

Urbanisation and Development in West Africa: Challenges and Policy Implications.

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Abstract

The West African sub-region is experiencing a sprout in urbanisation. Although it is adjudged the second slowest growing region in Africa, its rate of urban growth is still quite high by world standards. In 1960, the urban component of the region was estimated to be only 19.6 percent, but in 2000 it had grown to 40.7 percent (UNCHS, 1996). Is this fast pace of urban growth synonymous with socio-economic development in the region as is seen elsewhere? Unfortunately, this is not so. Rather, urban conditions and infrastructure remain parlous with abject poverty, illegal and ghetto settlements, poor communication and accessibility; ineffectual electricity water and sanitation refuse disposal and housing services. There are peculiarities and factors that drive the urbanisation process. This contribution tries to find meaning for the seemingly intractable developmental nexus vis-à-vis rapid urbanisation within the sub region. Some policy options are proffered as sustainable alternatives to obviate this anomalous state of affairs.

Introduction

Urban growth within West Africa has been steady but not astronomical. In 1970 the percentage of the total population living in urban areas was 19.6%, but by 2000 it had increased fairly significantly to 40.7% (Table 1). By 2025, it is estimated that 58.9% of West Africans will be living in urban areas. Compared to other regions of Africa, its rate of urbanisation only supersedes that of East Africa. While Southern Africa remains the most highly urbanised closely followed by Northern Africa with 49.9% and Middle Africa with 47.6% in 2000. Other estimates project that the continent's urban population will double every 12 years (Polese, 1997).

Each country in West Africa portrays a unique system of urban development with its distinct features and characteristics within the spatial national urban system ranging from the very large and complex (Nigeria), to the very tiny and small in population and area extent (Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, and Sao Tome and Principe).

Nigeria, with the largest population in the sub-region also has the greatest number of urban centres, many more millionaire cities and the largest spatial network of towns and cities (Table 2) than any other region in

the sub-region. The population of Lagos grew quite astronomically at an average rate of 5.6 per cent per annum over and above the national average of 3 per cent for the period 1975-2000 (Polese, 1997). At the other end of the spectrum, due to their population size, more than half of the countries of the sub-region: Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mauritania, Sao Tome and Principe, Sierra Leone and Togo have five or less urban centres with population of 50,000 and above (Table 2).

Table 1: Sub-Regional Urban Growth in Africa: Percentage of total population living in urban areas

Sub-Region	1970	2000	2025
East Africa	10.3	30.0	48.0
Middle Africa	24.0	47.6	64.7
Northern Africa	36.0	49.9	65.3
Southern Africa	44.0	61.7	74.2
Western Africa	19.6	40.7	58.9

Sources: United Nations, 1988, 1989a; UNCHS, 1996.

Table 2: Urbanisation in West Africa.

Country	Total pop (m)	% urban (2000)	Pop. of national capital city	Cities with pop of 50,000+
Benin	6.7	42	221,891 (2002)	10
Burkina Faso	11.3	19	709,736 (1996)	5
Cape Verde	0.4	44	95,200 (2000)	2
Chad	9.2	44	530,965 (1993)	5
Cote' D' Iv.	15.3	46	2,877,948 (1998)	20
Eq. Guinea	0.4	48	92,900 (2003)	2
Gambia	1.2	37	34,828	11

			(2003)	
Ghana	18.8	37	1,038,000 (1990)	11
Guinea	7.5	33	9,030,200 (2003)	7
Guinea Bissau	1.3	24	203,000 (1990)	1
Liberia				
	2.8	45	-	1
Mali				
	10.1	23	203,000 (1990)	8
Mauritania				
	2.5	58	558,195 (2000)	3
Niger				
	10.7	25	674,950 (2001)	6
Nigeria				
	130	44	371,674 (1991)	156
Sao Tome and Principe				
	0.13	66	51,886 (2001)	1
Senegal				
	10.1	47	1,982,093 (2002)	12
Sierra Leone				
	3.5	37	1,982,093 (2002)	4
Togo				
	5.4	33	732,000 (2001)	2

Sources: UNCHS, 1996, UNDP (2000) Stren, R; White, R. and Whitney, J. (1992). Thomas Brinkhoff, City Population, 2004.

Conceptualisation of West African urbanisation.

Many concepts exist to portray the nature of city growth and expansion or urbanisation generally (Todaro 1986; Chadwick 1987; Mabogunje 1970; Odum 1985; Stillwell 1975; etc.), but the peculiar circumstances normally associated with African urbanisation have also been elaborated (Peil, 1986; Peil and Sada 1984; Stren *et al.*, 1992; Satterthwaite, 1997; Simon, 1992; Gugler, 1996, 1997; Adepoju, 1988; Gilbert, 1993; Mabogunje, 1990; Njor, 2003). However, Mabogunje's (1970) conceptualisation (systems model, Fig. 1) seems the most apt in modelling West African urbanisation. He

posits that rural-urban migration, as a major component of urbanisation, is influenced by several environmental factors such as the social development in health and education; economic conditions such as wages, prices, consumer preferences, the degree of commercialisation and industrial development; technological advancement in transportation, communication and mechanization; and government policies that impinge on agricultural practices, marketing organisation and population movement within each country or region. In addition the migrant is influenced by the rural control sub-system, the rural adjustment mechanism and the urban control sub-system, while the migration channels are influenced either positively or negatively by feedback.

Chadwick (1987) also highlights the adequacy of the general systems theory as a framework in modelling urbanisation phenomena within urbanizing regional systems. These include:

- i) The exponential or logistic growth of population (and its decay), and of urbanized population, of population/distance effects in cities and in the demographic transition.
- ii) Competition and exclusion, as demonstrating relative feedback patterns eg. hotelling, and rental/accessibility/land value patterns.
- iii) The rank size rule, and other Pareto distributions as well as the allometric law.
- iv) Hierarchical order relationships as in central-places and other patterns.
- v) The general operation of feedback; of conditions of homeostasis and morphogenesis; of conditions of stability and complexity; of threshold situations and homeostatic plateaux.
- vi) The phenomenon of equifinality, shown by urban systems, for example the growth of very large cities through migration at various historical times, or the urban/rural ecological relationships at various times and in various civilizations and cultures.

It is quite evident that the extant scenario within West African is in addition to the above imbued with inherent peculiarities and features within the nation states that may or may not be distinctly different from one another.

Major causes of movement to West African cities.

Much has been said and proffered about the causal explanations for urbanward migration. The following appear to be the main reason: rural underdevelopment; need for education; urban bias; and political and administrative changes.

Rural underdevelopment

This remains a major push for migration into cities. The poverty in rural areas is far greater than that existing in the urban areas (World Bank, 2002, Population Reports, 2003). With most residents engaged in rudimentary agricultural production, output is limited and seasonal. Most women and children spend several hours of the day in search of wood fuel and water. Existence is basically at the subsistence level, and the basic infrastructure and services such as electricity, potable water, schools and accessibility are either in deplorable conditions, unavailable or scarce. Any decent level of living, therefore, can only be attained in the urban centres, leading to continuous and unrestrained movement from the rural hinterland to the towns and cities.

The need for education

Another causal factor for migration into West African cities is the need for education (Peil and Sada, 1984, Mabogunje, 1989, Potter and Llyod-Evans, 1998). Other than primary schools, most secondary and tertiary institutions are located in the cities. In Nigeria for instance, all the 59 universities are located in towns and cities. Since education uplifts a migrant's status, both socially and economically, (job prospects are higher), they opt to be educated even when it is often difficult. On attainment of better education most migrants can find formal jobs and get lifted out of the informal sector.

Urban bias

A major constraint to equitable regional development within the sub-region is urban bias (Roberts, 1978, 1995; Lipton, 1977, 1982). This has since independence meant that development remains skewed in favour of the urban centres, with regional inequalities in the national spatial system. As this happens more people are compelled to move to where there is hope of a better livelihood. As has been contended by several other researchers, 'urban bias' policies "translate into a higher standard of living for urban citizens" (Bradshaw and Nooran, 1997:8), and rural dwellers in West Africa remain virtual outsiders in the gains of development.

Political and administrative changes

Political development and power shifts since the independence has resulted in several political and administrative restructuring into states, provinces, prefectures, counties, local government areas etc. In Nigeria, for instance, states have increased from 12 in 1967 to 36 in 1996, resulting in new headquarters and administrative centres, leading to more migration from the surrounding countryside into them.

The features of West African urbanisation: a typology.

Mabogunje (1968) has attempted a categorization of African cities and posits that they “are less differentiated by function and area” to be intrinsically based on the interaction between two histories of pre-colonial urbanisation and a colonial quasi-industrial urbanisation. The typology of West African urbanisation shows clearly the following features: primate cities, port city capitals, secondary cities and new capital cities.

Primate Cities:

Nearly all the nations within the sub-region have a great proportion of the urban population resident in the national capital. However, the countries that have attained a primate status (more than 25% of total urban population resident in national capital) are Benin, Chad, Cote d’Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, G. Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo (Table 3). The status of Lagos, Nigeria is rather unique. It was until 1996 the capital city of Nigeria, but at the moment its population is more than 5 million residents, while estimates by the UNDP (2003) have it that including greater Lagos, the population is more than 13 million, which is over a quarter of the total urban population of Nigeria. It also has over 65% of all industrial establishments in the whole country.

Table 3: Primacy in West Africa: Some apt Indicators.

Country	Total population	Population of urban cities	% of urban pop % of urban pop
Benin	6,752,569	658,572	26.3
Cape Verde	434,625	95,200	-
Chad	9,253,500	530,965	29.5
Cote d’Ivoire	15,366,672	2,877,948	40.5
Gambia	1,364,507	1,364,507	80.6
Ghana	18,845,265	1,038,000	14.6
G. Bissau	1,360,800	203,000	67.7
Mali	10,179,170	10,179,170	38.0
Mauritania	2,508,159	558,195	37.2
Niger	10,790,352	674,950	32.1
Senegal	10,127,809	1,983,093	46.1
Sierra Leone	3,515,812	469,776	26.1
Togo +	5,429,300	375,499	25.0

Various Sources

Within the region many cities have hit a million and continue to be significant centres of economic and administrative organisation in their respective countries. Nigeria has the greatest number of these, with Lagos, Ibadan, Oshogbo, Ilorin and Benin representing the highly urbanised south west Kano, an expansive settlement, and the most important economic and cultural nerve centre, is the largest metropolis in the north. The colonial and administrative heritage of Kaduna has made it another important centre, as well as Maiduguri (the epicentre of the Kanuri kingdom), Zaria (an emirate and a famous University town) and Jos (an important tin mining and tourism centre). In the south and south eastern Nigeria urban centres that are above the million mark include Enugu (the defunct capital of former eastern Nigeria and now an important coal mining and administrative centre), Port Harcourt (the headquarters of Nigeria's petrochemical industry) and Aba (a highly enterprising business centre).

Table 4: Millionaire Cities of West Africa.

Country	City	Population
Cote d'Ivoire	Abidjan	2,877,948 (1998)
Ghana	Accra	1,038,000 (1990)
Guinea	Conakry	1,092,936 (1996)
Mali	Bamako	1,016,167 (1998)
Nigeria	Lagos	5,195,247 (1991)
	Kano	2,166,554
	Ibadan	1,835,300
	(Kaduna, Benin, Port Harcourt, Maiduguri, Zaria, Ilorin, Jos and Aba)*	Also estimated at over 1 million in 2002
Senegal	Dakar	1,983,093 (2002)

Sources: National Population Commission, Nigeria, (1996, 2002).

Thomas Brinkhoff, www.CityPopulation, 2004.

Port City Capitals

Due to historical circumstances most West African countries have access to the sea, and tended to develop inwards and as a result, there are large settlements in the ports and other proximate centres. Most of the national

capital cities therefore are port towns. These include: Porto Novo (Benin), Malabo (Equatorial Guinea), Monrovia (Liberia), Lome (Togo), Freetown (Sierra Leone), Dakar (Senegal), Sao Tome (Sao Tome), Abidjan (Cote d'Ivoire), Nouakchott (Mauritania), Bissau (Guinea Bissau), Conakry (Guinea) Accra (Ghana) and Banjul (Gambia).

Growth and Proportion of Secondary cities

Secondary cities (or medium sized cities, usually accommodating between 200-350,000 inhabitants or more, but not exceeding 1000,000 inhabitants) are a major component of West African urbanisation and the urban maturation process. Although much of the urbanisation in many countries is "single city based" a lot of the urban population is normally found in secondary cities. Hierarchically, both in functionality, political prominence, industrialization and amenities provision, they are placed second to the dominant capital city which invariably is also the primate city in most national city systems within the region.

Nigeria has the widest spread and greatest number of secondary cities in West Africa. Due to its political structure of 36 states, each state capital city is invariably a secondary city while Lagos is the primate city with over 12 million inhabitants. It is also the centre of commerce with over 60 of all industrial establishments in the country. Abuja, the new capital city is rightfully a secondary city through its newness, and with a population of about 300,000.

The advantages of secondary cities are various. Rondinelli (1983) argues that secondary cities provide (in both concrete and spatial terms) "a de-concentrated, articulated and integrated system of cities." According to him, secondary cities provide the following advantages within a regional system of cities.

- a) Pressures on the largest cities are relieved in terms of problems and amenity provision in housing, transportation, pollution, employment and poverty.
- b) Regional inequalities are reduced through the spread of benefits of urbanisation through the secondary cities.
- c) Rural economies are stimulated through the provision of services, facilities and markets for agricultural products and the absorption of surplus labour as labour efficiency is achieved in agricultural production.
- d) There is increased and decentralized regional administrative capacity.
- e) Due to interaction and flow of resources, poverty is alleviated in the intermediate cities.

Either through the generative or parasitic perspective, Rondinelli further highlights that the extent to which secondary cities influence regional development is dependent on the following attributes:

- i) Local leaders identify their success with that of their city and its region.
- ii) Local leaders invest in their city
- iii) They are innovative.
- iv) They are aggressive.
- v) The national government supports the internal growth of the city and its region
- vi) The economic activities within the city are linked to its hinterland through mutually beneficial processes of exchange.
- vii) The economic activities within the city are linked to each other to generate multiplier effects.
- viii) Economic activities within the city are organised to generate income for local residents and promote internal demand.
- ix) The public and private sectors cooperate to promote economic activities that generate widespread participation and distribution of benefits.
- x) The willingness of the city's leaders to promote and encourage social and behavioural changes responsive to the city's residents.

New capital cities.

The development of new capital cities (Table 5.1) in some countries in Sub-Saharan Africa has tended to increase new settlement development and urban-ward migration hence urbanisation. Some of these cities have been created merely for political reasons (Dodoma, Tanzania), as well as for enhanced national cohesion (Abuja, Nigeria).

Table 5: New Capital Cities of West Africa

Country	New capital	Old capital
Nigeria	Abuja	Lagos
Cote d'Ivoire	Yamoussoukro	Abidjan
Country	New name	Former name
Gambia	Banjul	Bathurst
Chad	N'Djamena	Fort Lamy

Source: Stock, R. (1995) *Africa South of the Sahara*. Guilford Press, 19.

Urbanisation and development: growth without development?

As enunciated by Gore (1984:149/50) "Urbanisation is not in itself bad. The problem is the spatial and hierarchical distribution of the population. In the end, developing countries need to bridge 'the void between the ubiquitous villages and parasitic great cities' by building a 'proper' Loschian hierarchy of urban centres which ranges from small towns to intermediate cities and national metropolis." This primarily is the problem with West African urbanisation, and due to the apparent maldistribution and malfunctionality of the urban centres development is barely evident. In essence there has been growth in urbanisation but not development.

It would seem that far from the predicament of people wishing to live mainly in towns, the question is whether the urban areas require them. An analysis of the level of poverty (urban-rural differentials), infant mortality, life expectancy at birth, literacy level, and the incidence of HIV/AIDS among the countries of the region shows a deplorable state of affairs (Table 6).

The utterly vulnerable

In this category are Niger, Chad, Liberia, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Mauritania, Benin, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone and Sao Tome. Due to the harsh political, socio-economic and environmental conditions that exist in these countries development has been quite elusive, even with rising levels of urbanisation. Liberia and Sierra Leone have remained under civil strife for several years with catastrophic consequences. Niger, Chad and Mauritania lie within or at the fringe of the Sahara desert with drought conditions that result in food shortages and famine. In 2004 the FAO (Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations) warned that drought and food shortages were imminent due to the influence of locusts that were devastating Niger in particular. The FAO further estimated that more than 2.5 million people and 32,000 children would be affected by acute food shortages.

Table 6: Other Development Indices for West Africa (2004).

Country	Poverty U/R	Infant mortality Rate			Life Exp. at birth (m/f)	GDP \$	FDI \$m	Literacy	Ext. Debt. (USD)
		1980	1990	1997					
Benin	33	107	90	80	48/53	440	51	39.8	1,308.1
Burkina Faso	-	66	50	39	45/46	300	11	12.8	221.8
Cape Verde	-	143	123	111	67/73	1490	14	75.7	887.7
Chad	63/67	105	91	83	44/46				17,680.0
Cote d' Ivoire	-	137	117	103	41/41	660	389	49.7	28,774.0
Eq. Guinea	-	154	132	118	48/50				439.3
Gambia	64	157	134	120	53/55	310	60	37.8	3,392.8
Ghana	27/34	163	141	128	56/59	320	137	73.8	889.0
Guinea	40	153	200	132	49/49	430	8	41	2,040.8
Guinea Bissau	-	180	159	145	44/47	140	2	39.6	2,945.5
Liberia	-	117	101	88	41/42	130	n/a	n/a	2,213.6
Mali	-	146	124	110	48/49	291	129	19	1,290.0
Mauritania	57	99	84	74	51/54				28,660.0
Niger	52/66	-	-	-	46/46	200	31	17.1	267.3
Nigeria	32/50	87	68	60	51/52	320	1200	66.8	3,256.8
Sao Tome and Principe	-	189	195	160	67/73				1,163.8
Senegal	-	105	91	83	51/55	550	78	39.3	1,295.1
Sierra Leone	53/76				33/35	150	8	36	
Togo	32	98	81	70	48/51	310	20	59.6	1,295.1

Sources: UN (2002 and 2004); World Bank (2001) World Development Indicators; African Development Bank (1999) African Development Report 1999. OUP.

Most of the urban population in these countries is in the capital cities and a greater part of the country is rural countryside normally virtually inaccessible, with the barest forms of infrastructure or services and therefore sparsely populated. In fact in Liberia, Guinea Bissau and Sao Tome only their capital cities have populations of over 50,000. With foreign

direct investment (FDI) of less than USD 50million respectively and GDP of less than USD 300 they are very vulnerable.

Policy implications.

It is evident that there has been a lot of policy failures within each of the countries within the region. For instance, according to UNDIESA (1981) policies to slow down rural-urban migration have been less successful due to the following reasons:

1. Weak government developmental policies (e.g. much voluntarism, but little compliance enforcement);
2. Failure of governments to perceive a conflict between excessive urban growth and national development;
3. Reliance on indirect measures of control with little effort to evaluate or coordinate their efforts on urbanisation and migration processes;
4. Emphasis on non-economic policy levers (housing and services) rather than stronger economic policy levers (jobs and prices) or on factors influencing the salience of economic factors – information and accessibility;
5. Lack of coordination between rural and urban development strategies, particularly on control of a specific migration pattern at different levels of the administrative hierarchy.

Policies that would obviate imbalances in the urban growth processes of the region can be redressed with the following strategies. These must be country specific to reflect salient and individual peculiarities.

- a) Each country (particularly those that have primate cities) should put in place a programme to revitalise and sustain secondary cities to reduce the pressure on the national capital.
- b) As a major effort towards enhanced sanitation, there should be within each country government sponsored community based refuse disposal programmes.
- c) Unavailable land is a major draw back in sustainable urban housing. Adequate housing will only be possible through the strengthening of mortgage institutions that would be driven by the urban communities, while government makes land available.
- d) Transportation;
- e) Poverty alleviation;
- f) Good governance.

Johnson (1970) has proved with historical evidence from England, Japan, Belgium and the USA that regional development requires ‘agrarian

commercialisation' which in turn requires the creation of a network of small market towns with the spatial sphere of the nations.

Conclusion

The development of towns and cities in the national urban systems of West Africa as elsewhere deserves greater study and attention as many more people cluster into them. Even though they are centres of economic growth and provide the synergy for further regional development, the development is disproportional and dysfunctional.

The West African scenario indicates that the allure of urban centres and their growth will intensify in the next few years through self-propulsion cum economic impulses and through political and administrative changes. Governmental and proactive policy response needs to be fast and appropriate for sustainable livelihoods and a healthy urban environment.

A major area of concern remains the deplorable state of infrastructure and services in most of the urban centres of the sub-region, and the concomitant admixture of complexities and weaknesses of the political, social and economic sectors. Good governance and pro-poor policies would in the long term alleviate the extant urban poverty that remains a hydra-headed monster, and capacity needs to be enhanced both in the private sector, among CBOs, NGOs and within governmental institutions alike.

National urban development policies and strategies must tilt towards checking unrestrained urban growth of primate city systems in order to achieve a preponderance of medium-sized or secondary city systems through deconcentration and decentralization.

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