



URBAN BIAS, URBAN CRISES, AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: Controversies and contending Issues

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ABSTRACT

Nigerian urban crises have, in recent time, assumed very critical dimensions. The battle line between survival and extinction among urban dwellers appears to be clearly drawn. There is little attempt at attacking the forces that breed rural decay and urban migration. The cosmetic approach to tackling Nigeria's rural development problem has, as can be expected, complicated the crises facing the urban area. Hopes that the democratic reawakening which swept through Nigeria in the last 15 years would bring positive changes to the rural areas in Nigeria has fizzled out as a combination of intrigues and display of ignorance and ineptitude by politicians, stagnate popular drive for change that will stem the tide of rural urban migration. Why should a state that has twenty seven local government areas establish almost all its economic activity in one local government? There seems to be a tendency inherent in the system of state management of funds that supports allocation of funds to the urban areas at the expense of the rural areas. It is this "urban bias" in development that is the bane of urban crises in Nigeria. Drawing inference from Imo State capital where virtually all economic activity of the state is hoisted at the state capital, we demonstrate how urban bias could distort economic progress and increase and reinforce the urban crises.

KEY WORDS: Urban bias, urbanization and Development.

INTRODUCTION

What is observed in many developing nations today is steady movement of people from rural areas to urban, in search of employment, educational opportunities and higher standard of living. By the year 2016, urban population is expected to be more than half of the people in the rural areas. Nigeria is a typical example of this, where there has been an overwhelming surge of its rural populace migrating to the urban. According to World Bank development indicators, in 2011 about 87.48 million Nigerians are residing in the cities, which is slightly above half of the

population of Nigeria. (World Bank, 2011). Yet debates about whether this development has been at the expense of the rural areas are far from being settled.

What is often given as the causes of rural-to-urban migration are mere symptoms. First, it is said that poverty in rural areas resulting from low agricultural productivity, aggravated by demographic growth, has been one of the strongest motivations for migration to urban centres. In some instances, prolonged drought or other natural disasters exacerbates rural poverty leading to mass migration from rural to urban areas. Secondly, in

most Sub-Saharan African countries, rural areas are relatively under-served in terms of physical, financial, social and economic infrastructure (Hove, 2013). Others reside with Gunnar Myrdal, and his theory of “WashBack and Spread Effect” hypothesis. It is safe to say that those who still hold on to some of these views are living by Hirschman’s unbalanced growth theory (Hirschman, A. 1958). The unbalanced growth hypothesis is a direct attack to the doctrine of balanced growth and it goes to advocate for investment in a few selected areas from where development will ‘trickle down’ to the entire society.

In the context of development theory and policy, however, the idea that urban areas might stand in opposition to rural areas was sharpened in the late-1960s and 1970s by Michael Lipton.

Rural-urban migration has been historically connected with industrialization, urbanization and closely associated with rapid economic growth in developed countries (Bhattacharya, 1993). In contrast, for most countries in contemporary Sub-Saharan Africa, rapid urbanization is taking place in an economic setting of negligible industrial growth and transformation which makes it a burden. Africa stands out as an archetype of the phenomenon of ‘urbanization without growth’ (UN 2004, (Fernandes 1998; Waugh 1990). Rural-urban migration has contributed for half of the urban population growth in Africa in 1960s and 1970s and about 25% of urban growth in 1980s and 1990s (Waddington & Sabates-Wheeler, 2003; Lall et al, 2006). Concentration of investment in industries, commerce, and social services in towns has been the causes for regional inequalities and differences in economic opportunities. The cities due to their economic positions witness an unprecedented surge from the rural areas even as basic amenities and meaningful economic ventures are in relatively short supply in the rural areas.

Nigeria has not avoided this trend of growth, sadly enough. According to Anochiwa and Maduka(2014), “despite Nigeria’s impressive economic growth in the past

20 years, it seems the poor are getting poorer as inequality looms. Nigeria’s growth suffers from multiple distributional patterns, a trend that has left the poorest groups largely outside the sphere of economic expansion and material improvement”. It may be tempting to blame different regimes of government as culprits, but according to Ekekwe (1991), “there is an inextricable link between the nation’s historical experience and their relationships to the deepening contradictions, conflicts and urban crises”. His argument was that the colonialist handed over to Nigeria at Independence a neo-colonial, dependent and peripheral capitalist economy. The colonial masters governed Nigeria using the model of indirect rule. Indirect rule set the foundation of making the cities fine where the ‘lord master’ stays to govern the people using their traditional rulers in the villages as middle men. From the very beginning this system of government came with bias in development which is counterproductive.

Rural to urban migration has been on the front burner over the years and will continue to occupy significant position in the urbanization process of the developing countries, because little attention is paid to the root causes of urbanization. The decision to migrate involves ‘push factors’ (no meaningful economic activity, neither is there social amenities in the rural areas) which force migrant out of the rural areas as well as ‘pull factors’ (expected good jobs, better pay, and availability of social amenities) which attracts migrants to urban areas. The gap between the welfare and income of the average urban dweller and his rural counterpart has continued to increase. Empirical analyses on the factors that determine rural urban migration is mixed. A number of studies show push factors (for example, individual’s inability to locate economic ventures in the rural areas as the cause of migration. Others insist that the real causes are pull factors (example, employment, educational opportunities in the urban etc). As can be seen in table 1.1, the world population living in the cities has grown in the last 50 years.

Table 1.1 Percentage of Population Residing in Urban Areas in the World, Africa and Nigeria, 1950-2025

Year	World	Africa	Nigeria
1950	29.2	14.5	10.1
1955	31.2	16.3	12.1
1960	34.2	18.3	14.4
1965	35.5	20.6	17.0
1970	36.6	22.9	20.0
1975	37.8	25.2	23.4
1980	39.5	27.8	27.1
1985	42.2	30.6	31.0
1990	45.2	33.9	35.2
1995	48.1	37.3	39.3
2000	51.1	40.7	43.3
2005	53.9	44.0	47.2
2010	59.3	50.7	54.8
2020	62.0	53.9	58.3
2025	64.6	57.1	61.6

Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia retrieved April 25, 2015

According to Michael Lipton (1977, 1984), urban bias is 'the main explanation of "why poor people stay poor" in post-colonial LDCs'. He said, the most important class conflict in the poor countries of the world today is not between labour and capital. Nor is it between foreign and national interests. It is between the rural classes and the urban classes. The rural sector contains most of the poverty, and most of the low-cost sources of potential advance; but the urban sector contains most of the articulateness, organization and power. So the urban classes have been able to 'win' most of the rounds of struggle with the countryside; but in so doing they have made the development process needlessly slow and unfair".

In this paper we share the view of Lipton on his article "why the poor remain poor" in less developed countries (LDCs) seriously. We are of the view that urban bias in development is the major cause of influx of migrants to the cities and the root causes of urban crises, especially, as we consider the case of Imo State in Nigeria. And it is this influx that ignites what we see today as urban crises. We want to believe that the real obstacle to an inclusive development of the LDCs and in particular Nigeria is urban bias in development.

THEORETICAL LITERATURE

Africa has increasingly become an urban continent with an average annual growth rate of 3.3 per cent of urban dwellers between 1990 and 2000, the highest in the world (Pieterse 2010). This expansion of Africa's urban population has persisted and greatly exceeds the rate at which gainful employment for job seekers could be achieved. Employment is particularly hard to find for

unskilled rural migrants. Large numbers of those who have left school both rural and urban origin remains unemployed for many years after graduation. Some of these unemployed people find shelter with and depend on relatives. This impairs the cities' ability to meet service delivery needs. Others survive through engagement in the informal economy (Obeng-Odoom 2011). This growing group becomes part of the urban poor.

The literature has identified as factors that facilitate urban migration; economic, financial, rural violence and fetishism, drought and the desire to break away from cultural inhibitions, educational opportunities (Todaro and Stilkind, 1981; Adepoju, 1980). The United Nations has also identified health services, the quality of housing, public science facilities, water supply, and gas electricity. Telephone, cultural and recreational facilities/ opportunities (theatres, movies, libraries, newspapers, mass media, public welfare, presents of friends and relations as reasons while people migrate to the urban. (Bryant and White 1982).

When development is only centered at the capital, the result is that the urban sector which are already well off in a comparative sense gets an increasing share of the national income and by extension an increasing share of the number of hoodlums, an increasing share of the number of jobless people, robbers, thieves, cult groups, contractors, trade unionists, rioters, prostitutes, students etc which inadvertently are the tools that exacerbate the urban crises.

What is Urban Bias in Development?

The Urban Bias Thesis (UBT) made five main claims: (a) rural areas of developing countries suffer from too little spending on education and health care (relative to their population figures); (b) these inequalities, combined with excessively 'urban' form of teaching and curriculum development, pull many of the 'best and brightest' in rural areas to the cities (a more neutral incentive regime would keep them in the countryside); (c) people in rural areas are forced to pay a higher share of national taxes than is fair (notwithstanding the fact that taxes from rural areas are difficult to collect); (d) urban bias is further and most damagingly evident in a series of government-imposed 'price twists' that causes inputs into rural areas to be overpriced when compared to a market norm, and which causes outputs from rural areas to be correspondingly under-priced; and (e) this combination of *distributional urban bias* (a,b and c) and price-twisting is not only unfair but inefficient: at the margin, Lipton maintained, a given sum of government money will earn higher returns in the small agriculture sector or rural off-farm employment creation than it will in cities or large-scale urban-based industries (Lipton, M. 1977; 2005).

Drawing the analysis home, urban bias means, when the federal government or state government gives attention to developing only the Federal/State capital/urban cities at the expense of other State/local governments/rural areas that make up that state. When there is a tendency to concentrate the states resources in developing the urban cities without a corresponding investment in the rural areas to support the rural poor. Almost all states of the Nigerian federation suffer from the phenomenon of urban bias in development. However, we consider the case of Imo State as a typical example.

Imo State: Some stylized facts about Institutions and Economic activities:-

Imo State with a population of about 4.8 million people is one of the 36 states of Nigeria and lies in the south eastern of Nigeria with Owerri as its capital and largest city and is approximately 100 square kilometres

(40 sq mi) in area. Owerri is bordered by the Otamiri River to the east and the Nworie River to the south. The state is made up of 27 local government areas- Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise, Ehime Mbano, Ezinhitte, Ideato North, Ideato South, Ihitte /Uboma, Ikeduru, Isiala Mbano, Isu, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Njaba, Nkwerre, Nwange, Obowo, Oguta, Ohaji/ Egbema, Okigwe, Onuimo, Orlu, Orsu, Oru East, Oru West, Owerri Municipal, Owerri North and Owerri West. Each of the local government headquarters is a potential industrial site and development area. Ordinarily, every local government headquarter should have the basic amenities that supports investment, like pipe borne water, electricity, accessible roads, a housing unit, a good general hospital, a good market etc. The main cities in Imo State are Owerri, Orlu and Okigwe. Besides Owerri, Imo State's major towns are Isu, Okigwe, Oguta, Orlu, Akokwa, Mbaise, Mbano, Mbaitoli, Mbieri, Orodo, Nkwerre, Ubulu, Ngor Okpala, Omuma, Mgbidi, Awo-Omamma and Orsu.

All industries, including the international cargo airport are sited at Owerri as well as all federal secretariats, housing all federal agencies. The Central Bank and all major players in the Banking industry in the State are located at Owerri.

The population of this single local government of Owerri is put to about 500,000 people. By implication, the remaining 26 local governments look up to the state capital for its sustenance. To Africa and most of the less developing countries this pattern of development has become pervasive and throws open a permanent political, social and economic crises that cannot be solved in generations to come.

What is observable is that the accelerated growth of the urban areas now becomes the tool to under develop the rural poor. How can accelerated growth of the state capital under develop the rural poor? We shall consider this by drawing inference from the rural-urban matrix of distribution of the benefits of public sector expenditure in Imo State. The following result tabulated below is a vivid picture of expenditure criteria with respect to Imo State:

Table 1.2. Expenditure criteria in Imo State

Sub - sector	Rural Bias (RB), and Urban Bias (UB)
Agriculture	RB
Mining	UB
Commerce/ Industry	UB
Electricity(Infrastructure)	UB
Education	UB
Health	UB
Defense and security	UB
Labour/Social welfare	UB
Financial Institutions	UB
General Administration	UB
Transport	UB

Source: Adapted format from Okowa, 1981

Agriculture :-

Conventionally, all expenditure in agriculture should benefit the rural areas where the farm is and the peasants could be found, but some of the benefits still go to the town where we have the planners. It is interesting to note, that Imo state does not have big time farmers who can plant hectares of land like could be found in the North. Activities like the Agricultural credits, Agricultural extensions, Research and education benefits the urban. None the less, the overall benefit might go to the rural areas where we have the mechanization schemes, irrigation schemes, fertilizers distribution etc.

Commerce and Industry:-

In Imo State most of the meaningful commercial activities and industrial enterprise are located in the urban area. Every company will locate to an area where you have at least, a minimum supply of power, security, labour force, and market. Government therefore employs its resources to favour the urban, perhaps to protect the business interest of investors.

Electricity:-

Electricity is often urban bias. The reason for the concentration of investment in this area to the urban is because all meaningful government institutions are cited here. For example, Afam a village in Oyiibo Local Government Area of Rivers State started generating power under National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) during the colonial era, but saw electricity in 2010. Meanwhile, the urban part of the state (Port Harcourt) has benefited from the distribution of this light since the late 1930s. The discrimination is based on the fact that apart from the generating plant, no other investment has taken place at Afam in Oyiibo Local Government since 70 years. However, the jinx was broken when one oil servicing company established at Afam in 2008 that was when the idea to give light to that community began.

Education:-

Almost all tertiary institutions in Imo state are cited at Owerri the state capital. That means most of the budget expenditure on education is urban bias. What other twenty six local governments may benefit from the state allocation in terms of education is perhaps salary payment of primary school teachers and secondary school teachers which does not constitute up to 30% of the budget on education. Therefore the public expenditure on education is urban bias.

Transportation:-

Transportation includes the railway, roads, seaport and Airport. If you take for example in Imo State and other urban cities-Port Harcourt, Abuja, Lagos, Enugu it is the government that procures urban mass transit buses to ply the roads to ameliorate the suffering of the urban commuters. We do not have record of any government that make plan for rural mass transit. Again, apart from Orlu that is emerging as an urban city and therefore witnessing the dual carriageway of its urban, no other such local government headquarter exists in Imo state that has dual carriage way. Therefore expenditure in this area is urban bias.

Health:-

Public expenditure on health is urban biased. It is estimated that about 80% of hospital beds are located in the urban cities. Most university teaching hospital is cited in the urban. For example, when it appeared that Nigeria's premier University, University of Nigeria Nsukka (UNN) was located in the remote area of Enugu state, the teaching hospital is at Enugu the state capital. All general hospitals with modern facilities are located at the urban. Therefore, public expenditure on health is urban bias.

Defense and Security:-

when the budget earmarks a certain percentage of amount as security vote it is majorly to secure the urban

dwellers and government functionaries. The state Governor or President must ensure that there is adequate security in the urban to encourage investors to come in and invest their money. Again, since the urban is the seat of government all necessary effort will be mobilized to secure it.

General administration:-

All state and federal secretariat are cited in the urban. All the labour and man power for the general administration live within and around Owerri the state capital. Also, public expenditure to this area is urban bias.

CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF URBAN BIAS

Over the years, third world countries (Nigeria inclusive) have learnt to treat urban migration (a symptom of urban bias) as the real cause of urban crises, neglecting the real cause(s). The major reason for the influx of youths to Port Harcourt, Enugu, Owerri, Kano, Lagos and Abuja etc is not so much of facilities there, but jobs that do not exist in the rural areas where they are coming from. It is to the credit of this surge that we have the incidences of crime and the degree of violence increased tremendously in a number of African cities. Crime and violence increasingly accompany deprivation and hunger (Kessides 2005). Again, the general problems of poverty and social exclusion within urban areas, extreme weaknesses of national police and justice systems and absence of trust between communities and local governments compound the challenge of increasing insecurity.

Nigerian politics has a tendency of fostering leaders who has long standing reputation for waste, corruption and mismanagement of funds. The ideological underpinning of these leaders as their economic plan reflects clearly is that if it is okay with the state capital, it is okay with the state, this tendency accounted for the incumbent government in Ekiti State to lose election. The reasons why government officials take this position are three fold: (1) to convince foreign investors that the state has the infrastructure to sustain any project; (2) to convince political opponents of the improvement in the state during their tenure; (3) To create room to embezzle government funds and perpetuate corruption. Also, it goes to show that these leaders are bereft of ideas of what development is all about. It also goes to show that such leaders do not sit to consider the economic or social implications and consequences of their actions.

CONSEQUENCES OF A LOPSIDED DEVELOPMENT

1. Many cities experience a wide range of criminal activities ranging from the petty to the armed

and organized crimes. Theft is the most common crime, but some criminal gangs have graduated to drug trafficking and money laundering in Nigerian cities.

2. Crime is also facilitated by the anonymous character of the big city, and by such institutional weaknesses as poor pay and inadequate training of police, and by deficiencies in essential infrastructure such as streetlights.
3. Women, the elderly, and the weak are easy victims of all kinds of crime.
4. The urban centers inadvertently turns to a conglomeration of touts, a conglomeration of gangsters, prostitutes, thieves, robbers, kidnappers, suicide bombers and as many as are distressed and discontented with life, the maimed, the depressed, and the deprived. As they could not find expression in their villages and local governments they find their route to the urban area.
5. Urban bias breeds a welfare disparity gap between the urban and the rural dwellers. This huge gap ought not to have been and therefore produces inefficient allocation of resources. This gap persists because only about less than 20 percent of investment for development goes to the agricultural rural poor.
6. Urban bias also increases income inequality and inefficiency. The rural poor are marginalized to feed the urban rich. The rural poor go to the urban market to make purchases at the prevailing market rates that does not favour them.
7. Urban bias in development generates a false economic balance of growth in the minds of the President or Governors of these states. How? When all concentration of development is done at the capital the government seems to have a sense of fulfillment because a visitor to the state will begin to judge the administration from what he or she has seen in the urban area. They will go with the impression that it is okay with the state. That sense of achievement opens the door for embezzlement of funds.
8. What follows is that a section of the press could be influenced to praise that particular government.
9. The most damaging aspect of it is that such administration would find it a little difficult to appreciate the sufferings in the rural areas and its yearning for attention. The governors can

then begin to buy private jets and build “mono rails” that do not add value to development.

10. For example, a Governor in Rivers State, Nigeria initiated the building of a 2 kilo meter mono rail that will gulp from the tax payer’s money well over N150 billion naira. This amount could be invested in the rural areas to establish not less than twenty cottage industries (Vegetable Oil Company, printing press, poultry farms, pig farms, plastic companies, roofing Sheet Company, enamel Ware Company, tissue paper, Paper Company and furniture etc.) that could employ not less than 1000 school leavers excluding the multiplier effect.
11. As noted, another consequence is that all job seekers will move to the urban area where it is expected to gain employment. It is worthy to note that most of the rural dwellers that troop to the urban area end up squatting in town for long without securing job. It is this group of the jobless youths that constitute nuisance in the urban areas.
12. Unplanned population explosion in our cities explains the much taunted infrastructural decay in our cities. More so in a country like Nigeria that do not have maintenance culture and corruption takes its toll in government contracts, the situation becomes more deplorable (Okafor, 2005).
13. The tendency towards developing the urban areas with little regard to the rural areas accounts for inequality in the distribution of government revenue.
14. One of the consequences of this phenomenon is that it will be impossible to build self-reliance, meet basic needs, without dismantling all the forces that bred inequality. If people are not mobilized for popular participation in government then whatever comes out of that system is a development of alienation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we consider it mere hypocrisy for governments in Nigeria to talk about urban crises as if the whole world has gone mad without taking recourse to the real issue. The upsurge of human beings to the urban areas causes population explosion. As the number of people continue to increase, so does the joblessness increase, house scarcity in the urban increases, robbers, thieves, occults, unionists, rioters, touts, cult groups, heavy traffic etc increases. It is this single concentration of

destitute, distressed, and disappointed people that cause the urban crises. And once efforts are made to enliven the rural areas the country would make progress towards a better urban city. To our mind, this is the contending issues.

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