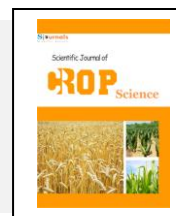


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Short communication

Urbanization and its consequence on the environment: Case studies from sub-Saharan Africa

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ABSTRACT

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90% of future population growth will be accounted for by the large cities in the developing countries out of which Africa has experienced the highest urban growth during the last two decades at 3.5% per year and this rate of growth is expected to hold into 2050. Although the rate of urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa is slower (32.8%) compared to North Africa (47.8%), the situation is still worrisome in its consequences. The results of the various studies on urbanization indicated that migration and other related changes are the sources in developing countries. The fast rate of urbanization in developing world is attributed to rural–urban migration, economic growth and development, technological change, and rapid population growth.

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1. Introduction

The rapid population growth and economic development in country are degrading the environment through the uncontrolled growth of urbanization¹ and industrialization, expansion and intensification of agriculture, and

¹The most basic definition of urbanization is the transformation of land from rural land uses, such as agriculture, to urban land uses, such as housing.

the destruction of natural habitats. One of the major causes of environmental degradation in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa could be attributed to rapid growth of population, which is adversely affecting the natural resources and environment. The current global trend shows a massive expansion of urban areas, this growth being actually generated by the numerical population growth and migration. Urban development determines changes regarding the organization of places, economic and social changes but these effects exceed the territorial barriers and generate a broad impact. Urbanization is seen as an effect of the current globalization phenomenon, with social aspects as well as the economic ones, representing the migration process of the population organizing in urban areas, areas considered to be true centers of progress that offer multiple options to residents. Cities are centers of changes, placed in a relationship of interdependence with demographic growth and economic growth. Substantial expansion of urban areas is due population migration to these areas, the identification of new feature options that can ensure the raising of welfare levels of individuals and improve their conditions of life. Emphasis on the process of urbanization intensifies pressure on resources, environment and its ecosystems (Bradbury, 2009).

2. Urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa

While more than 90% of future population growth will be accounted for by the large cities in the developing countries out of which Africa has experienced the highest urban growth during the last two decades at 3.5% per year and this rate of growth is expected to hold into 2050. Although the rate of urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa is slower (32.8%) compared to North Africa(47.8%), the situation is still worrisome in its consequences. It can well be expressed in terms of failure to bring about inclusive growth which, in turn, has resulted in the proliferation of slums, urban poverty and rising inequality. In many ways, Inequality in African cities remains the second highest in the world with an average Gini coefficient of about 0.58, well above the average of 0.4. In this regard, most SSA cities are characterized by insufficient basic infrastructure, particularly in low-income areas. Only 20% of SSA's population has access to electricity, and in 2010, 3% and 53% of Africans had access to fixed or mobile phones, respectively; 84% of the continent's urban dwellers have access to potable water while 54% to sanitation (AfDB et al., 2012). More broadly, 60% of African citizens live in places where water supplies and sanitation are inadequate.

3. Causes of urbanization

Rural-urban migration and natural population growth rates in cities are the major causes of the increasing rate of urban growth and slum proliferation in Africa. The results of the various studies on urbanization indicated that migration and other related changes are the sources in developing countries. The fast rate of urbanization in developing world is attributed to rural-urban migration, economic growth and development, technological change, and rapid population growth (Marshall et al., 2009).

3.1. Push factors

The normal push factors to rural people are the circumstances that make their earning of living impossible, land deterioration, lack of adequate land, unequal land distribution, droughts, storms, floods, and clean water shortages. These serious disadvantages make farming, the livelihood of rural people, hard and sometimes hopeless. Lack of modern resources, firewood shortages, religious conflicts, local economic declines, are also major reasons for moving to the urban areas in the region(Gugler, 1997; Girardet, 1996).

3.2. Pull factors

High industrial wages in urban areas are one of the biggest attractions for rural people. People will continue to migrate to cities as long as they expect urban wages to exceed their current rural wages. Employment opportunities, higher incomes, joining other rural refugees, freedom from oppressive lifestyle, access to better health care and education, are the "bright lights" for rural people. One of the main reasons for people to move to the urban areas is that the situation in the rural areas is very difficult. With the income level they have it is not possible to survive. In this case even the low salaries in the rural areas are more attractive than non-existing salaries in the rural areas (Gugler, 1997; Girardet 1996; Sajor, 2001).

4. Problems associate with urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa

The problems that are facing cities, towns, and their people are inadequate financial resources, increased poverty and a widening gap between rich and poor, unsustainable use of land, uncoordinated development and insecure land tenure, lack of green spaces and inadequate water supply and sanitation. These main problems have related to many other smaller problems like, lack of jobs, spreading homelessness and expanding squatter settlements, growing insecurity and rising crime, inadequate and deteriorating building stock, services and infrastructure, lack of health and educational services, rising traffic congestion and more pollution (UN, 1996).

In observing problems of urbanization in light of the public health perspective, environmental problems in most of the urban centers in the region are evident. Environment-related diseases or accidents remain among the major causes of illness, injury, and premature death. This is common in the poorer centers of urban areas. Most of these diseases are caused by pathogens in water, food, soil, or air. Burns, scalds, and accidental fires are common in overcrowded shelters, especially where five or more persons live in a small room (Gugler, 1997). The cities have two general categories of human environmental risk: those that directly affect health, such as pollution, and those that may not be less damaging, but operate indirectly by worsen the ecosystem that human life depends on. The link between environment and health is evident. Poor environment, housing and living conditions are the main reasons to the diseases and poor health. Improvements in sanitation, sewage treatment and quality of food, will prevent diseases like cholera. The lack of these basic facilities is still general in developing countries. Because of this, diseases like tuberculosis and diarrhea continuous to be common in the developing world (Kasarda and Parnell, 1993).

5. Policy responses to urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa

The various problems associated with urbanization in many sub-Saharan African cities, calls for key policy reforms by governments. Among others, 1. Upgrading informal settlements through the provision of integrated infrastructures and services that target the marginalized groups, including the poor, youth, women and elderly people. In addition, governments in the region, i.e. East Africa, should act aggressively to ensure sound urban development by putting and implementing clear urban development strategies;

2. Mobilizing urban financing from local and foreign investors. These resources should be efficiently and adequately allocated between central and local governments' urban projects and should encourage strengthening the role of municipalities;

3. Improving human capital (skilled man power) through equal access to education and healthcare services and facilities for all citizens at every level in order to meet labor market needs;

4. Diversification of economic activities through the creation of new economic systems oriented towards high sustainable and value-added production and exportation. These reforms should be more inclusive to ensure that all categories of citizens, regardless of their age, race, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic conditions, have equal access to adequate housing, basic infrastructure and services and equal job opportunities.

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