



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

RurbanAfrica  
African Rural-City Connections

## RURBANAFRICA POLICY BRIEF NO. 3

January 2016

### INTRODUCTION

#### **African's Rural-Urban Transitions and the New Global Agendas**

This Brief of the RurbanAfrica (African Rural-City Connections) project highlights the central role of positive rural-urban linkages in the new global agendas that will frame sustainable development in the next 15 years. Reducing regional inequalities is increasingly recognised as key to reducing poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, and depends largely on effective decentralisation and place-based policies. These have the potential to foster stronger rural-urban linkages - the interactions between agriculture, manufacturing and services that are at the basis of diversified and more resilient local economies. Reducing inequalities, however, crucially requires stronger and more accountable governance systems and inclusive urbanisation.

#### **The Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda**

This past September, the 193 member countries of the United Nations unanimously adopted the extremely ambitious 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 Sustainable Development Goals and 169 targets. These set out the development agenda for the next 15 years, for all countries and all people. The goals and targets "are integrated and indivisible and balance the three dimensions of sustainable development". They include ambitious targets on sustaining economic growth, on eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities, and on achieving environmental sustainability.

Integrating and implementing all of these goals and targets will be a tremendous challenge and there is a large potential for conflicts between them. In terms of economic growth and inequality, it will require a GDP annual growth rate of 7 per cent or more for the least developed countries, with even higher growth rates for the poorest 40 per cent of a country's population, and a doubling of the agricultural productivity and incomes of small-scale food producers.

Simultaneously, it will require universal provision of safe and affordable water and sanitation, ending hunger and ending all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. And it will require meeting numerous environmental targets, such as reducing the adverse per capita environmental impact of cities. Such an ambitious agenda will be complemented by the New Urban Agenda to be adopted at the Habitat III meeting in October 2016, which includes a specific focus on the direct relationship between positive urban-rural development and sustainable urbanisation.

### **Combining rapid per capita economic growth with declining inequality in sub-Saharan Africa: the importance of rural-urban linkages**

A commitment to both rapid economic growth and declining inequality has important policy implications vis-a-vis rural-urban transitions. There has been much debate, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, over such issues as whether urbanisation is proceeding too fast or too slow for the economy, whether economic investments are biased towards urban or rural areas, and whether smallholders need support to become more productive or whether larger more commercial farms need to be given the opportunity to expand unheeded. Such debates point to the importance of rural-urban linkages in achieving both economic growth and reduced inequalities, but focus attention on rather crude oppositions that are of questionable policy relevance.

Stronger rural-urban linkages have the potential to foster spatial inclusion, linking rural areas, people and enterprises with emerging and established urban centres that can provide services, access to markets and to non-farm employment.

***In rapidly urbanising countries, successfully integrating sustainable development goals and the new urban agenda into the rural-urban transition will lie at the heart of any attempt to meet the targets set for 2030.***

## EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

### **Rural development and changes in agricultural production systems in the RurbanAfrica project locations**

The influence of urbanisation is clear in all the RurbanAfrica rural locations, most notably those in dynamic rural areas of Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania. There, commercial farming of 'new' food crops has replaced traditional cash crops as well as subsistence food production. These transformations are driven by demand spurred by rapidly changing dietary patterns, primarily among emergent middle classes. For example, in Cameroon the traditional cash crop, coffee, is being replaced by potatoes, maize and vegetables destined for domestic and regional urban markets.

This trend is supported by improved infrastructure and a wider range of transport options, including trucks and motorbikes, as well as enhanced and more affordable mobile telephony. Parallel to this is the inflow in the rural areas of traders of all kinds and size, from local traders to wholesalers with arrangements with urban-based end-buyers and distributors, sometimes connected not only to domestic but also to regional and overseas markets. This in turn reflects the increasing diversification of trading channels in these agriculturally dynamic regions.

Interest in agricultural production as an economic investment also seems to be growing among urban-based investors, usually involved in the acquisition of much larger plots than those traded among local smallholders.

***Urban and regional demands are key drivers of changes in agricultural production and trade systems; in turn, these are at the root of rural transformations, including increased competition for land.***

### **Income diversification, mobility patterns and rural-urban transitions**

Transformations in agriculture and land distribution shape the livelihoods of rural households in Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania. While farming remains in most cases the key income-generating activity, in all project locations it is increasingly complemented with non-agricultural employment which revolves around rural service centres and small market towns. These seem to be especially important in both attracting new skilled migrants and in retaining local residents, especially young people. At the same time, there are strong indications of emerging new migration flows between rural areas, often seasonal wage labourers arriving at peak production times.

Migration can therefore no longer be considered as a unidirectional, permanent movement from rural to urban areas. There are, however, substantial differences in the mobility of different groups. On the one hand, urban residents move to rural areas where they invest in high-value agricultural production, including the purchase of land, trade and other processing and transport activities. On the other hand, poor rural groups, often smallholders with little land who are unable to enter the emerging dynamic food markets, increasingly engage in seasonal movement to work on large commercial farms as wage labourers or move to urban centres for unskilled and semi-skilled employment.

***The increasing importance of rural non-farm activities and of highly diverse mobility patterns reflects on the one hand the emergence of commercial, specialised farming connected to a wide range of urban and rural areas; on the other hand, it also reflects the gradual dispossession of low-income groups.***

## **POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **The need for inclusive urbanisation**

A key ingredient of successful attempts to combining economic growth and declining inequality is likely to be more inclusive urbanisation. Some of the groups most vulnerable during the course of rural-urban transitions are those that cannot obtain a secure urban home or job but find their rural opportunities declining. Alternatively families that successfully negotiate the rural-urban transition are often engaged in both rural and urban activities, and are intentionally multi-local.

Unfortunately, cities and towns that are growing rapidly, often as much the result of natural population growth as urbanisation, rarely plan for their population growth. In particular, they do not plan for the growing number of low-income residents who will not be able to afford formal housing or secure formal jobs. Planning regulations are designed for better-off residents, and intentionally or unintentionally work against the poorest residents.

In cities and towns around the urbanising world, this has led to the emergence of often very large informal economies and settlements, which are critical to the functioning of the local economy, but are not formally condoned. Informality often represents a somewhat awkward compromise. It is less exclusive than evicting the residents and closing down the small enterprises in the informal sector, but is in effect creating a form of exclusion within the city or town.

From a planning perspective, more inclusive urbanisation in conditions of relative poverty would require advanced planning that opens up land for urban expansion, and also for the safe and liveable densification of low-income settlements in town and city centres. It would require better relations between authorities and the organisations in informal settlements and in sectors of the informal economy, and eventually more supportive formal regulatory frameworks. More generally, it would require cities and towns more accommodating of low income residents and migrants, and of other groups excluded from urban areas or benefits. This includes women in most instances, but also, for example, minority ethnic groups, whose access to spaces, services and markets is being compromised. Such measures of inclusion are actively supportive of a more flourishing urban economy, and in reverse measures favouring economic growth need to be those that also favour more inclusion and equality.

***More inclusive urbanisation is a key ingredient of combining economic growth with reduced poverty. Experience indicates that governments are not able to control urbanisation rates directly, and that attempts to do so can have very negative consequences, especially for poor groups for whom migration and multi-locality are essential coping strategies.***

### **Achieving the goals through support to urban-rural linkages: spatially-blind or place-based policy approaches?**

Historically, urbanisation has been recognised as central to economic growth, but most urban growth strategies have accepted rising inequality and declining urban environmental conditions as unfortunate necessities, best addressed when the necessary economic resources are available. As recently as 2009, the World Bank's World Development Report subtitled "Reshaping Economic Geography" explicitly excluded "the social and environmental effects of a changing economic geography" from the report, effectively abnegating responsibility for the social and environmental consequences of their recommended approach to the rural-urban transition. This is based largely on spatially-blind, 'one-size fits all' policies that include strengthening formal institutions (to enforce the rule of law and protect private assets), investing in transport infrastructure and create larger internal markets. By focusing on dynamic areas around larger urban centres, these policies run the very concrete risk of exacerbating economic underdevelopment in remote rural areas, leading to greater regional and territorial inequalities and poverty.

Alternatively, a place-based approach puts at its centre both formal and informal institutions and integrated, multi-sectoral and comprehensive strategies. The explicit geographic focus builds on local conditions and advantages and in so doing aims to increase resilience and reduce regional inequalities. The bottom-up approach involves local stakeholders in planning and implementing development strategies, stimulating dialogue and co-production of solutions between local government and civil society, and greater transparency and accountability. This territorial approach to rural development is increasingly supported by international agencies, including the OECD and the European Commission.

***Achieving the SDGs in low income countries will require combining economic growth with poverty reduction and environmental sustainability. Place-based approaches that support more inclusive urbanisation and rural-urban linkages that foster a more dynamic rural sector, including dynamic agricultural systems, can play a key role. Reducing inequalities, however, also requires accountable, competent and resourced governance systems.***

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The African Rural-City Connections (RurbanAfrica) project explores the connections between rural transformations, mobility, and urbanisation processes and analyses how these contribute to an understanding of the scale, nature and location of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. The RurbanAfrica project is advancing the research agenda on rural-city connections in sub-Saharan Africa by addressing a range of crucial components: agricultural transformations, rural livelihoods, city dynamics, and access to services in cities. Our aim is to generate new insights into the relationship between rural-city connections and poverty dynamics.

The research is organized into six work packages: Agricultural transformation, rural livelihoods, city dynamics, access to services, knowledge platform and policy dialogue, and synthesis, dissemination and management. Central to the approach is the on-going integration of policy research, policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and empirical research.

The empirical research is carried out in the four Sub-Saharan African countries comprised in the project; Cameroon, Ghana, Tanzania and Rwanda. For the different work packages the focus is respectively on selected dynamic rural areas, a rapidly growing intermediate-sized city and the largest city in each country. The research applies a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods, comprising questionnaire surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, observations and different participatory rural appraisal sessions. See the Work package reports published on the project website [rurbanafrika@ku.dk](mailto:rurbanafrika@ku.dk) for further elaborations on the methodology.

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## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** African Rural-City Connections (RurbanAfrica)

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FP7 Framework Programme for Research of the European Union –  
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April 2012 – March 2016 (48 months)

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## BUDGET

EU contribution: 2 694 863,75 €.

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## WEBSITE

[www.rurbanafrika.ku.dk](http://www.rurbanafrika.ku.dk)

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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## FURTHER READING

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**The reports and paper can be downloaded from [www.rurbanafrika.ku.dk](http://www.rurbanafrika.ku.dk)**