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Strengthening Rural-Urban Interactions as a Contemporary Paradigm to Sustainable Development in Africa: The Case of Meme Division, South-west Region, Cameroon

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Abstract

The world's population is increasing by around 85 million every year – the equivalent of another Egypt or Mexico, and by 2025 most of the growth is expected to be within urban areas of developing nations. This implies a continuous supply and dependence on raw materials and other infrastructural developments. This study therefore seeks to examine the flow of people, finance through remittances as well as the flow of goods and services between rural and urban settlements in developing nations using the Meme Division of the South-West Region of Cameroon as a case study. The problem of most development theory and practice based on the dichotomy between rural and urban settlements is reflected through the division of policies along spatial and sectoral lines, with urban planners concentrating on urban nodes with less attention to the rural nodes. This has widened the development gap between rural and urban centres, thus accelerating rural-urban migration and a consequent increase in the rate of urban poverty and urban primacy in most developing countries. As its main objective, the study sets out to investigate the relationship between small and intermediate urban centres and their surrounding regions, with particular attention to spatial and sectoral linkages which constitute the basic tenets for a win-win development situation. To attain the objectives, both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized. The secondary sources constituted internet sources and available materials on rural-urban linkages while the primary data was principally from direct interviews and the administration of questionnaires. A systematic sampling technique was used to generate information from the sampled population and the Rank Size Rule was used to analyse the collected data to categorise areas of high linkages and their levels of development. The findings revealed that encouraging rural-urban linkages will constitute a contemporary approach in

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solving urban problems of increasing slums and urban poverty while reducing rural exodus. From the findings, it was recommended that planning should be done on a regional basis rather than dividing settlements into urban and rural as well as developing transport routes to ease communications between the two areas. The study concludes that regional development as a development option will go a long way in bridging the gap between the rural and urban areas, thereby accelerating regional integration and development as a whole.

Résumé

La population mondiale augmente d'environ 85 millions chaque année, l'équivalent de la population de l'Égypte ou du Mexique, et la majeure partie de la croissance d'ici à 2025 devrait s'opérer dans les zones urbaines des pays en voie de développement. Cela implique un approvisionnement continu et une dépendance à l'égard des matières premières et le développement d'autres infrastructures. Cette étude vise donc à examiner le flux de personnes, le flux financier par les transferts de fonds ainsi que le flux de biens et de services entre les zones rurales et urbaines dans les pays en voie de développement, dans le cas du Département de Meme, dans la région Sud-Ouest du Cameroun. Le problème de la plupart des théories et pratiques du développement reposant sur la dichotomie entre les zones rurales et urbaines se reflète dans la division des politiques selon les lignes spatiales et sectorielles, les urbanistes se concentrant sur les nœuds urbains tout en accordant moins d'attention aux nœuds ruraux. Cela a creusé l'écart en matière de développement entre les centres urbains et ruraux, accélérant ainsi l'exode rural et l'augmentation conséquente du taux de pauvreté en milieu urbain et de la primauté urbaine dans la plupart des pays en voie de développement. L'objectif principal de l'étude est d'examiner la relation entre les centres urbains petits et intermédiaires et leurs régions avoisinantes, en accordant une attention particulière aux liens spatiaux et sectoriels qui constituent les principes fondamentaux d'une situation de développement gagnant-gagnant. Pour ce faire, l'étude s'est fondée sur des sources de données primaires et secondaires ont été utilisées. Les sources secondaires incluaient des sources Internet et des documents disponibles sur les liens entre les zones rurales et urbaines, tandis que les données primaires proviennent principalement d'entretiens directs et de l'administration de questionnaires. Une technique d'échantillonnage systématique a été utilisée pour générer de l'information provenant de la population échantillonnée et la règle rang-taille a été utilisée pour analyser les données recueillies afin de catégoriser les zones de fortes relations et leurs niveaux de développement. Les résultats ont révélé que le fait d'encourager l'établissement de liens entre les zones rurales et urbaines constituerait une approche contemporaine pour résoudre les problèmes urbains liés à l'augmentation des taudis et à la pauvreté urbaine tout en réduisant l'exode rural. Sur la base des résultats, il a été recommandé que l'urbanisation se fasse sur une base régionale plutôt que de diviser les communautés en zones

urbaines et rurales, ainsi que de développer des voies de transport pour faciliter les communications entre les deux zones. L'étude conclut que le développement régional en tant qu'option de développement contribuera grandement à combler l'écart entre les zones rurales et urbaines, accélérant ainsi l'intégration régionale et le développement dans son ensemble.

Introduction

According to the United Nation's projections (2010), the world's population will grow to more than nine billion by 2050. The United Nations expects that between 1995 and 2025 the number of people living in urban areas will nearly double from 2.8 to 5.3 billion, and that 90 per cent of that growth will be in developing countries. This implies a continuous supply and dependence on raw materials and other services from the rural areas as urban areas keep reducing through housing construction and other infrastructural developments (Fombe and Balgah 2010).

Rural-urban linkages, according to UN-HABITAT (2010), include flows of agricultural and other commodities on the one hand from rural-based producers to urban markets to serve the needs of the urbanites and to the regional, national and international markets, and on the other hand in the opposite direction, flows of manufactured and imported goods from urban centres to rural settlements. They also include the flow of people between rural and urban settlements, either commuting on a regular basis, for occasional visits to urban-based services and administrative centres, or migrating temporarily or permanently. Financial flows include, primarily, remittances from migrants to relatives and communities in sending areas, and transfers such as pensions to migrants returning to their rural homes including investments and credit from urban-based institutions. These spatial flows overlap with inter-linkages between sectors both at the household level and at the level of local economies and include backward and forward linkages between the agricultural, manufacturing and service sectors (Mulongo *et al.* 2010). Most urban centres, especially small and intermediate ones, rely on broad-based demand for basic goods and services from their surrounding populations to develop their secondary and tertiary sectors (Takoli 2005). On the whole, synergy between agricultural production and urban-based enterprises is often a key to the development of more vibrant local economies and, on a wider level, to less unequal and more 'pro-poor' regional economic growth and integration (Lucatelli and Peta 2011).

In most developing countries and especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, the rate of urbanization is rapidly increasing (UNEP 2010). This can be largely attributed to the few available cities within the continent concentrated mainly along the coast. Colonial influence in Africa accounts for most of the city

development along the coast as the colonialists created transport routes for the evacuation of raw materials from Africa to European industries during the colonial era. In French colonial Africa especially, city development followed the pattern of creating major urban centres for development impulses to subsequently diffuse from the urban centres to its surrounding settlements. This, if properly implemented, will lead to regional integration and the growth of the nation as a whole. The trend has however not been effective as most of these cities like Dakar in Senegal, Abidjan in Ivory Coast, Accra in Ghana, Lomé in Togo, Lagos in Nigeria, Douala in Cameroon, Pointe Noire in Gabon, and Mombasa in Kenya among others have continued to grow as primate cities absorbing growth potentials from their surrounding settlements (Fombe and Balgah 2010). This constantly restricts the spread of development impulses into the surrounding settlements but rather promotes an increasing flow of resources from rural to urban areas leading to the increasing gap between urban and rural areas (Kjell *et al.* 2014).

Given the expected trends of rapid urbanization in Africa, it has become imperative to plan for such unprecedented urbanization by strengthening the connections between urban and rural environments, if humanity must live up to the expectations of sustainable urban development and regional equality.

Statement of the Problem

Spatial integration calls for separate regions to interact through development impulses. According to this concept, there should be an easy flow of ideas, movement of people, goods and services and communication between the different parts. Considering Third World continents, identified regions such as countries, natural and functional should be capable of benefiting from the advantages of each other for a balanced and equitable development. Nonetheless, most regions of the world have little spatial integration due to a number of problems. Most developing economies especially in Africa, according to Abumese (1987), are dual. That is, a nation of haves and have nots i.e. an economy of supply and exchange (urban areas) and one of subsistence (rural areas). The primate cities of Africa all tend to absorb growth within them at the expense of surrounding rural settlements leading to their continuous growth and development.

Most development theories and practice are implicitly based on the dichotomy between rural and urban areas, populations and activities (Elbe and Middleman 2009). This is reflected in the division of policies along spatial and sectoral lines, with urban planners usually concentrating on urban nodes and paying little attention to rural-led development, while rural development planners tend to ignore urban centres and define rural areas as consisting only

of villages and their agricultural lands. This has widened the development gap between rural and urban centres.

The Kumba urban area is not an exception as development is concentrated entirely within the urban centre leaving its surrounding rural areas underdeveloped despite the fact that they contribute at least 75 per cent of total input in terms of agricultural raw materials and labour supply. These rural satellites suffer from the absence of basic social facilities such as health facilities, electricity supply, pipe-born water supply and the lack of storage facilities in cases where electricity is virtually unavailable. These situations have led to an increase in unbalanced development and a reduction in the rate of rural-urban interaction.

As cited in Fombe (2006), urban poverty is rural poverty transferred. That is, the lack of regional integration between rural and urban environments in most African states has necessitated the high rate of rural exodus leading to the prevalence of urban poverty in major cities of Africa. According to recent studies by UN-HABITAT (2013), the urban poor in most African cities live in conditions that are at least two times worse than their rural counterparts. There is therefore a need to redress this situation by providing a win-win situation for both urban and rural areas.

The main objective of this study is therefore to identify the missing links between the urban and rural areas as urban areas draw a lot from the rural areas with limited flow in the opposite direction. Also, the study examines the implications of these interactions in the light of regional integration and growth of the region. Using the Meme Division of Cameroon with Kumba as a major urban and primate city of the area, such missing links will be determined and policy options for the strengthening of regional integration suggested.

The Study Matrix and Methodology

The Study Matrix

The Meme Division is a second-order administrative division and hosts the largest city – Kumba – in the South-West Region. It is located at longitude 9°20'E and latitude 4°50'N, sitting on an elevation of approximately 785 meters above sea level as illustrated in Figure 1. The division has an approximated population of about 300,000 inhabitants (2005 Census and 2010 estimate) with the major ethnic group being the Bafaw people. However, due to the cosmopolitan nature of Kumba, the division is host to different ethnic groups like the Bamelike, the Bayangs, the Bakossis', the Irokos' and, amongst others, the Igbo tribe from Nigeria. The major languages spoken within the region include English, French and Pidgin-English.

crop buyers, administrative functions and the hospital. Within each stratum of the rural area, the respondents were randomly interviewed to obtain information regarding where they sell their farm products, and where they go for health and administrative services. Also, rural retailers on their part were interviewed to know where they buy goods from and the quantity of products they can buy at a time. The urban market constitutes an avenue to understand where goods sold in the market come from. The Regional Hospital Annex in Kumba was also sampled to deduce the catchment of the hospital within the region.

A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to each of the stratum using a systematic random sampling pattern in the six rural settlements and the Kumba urban market. This was to reduce bias and save time during the field work. Direct interviews were made with some agricultural warehouse owners in Kumba who were noted to buy some cash crops like cocoa on a large scale from these rural areas. This was done to understand the respective rural areas they buy from, the problems faced in transporting the products and proposed measures to ameliorate the situation. The collected data was analysed using the Rank Size Rule method.

Conceptual View

This study makes use of two main concepts – the Growth Pole and Growth Centre concept by Perroux and the Trickle Down and Polarization Effect by Hirschman. The Growth Pole and Growth Centre concept was used to show the current situation of primate cities in Africa and the Trickle Down and Polarization Effect was used as a way forward for regional integration and equitable regional development in Africa.

i. Growth Poles and Growth Centres by Perroux (1950)

Perroux (1950) in this concept attempted to understand the mechanisms by which development impulses are transmitted through the whole economy. According to him, growth poles are centres or foci from which centrifugal forces emanate and to which centripetal forces are attracted. Perroux was not concerned with the geographical pattern of economic activity/growth, or intra – and inter-regional shifts, but as an economist in abstract economic areas. He stressed that a growth pole is an industry (firm) which is propulsive, having direct and indirect dominance over all other activities and enjoying oligopolistic concentration.

For the growth pole mechanism to be effective, it must have certain linkages: forward, backward and lateral (interaction between the various production sectors in an economy – primary, secondary and tertiary), and a 3-dimensional force needs to exist. The strength of a propulsive industry will depend on the use of growth inducements from primary to tertiary sectors and laterally by

interacting with other lateral industries within and outside of its sphere. The presence of the three linkages provides channels through which direct and indirect influences of development in Africa and Kumba in particular, the favoured growth poles tend to grow independently without spreading the impulse of development to its surrounding unfavoured areas. This further widens the gap between the haves and the have nots. However, the concept strives for trickle down and polarization of development impulses through integration of activities and spread of development indicators throughout the region in order to bridge the gap between the rural and urban settlements.

Results

State of Rural-Urban Interaction in the Meme Division

The state of rural-urban interaction in the Meme division can be viewed from two main indicators, firstly, the Kumba Main Market and secondly, the Regional Hospital Annex of Kumba. The data collected revealed the extent to which Kumba interacts with its surrounding rural settlements based on the origin of patients to the hospital.

The Kumba Main Market

The Kumba urban market seeks traders from different areas, amongst which are shop owners dealing mostly with manufactured goods and makeshift owners who are dealers of mainly foodstuffs produced directly from the farms. The traders come from different areas to sell and buy products for either retail sale or consumption in the destination areas. The major areas served by this market and type of goods bought by these traders can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1: Origin and destination of products from the Kumba urban market

Origin	Products from Kumba market	Vegetables (in bundles)	Plantains (in bunches)	Yams (in tubers)	Cocoyams (in bags)	Potatoes (in bags)	Total/destination	Percentage (%) / destination
	Destination							
Environ of Kumba	Douala	3,500	800	6,000	800	800	11,900	57.94
	Limbe	1,500	25	300	380	100	2,305	11.20
	Muyuka	600	20	400	30	40	1,090	5.31
	Kumba	2,000	1,000	1,500	200	400	5,100	24.83
	Others	30	20	55	20	20	145	0.71
	Total	7,630	1,865	8,255	1,430	2,700	20,540	100.00

Source: Field work (2014)

Table 1 illustrates that the highest destination area of products from the Kumba market is Douala (57.94%) followed by Kumba (24.83%), Limbe (11.2%), Muyuka (5.31%) and others (0.71%) like Ediki, Kake which are other smaller settlements around Kumba. Douala produces most of the food crops needed. This relationship can be seen in Figure 2.

Based on the relationship between the origin of farm produce and destination zones, the sphere of influence can be depicted. This shows the extent to which goods from the surrounding rural areas of Kumba can go and thus the need to strengthen rural-urban interactions for posterity.

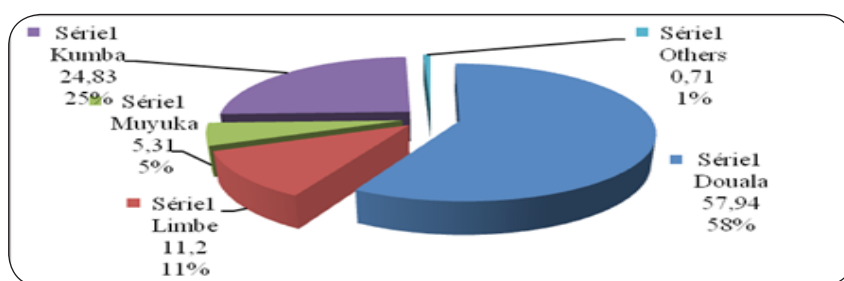


Figure 2: Percentage distribution of products from the Kumba Market

Source: Field work (2014)

Another major agricultural product from the surrounding rural areas is cocoa. All the rural areas surrounding Kumba are cocoa-producing areas and they sell their produce to major cocoa buyers in Kumba. These main cocoa buyers have been able to control the cocoa economy for the past decades within the region and they have been able to assist in the repair and maintenance of roads to ease accessibility between Kumba and its surrounding rural settlements.

The Kumba Regional Hospital

Data obtained for inpatients reveal the movement of patients from different destinations to the Kumba Hospital through a centripetal flow pattern, as seen in Table 2.

Table 2: Average movement of inpatients/day for a period of two months

Place of Origin	Total inpatients/ day	Percentage (%) flow of total inpatient/day	Point of destination
Ikiliwindi	17	9.83	KumbaGeneral Hospital
Etam	20	11.56	
Bekondo	15	8.67	
Marimba	14	8.09	
Mbalangi	8	4.62	
Mukonje	21	12.14	
Barombi Kang	4	2.31	
Kumba	74	42.77	
Total	173	100.00	

Source: Inpatient Department, Regional Hospital, Kumba (June to July 2014)

From Table 2, it is deduced that the Kumba urban area has the highest number of inpatients while Barombi Kang has the lowest. This limited number of inpatients from Barombi can be accounted for by the existence of health units in the village. However, out of the four patients, on average 2 or 3 are referred from these clinics to the Regional Hospital in Kumba. Irrespective of the number of patients going to the hospital daily, the sphere of influence produced by the hospital calls for better linkages and regional integration within the region.

On the other hand, the outpatient directory shows a centrifugal pattern of movement as patients after consultation and/or treatment move back to their various origins. Some of them are referred to other hospitals as illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3: Direction of Outpatients from Kumba General Hospital

Point of origin	Destination	Frequency of outpatient/day	% of outpatients/day
Kumba General Hospital	Douala	2	1.16
	Manyemen	8	4.62
	Limbe	3	1.73
	Ikiliwindi	16	9.25
	Etam	17	9.83
	Bekondo	13	7.51
	Marimba	12	6.94
	Mbalangi	7	4.05
	Mukonje	20	11.56
	Barombi Kang	4	2.31
	Kumba	71	41.04
	Total	173	100.00

Source: Inpatient Department, Regional Hospital, Kumba (June to July 2014)

Table 3 reveals that some of the patients are referred to specialists' hospitals in Manyemen, Douala and Limbe for further treatment. The other patients are either sent back home or admitted depending on the severity of the case. These movements show the extent of coverage of the hospital and thus the need to strengthen the links between the urban and rural areas of Kumba and Meme division as a whole.

The Missing Link between the Rural-Urban Divide

Nature of the Roads

Most roads linking the different neighbourhoods of Kumba are tarred. This eases the movement and circulation of goods and services within the town. However, none of the roads linking Kumba to its surrounding rural settlements are tarred. All of them are earth roads and seasonal in nature as seen in Figure 1. Based on field data, 98 per cent of the respondents confirmed the stress attached to transporting goods and people during the rainy season. Some of them take two or more days for a distance of about 70 to 105 km. This greatly reduces the rate of interaction and integration between the urban and rural settlements of the region. Also, most of the cars adapted to transport goods and services along these roads are in a poor state and always overloaded with goods and passengers. This inhibits movements between Kumba and its surrounding rural areas.



Figure 3: Poor nature of the roads during the rainy season connecting Kumba-Mbonge (a) and Kumba-Ikiliwindi (b)

Source: Agbortoko (August 2014)

It should be noted here that, within the selected rural areas of study, Ikiliwindi is the largest producer of cocoa and cocoyams, about 95 per cent of which are destined for the Kumba market.

Electricity Supply

Besides Barombi Kang and Marumba, none of the other rural settlements have an electricity supply. The problem of electricity supply can be linked to problems of storage facilities. Data collected revealed that storage problems have led to the sale of agricultural products like vegetables amongst other perishables at lower prices to urban retailers who in turn sell them at higher prices in the urban market. A bundle of vegetable sold at 75 Frs CFA in a village settlement like Ikiliwindi, Bekondo or Etam sells at 300 Frs CFA within the Kumba urban market. Since the rural farmers lack the means to preserve their farm produce, they are forced to sell at lower prices for fear of them rotting.

Unbalanced Trade Relationship

There is an unbalanced trade relationship between urban buyers and rural farmers that disadvantages the farmers. Most of the rural farmers are unable to purchase basic materials for agricultural production like pesticides and fertilizers. In such situations, the urban buyers move in to supply these farmers. According to field data, pesticides sold for 350 Frs CFA per pack in Kumba are given to these farmers for 700 Frs CFA in a business relationship termed '10 born 10'. This relationship continues to impoverish the rural farmers who engage in farming activities throughout the year only to receive half of what is being produced on their farms. This is a common exercise in

the cocoa trade within the Meme Division. It must be noted that Kumba in itself as an urban centre does not cultivate cocoa but that the major cocoa exporters are based in Kumba. This means they depend solely on the surrounding rural communities for cocoa.

Added to this, the price per kilogram of cocoa bought from these rural farmers is being determined by the urban buyers. Most often, the urban buyers complain of transportation costs which they always deduct from the buying price, which is still way below the actual price of cocoa per kilogram. The field survey indicates that the actual cocoa price per kg ranges from 1,200 Frs CFA to 1,800 Frs CFA but rural farmers often sell their cocoa at 800 to 1,100 Frs CFA. This unbalanced trade continues to impoverish rural farmers while the urban buyers become richer and richer.

Administrative Functions

The division is headed by a Senior Divisional Officer (SDO) while other development activities are controlled largely by the Government Delegate of the City Council. Most infrastructural developments like road construction and pipe-borne water among others are controlled by the Government Delegate. The Lord Mayors of the different councils are all under the Government Delegate and so will implement any development activity according to the SDO's instructions. Based on the field data, roads for example have been developed within the neighbourhoods of Kumba while the roads linking the rural areas have been left seasonal.

Also, the seat of the Government Delegate remains within the urban environment and so will carry out development activities only within the urban milieu. This reduces the rate of interaction between the urban areas and their rural counterparts.

Rank Size Rule Analysis

From the collected data, the above was realized from the interaction of Kumba and its surrounding environs. Using an example from the inpatient records of the Regional Hospital Annex in Kumba, the following can be calculated:

Table 4: Rank-Size distribution of inpatients and outpatients from the Regional Hospital Annex, Kumba

Rural settlement	Inpatient records	Outpatient records	Rank (inpatient)
Ikiliwindi	17	16	3
Etam	20	17	2

Bekondo	15	13	4
Marimba	14	12	5
Mbalangi	8	7	6
Mukonje	21	20	1
Barombi Kang	4	4	7

Source: Field work (2014)

From Table 4, it is realized that Mukonje is ranked top, followed by Etam, Ikiliwindi, Bekondo, Marimba, Mbalangi and Barombi Kang. This can be explained by the fact that Mukonje is a very remote settlement with little infrastructural development. Medical centres are absent but it constitutes one of the major areas from which food stuffs especially cocoyams are grown for transportation to Kumba and other urban centres, as indicated in Table 1. Etam on the other hand is a road-side settlement along the major road linking Kumba and Mamfe (another major settlement). It is also lacking in social amenities and so will depend on Kumba for sales of products and use of its infrastructures amongst other services.

The above explains why Kumba as the main urban centre continues to grow at the expense of the surrounding areas. The top-ranked settlement (Mukonje) supplies most of the food stuffs to Kumba but lacks basic amenities to survive. This contributes to the increase in the rural exodus to Kumba and other neighbouring urban centres in the region.

Discussion

In the background of rural-urban integration, the Meme division is greatly lacking as the link seems to be distorted due to poor roads, lack of social services and the concentration of activities within the urban environment. Against this backdrop, there is therefore the need to strengthen the rural-urban link to enhance sustainability.

The International Development Agenda is increasingly recognizing the potency of the rural-urban linkage development approach to sustainable development. UN-HABITAT for example considers this as having potential both for promoting rural-urban development benefits and for generating substantial employment and therefore contributing to poverty eradication as well as bridging the divide between the haves and have nots. Also, the Habitat Agenda (paragraphs 10, 99, 141 and 147) clearly makes the case for economic, social and environmental interdependence and for the need for balanced and mutually supportive development between rural and urban areas.

According to Okpala (2003), the old orthodoxy of a discrete and dichotomous approach to urban development as distinct from rural development no longer accords with reality, considering the complementary functions and flow of people, capital, goods and services, employment, information and technology between the two areas. Urban integrated development, rural areas' territorial development and the organisation of basic services in more remote rural areas are important elements to boost regional integration within different regions. This is seriously lacking in the study area as the poor trade relationship and poor roads, among others, have not been identified as important elements to enhance regional integration and sustainable development.

Public services and sustainable development have been recognized as the crucial functions to be considered in this action, highlighting the importance of public service upgrading in order to support regional growth (Barca 2009). Public services, accessibility and quality are crucial for territorial cohesion.

It can be drawn from the analysis that there is an increasing need to integrate rural and urban activities in order to enhance sustainable development. This rural-urban relationship can best be seen in the aspects of agricultural linkages. As pointed out by Naquo (1980), Ougnau (1981), Haji (1980), Minamino (1996), Jefferson (1985) all emphasized that no one urban centre has all the resources it needs to survive. They further added that the markets for agricultural products that can be found in most cities represent one example of such mutually beneficial relationships. However, the development of some roads like those linking Kumba with Mbalangi, Kumba with Barombi Kang as well as Kumba with Ikiliwindi indicates a way forward towards regional integration for the Meme region as a whole.

Conclusion

Regional integration in Africa has not yet been realized, be it at local, national or international levels. Most of the urban areas have grown to a primate city state thereby absorbing growth potentials to themselves at the detriment of their surrounding rural counterparts. This study has been able to identify the different rural-urban linkages using the Kumba urban market and the Kumba Regional Hospital to illustrate the origin of people and their various destinations. It also brings out the missing link in their relationship and the need to enhance regional integration for sustainable development.

The concept of rural-urban linkage and regional integration stands as a way forward towards the reduction of urban poverty and regional development. By bridging the gap between the haves and have nots, improved trade relationships and road links among others must produce a

win-win situation for both parties. This does not however exist in African cities. Most of them like Lagos in Nigeria and Douala in Cameroon, among others, have absorbed growth potentials like the attraction of rural youths and agricultural raw materials, as well as distorting the rural lifestyle through the suburbanization process in situations of urban expansion. Rather than bringing regional development, these cities have increased the poverty gap between rural and urban areas. Thus, there is a need to curb such negative relationships by changing development strategies from urban-based or rural-based to regional development. Through this, the redistribution of resources and the general growth of regions can be envisaged. This falls in line with the UN-HABITAT Agenda towards bridging the development gap between urban and rural poverty.

Recommendations

In order to bring about regional integration and development, there is definitely the need to strengthen rural-urban linkages between the said regions. This will inevitably lead to the merging of development ideas towards regional growth. To ensure this, the following recommendations have been posited.

Firstly, there is the need to change development patterns from rural-based or urban-based approach towards regional-based development. This can be achieved through the redistribution of resources as well as the transfer of industrial concentration from urban to rural areas.

Secondly, agricultural intensification through subsidies from the state and the regularization of agricultural products, as was the case with the defunct National Produce Marketing Board in Cameroon, will go a long way to reducing poor market relationships between urban buyers and rural farmers.

Finally, the need for infrastructural development in rural areas like roads, electricity provision and healthcare facilities among other basic social facilities will help reduce the rural exodus and a consequent reduction of the urban poor.

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