



# EUROPEAN POLICY BRIEF

RurbanAfrica  
African Rural-City Connections

## RurbanAfrica Policy Brief No. 2

13 JUNE 2014

### INTRODUCTION

This second Brief of the RurbanAfrica (African Rural-City Connections) project reports in more detail on the policy challenges of supporting positive interactions between an agricultural sector that is undergoing profound transformations and in the process changing the nature of rural livelihoods, with increased mobility and diversification of sources of income, and the rapid growth of urban centres where access to basic infrastructure and services is far from adequate.

### EVIDENCE AND ANALYSIS

#### RurbanAfrica Country Policy Dialogues

There is still a widespread tendency among national governments in low-income and rapidly urbanising countries to view rural and urban development as alternative, rather than complementary. The aim of the RurbanAfrica project is to explore and describe the multiple links between rural and urban areas. This includes getting rural and urban policies better coordinated, and considering the urban (policy) implications of rural development, along with the rural (policy) implications of urban development.

To ensure that the project findings respond to stakeholders' needs, promote cross-sectoral dialogues, and reach a wide audience, initial policy dialogue meetings were held in the four countries included in this project – Tanzania, Rwanda, Cameroon and Ghana. This first set of dialogues stimulated discussions and elicited views from policy-makers, academic researchers, and civil society organisations on the key issues explored in the country case studies. It also provided feedback to the research teams on the country-level state-of-the-art reviews, and helped sharpen the research questions to be addressed in the fieldwork.

The dialogues have shown that there is clearly great interest among policy-makers in 'how to get urbanization right', especially in those countries with rapid urbanization rates and where population distribution is seen as a policy issue of high importance, while at the same time ensuring that current transformations in agricultural production systems support rural development. There are also substantial challenges, as described below.

### **Land remains an overarching issue in all countries**

In both rural and urban contexts, access to land is often problematic. A key rural issue is the inadequate knowledge on the proportion of land that is fertile and suitable for agricultural production, which is often over-estimated, while at the same time the impact of environmental change on land degradation tends to be under-estimated. A key urban issue is poorly documented and unequal land ownership and control, and a tendency for land contestation to prevent the efficient and equitable use of urban land. Lack of coordination between different sectoral ministries means that double-counting of land for specific projects is common. Participants from the Tanzanian and the Rwandan meetings estimated that summing up all the different agricultural and infrastructure projects, the land needed might be considerably more than what is available.

***There is clearly an urgent need for improved cross-collaboration on land use planning between different ministries and government agencies.***

In rural areas, such information should include productivity levels. In many cases, land productivity declines rapidly with switches from extensive to intensive agriculture, with serious implications for large-scale agricultural development projects. The desire to access fertile land is also an important driver of the growing movement of population from areas with high rates of land degradation, such as the central regions of Tanzania and Northern Ghana. Land speculation is however also an important factor, and in many cases it is linked to transformations in agricultural production systems. Land speculation also affects small-scale farmers in peri-urban areas who are bought out of their farms but have difficulties in finding alternative livelihoods; this is especially the case around rapidly expanding urban centres, where there is high competition for land and an urgent need to protect land for agriculture and prevent urban sprawl from encroaching on fertile soils.

***Scarcity of land is central to policies and development visions of all countries in this project. Building a more accurate knowledge of current and planned land use and of the impacts of environmental degradation is clearly a necessary first step towards better planning.***

## **Taking advantage of agriculturally dynamic areas**

In all countries there is a clear policy emphasis on trying to increase the productivity of agriculture. Attempts to modernize farming through land use consolidation and improved access to markets are likely to result in a reduction of the land available for the still high numbers of households relying on subsistence farming. At the same time there is no obvious evidence of efforts to increase farm employment opportunities for rural residents.

For policy makers wishing to support more productive agriculture, while also encouraging a smooth transition towards more urban economies, agriculturally dynamic areas seem to provide ideal solutions. In order to identify the desirability of different models of agricultural development represented in these dynamic areas, it is important to understand better both their implications for economic outputs and for the scale, type and location of employment.

***Policies must be responsive to new economic opportunities as they emerge, and remove blockages to more productive agricultural systems. But in order to ensure that the more vulnerable and low-income groups do not lose out, policies must also help such groups to cope with the changing conditions, and provide a minimum level of economic stability.***

## **Mobility and migration: profound transformations in rural livelihoods and urbanization**

In the absence of alternative income-generating opportunities, net migration to urban centres will continue. In Rwanda, it is expected that levels of urbanization will increase from 16.5 % in 2012 to 30% in 2020, putting huge pressure on planning and services in urban areas. Current rural development policies – for example improved infrastructure and, in the case of Ghana, the Services Opportunity Project (GSOP) - implicitly or explicitly aim to reduce rural-urban migration, but with little success; at the same time, the implications for population distribution of the commercialization and mechanization of agriculture, and the subsequent displacement of smallholder producers, are largely neglected.

***A key issue for policy-makers is a better understanding of how policy decisions related to agricultural production impact on population distribution and urbanisation.***

Such understanding needs to go beyond generalisations: mobility patterns are complex, and include rural-urban as well as urban-urban movement. The latter helps explain the concentration of urban growth in the South of Ghana and in Dar es Salaam, in Tanzania. Seasonal, circular and other forms of short-term mobility also need to be taken into consideration. This is especially important as these are the migrants who are likely to be more vulnerable once they move to the city, and in need of specific social protection policies.

***While the links between migration and vulnerability need to be better documented, it is important to address the widely held assumptions that migration is inherently problematic.***

Migration can be a means to escape poverty for individuals and households; the fact that migrants can indeed increase pressure on services and infrastructure effectively highlights the development gap – that is, the inadequate provision of housing, services and infrastructure - that exists in most urban centres.

## **Recognising and supporting the potential of smaller urban centres**

All four countries in the project are urbanising. However, in most cases this is an uneven process, with large cities – Dar es Salaam, Accra, Kigali and Douala growing more rapidly than most small and intermediate urban centres, and with some cases of stagnation or even decrease in the population of some towns. No easy generalisations can be made, as socio-economic, cultural as well as environmental factors all play a role. However, the concentration of investments in large cities – especially in higher-order infrastructure and services such as hospitals and universities, which in turn attract private investment and employment opportunities - is a contributing factor that can be addressed by appropriate policies.

***Strengthening the role of smaller urban centres needs to be a policy focus in rapidly urbanising countries.***

Providing better support to small urban centres can serve the dual purpose of reducing pressure on larger cities, and providing non-farm employment to rural populations, especially the growing proportion of educated (and uneducated) youth who are moving out of farming. To do this efficiently and equitably, a better understanding of the specific regional/rural context and of the nature and role of each smaller urban centre is necessary, and must be acted upon.

***Effectively, this implies decentralised planning which in turn requires stronger capacity and resources by local governments.***

It is also necessary to sharpen definitions of what is designated as ‘urban’ and to distinguish between function and form – and the related policy and planning requirements. But despite the growing recognition of the important role of smaller urban centres, specific policies are still missing. In Tanzania, there are now 97 ‘minor towns’, a newly created administrative status; however, there are no specific policies for their development.

## **Urban expansion and service provision**

Despite the recognition of the need to address rapid urban growth in all four countries, at the national level rural development often remains the priority; This results in inadequate policies, and limited local government capacity, to provide a planning framework for urban expansion and service provision. This results in haphazard urban growth, which includes low-income settlements – but it is important to note that in all four countries, middle and higher income neighbourhoods are also often ‘informal’ as urban expansion typically precedes planning.

***As in the case of land, a key issue appears to be lack of coordination between different authorities.***

Urban expansion, especially but not only in the larger cities, is characterized by rapid peri-urban development and urban sprawl. At the policy and planning levels, fragmentation appears to be the result of uncoordinated decentralization. Municipalities, private service providers and other stakeholders are engaging in development and provision of services with little if any contact with each other. Hence, the dynamics of urban change are linked to both formal and informal initiatives: public policy choices can result in public (and private) investment that leap-frogs sprawl, thus shaping urban expansion. This is often overlooked, and perhaps too much emphasis is put on

informal settlements as the main driver of urban expansion. Urban centres provide several advantages compared to rural areas. Access to services is generally better, and so are employment opportunities which drive rural-urban migration. However, inequalities based on wealth remain high.

***More dense urban forms have clear advantages for the effective use of resources and for the provision of infrastructure and services, but need to be planned for in ways that do not exclude low-income residents – especially recent migrants who tend to live in areas with high levels of environmental hazards, but often closer to casual employment opportunities.***

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Governance and the rural-urban transition: the need for inter-sectoral and spatial coordination**

Keeping track of the rapid transformations taking place in Ghana, Cameroon, Tanzania and Rwanda – and in several other low and middle countries - and their implications for equitable development in both rural and urban areas is a major challenge. Perhaps the clearest message emerging from the country policy dialogues is the need to address the current fragmentation of roles and responsibilities of different government agencies at all levels. Related to this is the urgent need for consolidated knowledge on available resources, of which land is a primary one.

Additional information is needed to understand the actual mix of income generating activities that support both rural and urban residents – and the large proportion of ‘multi-local’ households, for whom mobility and migration are important. A more holistic understanding of rural-urban linkages can have several positive implications. For example:

- Large-scale agricultural development projects could include increased attention – and investment – in forward and backwards linkages between farming and non-farm activities (provision of inputs, processing and service provision) that if undertaken locally can support the development of smaller urban centres, with an increase in much-needed local non-farm employment.
- In urban centres, a better understanding of the dynamics underlying migration and mobility and the different forms these take is a key element of more adequate planning for urban growth.

Improving rural-urban synergies requires more adequate governance systems:

- At the national level, sectoral ministries need better integration, while greater capacity is needed at the local level. In many cases, policies are formulated but not implemented adequately. In some cases, this is because they do not reflect reality on the ground – for example, land where urban expansion has already taken place may be still considered as agricultural.

- Local governments are often required to implement sectoral policies that may contradict each other due to the lack of coordination and consolidated information.
- Local governance systems that include civil society organisations and the private sector can be far more effective in assessing emerging issues such as access to services, water and sanitation and migrants' welfare in urban areas, in identifying the needs and priorities of local populations (especially low-income groups) and help define policy priorities

## RESEARCH PARAMETERS

The overall objective of the African Rural-City Connections (RurbanAfrica) project is to explore the connections between rural transformations, mobility, and urbanization processes and analyze how these contribute to an understanding of the scale, nature and location of poverty in sub-Saharan Africa. The RurbanAfrica project will advance 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. In this respect the project challenge a number of generally accepted 'truths' about rural and city development, and the importance and implication of migration in shaping these. It thereby questions the overall negative interpretations of the economic role of rural-urban mobility and migration in sub-Saharan Africa and generates new insights into the relationship between rural-city connections and poverty dynamics. 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.

## PROJECT IDENTITY

**PROJECT NAME** RurbanAfrica: African Rural-City Connections.

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Dschang, Cameroon

University of Ghana  
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#### FUNDING SCHEME

FP7 Framework Programme for Research of the European Union –  
Collaborative project – Socio-economic Sciences and Humanities.

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#### DURATION

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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