Rural – Urban Migration in Nigeria: Implications for Development and Social Order in the 21st Century

Sule, Israel Dantata and Adegboyega, Kamorudeen
Department of Sociology Ahmadu Bello University Zaria

The phenomenon of unregulated movement of people especially from rural to urban areas in Nigeria is on the increase. Sad enough, the movement is mostly characterized by the most viable and productive proportion of the population in the rural areas whose ages are between 16 and 35 years. The peculiar history of the emergence of modern cities in Nigeria which is located in the capitalist political economy as well as the deliberate but jaundiced governmental policies, provision of infrastructural facilities and the establishment of industries largely contribute to the phenomena. Unfortunately, the migration of most of these people from rural to urban areas is associated with unmet needs such as job opportunities, good infrastructural facilities and better living conditions. In order to cope with the challenges of life, majority adopt illegal survival strategies that directly challenge and impact on development strategies and the issues of social order. In terms of methodology, this paper reviews relevant secondary and empirical documents where it is argued that most of the vices being witnessed in most of the cities in Nigeria cannot be isolated from the problem of unregulated rural-urban migration. The paper posits that there is the need on one hand for a paradigm shift in the country's development policies, both at the phase of formulation and planning and on the other; the commitment to actively execute to details. Such policies that will stem the tide of rural-urban drift. Second, there is the need to adopt best practices that will engender viable management of both the rural and urban areas in order to deal with the problem of security and order.

Keywords: Pre-capitalist Mode of Production, Capitalist Mode of Production, Rural-Urban Migration, Development, Social Order

Introduction

It is pertinent to recognize that large cities existed at different historical epochs, such as in Mesopotamia, China, America, India and even in Africa. In fact historical account shows that urban areas predates colonialism in Africa. However, these cities are in many ways different from modern urban cities. Whereas, the origin of most of these cities are closely associated with agricultural revolution in food production, which led to increased sedentialization and increased population growth, their economies were predicated on pre-capitalist modes of production that is largely subsistent in nature with elementary forms of resource accumulation coupled with communalist and/ or feudalistic political structures that are equally characterized by homogeneity of people and culture; ties of personal dependence and restricted mobility of labour. Hence Sjoberg (1960) typified them as pre-industrial cities. Furthermore, the relationship that existed between urban and rural areas (especially in Africa) at that time were more interdependent and symbiotic in nature, in which both sectors co-exist in such a way that there were no noticeable geo-spatial, socio-spatial and geo-economic structural disequilibrium and negativity. In other words, the socio-
economic imbalance and disarticulation that has come to characterize urban-rural linkage in modern times was virtually none existent.

The emergence of modern urban areas especially in Europe as well as from the beginning of colonialism in Africa lies in the development of the capitalist mode of production. Perchonok (1994), posits that beginning from the twelfth century, mercantile capitalism led to the founding of new cities in Europe. This new mode of production consequently brought about a new social order that was characterized by long distance trade, free mobility of labour, a degree of individual freedom and a legal system which permits new contractual relationships; and market exchange based on a monetary economy. This led to the large movement of people from the rural areas to the urban centres in search of jobs and ‘freedom’ from the communalistic or feudalistic power structures that existed at that time. Thus, since most of the industries were located in cities, and as part of efforts to sustain the new economic system, a large labour force was required and effective transport systems were evolved to enhance the migration of people from their rural communities to urban areas to participate in industrial occupation. As industries increased in number, so also the demand for additional labour force increased; hence several people abandon the rural communities in preference for urban areas, consequently leading to the growth of cities and towns.

Bell (1981) succinctly described the situation when he said that cities in Western Europe kept expanding rapidly because of improvements in agriculture and transportation, the opening of new lands and new trade routes, and above all, the rise in productive activity, first in highly organized handicraft and eventually in a revolutionary new forms of production – the factory run by machinery and fossil fuel. The large modern cities have come to rest on high production of mechanized agriculture, on highly developed means of transportation, on a vast range of non-agricultural jobs created by industrialization and on a massively concentrated labour force drawn from the rural areas.

The above unique historical experience was never replicated endogenously in Africa, but it resonated via the forceful colonization of Africa. By the colonial conquest of Africa, various pre-capitalist economies were re-ordered and re-oriented away from production for local needs, to production for the need of the imperial powers. In order to achieve this, the colonial powers re-organized the social structure they met in various indigenous communities through their own kind of policies and legal instruments. In order to effectively subjugate the pre-capitalist modes of production to the capitalist mode of production, the entire gamut of economic activities were carried out through the introduction of monetary economy. Thus, labour, trade and commerce, tax, transportation of goods and services and all other forms of meaningful economic transactions were done via the acceptable legal tender approved by the colonial power. This singular policy led to the forceful migration of people especially the able-bodied young men from the rural areas to the urban areas in search of jobs that could help them secure the means that will enable them participate effectively in the new economic system. Furthermore, other apparatuses such as banks, courts and police were equally introduced to oversee and enforce the compliance of the indigenous people (Tamuno, 1970; Rodney, 1972; Sule, 2006).

In fact, Ahire (1985) traced and linked the emergence and role of the colonial police in Nigeria to the deliberate re-organization of the indigenous pre-capitalist structure to serve capitalism. He noted that one principal area that the police was effectively used to decimate the pre-capitalist mode of production was in the conscription of a large number of indigenous people, to participate in the inhuman policy of forced labour and forced migration. Having realized that the kind of labour force required for capitalist construction could not be created through voluntary means, the colonial government frequently resorted to forced labour by conscription as they ‘forage’ and ‘pillage’ various communities to achieve this. It was through this method that a substantial labour force was made

---

5 Ibid p 15-17
available for wage employment in the Plateau tin mines, Enugu coal mines, the construction of roads and rail lines and in various sectors of the economy throughout Nigeria. The cities therefore became a critical and crucial intermediary in the colonial economic system, linking indigenous people and their communities to international capitalism. Thus, rural to urban migration in Nigeria and its attendant consequences cannot be understood without adequate reference to, and analysis of the intrusion and foisting of capitalist mode of production on indigenous pre-capitalist mode of production. This assertion has been affirmed by Cheru (2002) when he said that colonialism gave to Africa many of the contemporary qualities of its rural and urban areas. He further argued that the main component in the growth of cities in the earlier part of post – independence era was rural to urban migration. This has continued to remain a major precipitating factor in the depletion of rural communities and the growth of urban centres in Nigeria. As a result, the “culture” of rural to urban migration was installed. In stressing the difference between pre-colonial migration and that of the colonial and post-colonial periods, Amin (1974) noted that the first was a movement of peoples who always return back to their communities after a short stay while the latter is a movement of labour in the context of the newly created labour market with little or no hope of returning back to the rural areas immediately.

According to Onyeonoru (1994), the trend of rural to urban migration witnessed during the colonial period continued in post – independent Nigeria without abating. The trend was further exacerbated by the oil boom of the mid – 1970s coupled with a urban – biased development strategy pursued by various Governmental regimes. This led to the increasing imbalance in development between rural and urban areas which resulted in stagnating the rural sector and led to an ever increasing urban congestion with its attendant pressures and consequences on infrastructural facilities, socio-spatial needs and urban management, as able bodied men flocked to the cities.

‘Rural’ and ‘Urban’: Towards an Empirical Explanation

Germane to our understanding of rural to urban migration in Nigeria is an attempt to empirically conceptualize and define what is “rural” and “urban”. First, this is quite imperative because the two concepts can be defined in a variety of ways depending on the objective of the analyst. Thus, we discover that economists, psychologists, historians, geographers and even sociologists may adopt different parameters in their definition of the concept as has been demonstrated by Henri (1925); Sjoberg (1960); Weber (1958); Montgomery et al. (2003) and Hugo et al. (2003). Second and deriving from the above, the nuances of assertions and divergent contemplations have serious implications for policy formulation and execution. Possibly this may be responsible for why certain scholars, with specific reference to Nigeria, (See Udeh, 1989 and Adewale, 2005) posit that the rural to urban migration trend no longer exist and that Nigeria is beginning to record a massive reversal, i.e. urban to rural migration—a thesis which does not tally with the findings of such reputable international organizations like the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (2001, 2003); UN – Habitat (2001), United State Agency for International Development (USAID), (2002); World Facts (2004); Department For International Development (DFID) (2004), and that of several scholars like Nwokocha (2008), Satterwaite (2006), Mohammed (2009) and Min-Harris (2010). The misleading assertions of Udeh (1989), Adewale (2005) and some other scholars could be as a result of the way they conceive and define the two concepts of ‘rural’ and ‘urban’. Third, we also discover that in government quarters, different parameters are used. These parameters could be due to some other extraneous political factors that border on international aid and support rather than demographic ones. Thus, most governments use one of these four parameters,
i.e. population size thresholds; the proportion of the population employed in non-farm activities; the administrative or political status of a settlement; and a list of settlements named as ‘urban’ as compared to those not listed in the national census to determine what is ‘urban’ and what is ‘rural’. Hence, there are divergent opinions among different nations as to what really constitute ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ (Satterwaite, 2006).

In this paper, however, the rural area is conceptualized as largely characterized by the agricultural sector, consisting mainly of farmers—this does not rule out the presence of non-agricultural activities such as small-scale enterprises and petty-trading. However, the driving force of rural economy in Nigeria is mostly farming. Rural communities are largely homogenous and human relationship and interaction is of the mechanical solidarity type, and population is mostly sparse. While urban area is largely characterized by manufacturing and processing, construction, transport, storage, education and health industries, it is a high wage and high productivity sector with relatively high output-capital ratio. It also has a high population density hence a highly heterogeneous community in which social relationship and interaction is of the organic solidarity type (Durkheim, 1966).

**Rural-Urban Migration Trend in Brief**

In 1974, rural population in Nigeria was 75% of the total population but by 2001, urban population had assumed a high dimension of 44% of the country’s population. This rapid urban growth portends serious implications on the environmental and the well-being of the citizenry. According to the report of United Nations Population Division (2002), the world’s population is becoming increasingly urbanized. The report revealed that in 1950, 30% of the world’s population of industrialized countries now lives in the urban areas and by 2002; the figure had increased to 47% of the global population. It also has a high population density hence a highly heterogeneous community in which social relationship and interaction is of the organic solidarity type (Durkheim, 1966).

With specific reference to Nigeria, the findings of Ogunsanya (2004), World Facts (2004) Department For International Development, (2004); Cross et al (2006), Asinyabola (2010) among others, confirm that the trend of rural to urban migration in Nigeria is rapid and seems unabated. In fact, according to Ogunsanya (2004) and Asinyabola (2010), Nigeria is urbanizing at a very high and rapid rate. Their works reveal that this has been the case since 1950 when urban population was only about one million, but rose to eleven million in 1963, representing 2% of the country’s population. Spurred by the oil boom of the 1970s, Nigerian cities witnessed a high and unprecedented influx of people (especially youths) from the rural areas to urban centres in search of jobs and better living conditions.

At this juncture, it is pertinent to say that though this particular trend of migration was disrupted due to certain events that took place between the early part of the 1980s to about 1992, several evidences show that the rural – urban trend have since picked up in such a dramatic form that projections suggest that the number of those living in town and cities will reach 100 million (approximately 67% of the entire population) by 2020 (Department For International Development report, 2004; Egunjobi, 1999 and Asinyabola, 2010).

Onyeonoru (1994), identified the events that momentarily stalled the rural to urban migration trend as follows. The impact of the world economic recession (necessitated by the oil glut) that became evident in Nigeria around 1981 which led to a decline in the country’s oil production from about 2.05 million

---

ensued that impacted negatively on the economy, this led to a resultant decline in Nigeria’s foreign reserves and hence a foreign exchange crisis. This further led to the reduction of the labour force in the manufacturing sector. Within the above period about 50% of Nigeria’s import substitution factories went bankrupt; this led to the closure of 101 manufacturing companies and the laying off of about 200,000 workers between December 1982 and July 1983 alone. About the same period, i.e. between 1981–1984, about 80% of construction workers were laid off. In the flour mill sub-sector of Food, Beverage and Tobacco, about 300,000 workers were made redundant between 1986 and 1989, while over 1 million workers both in the private and public sectors lost their jobs between 1981 and 1983. According to Onyeonoru, most of them returned home within this period to pick up farming. Second, is the introduction of the structural adjustment programme in 1986 by the Babangida administration which re-enforced the austerity measures of the 1980s. This further led to the reduction of the labour force in the public sector. Furthermore, in 1992, most State Governments also reduced their work force by between 25–50% to enable them pay the wage increase in the light of non-increase in Federal revenue allocated to them despite the fact that the federal government increased wages by 45% due to the high rate of inflation that accompanied the devaluation of the naira by about 80% in March 1992. Thus, the loss of job further aggravated urban to rural migration. Third, is the creation of more states and local government areas at various times within this period that led to the movement of people from the urban areas to the rural areas in search of newly created opportunities and jobs. Fourth is the introduction of other programmes that were meant to facilitate genuine rural transformation and development such as the establishment of the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFFRI) in 1986; the establishment of Peoples Bank in 1989 and Community Bank in 1990; the establishment of the Better Life for Rural Women; the Central Bank of Nigeria’s banking policy that encouraged commercial banks to open rural branches between 1985 – 1989.

However, Onyeonoru posited that this trend was not sustained and therefore became inhibited due to a number of reasons. These include: (i) the poor funding and ineffective management of the programmes and their discontinuities by subsequent regimes; (ii) the delay in the payment of workers’ entitlement which made life in the rural communities even more harsher, coupled with the lack of adequate infrastructure such as good schools, roads, hospitals, portable water, etc. to sustain returning migrants; (iii) the ill preparedness of new Local Government Areas (LGAs) and States to cope with the sudden re-distribution of the population; coupled with the population pressure on the meager facilities and infrastructure in the newly established capitals of most of the LGAs and States which led to new problems of social adjustment (note that the creation of some of the new states also brought about new openings and opportunities which led to labour migration on a massive scale from the rural areas to newly established state capitals because of labour shortage such as in Ondo State after the creation of Ekiti State, Katsina State after it was carved out of Kaduna State, etc.); (iv) the pull and push effect of rural state capitals on adjoining rural areas (a good example is Lokoja, Kogi State; Uyo, Akwa Ibom State; Minna, Niger State, and Lafia, Nassarawa State); (v) the return of the country to civil rule in 1999, coupled with new vista of opportunities provided within the political and economic sectors of the economy have led to the reversal of urban–rural migration to its former trend, i.e. rural to urban migration.

From the foregoing and contrary to the positions of Udeh (1989) and Adewale (2005), it is very clear from recent studies, that out of the different
types of migration that occur in Nigeria, i.e. rural-rural, rural - urban; urban - urban and urban - rural migrations, the fastest growing type is the rural to urban migration (See, Cross et al. 2006, Min - Harris, 2010), United State Agency for International Development (USAID), 2000).

Implications of Rural-Urban Migration on Development and Social Order in Nigeria

Several factors have been adduced to explain rural-urban migration. These include personal political motives; the attractive nature of urban life often referred to as ‘the bright lights’ theory; the desire to belong to the urban social class; the inability of ecosystems to support rural population; personal psychological traits of certain people as adventurers and risk takers and ethno religious conflicts (Adedimeji, 2002). While these factors do influence rural-urban migration, preponderantly, the Nigerian situation is traceable to first, its colonial pedigree and second to economic reason.

Apart from the fact that forced labour and forced migration as well as the citing of industries and the concomitant development of a money economy necessitated initial rural-urban migration in colonial Nigeria, the colonial government also favour centre-versus periphery administrative orientations. In other words, the colonial government favours the primacy of urban areas over and above rural areas in the allocation and distribution of infrastructural facilities such as roads, pipe borne water, healthcare facilities, electricity and educational institutions. After independence, the political elite that took over the reigns of government from the colonialists retained most of the colonial structures, style of administration, and policy orientation without any modification. Thus, a disproportionate share of infrastructure continued to be concentrated in urban areas - what Lipton (1977) referred to as “urban bias”. This has in turn unleashed powerful currents of rural-to-urban migration which the long years of military rule could not correct. (Obono, 2002; Cheru, 2002 and Nwockocha, 2008).

Equally fundamental to the understanding of rural-urban migration in Nigeria is economic reason. According to O’Connor (1994), rural-urban migration is largely a function of perceived greater economic opportunities in the cities than in the rural areas especially among youths who constitute the highest population of rural dwellers. According to Min–Harris (2010:161),

Migration is not only a coping mechanism to escape poverty; it is an opportunity for rural young people to feel a sense of pride, self-respect, and be viewed as leaders within their family and their broader community.

Young people view migration as an avenue to improve their status.

In fact, Bah et al. (2006) assert that in south-eastern Nigeria, migration is considered essential to achieving economic and social success, hence parents encourage their youths to move to the cities. Even when the cities have largely ceased to be areas of economic opportunities and have become saturated and marked by stagnation and unemployment due to the impact of faulty governmental policies and programme coupled with the effect of recent global economic downturn, the rural dwellers keep trooping to the urban centres for jobs that are not there. The impact of rural-urban migration is indeed a rapid deterioration of the rural economy, leading to chronic poverty and food insecurity (Mini, 2001 and Iruonagbe, 2011).

Furthermore, income in agriculture which is the mainstay of rural economy is lower than urban incomes. Several factors are responsible for this. These include: small quantity and poor quality of investment and techniques of agricultural production, farmers restricted access to credit from banks, and on the part of banks, the problem of recovering credit from farmers, which further compounds farmers’ vulnerability of not having access to credit at all; lack of access to viable market; absence of adequate storage facilities and the problem of land tenure system among others have made several rural dwellers to drift to the urban centres to seek for opportunities in non-agricultural employment. Also, the impossibility of supporting a family on a very small land holding and

---


3 Obono, 2002; Cheru, 2002 and Nwockocha; 2008.

4 Chuba, E, 2009, p 532.

5 Ibid.

the difficulty of rising in the social scale or of gaining access to ownership frustrates the rural dwellers to seek solace in the urban centres.

The influx of rural dwellers to the urban centres puts untold pressure on support services, infrastructural facilities, amenities and even space. This has grave implications for sustainable development and social order in various dimensions. The continued rise in the urban population necessitates additional demands and pressures for such urban services like housing, sewage, lighting, roads, police and fire protection and other expensive overheads. It can also be said that the unemployed in the cities constitute a potential threat to social order and stability. What is more, while the migration of rural dwellers goes to exacerbate the level of unemployment and underemployment in urban areas, it also creates labour shortage and reduces productivity in the rural areas. The rural–urban migration has changed the face of the country’s megacities, but its impacts also reach residents of villages left behind by their family members. Most migrants are men but women, especially young women, also move to cities. As a result, villages are increasingly populated by older women, the elderly and children (International Food Policy Research Institute, 2012). This has contributed immensely to the problem of food insecurity that is facing the country. Loss of manpower in agricultural activities has also led to increase in prices of goods and services in urban areas.

No sooner the in-migrant arrive the city than he began to discover that he no longer enjoys the usual social support and control provided by the extended family system in the rural areas. Coupled with the process of quick acculturation, peer pressure influence, psycho-social stresses emanating from lack of employment opportunities, good housing, overcrowding of space, intensified poverty, environmental pollution, continuous and consistent immigration, the migrant begins to develop alternative survival strategies that often produce an inter-related matrix of powerful criminogenic forces. Thus, deviant and criminal behaviours such as pick-pocketing, burglary, human trafficking, drug-addiction, prostitution, armed robbery etc. begin to emerge. These criminal tendencies are superlatively higher in urban areas than in the rural communities. Muhammed (2009) linked youth violence in Nigerian cities to urban congestion. He opined that this is largely a direct consequence of youth rural–urban drift. The upsurge of cult clashes, vandalism, ‘area boys and girls’, and thuggery are features that are more common in the urban areas than in the rural areas of Nigeria. In a study carried out by Odejide and Ohaeri (1994), they found the abuse of most hard drugs like cocaine and heroine to be an urban phenomenon. They equally discovered that 81.5% of those engaged as drug couriers are youths.

The impact of rural–urban migration is quite devastating and has posed a major challenge to both rural and urban management. Various Nigerian cities such as Lagos, Kano, Jos, Bauchi, Onitsha, Kaduna among others have become the loci of various forms of violent eruptions ranging from ethno-religious crisis, kidnapping, riots and civil strife, organized street violence, electoral violence, murder, rape and hired killings and assassinations. In fact most city dwellers live in constant fear to the extent that, most urban architectural designs are now referred to as ‘architecture of fear’, while the streets have become ‘corridors of terror’ especially at night. The effect on the cost of life and property and the incalculable emotional and psychological trauma associated with urban areas is unquantifiable. More specifically, urban violence is an intolerable developmental burden that must be ‘arrested’ to allow for prospects of sustainable development. The inadequacy of urban welfare services coupled with the decay of various infrastructural facilities and the lack of access to urban employment opportunities call for a rethink of governmental policies and a complete paradigm shift in the management of rural–urban migration.

**Conclusion**

The article examined implications of rural–urban migration on development and social order in the 21st century and contends that rural–urban migration in...
Nigeria is on the increase coupled with unfavourable governmental policies that stimulate the ugly trend. The incidence has impacted negatively on the country’s developmental programmes. For Nigeria to attain meaningful social, political and economic development therefore, appropriate mechanisms that would enhance equilibrium in all facets of life must be put in place by the government and stakeholders. Consequent upon the above realities, the paper recommends the following:

Beyond the strategy of providing basic amenities and infrastructure in rural communities to stem the tide of rural-urban drift, there is the need to change fundamentally, the socio-economic and political ideology of the country which is hinged on capitalist orientation to one that is welfarist and people-oriented in nature. Efforts must be geared towards proper integration of rural economy into the urban economy such that rural dwellers occupy reasonable place in government developmental programmes. By so doing the people become participants in the development process. An assessment of development policies in the old Western Region under the leadership of Late Chief Obafemi Awolowo indicates the role of rural dwellers in regional development. The balanced rural-urban economic link established by that regime consequently enhanced the economic development of the region. Thus, civil societies, community based organizations, community leaders and women leaders need to be involved by the federal government in the formulation and execution of such strategies.

It is a truism that good governance is essential to a virile and robust national development. However, corruption, deception, lack of checks and balances and unnecessary bureaucratic bottlenecks has seriously hampered development especially in the area of rural and urban transformation. A situation where money allocated to revamp dilapidated infrastructures and, or to build new ones at both sectors are either embezzled or misappropriated by politicians and government officials puts the citizenry in a cul-de-sac that many a times lead to violence. Thus, the Nigerian government must create a climate of accountability, equity and fairness in the execution of government policies. Also, the over politicization of government programmes and projects should be discouraged. This has led to delay, diversion or stoppage of meaningful programmes that are expected to positively impact on the lives of the citizenry and thereby stem problems that could lead to disorder.

The political elite and top government officials need to jettison the ‘GRA mentality syndrome that makes them change residence to ‘choice’ areas of the city. Such change isolate them from the everyday realities, struggles and challenges that confront Nigerian masses, hence they are not sociologically informed and psychologically disposed to find solution to their problems. Likewise, most local government officials and so called ‘grassroots’ politicians who are expected to be closest to the rural dwellers prefer to live in cities instead of their constituencies. This attitude has created a ‘bipolar world’ between the rulers and the ruled. No wonder there is no quality development taking place in the rural areas. If this mentality is fought against, it will foster a better understanding of the plight of Nigerian citizens especially in the rural areas and will equally serve as an impetus to provide better quality of life that will reduce, especially the unnecessary urge for rural-urban migration.

Finally, emphasis must still be directed at providing the enabling environment that will allow farmers in the rural areas have proper assistance in the procurement of loans and credit facilities, pesticides and farm implements that will galvanize them to embark on industrial agriculture and by so doing become employers of the teeming untapped labour that is ‘wasting away’ in the cities. A rise in the quantity and quality of agricultural and livestock production is an essential prerequisite for a rural transformation programme. Government intervention should also enable a proper pricing of farmers produce in such a way that their income is comparable with people in the urban areas. This will discourage many from abandoning the land to go to the city. Furthermore, government needs to invest in the siting of labour-intensive industries in the rural areas. This will grossly minimize rural to urban migration especially among youths with unskilled labour.

References


**Biographical Note**

**Adegboyega Kamorudeen** lectures in the Department of Sociology, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. He has published in national and international journals. His research interests include social theory, public health, youth and sustainable development and medical errors.