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Urbanization and migration in Africa

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I. Introduction

Migration has, historically, been an integral part of life in many parts of the world, but has more recently become a topic of major focus in policy and academic circles. One of the major outcomes of migration, especially in the developing world, is urbanisation (Owusu, 2018; Awumbila et al., 2014). The proportion of the world population living in towns and cities rose from about 30% in 1950 to 54% in 2015 and is projected to rise to 66% by 2050 (United Nations Population Division, 2014), with most of this urban growth occurring in Africa and Asia. Although data from recent population censuses shows that Africa is not the world's fastest urbanising region (Potts, 2012), there is enough evidence to suggest that Africa's urban population has been growing at a very high rate. The proportion of Africa's population living in urban areas rose from about 27% in 1950 to 40% in 2015 and is projected to reach 60% by 2050 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014). Several African countries (e.g. Gabon, Libya, Algeria, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroun, Ghana) have more than 50% of their populations living in urban areas. The rapid increase in urban population, in Africa, is largely caused by migration, which is driven by a combination of economic, social, political, demographic, and environmental factors.

In response to the rapid urbanisation and associated problems, such as pressure on social amenities and rising urban unemployment, many African governments and municipal authorities have been discouraging rural-urban migration. Yet the actual developmental impacts of migration and urbanisation are quite poorly understood. This presentation will examine the relationship between urbanization and migration in the context of sustainable development. It will also examine the demographic impact of urbanisation, and discuss the challenges to promoting sustainable urbanization in Africa. The paper argues that despite the largely negative view of rural-urban migration and urban growth in Africa, urban areas provide livelihood opportunities for rural-urban migrants. It is also argued that migration governance should be an integral part of urban planning and sustainable development programmes in Africa.

II. Patterns of African Migration

Although political narratives and media images suggest an “exodus” of Africans to Europe, a majority of African migrants travel to destinations within the region (UNCTAD, 2018). Africa has the lowest intercontinental outmigration rates of all world regions (Flahaux and De Haas 2016). A recent assessment by UNCTAD (2018), based on data provided by United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2014, shows that about 53% of African migrants remain in the region. The percentages of emigrants that remain in each of the sub-regions of Africa are as follows: Eastern Africa (71%), Middle Africa (79%), Northern Africa (13%), Southern Africa (52%) and Western Africa (72%). The same UNCTAD (2018) assessment shows that in 2017, the main destination countries of intra-African international migrants were South Africa (2.2 million) and Côte d'Ivoire (2.1 million). Uganda, Ethiopia, Nigeria and Kenya were also major receiving countries. The countries with the highest stock of international migrants as a share of total population were Equatorial Guinea (18%), Gabon and Seychelles (14%) and Djibouti (12%) (UNCTAD, 2018). Outside Africa, Europe is still the most popular destination of African migrants. However, many Africans are also moving to other regions, especially the Gulf States. This is attributed to strict visa regimes in traditional popular destinations in Europe and North America. Africa has also recently attracted increasing number of migrants, especially from Asia.

Although international migration has received more attention in recent debates on migration, internal migration, especially the rural-urban type, is far more significant in terms of the numbers of people involved and perhaps the flow of remittances (Awumbila et al, 2014). In Ghana, for instance, a survey conducted by the Centre for Migration Studies in five migration source regions, in 2018, shows that over 60% of households had at least one migrant member in urban areas. Most of these rural-urban migrants regularly send remittances to their family members in the rural areas.

III. Migration and Development in Africa

As in many parts of the world, there are contesting views on the relationship between migration and development in Africa. While underdevelopment and poverty were initially held as drivers of migration, recent scholarship has shown that socio-economic development has also contributed to migration within and out of the region.

With reference to the developmental impacts of population movement, the negative effects of migration have, historically, dominated discussions in both policy and academic circles. It has often been argued that migration negatively affects socio-economic development of sending areas, as a result of brain drain, shortage of labour, and declining productivity. In migrants receiving areas, migration is often blamed for pressure on social amenities, unemployment and declining standards of living. In recent years, however, it has been recognized that if properly managed, migration can contribute to the socioeconomic transformation of the economies of both receiving and sending areas (Awumbila et al., 2015). Consequently, a number of African countries, such as Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana, have recently formulated migration policies to minimize the negative effects and maximize the developmental impacts of migration. Most of these policies seek to enhance systems for protecting the rights of migrants, while promoting the transfer of migrants' remittances and skills for socio-economic development (Teye, 2017).

In recognition of the developmental impacts of migration, there have been efforts to facilitate intra-regional mobility within the various regional economic blocs. There have also been efforts to promote inter-regional mobility within Africa. In 2015, the African Union has elaborated a draft protocol on the free movement of persons, right of residence and right of establishment. As of July 2018, 32 of the 55 countries have signed the protocol. One country (Rwanda) has ratified the protocol. As a way of promoting skills transfer from migrants, a number of African countries adopted Intra-African Talent Mobility partnership programmes which committed states to reduce work permit application fees and establish functional labour markets and skills recognition programmes.

While many African governments have implemented strategies to harness the developmental impacts of international migration, many of the countries do not have programmes for harnessing the benefits of internal migration (Teye et al, 2015).

IV. Linkages between Migration and Urbanisation in Africa

Although a significant proportion of the rapid increase in urban population is caused by the high rate of natural increase in towns and re-classification of settlements into urban areas, migration accounts for a significant proportion urbanisation in Africa. In some countries, rural-urban migration accounts for about 60% of urban growth because rural-urban inequalities of development force people to move from rural areas to urban areas in search of jobs.

Some of the very large African cities are: Lagos in Nigeria (21 million people), Cairo in Egypt (20.4 million), Kinshasha in D.R. Congo (13.3 million), Luanda in Angola (6.5 million), and Nairobi in Kenya (6.5 Million), Abidjan in Côte d'Ivoire (4.8 million), Alexandria in Egypt (4.7 million), Johannesburg in South Africa (4.4 million), Dar es Salaam in Tanzania (4.4 million), Casablanca in Morocco (4.3 million) and Accra in Ghana (4.1 million).

There is enough evidence to suggest that African urban population will continue to grow, with rural-urban migration continuing to drive the urbanisation process. It has been projected that most of the urban growth will take place in small and intermediate cities and not in the megacities. This implies that the need for urban management is greatest in smaller cities (UN-Habitat, 2014).

V. Impacts of Rapid Urbanisation in Africa

Urbanisation has both positive and negative impacts on socio-economic development in Africa. In this section, I will highlight some of these impacts.

1. Developmental Challenges of Urbanisation

Recent urbanisation in many African countries has resulted in rapid and unplanned urban growth, resulting in housing problems and emergence of slums. In some African urban centres, more than 50% of the population live in slums, which are characterised by overcrowded houses, limited electricity supply, poor access to water supplies, little sanitation and insecure living conditions which are associated with frequent evictions by city authorities and landlords. Overcrowded housing and poor living conditions create a fertile ground for crime and social vices (e.g. drug abuse) though the evidence is weak.

In recent years, urbanisation has also resulted in rising unemployment and urban poverty in some African countries. For, instance, while poverty levels in Ghana as a whole has declined in recent years, Accra (the capital) more than doubled its standard poverty incidence (4.4% in 1999 to 10.6% in 2006) and extreme poverty incidence rose from 1.3% in 1999 to 4.4% in 2006. The main challenges to promoting sustainable urbanization in Africa include: (i) Lack of adequate resources to enhance the quality of urban infrastructure and promote urban dwellers' access to affordable housing, water, electricity, health facilities and other social amenities (Owusu, 2018); (ii) inadequate investments to generate employment opportunities (UN-Habitat, 2018); (iii) lack of effective policy framework for incorporating migration into sustainable urban development programmes; and (iv) weak capacity of municipal authorities to effectively design and implement sustainable urban development policies.

2. Positive Developmental Impacts of Rural-Urban Migration and Urbanisation

Despite the largely negative view of urbanisation in Africa, urban living has, in a few cases, contributed to access to education, health services, lower fertility, improved access to social services. Some of the informal settlements tend to boom with various forms of entrepreneurial businesses and activities mostly in the informal sector. A recent study by Awumbila et al (2014) among rural-urban migrants in two slums in Accra showed that incomes of the migrants were irregular, but higher than at places of origin. Over 76% of them save whereas 78% sent remittances within last 12 months prior to the study. About 88% of the rural-urban migrants assessed their overall household life as 'improved a lot/somewhat improved' after moving to Accra. The authors concluded that while development policies continue to regard rural-urban migration as negative, largely leading to an increase in urban

poverty, urban slums are not just places of despair and misery, but also places where migrants are optimistically making the most of their capabilities, despite obvious difficulties and trying to move out of poverty (Awumbila et al, 2014).

3. Demographic Impact of Urbanisation

The relationship between urbanisation and demographic indicators have not been extensively analysed in Africa. However, there is enough evidence to suggest that urbanisation is contributing to a reduction in total fertility rates. In Ghana, for instance, total fertility rate has declined faster in urban areas than in rural areas. The total fertility rate in urban Ghana is 3.3 while that in rural Ghana is 4.7 (GSS, 2018). Urbanisation also contributes to reduction in child mortality rates as urban dwellers have better access to health services. The contribution of urbanisation to adult mortality rates has been contested. Although it was initially thought that urbanisation contributes to a reduction in adult mortality rate as a result of access to health services, a recent assessment by Menashe-Oren and Stecklov (2018) shows that in Sub-Saharan Africa, adult mortality rate is higher in urban areas than rural areas. This was explained by the fact that the urban poor suffer from a ‘double burden’ of disease – both noncommunicable or chronic illnesses associated with later stages in the epidemiological transition and infectious diseases (Agyei-Mensah and Aikins 2010). The urban poor also lack access to health services.

VI. Policy Responses to Rural-Urban Migration and Urbanisation in Africa

Instead of planning for urban growth and providing infrastructure and services for the poor, policy prescriptions focused on discouraging people from moving to urban areas. In some African countries, some NGOs have provided financial incentives for young girls and boys who arrived in urban areas to go back to the rural areas. These programmes are based on the wrong assumption that rural –urban migrants are not contributing to development. Several slum dwellers are also forcibly evicted from their homes each year to make way for infrastructure projects and private development. There have been very few programmes of urban renewal and slum upgrading in decaying urban centres. Affordable housing schemes have also been implemented in some countries but the houses are still not affordable to the urban poor. Some African countries have formulated urban development policies (e.g. Ghana, Nigeria) which seek to “promote efficient urban and regional development and ensure improved standard of living and well-being” (extracted from Nigeria Urban Development Policy). However, these policies have not been well implemented, as a result of lack of resources. Other programmes implemented to deal with the challenges of rural-urban migration and urbanisation includes: implementation of programmes directed at bridging the rural-urban divide; poverty reduction programmes; and measures to ensure environmental sustainability. However, most of these strategies have not achieved desirable results, as a result of lack of financial resources and weak technical capacity.

VII. Conclusions

Africa is experiencing rapid urbanisation, with rural-urban migration continuing to play a significant role in the urbanisation process. While migration and urbanisation bring new challenges, such as pressure on employment and social services, urban areas also provide several livelihood opportunities to migrants. Current policy prescriptions that tend to deal with the challenges of urbanisation by discouraging people from moving to urban areas are bound to fail, unless the underlying drivers of rural urban migration are addressed. While migration and urbanization can lead to increased urban poverty and the proliferation of slums,

they can also lead to economic growth and poverty reduction. Migration governance should be an integral part of urban planning and sustainable development programmes in Africa. Effective policies and actions are needed to reap positive dividends from migration and urbanization in Africa.