

*Rural-Urban Linkages for mutual gains Evidence from  
Sub-Saharan Africa*

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**Abstract**

Africa has been one of the rapidly urbanizing continents in the world. The Sub-Saharan African region has been projected to be one of the highest urbanizing regions in Africa by the year 2050. Most scholars have often focused on the negative impact of urbanization in the region. This paper provides evidence to show that there are positive impacts of urbanization in the region. Some rural-urban linkages such as access to markets and access to service centers provide mutual benefits for both people living in rural and urban areas. These linkages can therefore be exploited positively to accelerate development in the region.

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**1.0 Introduction**

The 21st century has been characterized by rapid urbanization, with the forces of agglomeration getting very stronger each passing day and consequently making previously small towns expand at a very faster rate. Urbanization is accompanied by both problems and benefits. Globally there are a lot of rural areas benefiting from the urbanization of major cities.

Africa has over 40 percent of its population now dwelling in cities (Hussein and Suttie 2016). Africa is expected to have an urbanization rate of around 56 to 64 percent by the year 2050, Sub Saharan Africa has been tipped as the region in Africa which will experience the largest percentage of urbanization come 2050 (Hussein and Suttie 2016).

Even though the future of urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa is bright, most scholars have often only dwelled on the negative impacts that urbanization has on the region, thereby ignoring some of the benefits that urbanization provides in the region, especially in the rural areas. Despite the interest in urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa, few studies have considered the rural-urban linkage that exists in the region and how mutually beneficial these linkages are. This paper aims to provide evidence to support the fact that the rural-urban relationship in Sub-Saharan Africa does not only leave negative externalities on rural areas but also establishes urban-rural linkages which are mutually beneficial.

## 2.0 Methods

Data was collected from secondary sources which included webpages, journals and reports, and internet databases, data used from these sources were data that was relevant to the achievement of the objectives of the study. Using phrases like “urban-rural linkages in”, “urban-rural linkages in Sub Saharan Africa”, “benefits of urban-rural linkages,” data was searched for using internet databases including google scholar and Jostor and other grey literature such as websites of organizations. Data were analyzed based on 3 major themes which were (1) Rural-urban linkages in Sub Saharan Africa (2) Mutual benefits of existing rural-urban linkage (3) How to further solidify rural-urban linkages in Sub Saharan Africa

## 3.0 Discussions

### 3.1 Rural-urban linkages in Sub Saharan Africa

In Tanzania, there is evidence of numerous urban-rural linkages. New rapidly developing urban areas provide numerous opportunities by performing several functions to rural areas some of these functions include, marketing access function, employment creation function, social service center function, and access to financial services function (Birch-thomsen *et al.* 2015).

In Tanzania, emerging urban areas provide a market function for traders in the sense that vibrant markets are established in urban areas. This enables people from the rural areas to visit these urban areas to undertake trading activities. Also, most of the rural folks visit urban

areas to sell directly to processing companies, industries in emerging urban areas. Madizini and Igowole get their raw materials from farms of the surrounding rural areas (Birch-thomsen *et al.* 2015). Also, urban areas in Tanzania serve as employment destination centers for people from rural areas who are seeking to work and improve their lives, urban areas also provide social services such as schools and major health facilities (Birch-thomsen *et al.* 2015). Finally, some urban areas provide financial services to people dwelling in rural areas. Urban areas have well-established banks and other savings and loans institutions, people from rural areas are now able to take advantage of existing banks in nearby urban centers to save and acquire loans. Also, more rural folks can get connected with other informal lending systems such as the money lenders and rich relatives in these urban areas (Birch-thomsen *et al.* 2015).

In Mali urban areas have served as a marketplace where rural farmers can now purchase modern farming equipment/machinery. This enhances efficient farming and thus increases yields. Residents who are rich in these urban areas buy these equipment/inputs and send them to their relatives in the rural areas. Some of these equipment supplied by urban relatives to rural relatives include fertilizers, tractors, and mills (Bah *et al.* 2003).

In southeastern Nigeria, the availability of a cheap transport system encourages most rural women to commute on daily basis to go and work in the nearest urban centers. Women go to these urban centers to work as cleaners and gardeners while most of the men commute to urban centers engage in jobs in the construction and oil industry (Bah *et al.* 2003).

In Kenya, people living in urban areas are consumers of most of the food produced in the rural areas most traders from rural areas sell their produce to city dwellers to gain income to take care of their households. Urban centers provide jobs that are not agriculture-related to a significant number of rural residents (Kago and Sietchiping 2017). It must be noted that most Africans continue to maintain strong linkages with their hometowns no matter the number of years that they spend in cities and some even prefer coming home to settle down after retirement (Dávila 2015).

## **4.0 How both rural and urban areas benefit from the existing positive urban-rural linkages in Sub Saharan Africa**

### **4.1 Trading and marketing**

A lot of people living in the rural areas in Sub-Saharan African countries engage in trading activities with neighboring urban areas (Birch-thomsen *et al.* 2015, Kago and Sietchiping 2017). In this case, a lot of people especially in the rural areas sell their farm produce in markets in urban centers and earn income. In the urban centers, a lot of city dwellers are

employed mostly in the secondary or tertiary sector of employment hence there is always a high demand for food and other agricultural products. The market and trading linkage that exists between rural and urban areas enables rural folks to trade agriculture products and earn income while the urban folks are also able to get food which they need to survive.

## **4.2 Creation of employment**

A lot of rural folks move to urban centers in search of jobs to improve their standard of living and those of their relatives in the rural areas (Bah *et al.* 2003, Birch-thomsen *et al.* 2015, Kago and Sietchiping 2017). Most rural folks travel to urban areas to work mostly in the construction sector. Others also get jobs such as cleaning and gardening to earn some income. After earning incomes most of these people who migrated to the urban centers send home remittances from the income that they have earned while working in the urban centers. These monies are used by relatives in the rural areas to cater to their basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter. In return, the factories and rich households in urban areas can have access to affordable and most often cheap labor.

## **4.3 Provision of social service and infrastructure access**

Urban areas provide access to infrastructure for people from rural areas in most countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. Most prominent among these infrastructures are schools and health service facilities. The linkages that exist enables rural people to have access to quality education and health care, which in the long term earns most of them better jobs and longevity or higher life expectancy. In return the urban areas also benefit from rural people who use this infrastructure because service/user fees are charged, people from rural areas pay to use some of the infrastructures in urban areas. User fees generate internally generated revenue for both local and central governments. These revenues are mostly used to undertake developmental projects in both the urban and rural areas.

## **4.4 Provision of credit and financial services**

Most rural farmers save with financial institutions situated in urban centers some of them also through the guidance of various financial institutions can wisely invest their monies in urban centers and get rewarding interests or dividends on it. As more people save, the finance that an urban authority can access from financial institutions as loans also increase immensely. This enables financial institutions the ability to loan huge amounts of funds to government

institutions to implement projects and development interventions in urban areas to improve the lives of people.

## 5.0 Conclusion

As Sub-Saharan Africa continues to urbanize rapidly, this urbanization needs to be accompanied with it many positive rural-urban opportunities and linkages, which governments in the region can take advantage of. It has been explicitly established in this paper that rural-urban linkages exist in Sub-Saharan Africa, and they mutually benefit both urban and rural areas, these linkages must therefore be further strengthened and exploited positively.

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