share of the slum population is made up of migrants, both from within the country and from other countries. Living in slum is obviously not an option but results from lack of alternatives: for most of the low-income population irregular settlements are the only place where it is possible to rent or to build one's dwelling. However, being a slum resident often meets with the stigmatization by the rest of the urban population, further deepening the disparities existing within the city.

Although in recent years some progress has been achieved in improving the conditions of slum areas, the efforts carried out fall well

behind of necessity, so that the issue remains one of the most challenging the public authorities have to cope with. As recognized by the United Nations "unless public policy addresses the issue in a comprehensive manner, drawing on the capabilities and will of all stakeholders, many of the developmental efforts may remain largely marginal" (UN-Habitat, 2003).

Dakar

In the nineties the urbanization of Dakar recorded a very rapid growth, with rural migration contributing by approximately 50.000 people per year more, so that at the end of the decade the population had increased by more than 50 percent. Today, the capital city of Senegal is host to more than two million people, corresponding to approximately 20 per cent of Senegal's total population and to almost 50% of the urban population in the country.

The availability of products, services and socio-economic infrastructure is the reason for such primacy, and fuels it notwithstanding the official government policy to reduce the disparity between Dakar and the rest of the country as the recently adopted (2002) "Declaration on Population Policies" aiming to prevent migration to the capital city.

As it concentrates the bulk of Senegal's economic and administrative activities, Dakar needs specialised services for wage-earners (restaurants, maintenance services, house help, food stores, laundries, etc.). The development of the two major suburbs of Pikine and Guédiawaye has brought about the growth of a large informal sector of retail commerce and services that are essential to the sustenance of the poorer segments of the population.

Thus, it is all but obvious that the concentration of economic activities, employment opportunities in the formal as well as the informal sector, higher income levels, better service provision, all play a major role in the collective imagination and in the actual decision many Senegalese make to move to Dakar.

As for international migration, several factors keep driving migration flows towards Dakar:

- With its large population settlements spread across different countries and its pre- and

post-colonial history, West Africa is perceived as a region “without borders”, a multi-dimensional space where migrants develop social relations at various levels of which Dakar has been and remains the major pole of attraction, much more so after the crisis in Côte d’Ivoire, when many West African communities such as Guineans and Mauritians left the country and turned to their existing networks in Senegal.

- Migration networks maintain social links among a broad linguistic community – often unifying populations established on either side of relatively recent borders – and play a major role in the constant circulation of people in West Africa.
- Senegal’s prominent status in the former French West Africa, and Dakar’s appeal as the then federal capital of an extensive hinterland, have also favoured immigration.

It is worth noting that the dynamism of international migration in Senegal is mainly related to the flows towards the advanced economies. Poverty driven migration is increasingly supplemented by migratory inflows related to globalisation, mostly by young, educated people looking for new opportunities and coming to Dakar in search of the networks that will smuggle them to Europe or North America.

Inevitably, the rapid growth of the city has compounded some already severe urban problems. The provision of infrastructure and services as well as housing to the low-income families, including migrants, is far from meeting the needs. This results in the continuous expansion of irregular settlements and the informal sector, including illegal activities, which in the local population’s view adds to the problem of insecurity in the city. This is increasingly linked to the presence of migrants

from other West African countries, such as Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire, even if filling sectors of the labour market eschewed by the local population.

National and international urban migration in Sub-Saharan Africa appears as an inevitable trend which will continue for many years to come, particularly so in the framework of increasing globalization. Therefore governments must learn to deal with the consequences of migration flows and their effects on urban growth. However, Sub-Saharan Africa local governments, increasingly vested with the responsibility of designing and implementing urban policies, have only limited capacity.

Experience shows that such capacity should be built around at least two urban policy priorities:

- *Housing and services.* Probably the most important problem migrants face when they arrive is housing. The formal housing or land markets are generally inaccessible to the low-income population most migrants add to and the formation of inner city slums or the expanding “ethnic” informal settlements in the peripheries is the result of this inaccessibility. Providing access to urban services throughout the city is a second element of an urban strategy aiming at improving living conditions in the city. Local governments can promote policies that make housing and services more accessible to the low-income population.
- *Employment.* In the framework of the labour market increasing polarisation produced by globalization local governments can promote “formalisation” policies that would benefit all those who work in informal activities where long hours, low wages and unhealthy or even dangerous working conditions are the norm.

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