

Land Policy and the Informal City in Nigeria

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SUMMARY

The arguments in Nigeria over whether the urban or the rural areas should be given greater priority in national development appear somewhat misplaced and unhelpful because the urban and rural areas are mutually interdependent, with many complex links and interactions between them, and the constant movements of people, goods, money, ideas and information from one to the other. For this reason, the Habitat Agenda of the Istanbul City Summit advocates *"an integrated approach to promote balanced and mutually supportive urban-rural development (through) strong local and national institutions that place emphasis on rural-urban linkages, and treat villages and towns as two sides of the human settlement continuum"*

The paper considers ways to overcome the traditional divide between urban and rural planning and development, and by so doing achieve a balanced and more sustainable pattern of development and poverty reduction. It focuses on the promotion of small and intermediate urban centres as an appropriate middle course which combines the advantages of urban as well as rural approaches to development, but without the disadvantages of large population concentrations in a few metropolitan areas, or of the wide dispersal of investments and scarce resources in scattered villages too small to support basic services. Medium and small towns are uniquely placed in the urban-rural interface to foster mutually beneficial linkages between them, and also to promote the more sustainable use of natural resources in the surrounding region. Recent research suggests that more than half of the urban population in Africa lives in urban centres of this size group, and that the massive increase in urban population expected in the next 20 years will occur in these small towns, hence the urgent need to take their growth, planning and links with the rural areas fully into account in the development effort.

The paper then discusses the policy, planning and investment implications of promoting medium and small towns as a way to enhance urban-rural linkages, drawing ideas from the Habitat Agenda, and other recent global initiatives that seek to support sustainable urbanization and the Millennium Development Goals. Particular emphasis is placed on the imperative of political and administrative decentralization to strengthen local government, especially with the recent creation of 36 States and 774 Local Governments Areas in Nigeria; the need to improve the infrastructure and services that connect producers and consumers in rural and urban areas; reforms in the macro-economic and regulatory framework to support rural agriculture and trade, and to remove needless constraints on the operation of the private sector, especially the informal sector and small-scale enterprises. Finally, the paper points out that the promotion of medium and small towns should not be seen as a substitute for direct programmes of urban and rural development, but rather as an essential and often overlooked component of a national policy for a balanced development of the whole range of human settlements in the country.

Using Medium and Small Towns to Strengthen Urban-Rural Linkages in Nigeria

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the case for promoting medium and small towns as a way to achieve balanced and equitable growth and development in Nigeria. After a brief review of the rapid rate and uneven pattern of urbanisation in the country, the paper comments critically on past development policies which overlooked the interdependence and complementary links between the urban and rural areas, and concludes with some general reflections on how the development of smaller urban centres could support the current programmes for decentralization, rural transformation and poverty alleviation.

The development of small and intermediate urban centres has for the past several years been canvassed by many scholars and influential aid agencies as an appropriate middle course, which combines the advantages of urban as well as rural development, without the shortcomings of excessive metropolitan growth or of the wide dispersal of limited resources in scattered rural villages too small to support basic services. Following independence, many African governments assumed that to concentrate productive activities and services in a few large cities would bring about faster growth, the benefits of which would spontaneously trickle down to the other sectors of the economy. Indeed many planners and policy makers still maintain that rapid urban growth is inevitable and desirable, and that it would be counterproductive to intervene prematurely to deconcentrate economic activities, or to unduly disperse large population agglomerations (Egan, 1985; Egan and Bendrick, 1986). On the other hand critics of large city bias complain that the top heavy pattern of urbanisation and development is both unjust and inefficient; that economic development is not reaching the poor because resources are disproportionately allocated in favour of the urban areas at the expense of the countryside where the bulk of the people still live. To restore parity and health in urban and rural development they urge developing countries to correct the policy imbalances, and discourage urban privilege which attracts rural migration to compound the problems and inefficiencies of the large cities (Todaro, 1981; Lipton, 1977).

Because of these pro-urban and anti-urban stereotypes, urban and rural development have been misconceived as parallel or even antagonistic lines of development, ignoring the mutually supportive elements between them. The advocacy of small town policies is based on the belief that urbanisation is not necessarily detrimental to rural progress, and that it is the unbalanced pattern of urbanisation rather than urban growth per se that may have created disparities in the past. A more dispersed pattern of urban settlements, with a fair amount of middle and lower order urban centres would not only relieve pressure on the large cities, but would also stimulate and support regional, rural and agricultural development, increase the proportion of people reached by basic services, and thus help to achieve the current Millennium Development Goals (World Bank, 2003). The so called Urban Functions in Rural

Development (UFRD) approach is essentially a way of assessing the settlement system within a given area in order to distribute investments and productive activities more efficiently and equitably (Rondinelli, 1982; Kammeier and Swan, 1984; Bromley, 1983).

In spite of its wide appeal, critics of the small town approach, especially in political economy literature, contend that the claims about its merits are purely hypothetical, and that the prevailing political and economic structures in most developing countries are incompatible with the equity ideals which the approach seeks to promote. In the circumstances, small towns are more likely to promote exploitation than equitable growth, and to constitute a blockage on rural progress (Southall, 1979; Southall, 1988).

1.1 Policy Debate on Medium and Small Towns

Several research groups and donor organizations have sponsored studies and conferences to consider the benefits and shortcomings of promoting small towns; the role which this category of urban centres can play in regional and national development, and the appropriate policy instruments to foster these roles (World Bank, 2003; UNDP/UND-Habitat, 1995). There are several unresolved questions about the exact size of settlements to promote, how to identify those with the potential to support rural development and how to ensure that they do, in fact, enhance the progress of the countryside. The proponents of the approach recognise that the concept cannot be uniformly applied since towns of various sizes perform different functions in different contexts; but settlements of between 5000 and 100,000 population range are favoured because more than half of the urban population in Africa lives in urban centres in this population range, and because they are better placed to foster the economic interdependence between urban based enterprises and rural consumers, and between rural producers and urban markets (Tacoli and Satterthwaite, in World Bank 2003).

Settlements in this size group have often been bypassed in the development effort when they should in fact play a crucial role as the hubs of local economic, political, and social development. They reflect a more dispersed pattern of urbanisation which should reinforce the trend towards greater political decentralisation - to relieve the central government of worsening administrative and financial burdens, and ensure a more broad based approach to development. They should “provide the lower end of a decentralized administrative and political hierarchy, channelling local concerns bottom up, and articulating government objectives top down” (UNCHS-Habitat, 1981, p. 26).

Even more important, they are an effective tool for integrating the urban and rural economies, and for achieving a balanced distribution of urban populations. If the appropriate linkages are established, medium and small towns would greatly relieve the pressure on the overstrained infrastructure, services and resources of the large cities, by deflecting the flood of migrants, and helping to disperse the clustering of industrial and commercial activities there. They would also provide the urban based support functions for the improvement and commercialisation of the rural agricultural economy. As well, improved rural productivity, increased opportunities for investments, and for non-farm employment in agro-processing and small scale manufacturing enterprises would enhance rural incomes and purchasing

power, and thus improve the quality of rural life (Tacoli, 1998). A wide range of civic services - for health care, education, transportation, religious and cultural activities - could be provided in these towns at economically more attainable and accessible levels for the benefit of the surrounding rural areas. Innovative ideas and methods are also easily diffused through various channels to the rural households.

As indicated earlier, the concept and its application have been battered on both sides by those who advocate direct rural investments, and those who endorse a more concerted and focused approach to the development effort. With the prolonged recession and economic crisis of the 1980s and '90s, and the increasing tempo of globalization, many scholars caution developing countries against socially and politically motivated policies of geographical balance and small town creation, which run counter to the efficient and productive functioning of the national economy, and are in any case difficult to enforce in free enterprise economies. Besides, policies of spatial balance do not necessarily guarantee social equality, as the welfare of a place is not the same as the welfare of all the people who live there. Locating social services and facilities in small towns, nearer the rural dwellers, does not necessarily guarantee access to these facilities, or provide the resources required by the peasants to avail themselves of the services and opportunities (Egan, 1986; Dias, 1984). Above all it is argued that since the rural people depend for most of their income on what they produce in the rural area, direct rural investment is preferable to going through the intermediary of small and medium towns, especially if direct links can be established between the rural areas and the existing large cities. It is also common for brokers and middlemen to shortcircuit the small towns and do business directly in the villages and periodic markets. A 1988 conference on small towns organised in Wisconsin Madison suggested from the experience of African countries surveyed that small towns could worsen rather than remove social inequalities, since most African governments tend to preach egalitarian ideologies but follow elitist and centralist practices (Southall, 1988).

Granting these limitations, it would still seem that the weaknesses of the small town approach arise more from defective implementation and political constraints than from any inherent defects in the logic of the concept itself, especially if small towns are seen not as a substitute for but as complementary to national policies for urban and rural development. This is even more true now that urban and rural livelihoods are becoming more and more intertwined, with increased flow of people, goods, ideas and other resources, and both urban and rural areas acquiring more and more of the characteristics of each other (Hundzalz, 2001).

2. THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

2.1 Trends and Patterns of Urban Growth

Unlike some African countries which have an explicit "District Focus" development approach, Nigeria has no policies designed explicitly to promote medium and small towns; but recent and current programmes for administrative decentralization and rural development are consistent with the small town approach. The break up of Nigeria's four former regions

into thirty six states, as well as the recent creation of as many as 774 local government areas have fostered the growth of intermediate and small urban centres as the capitals of the new states, and the headquarters of the new local governments. Also the development of roads and economic oriented infrastructure through various central and state government directorates and agencies could help to provide the necessary conditions and linkages needed for the effective implementation of small town policies.

Nigeria is a vast country of some 923,768 square kilometers, with a disputed population of about 125 million. Large cities had already developed in various parts of Nigeria long before the establishment of British rule; but colonial change altered the pre-existing organization of space and encouraged the emergence of many new centres of administration, trade and transportation. The role of colonial cities was, however, narrowly conceived as enclaves for external trade, with few productive links with the countryside, in spite of the obsession with indirect rule.

Between 1952 and 1963 - the years for which reliable census figures are available, the number of cities with population exceeding 20,000 rose from 56 to 183. By 1963 there were 24 cities with over 100,000 people, 55 with over 50,000, and 183 with over 20,000. Of the 183 cities with 20,000 and above, seventy were located in the northern parts of the country, seventy-eight in the west, twenty nine in the east and six in the mid-western region. The vast middle-belt region and parts of the deep north were grossly underserved by the urban system. The import substituting industrialization policies of the 1960s worsened the uneven pattern of urbanization, with the growth of certain distinct zones of urban concentration: the Lagos/Ikeja-Ibadan cluster to the southwest, the Port Harcourt-Aba-Onitsha-Enugu group of cities to the east, the Kano-Kaduna-Zaria axis to the north, and the chain of urban centres in the Benin-Sapele-Warri area. (Mabogunje, 1977; Okafor, 1985). These large concentrations attracted a disproportionately high percentage of national industrial investments, modern infrastructure and productive resources, as well as commercial, administrative and educational facilities. Estimates suggest that the total urban population in the country had risen from 29.89 million or 31 percent of the national population in 1985 to 38.29 million or 34 percent of the population in 1990. Estimates at the turn of the century suggest that 43.5 per cent of the population live in urban areas, up from 39 percent in 1986, and is projected to reach 50 per cent by the year 2000, and 65 percent by 2020. The rate of urban growth is thought to be 5.5 per cent, roughly double the national population growth rate of 2.9 percent. By 1995, there were seven cities with populations that exceeded one million, 18 cities with over 500,000; 36 with over 20,000; 78 with over 100,000, and over 5050 with more than 20,000. Lagos the former national capital has grown from 1.4 million in 1963 to 3.5 million in 1975; is now thought to be six million, and projected to be 24 million by 2020 (Okunlola, 2001).

2.2 Urban-Rural Relations, and Small Town Policies

Nearly all Nigerian development plans have announced policies that pay lip service to rural development and urban-rural balance. The Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare, 1945-1956, emphasized the need to “simultaneously develop urban and rural areas... in order

to prevent any further flow of people from the country to the town with the attendant consequences of squalor, unemployment and crime". The Nigerian Town and Country Planning Ordinance of 1946 established the legal basis for urban and regional planning; but its provisions have been widely flouted and ignored. The first truly national plan after independence, covering the period 1962 to 1968, pledged to "achieve a more equitable distribution of income both among people and among regions". The Second Plan 1970-1974 aimed at laying the basis not only for a self-reliant nation, but also of a dynamic economy, and a just, egalitarian, free and democratic society, with full opportunities for all citizens. The Third Plan, 1975-1980 contained a formal commitment to regional planning and rural development, and advanced fresh proposals to ensure "integrated urban-rural development based on the recognition of the vital function of each segment and the need to equip it for its role in the overall development of the economy"; and the Fourth and last plan (1981-85) promised "to revitalise and transform the Nigerian rural sector, and enhance the quality of rural life", through a more balanced allocation of investments and development effort.

In practice urban and rural development programmes have been merely juxtaposed, poorly coordinated and undermined by resource and organisational constraints. Programmes for rural development aimed at improving agricultural productivity and export earnings, and ensuring self sufficiency in food, were marred by organizational bottlenecks and the disadvantageous pricing policies of the marketing boards. After the disruptions of the civil war, 1967-70, the military administration of General Gowon accorded agriculture "the highest order of priority", and launched the National Accelerated Food Production Programme, NAFPP, which involved government in direct food production, to check the escalating prices of local and imported food items. The results were as disappointing as the equally extravagant Operation Feed The Nation (OFN) programme of the General Obasanjo regime in the late 1970s. The ambitious programmes of Integrated Rural Development through River Basin Development Authorities and Agricultural Development Projects, ADPs, cost the nation more money than the results they produced. The planning defects and dismal performance of rural agricultural development projects have been extensively discussed in the literature, and need not detain us here (see Ukwu, 1983; Sokari George, 1987). Vast amounts of resources were misallocated or otherwise misappropriated in projects of doubtful priority, scattered thinly over widely dispersed rural villages (Onyemelukwe, 1980).

Direct rural development effort was further undermined by the phenomenal expansion of the urban sector during the oil boom of the post civil war period of the 1970. The massive increase in urban-based jobs - in administration, construction and commerce, as well as generous wage increases accelerated the rate of urban migration, and widened urban-rural disparities, even though there was also an increase in urban poverty. The large towns were growing larger, and the smaller ones were not doing so well. Of the 2,215 industrial establishments employing ten or more workers in Nigeria in 1975, the leading seven cities - Lagos, Kano, Port Harcourt, Benin City, Jos, Ibadan and Enugu accounted for 68.2 percent. Rapid urban growth appears to have speeded up rural agricultural decline. Government was forced to meet food deficits through import, the bill for which rose from 126.3 million naira in 1973 to 1.5 billion in 1980, just as agriculture's contribution to export receipts had dropped from as high as 83 percent in 1960 to as low as 06 per cent in 1977 (Fair, 1984).

Small towns received hardly any attention in the planning effort; and the large cities were allowed to develop in a disorderly manner. A new Federal Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Environment was set up in 1975 to coordinate urban policy, but was soon afterwards absorbed by the powerful Ministry of Works and Housing. Ambitious programmes of urban housing and infrastructure development were initiated but were heavily politicised and inequitably distributed. Over 200 towns in the country acquired new master-plans to guide their development; but most of them achieved less than 30 per cent implementation before the recession set in. Aggressive campaigns for environmental sanitation turned out to be an instrument for the demolition of squatter settlements and the harassment of the urban informal sector.

2.3 The Recession and Decentralisation

As oil prices dropped and export earnings declined, there was renewed interest in agricultural development and other forms of adjustment, including deregulation and economic liberalization, the abolition of marketing boards and restrictive pricing policies, and the encouragement of greater private sector participation in the development process. In response to the prolonged economic crisis and the weakening capacity of the state, the trend of development thinking has shifted in favour of the principles of enablement, decentralization and partnership as essential elements of good governance and sustainable urbanisation. To relieve pressure on the central government, already overburdened by debt repayment, decentralisation assumed a new importance. For political and military reasons the four former regions of Nigeria had been broken up into twelve states at the onset of the civil war in 1967. Seven additional states were created in 1976, and two more in 1986, bringing the total number to twenty-one. By 1995 the number of states had risen to 36. The capitals of the new states (see table 1) have developed into medium-sized centres at which decisions and initiatives about development are taken for regional growth. The new state structure, more than the regional arrangement that preceded it, provides a wider spread of centres for administration, growth and development. Also to decongest Lagos, the government embarked on the costly project to build and relocate the national capital in the frontier region of Abuja.

The decentralising impact of state creation on the distribution of urban populations and urban opportunities was, however, fairly limited because of the vast size of the country. By 1989, the states had populations ranging from 2,053,000 in Niger State to 9,926,000 in Kano State. Niger, which was the smallest state was still two times the size of Botswana, and two and half times the size of the Gambia. There was still the problem of urban primacy at the level of the States. In Lagos, Kano and Rivers States, for instance, the capital cities of Lagos/Ikeja, Kano City and Port Harcourt dominated the entire urban scene, and inhibited the growth of other urban centres. Their impact on the remote rural areas of the states was bound to be limited given the poorly developed transport connections between the state capitals and parts of their rural hinterlands. As indicated above, the number of states has since been increased to 36, with more far reaching decentralizing implications.

Happily, far reaching reforms have since 1976 also been introduced in the system of local government “to further decentralise significant functions of the state governments to the local

level in order to enhance rapid development and stem rural to urban drift” (Federal Republic of Nigeria: Guidelines, 1976). The reforms are guided by the idea of development from below, to help redress the country’s inadequately developed system of lower and middle level urban centres, and to enhance grassroots participation in the development effort. The reforms are also specifically meant to strengthen the financial and managerial capacity of the local governments, and to make them more development oriented. By May 1989 the number of local governments was increased from 304 to 449. Several others illegally created during the Second Republic were disbanded by the Buhari regime. But following further decentralization, especially during the Babangida era, as many as 774 local governments were created and some of the local governments cut across urban and rural areas. The headquarters of these local government areas are being upgraded and developed as centres of small scale manufacturing and commercial activities, in addition to their traditional administrative and service functions. With the appropriate physical and economic linkage, they provide an appropriate framework for creating third tier urban centres, nearer the life and work of the rural people, and better placed for effective outreach to the surrounding countryside.

Other initiatives to improve rural infrastructure and services have since been taken to further enhance the development of medium and small towns. The 1986 Federal budget speech had inaugurated an ambitious programme to “revitalise and transform the Nigerian rural sector and enhance the quality of rural life” through the powerful and well funded Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), which had a broad mandate to liaise with federal, state and local government authorities and agencies, as well as with local communities and private organizations, to promote food production and rehabilitation of rural feeder roads, and provide other forms of economic oriented infrastructure. Ancillary Directorates for Mass Mobilization (MAMSER), for Employment, and for vocational training and apprenticeship have also been established to promote rural development and informal sector enterprises.

Thus, the decentralising impact of the creation of several states and local governments, and the initiatives in rural infrastructure development provide a potentially favourable basis for the development of secondary cities oriented to the development of the countryside. But as with many other promising ideas in third world development, the gap between potential and actual performance is still usually very wide.

2.4 Using Medium and Small Towns to Enhance Rural-Urban Linkages

It would be unhelpful to generalise or prescribe a single uniform approach for all the towns and sectors of a country as large and diverse as Nigeria. But it is important to identify the policy, planning and investment implications of the actual and potential linkages between rural and urban development, and highlight how small towns can be used to promote regional development and poverty alleviation. Some of the global action agendas of the 1990s, especially Agenda 21 of the Rio Earth Summit and the Habitat Agenda of the Istanbul City Summit provide useful guides that could profitably be adapted to local conditions in Nigeria and other developing countries. The Habitat Agenda for instance advocates “an integrated

approach to promote balanced and mutually supportive urban-rural development” through “strong local and national institutions... that place emphasis on rural-urban linkages and treat villages and towns as two sides of the human settlement continuum”. (UN-Habitat 1998).

To accomplish this, current research on best practices suggests among other things the need to create strong local government systems through genuine decentralization; the need to support urban based informal/small enterprises sector which have strong links to and influence on rural livelihoods; to emphasize linkages rather than boundaries in local administrations and economies. These areas of emphasis have implications for the current programmes of political restructuring and decentralization in Nigeria.

The 1976 local government reform is criticized for creating a uniform, single tier structure of local government for the whole country, making no distinction between the urban and rural areas. Current thinking on development suggests, however, that it is perhaps best to emphasize linkages rather than boundaries in the structure of local governments, ‘as urban-rural linkages can best be managed by new types of local authorities which transcend traditional administrative boundaries between cities and rural areas, capable of managing settlements and their economic, social and environmental linkages at the regional settlement level” (Hundsatz, 2001).

Unfortunately, in spite of the decentralization of power implied in the creation of more states and local governments in Nigeria, decision making and resource allocation have remained highly centralized. Although the percentage of national revenue allocated to local governments has increased from 3% in 1976 to 20% in 1991, local governments still remain under the legal and political influence of the higher levels of government whose political leaders appear to have different interests and priorities. Many of the local governments also appear to be too large and distant from the grassroots to be able to play the catalytic role expected of small and medium towns. It would be helpful in this regard to revisit the recommendations of the Dasuki Committee on the Review of Local Government Administration in Nigeria, (1985) and the Report of the Political Bureau (1987) both of which urge further structural decentralization to ensure that local governments are close enough to the people to be able to appreciate their needs and provide meaningful scope for local participation.

Other measures are needed to strengthen explicit linkages between programmes for small towns and agricultural/rural development. In respect of planning, there is a growing consensus that planning practice needs to be made more realistic, more flexible and advisory, and more compatible with local conditions. Although the discredited colonial Town and Planning Act of 1946 has since been replaced by the 1992 Urban and Regional Planning Law, the National Planning Commission, the State Planning Boards and the Local Government Planning Authorities envisaged in the implementation of the provision of the law have yet to become operational. There is also the long standing need to review the centralized approach to land use control introduced by the 1978 Land Use Decree/Act, and to move towards a more decentralized land delivery system that would be better able to ensure enhanced land and housing tenure for townspeople, especially the urban poor (Nwaka, 2004b).

Proper links must also be forged among the small towns, and between them and the large cities, to ensure that the growth impulses and benefits engendered in the secondary cities are spread and not appropriated by the elite who live there. The towns themselves need to be provided with basic services and economic oriented infrastructure - shelter, water supply, electricity, markets, marketing and storage facilities and so on. Small businesses and informal sector enterprises need to be promoted and protected through improved access to credit, technical support and training opportunities, as well as less restrictive licensing procedure to help legalise their status. Improved access to farm inputs, agro-processing equipment and facilities for rural farmers, and opportunities for non-farm employment are essential for improvement in rural conditions.

With the prevailing economic and political uncertainties and budgetary constraints in the country central and state governments must sometimes be content to play a more enabling role of promoting active partnership between the government and the people, and making conditions for self help and private sector participation as favourable as possible.

Another way of incorporating rural development in urban development planning is to recognise and promote the strong ties which exist between towns-people and country folk in most African countries. In Nigeria most town dwellers straddle the urban and rural worlds, and maintain close links with their hometowns. Individually, and collectively through ethnic unions and clan associations, they channel resources and progressive ideas to their home villages, and invest considerable proportions of their urban savings in social and productive economic ventures in the villages. Official policy should seek ways to harness the enormous amounts of urban to rural remittances, and fund-raising activities organised by townspeople for development projects in their hometowns. Strengthening hometown ties may be one of the ways of tying small town policies to rural development programmes; and it is in this sense that “the road to rural development in Africa may well go through urban investments” (Hyden, 1986, p. 211; Dike, 1982; Trager, 1988; Honey and Okafor, 1998).

Finally, the promotion of medium and small towns should not be seen as a substitute for direct programmes of urban and rural development, but rather as an essential component of national policy for balanced development of the whole range of human settlements in the country.

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