



EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

RurbanAfrica
African Rural-City Connections

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INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth and final Brief of the RurbanAfrica (African Rural-City Connections) project. Much has happened since the inception of the project. New global agendas have recognised the significant role of urbanisation and the need for stronger rural-urban linkages for sustainable development, and national policy conversations increasingly highlight the important synergies between different economic sectors and governance systems. Drawing on the findings of the project and on the final national policy dialogues, this Brief focuses on the challenges and opportunities ahead, and on what can be learned from the RurbanAfrica project experience.

Documenting profound transformations in both rural and urban areas

As its starting point, the RurbanAfrica project questioned whether widely held assumptions on sub-Saharan Africa's development trajectories are supported by current evidence. At the heart of these assumptions is a disconnect between on the one hand an overwhelmingly 'traditional' agricultural sector that fails to support structural transformation in rural development, and on the other hand rapid urbanisation rates that rather than reflecting economic growth are a major cause of increases in urban poverty and the growth of slums. Somehow missing in these debates is an explicit attention to the ways in which urbanisation and rural transformations are linked, and their potential impacts on socially equitable and environmentally sustainable economic development. This in turn is reflected in largely inadequate governance responses to rural and urban transformations which all too often end up increasing inequalities rather than supporting inclusive urbanisation and rural development.

Rural transitions in dynamic agricultural areas

Our work on rural transformations; *Agricultural transformations, livelihoods and rural-city connections: Policy implications for regional development* (Griet Steel et al. 2016), focused on emerging dynamic agricultural areas in Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania, where production is dominated by smallholders and the introduction of new crops or the expansion of traditional ones is the engine of increases in aggregate production and incomes. None of these locations fit the picture of 'traditional' smallholder agricultural systems, and while they are not representative of the whole sector they nonetheless provide useful insights on the nature of rural transformations in the three countries. All study areas share some common characteristics.

First, there is a remarkable increase in the number of external investors, attracted by a booming production, which in turn is driven by domestic, regional and international demand. This includes these new actors purchasing or leasing land, spurring changes in land tenure systems and land use patterns, with mixed consequences on indigenous smallholders who may gain from more flexible access to land but also be excluded from it because of rising land prices. External investment is closely linked to the growing numbers of seasonal migrants employed as wage agricultural labourers.

Second, dramatically improved transport infrastructure and the widespread use of mobile phones and ICT, including access to mobile banking and support networks, seem to favour smallholders: traders now come to settlements, rather than farmers having to go to markets, reflecting their stronger negotiating position.

Third, there appears to be a substantial increase in mobility and in the diversification of income sources among local households, which overall contribute to more secure livelihoods. Migration is of course closely linked to better connectivity; but it is also related to local employment opportunities, especially in non-farm activities. If these are not available, people will move to where they are. The nature of the predominant crop largely determines whether it contributes to the diversification of the local economic base and whether added value is retained and re-invested locally through processing and other activities. This is where there are notable differences between the case study locations, showing that perishable crops such as vegetables, which require quick harvesting, handling and transport, are far more likely than industrial crops such as palm oil and rubber to contribute to the emergence of 'urbanising' villages offering employment, goods and services to their own residents and those of the surrounding areas.

Urban expansion, mobility and access to services

Our work on urban growth and access to services for urban residents; *Urban Policy Briefs: Implications of mobility and urban growth for planning and development in Ghana, Cameroon and Tanzania* (Katherine V. Gough et al. 2016) and *Governance of services in low-income city communities* (Ian Smout et al. 2016), focused on the primate city and a secondary town each in Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania. As in the rural locations, the case study areas share common characteristics. The first is that migrants to these urban centres are a diverse group with regard to age, sex, wealth status and reasons for migrating, a finding that invites caution in making generalisations about migrants, especially in assuming that migration is an important factor in the increase of urban poverty (see <http://www.e-pages.dk/ku/1208/>, <http://www.e-pages.dk/ku/1209/> and <http://www.e-pages.dk/ku/1207/> for the Urban Policy Briefs on *Implications of mobility and urban growth for planning and development* in Ghana, Cameroon and Tanzania respectively). This is clearly not the case.

Second, in the majority of cases migrants intend their stay to be permanent rather than temporary. This means that they are prepared to invest in the city, which in many cases entails a loosening of their ties to rural home areas. This is especially the case when rural assets such as land have limited value.

Third, and perhaps the most significant finding, migrants do not contribute substantially to the physical expansion of urban centres into peripheral areas. This is in fact driven by well-established and often urban-born residents who have accumulated enough assets to invest in home ownership, but for whom the choice of location is limited by high land values. In the absence of housing finance and with highly unregulated rental markets, cheaper, un-serviced peripheral land is the best option for incremental house construction. Recent migrants, in contrast, tend to reside in central locations in the city. Such urban expansion has wider implications. On the planning side, it is happening informally, without basic infrastructure and services in place, making it both technically challenging and financially costly to provide them once the areas are already relatively densely built-up. Moreover, the growing number of residents moving across long distances between residential and work places in the absence of adequate mass transport systems is clearly a major challenge in the largest cities, where being stuck in traffic jams for hours on end is part and parcel of city life.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

New opportunities, emerging and remaining challenges

The findings from the RurbanAfrica case studies document profound transformations of what are essentially success stories of economic growth. Rural areas and rural livelihoods are changing, and in the dynamic ‘hotspots’ new connections with urban areas are emerging and old linkages are strengthened. Flows of finance, goods and people are more intensive and shape rural economies, creating new employment opportunities in non-farm sectors. Urban centres, on the other hand, continue to grow both demographically and physically, reflecting their role in national economies where the share of industry and services in both GDP and employment is steadily increasing, and where a growing middle class of established residents aiming for the security of homeownership drives urban expansion.

Sustained economic growth is pivotal in achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; what remains to be seen, however, is whether the trajectories documented by the RurbanAfrica project also support the equally central goals of eradicating poverty and reducing inequalities, and achieving environmental sustainability.

In rural areas, a key challenge is how to support dynamic ‘hotspots’ while enhancing the opportunities for those who lose out and ensure environmental sustainability. While external investors are essential to the economic success of these locations, landless and unskilled groups are likely to be increasingly marginalised from farming, while agriculture relies on the intensive use of natural resources, including water, and on chemical inputs. Moreover, while more flexible land markets can improve access to local young people and provide cash to local households, the widespread lack of transparency in land transactions is a source of concern. Essentially, the challenge is how to ensure the equitable distribution of the resources generated by new forms of local production. Local governments can play an important role in this, by encouraging the creation of local non-farm employment through the provision of basic infrastructure and market places, by enforcing regulations that protect local environments and by ensuring transparent land transactions. To do so, however, they need support from national governments.

A second key challenge is how to enhance the benefits of wider mobility patterns. As migration becomes a pervasive element of livelihoods, it also becomes increasingly diverse. Any assumption that migrants are a homogenous group is increasingly inaccurate, and policies that attempt to curb migration and mobility are, at best, ineffective. What can be broadly termed as ‘multi-locality’ raises a whole new set of issues with regards to citizenship rights and responsibilities. These include the payment of taxes to local authorities, an important issue in rural areas with growing numbers of urban-based entrepreneurs; at the other end of the spectrum, it includes access to basic services and security of tenure in destination areas, either urban or rural, for recent migrants who are typically renting housing and agricultural land, often through semi-informal secondary rights.

With regard to urban expansion, a key challenge is how to overcome a situation where urban standards are unenforceable and may be unenforceable at scale. These include minimum size residential plots that are largely unrealistic and which result in the informalisation of entire neighbourhoods, especially low-income ones. More appropriate planning tools are needed to support, rather than exclude, large proportions of the population of rapidly growing cities such as Dar es Salaam, Accra and Douala. Crucially, these include low-income groups as well as middle-class, established residents.

But perhaps the central challenge in all three countries is that of preparing for anticipated urban population growth. Local governments are critically positioned to support the growing urban populations, but have neither the capacity nor the incentive to take up this challenge. It is critical to move towards getting local governments to provide the right support for their expanding populations, extending across the range of private, government and owner-occupier-led housing solutions.

Learning from the RurbanAfrica project: linking rural and urban issues

The RurbanAfrica project has brought together multi-disciplinary teams in three countries, covering a large number of case study locations in both rural and urban areas. Our ambition was to bring together different perspectives to document how urbanisation dynamics and rural transformations are inextricably linked and require what can be termed a new governance architecture. During the lifetime of the project, several international organisations shared this thinking, focusing on the potential of territorial, place-based approaches for regional, rural-urban development, as discussed in our third Policy Brief; *RurbanAfrica Policy Brief No. 3* (Jytte Agergaard et al. 2016) (see: www.e-pages.dk/ku/1187/).

Despite this increased recognition of the relevance of rural-urban linkages for sustainable development, and perhaps also despite the growing recognition of the significance of urbanisation and its related opportunities and challenges, there are still substantial barriers that need overcoming. These were especially highlighted by the participants in the national policy dialogues held as part of the RurbanAfrica project in Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania. Sectoral policies still largely dominate national development strategies, where the promotion of structural transformation of agriculture through increased productivity and mechanisation rarely considers its implications for rural livelihoods. On the other hand, discouraging migration to the cities continues to be seen as an important tool to manage urban growth, despite the fact that it is largely ineffective and possibly based on inaccurate assumptions. Effectively, sectoral policies also have a spatial dimension – either rural or urban – and rural-urban linkages remain a policy grey area. At the same time, however, participants in the national policy dialogues identified stronger and more accountable local governance systems as key to addressing rising inequalities and environmental concerns in both rural and urban areas, and especially across them.

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 rurbanfrica@ku.dk for further elaborations on the methodology.

PROJECT IDENTITY

PROJECT NAME	African Rural-City Connections (RurbanAfrica)
COORDINATOR	Jytte Agergaard, Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen, ja@ign.ku.dk
CONSORTIUM	Loughborough University Leicestershire, United Kingdom National University of Rwanda Butare, Rwanda Sokoine University of Agriculture Morogoro, Tanzania The International Institute for Environment and Development - IIED London, United Kingdom Université Toulouse II Le Mirail Toulouse, France University of Copenhagen Copenhagen, Denmark University of Dschang Dschang, Cameroon

University of Ghana
Accra, Ghana

University of Utrecht
Utrecht, Netherlands

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WEBSITE

www.rurbanafrika.ku.dk

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact: Jytte Agergaard, ja@ign.ku.dk

FURTHER READING

Griet Steel, Paul van Lindert, Niels Fold and Tobias Mynborg (2016): Agricultural transformations, livelihoods and rural-city connections: Policy implications for regional development, RurbanAfrica Work Package 1 and 2, Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen, Denmark

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All publications and material from the RurbanAfrica project can be accessed at www.rurbanafrika.ku.dk/publications