

## Urbanization and Urban Growth: Challenges and Prospects for National Development

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The achievements of humanity in the modern age have provided unprecedented opportunities for human welfare and fulfillment, but they have also placed in the hands of humanity, instrument of universal destruction. When one takes a cursory look at Nigeria today, the sheer rapidity of urban growth remains one of the most astonishing and awesome aspects of the whole process of social change. This is evident in the increase and influx of populations in most of the cities of Nigeria. More important is the fact that the urban share of the total has increased greatly everywhere as urbanization has spread to all parts of the country. Although there are variations in the amount of urban growth occurring in Nigeria, nearly all cities have two things in common. First, the proportion of people living in cities is rising and second, the cities themselves are large and growing. The consequence of this is that most of the Nigeria people will soon be city dwellers. Nonetheless, urban population is increasing more rapidly in developing countries like Nigeria. The paper concludes that despite their obvious problems, cities continue to provide more opportunities for national development and therefore recommends that government should take responsibilities to address the challenges by showing serious commitment to overcome them and take advantage of the prospects inherent in urbanization and urban growth.*

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**Keywords:** *Urbanization, Urban growth, challenges, prospects, population, national development*

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### **Introduction**

The growth of the world's urban population can be put in perspective by comparing dates at which major landmark figures are reached. The urban population first reached one billion only in 1961, and 2 billion in 1985. It is likely to have passed 3 billion in 2002, and is projected to

attained 4 billion in 2017 and 5 billion just after the projection period (in 2031) (World Urbanization Prospects, 2004). It is noteworthy that the number of years to attain the 3, 4 and 5 billion totals does not change significantly over this period.

Those trends imply that all the expected world population growth during 2000-2030 will be in urban areas. During that period the urban population is expected to rise by over 2 billion persons, from 2.9 billion to 4.9 billion. Since natural increase is generally lower in urban than in rural areas and is expected to decline in birth, the substantial growth expected in the urban population will be fueled primarily by both rural-urban migration and the geographical expansion of urban settlement through annexation and the transformation of rural villages into urban towns. These processes have been important in part, for urban growth and will continue to be important, especially for the developing world, where the potential for the emergence of new urban settlements is high.

With the largest and one of the most rapidly growing cities in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Nigeria has experienced the phenomenon of urbanization as thoroughly as any African nation, but its experience has also been unique in scale, in pervasiveness, and in historical antecedents. Urbanization is a worldwide phenomenon especially now that developing countries of the world are increasingly being integrated into the global capitalist system. Africa and the rest of developing world witnessed for the first time rapid urbanization immediately after the second world war, which opened the paths to the world capitalist system, (UNO, 2002; Schaefer, 2005). It is in the light of the foregoing that this paper will examine various issues under consideration under the following sub-heading: urbanization as a concept; patterns of urban growth in Nigeria, origin of urbanization in Nigeria, theoretical discourse, challenges and prospects in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual and theoretical framework**

Urbanization is a process whereby people move from rural areas or the country side to cities for permanent residence or temporary business activities. Urbanization, in this sense signals a shift in traditional ways of life to modern civilization, which symbolizes formality, civility and universalism. However, some scholars have argued that there has not been any universal definition of urbanization because the concept is multi-theoretical in nature. Therefore, a robust definition of urbanization must consider the structural transformation taking place in the economy, politics, legal, social, cultural and demography of a particular society which signifies that there is a shift from tradition to modernity, (Wirth, 1938; Ezeani and Elekwa, 2001).

A society cannot be said to be urbanized, until, it fulfills certain demographic requirements such as increased population size, changes in structure and available infrastructures as well as perhaps, increased dependency on capitalist mode of production. Writing about factors that often qualify a place to be identified as an urban area, Wirth (1938) argued that urbanization is a process of becoming urbanized. Urbanism, is a way of life which the urban population must naturally emulate because the city impacts on people as soon as they arrive, though at different degrees. He identified population size, population density and cultural heterogeneity as prerequisites for classifying an area as an urban area.

Whereas, the issue of population size is sacrosanct to the demographers, sociologists believed that urbanization is actually the feasible and obvious, modification and transformations in the patterns of social relationships. Urbanization, apart from accentuating the process of modernity, usually ensures that urban populations dissociate themselves from official, blood, primordial and ascribed relationships capable of hampering the growth of capitalism and the money-market economy.

Notwithstanding, the divergence of opinions on the concept of urbanization, the United Nations has said that we cannot leave out the issue of population size, (UN, 2002). Thus, the starting point should be a designation of an urban area from a rural area. Cohen (2003), observed that this approach is even the most fundamental source of confusion in the study of urbanization and the urban growth. No wonder, some scholars have insisted that there is a natural continuum between a rural area and an urban centre. This issue should no longer remain controversial for too long since the designation is often a function of national consideration across countries of the world. In the case of Nigeria, any place with a population of 20,000 and above is an urban area. Experiences have shown that urban population is never static, both internal and external migrations do contribute to population agglomeration.

### **Neo-Marxist Theory as explanation of Urbanization phenomenon**

This theory is a strand of the critical theory of the Frankfurt school, in Germany. It emerged in response to the liberal urban theoretical postulations on urbanization, (Ezeani, 2001). For the liberal theorists or the Chicago school, urbanization is a blessing and one of the by-products of capitalism. The emergence of capitalism, by all standards, has led to man's liberalization and civilization. Increasing urbanization is, therefore, a process of societal progress and urban expansion. Thus, the problems associated with urbanization should not be seen as unnatural. They are both driven by natural as well as social factors. As villages become towns, urban population increases and new cities will continue to be accelerated by the combined forces of fertility, migration and industrialization.

The Neo-Marxists have however disagreed with the Chicago scholars. According to them, urbanization is an engine behind capitalism. The process of urbanization is synonymous with the process of monetization of economic activities wherein capital becomes the essential commodity being pursued by all actors. However, due to the structural inequalities inherent in capitalist mode of production, the poor, the less privileged and the proletariats are always sidelined in the process. Urbanization therefore helps to perpetuate the process of labour alienation and urban segregation.

### **Urbanization Trends in Developing Countries**

Striking differences in patterns of urbanization exist between the more developed regions and the developing countries. However, the urban population of the less developed region has been growing considerably faster than that of developed countries. The developing countries accounted in 2000 for 69 percent of the world urban population and 80m percent of the total population. The urban population of developing countries, having generally lower fertility than that of the overall population, have experienced particularly high growth partly because of both high rural-urban migration and the expansion of urban localities through transformation of rural settlements into urban. As a result, urban areas of developing nations have been absorbing a rising share of the annual increment to the world urban population.

### **Patterns of Urban Growth in Nigeria**

Despite its status as the world's least urbanized region, sub-Saharan Africa already has an urban population as large as that of North America. Moreover, while overall global urban growth rates have fallen below two percent, those of SSA are projected to continue above three percent until 2030. Several factors contribute to this distinctive pattern, including low initial levels of

urbanization, high rates of overall natural increase and movement from the countryside to cities of relatively modest size (Montgomery et al, 2003).

How cities grow affects their development trajectories. It is estimated that, in the 1960s, and 1970s, rural-urban migration accounted for 40 percent of Africa urban growth, most of it directed towards larger cities (Tacoli, 2001). The remainder was mostly attributable to natural increase; the reclassification of rural territory as ‘urban’ added relatively little. No estimate is readily available for recent periods, but the role of migration inevitably tends to decrease as urbanization rises (UNFPA, 2007).

The number of people living in the urban areas as at 2001 and the projected population of urbanites in Nigeria and selected countries in the year 2020 as indicated in table 1.

**Table 1: Urbanization Trends and growth of urban population in Nigeria and selected countries – 2020**

Countries	Level of Urbanization		Estimates and Projections		Annual Growth Rate %	
	% 2000	2020	% 2000	2020	2000-2010	2010-2020
Africa	37.2	47.9	295,228	269,408	3.66	3.26
Algeria	57.1	67.5	17,311	27,301	2.54	2.01
Ghana	36.1	45.3	6,963	13,021	3.15	3.15
Kenya	33.4	50.8	10,234	21,710	4.38	3.14
Nigeria	44.1	58.3	50,175	107,428	4.23	3.39
S. Africa	56.9	69.6	24,629	30,624	1.63	0.55
Asia	37.5	48.7	1,375,519	2,231,108	2.60	2.24
Malaysia	57.4	68.0	12,758	20,325	2.68	1.98
Europe	73.4	77.6	534,061	539,532	0.04	0.07
Germany	87.5	90.5	71,798	72,303	0.11	0.04
Brazil	81.2	88.9	138,287	187,281	1.75	1.28

*Source:* UN-HABITAT, 2003b, p.252.

The UN-Habitat (2008) indicated that the majority of people worldwide will be living in towns or cities, taking into cognizance the current indicators of growth leading to the arrival of the urban millennium. With regards to future trends, it is estimated 93% of urban growth will occur in Asia and Africa. Urbanization is not necessary a new phenomenon on the continent of Africa, as shown by centres like Addis-Ababa, Lagos, Nairobi, Cairo, Kano and Timbuktu. What is noteworthy about contemporary urbanization in Nigeria is its fast pace. Like many developing countries, Nigeria has experienced especially since political independence one of the fastest rate of urbanization in the world.

The period of urbanization in Nigeria is categorized into three-fold:

Pre-colonial: Cities such as Lagos, Kano, Zaria, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Ibadan, Osogbo, Abeokuta, Ilorin, Oyo, Benin, Onitsha, Calabar.

Years of Colonial rule: New districts were added to the pre-colonial cities, and established new urban centres such as Kaduna, Minna, Jos, Makurdi, Enugu, Aba, Owerri, and PortHarcourt.

Post Colonial period: This witnessed not only the initial industrialization of the country but the political restructuring of the country leading from 1967 to the creation of 12 states which has now increased to 36 states and Federal Capital Territory Abuja. The capitals of each of these

states, even those states like Jigawa, Nasarawa and Taraba that were almost starting from the scratch have been growing at rates which has made them approach metropolitan level, (Development Policy Centre, 2002).

### **Challenges**

Nigeria as a nation has over the years been experiencing an accelerated shift of her populations from rural to urban areas. This rapid rate of urbanization has no doubt engendered several challenges and problems similar to situations in other parts of the world.

Sadly, most problems confronting cities, towns and their inhabitants as identified in Agenda 21 in Nigeria include inadequate financial resources, lack of employment opportunities, spreading homelessness and expansion of squatter settlements, increased poverty, growing insecurity and rising crime rates, inadequate and deteriorating building stock, services and infrastructure.

Other problems include substandard and inadequate housing, slums, transportation problems, low productivity, crime and juvenile delinquency, lack of health and educational facilities, improper land use, insecure land tenure, rising traffic congestion, increasing pollution, lack of green spaces, inadequate water supply and sanitation, uncoordinated urban development and an increasing vulnerability to disaster.

The paradox is that cities have also become a locus of excruciating poverty and deprivation. This is particularly, the case in developing countries where rapid and chaotic urbanization is being accompanied by increasing inequalities, which pose enormous challenges to human security and safety ( United Nations Conference on Human Settlements, 2001).

### **Prospects**

A greater proportion of the population resided or intended to reside in the urban areas to scramble for the resources available. This has made cities potent instruments for national economic and social development, attracting investments and wealth creation. Social development, human and technological resources resulting in unprecedented gains in productivity and competitiveness are potentials of urbanization. Indeed, cities are the repositories of knowledge and the agents of socio-political change. And within this new constellation, cities are serving as the nexus of production, innovation and specialized services, as well as generating new forms of social organization, cultural integration and dialogue among civilizations as the world, assisted by radical innovations in transport and communication technology becomes a global village and market place.

Scholars increasingly acknowledge urbanization as an intrinsic dimension of economic and social development, reflecting the rational decisions of millions of internal migrants to seek new opportunities in the cities.

In terms of economic output, urban areas represent a much larger share of gross domestic product (GDP) than their share of the population. The very concentration of such activity in cities may lead to more efficient markets and hence promote development, both urban and rural (Kessides, 2006). Similarly, urban centres have been repeatedly identified as privileged sites, hosting the core of modern economic and social functions, with superior amenities and services often stemming from both economic advantages of scale and proximity and political advantages of leverage (Lipton, 1976; Lowry, 1990; Chen et al, 1998). Hence, social indicators usually show urban advantages in public health, associated with improved access to modern health services, safe water and sanitation (Montgomery et al, 2003).

This model of a strong direct association between urbanization, economic growth and social development has prevailed since the industrial revolution, but it has recently come under question for sub-Saharan Africa. Rural-urban migration and urban natural increase have been linked to the expansion of urban poverty (Mabogunje, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

As long as facilities for human survival are not provided in the rural areas, people will continue to move to the urban centres to scramble for their share of the existing facilities and live a more comfortable life. Governments in Nigeria have failed to curtail such movements and the consequences are over dependency on the urban infrastructures, the growth of urban slums and high population density. Unfortunately, the urban milieus have not been able to meet the challenges of urbanization resulting in high crime rates and all other forms of anti-social behaviours which require another institutional framework to manage.

Overall, then, urbanization benefits both migrants and the economy (White and Lindstrom, 2005). Policy makers in Nigeria have been increasingly inclined to accept the explanation of 'over-urbanization' as a cause of poverty. But urbanization and urban growth, per se, cannot be blamed for African poverty; on the contrary, despite their obvious problems, cities continue to provide more opportunities for national development and personal realization.

### **Recommendation**

1. Giving these realities, there is the need for all levels of government to take responsibilities to address these challenges by showing serious commitment to overcoming them through various planned strategies.
2. If linking population and sustainability means focusing development on the welfare of the population as both agents and beneficiaries of the development process, slowing down urban growth and the development of infrastructures should then be viewed as the two main components of all sustainable development strategies in Nigeria.
3. Re-direct distribution of population away from rapidly growing urban areas of the country as a result of massive rural-urban internal migration by eliminating the current imbalance in economic and social opportunities in urban as compared to the rural areas. Therefore, an attempt should be made to embark on planned development whereby the rural areas would be developed relatively and have basic social infrastructures that can attract and sustain the population, in form of return migration.

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