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3. AUTHOR(S)
L.R. MILLS

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9. ABSTRACT

This paper has attempted to demonstrate with evidence from a sample area in central Sierra Leone how considerable circular migration takes place between the rural areas and various urban centres of the country. The equivalent of 12% of the resident village populations were absent from their rural homes and two-thirds of these people had migrated to the towns. It has been shown how widespread such migration is throughout rural society as 70% of all households had at least one person away. Thirty percent of the absentees were considered as unemployed in urban destinations. Most of those in jobs were employed in the unskilled or semi-skilled sector and a substantial number were away as illicit diamond miners. If, as was indicated, it was "hardship" and "lack of local jobs" that largely encouraged out-migration then development in rural employment may well reduce the circular migration to urban unemployment.

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CIRCULAR RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION: THE CASE
OF RURAL RESIDENTS IN CENTRAL SIERRA LEONE

L. R. HENNS

Much has been written on migration¹ in Africa although few studies have attempted a comprehensive study of rural-urban population movement either at the continental or national level.² Many works have dealt with labour movement³ but essentially these have considered little more than the transfer of adult male workers. Such analyses would not apply to all or even most of the movement in Sierra Leone or in a good number of other countries. There is also a substantial body of literature dealing with urbanization and rural-urban migration but most of the studies in this context consider the movement from the urban end of the process.⁴ Although these works are of great importance when considering rural-urban movement they do not cover all migrants who leave the rural areas nor do retrospective reasons for moving given by migrants presently in the towns necessarily coincide with their reasons at the time of moving or with the reasons for other migrants moving at the present time. Further, rural-urban migration

is not a permanent one-way flow to the towns as was very much the case in the urbanization process of 18th and 19th century Europe. In many parts of Africa there is considerable and widespread migratory circulation with many migrants returning periodically from their urban destinations to their rural source areas. Again, however, greater emphasis appears to have been placed on the study of the urban side of the process where problems are certainly more striking and of more immediate importance.⁵ The back and forth movement of circular migration, however, has considerable demographic, economic and social effects on the rural areas even though the migrants may spend most of their time away from their rural homes. The significance and effects of circular migration on the rural areas has rarely been considered despite suggestions from such writers as Prothero⁶ that conditions in home areas are a logical development or even a prerequisite of migration destination studies.

People involved in circular migration can be considered as quite distinct from those people making a permanent move. They consider themselves to have rural

roots and maintain rural ties; they consider themselves as belonging to rural families and rural society and to be absent from households to which they return periodically.⁷ As such they can be considered as rural absentees. The purpose of this paper, therefore, is to consider these rural absentees in four different respects. The paper initially attempts to delimit the absentee element in a given rural population and to determine how widespread it is throughout that society. It then considers how much of the temporary movement out of the rural area is, in fact, to the towns and how much is merely a move to other rural areas. This is followed by a consideration of the possible reasons creating such movement and the various links maintained by the migrants with their rural homes.

The present preliminary study is based on sample villages in central Sierra Leone and chosen randomly from settlements in Tonkolili District covered by a larger-scale population study.⁸ The villages are situated in four chiefdoms slightly to the east of the geographical centre of the country and the people of the area

belong predominantly to the Temne tribe. The area has one of the lowest road densities in the country and seven of the settlements under study are totally inaccessible except by foot. A major new highway has recently been constructed⁹ through the area and the villages are now finding themselves in the vicinity of a major route now linking the two main economic centres of Sierra Leone: the capital Freetown and environs in the west and the diamond region of Kono District in the east.

The data for the sample settlements were collected between July and September, 1972 and when compared with the 1963 census figures considerable out-migration appears to have taken place. In total the population of the villages had remained almost the same in size during the previous nine years and when considered individually it was seen that half of the settlements had actually decreased in numbers since the 1963 census. This apparent depopulation can to some extent be explained by permanent out-migration and also by the increased out-movement of circular migrants or absentees: those

villages registering the greatest decrease in size tended to have the largest number of absentees. Permanent out-migration must, however, be considered as the major factor in population decrease.

The Absentees

For this study an absentee was defined as a person who had been away from his home for at least one month at the time of interview, who was considered as part of the household by the remaining residents and who was expected to return to that household. A figure equivalent to 12% of the resident population of the ten villages was estimated as absent. Those people who had left the villages were not a representative sample of their settlements; instead they clearly displayed the distinct selectivity of migration.

The absentees were found to be considerably different from the populations remaining in the villages in several respects. To a large extent they were males and had a sex ratio of 158 (males per 100 females). This compares with 82 for the population left behind. When considering age the absentees were found particularly

concentrated in the younger cohorts. Almost 70% were aged between 10 and 30 years compared with some 40% in the same age groups for the population remaining in the rural areas. As a group slightly more than half of the migrants were or had been married. Such a figure, however, fails to reveal the considerable difference between the sexes where marital status is concerned. Almost all the female migrants (85%) were or had been married whereas two thirds (63%) of the men remained single. Like their relatives who were left behind, the migrants were on the whole illiterate and had never been to school. Such a situation is reflected in the nature of the work undertaken by the migrants. Back in the village almost all the active males (90%) were involved in agriculture. The migrants however, appear to have given up such an occupation. The largest single group (60%) of the men were considered as unskilled and semi-skilled workers whereas less than 20% were still concerned with farming. Others, in smaller numbers were found in trading, in skilled occupations and a few in administrative and professional pursuits.

In order to determine how widespread was the occurrence of out-migration throughout the rural society the data pertaining to absentees were collected at the household level. In much demographic and sociological writing there is considerable ambiguity over the term "household". It has been used synonymously with a dwelling unit or a family group - either nuclear or extended. The most widely used definitions are the "housekeeping" unit and the "household-housing unit". With the latter definition the household is considered as a single dwelling unit providing its members with common shelter and all therefore live under the same roof. With the "housekeeping" unit the household is primarily regarded as providing its members with meals - all members eating from the "same pot". This type of household is often considerable smaller than that of the dwelling unit type.

For ease of enumeration in the present study the dwelling unit/household-housing definition was initially used. Although household sizes tended to be high it was found that such dwelling units in the rural areas

covered were generally synonymous with the housekeeping units. The mean resident household size was 13.2 persons and approaching 70% of all households had at least one member absent. Some households had up to eight people away. The question arising therefore was, if out-migration was so widespread at the household level, from what type of household (as regards size and structure) did the absentees originate and were there any differences prior to out-migration between households with and those without absentees? Those households with absentees had an average of 3 persons away. These people belonged to a household considerably larger than those units without absentees and which remained, larger on average, even after the departure of the migrants (see Table 1). The de jure size of the average "migrant" household was 17 persons: with three absentees the resident household was therefore 14 persons. Those households without any people away were less than 12 persons in size. Such a situation can perhaps be explained by the fact that in a larger household the people most inclined to migrate are available in larger numbers and secondly the pressures encouraging departure (overcrowding, for example, or pressure on food supplies) are often greater in a bigger household.

TABLE 1: ABSENTEES and HOUSEHOLD SIZE

	HEAD OF HOUSEHOLD	WIVES	CHILDREN	OTHER RELATIVES	OTHERS	TOTAL
TOTAL RESIDENT HOUSEHOLDS	1.0	1.6	3.2	6.3	1.3	13.2
HOUSEHOLDS WITHOUT ABSENTEES	1.0	1.5	2.3	6.0	0.9	11.6
HOUSEHOLD WITH ABSENTEES	0.9	1.6	3.6	6.4	1.5	14.0
ABSENTEES ⁺	0.1	0.1	1.2	1.2	0.1	3.0
DE JURE "ABSENTEE" HOUSEHOLDS	1.0	1.7	4.9	7.6	1.7	17.0

Due to rounding sub-totals do not always add up to total figures.

This can be illustrated by examining the household structure of dwellings having migrants with those dwellings without migrants (see Table 1). The average resident household had a male as its head with generally one or two wives, three or so children, six other relatives and one or two other people such as lodgers or wards. Whether the household had migrants or not, the average number of wives change little: 1.5 for the "non-migrant" household and 1.7 for the de jure "migrant" unit. In the other three population groups of the household members there were marked differences and especially in the numbers of children. The de jure "migrant" household had more than twice as many children as households without any migrants. In a rural society in Africa as is presently being considered, children are an important economic asset. In maintaining a farm children are of considerable use but it may be that more children may bring diminishing returns. It is possible, therefore, that there may be an optimum size for such rural households and above a certain number, children may be considered less necessary in an economic sense and may therefore have fewer restrictions placed

on their emigration. That such a situation occurs is suggested to some extent by the fact that absentee children (especially in the case of the males) were rarely the eldest - but quite often the third or fourth eldest. Of all the males leaving the villages - whether to urban or rural destinations - approaching half (46%) were sons of the head of the rural household and a further fifth (21%) were younger brothers.

The Movement To The Towns

This study is specifically concerned with the movement of rural migrants to urban areas. Two thirds of the absentees enumerated (66%) were found to have moved to the towns¹⁰ in Sierra Leone and a study of these particular migrants shows even more markedly the selectivity of migration. The main flow of migrants (probably 40%) went to the diamond areas of Kono with the single most important destination being Koidu which took 20% of all surveyed migrants. The next most important centre was Freetown which took approaching 10% of the flow. Between the capital in the west and the diamond area in the east a string of settlements (Makeni, Magburaka,

Makali, Masingbi, for example) situated along the major road linking the two areas and passing through the sample area, took a further 10% or so of migrants. Thus up to 70% of the migrants leaving the study area of central Sierra Leone had moved to settlements in an east-west belt along the newly-constructed road with the greatest concentrations at each end of the routeway in the two most important centres of employment generation.

In a variety of characteristics the urban-bound migrant was found to be distinctly different not only from the people left in the village but also from the migrants moving to other rural areas. Whereas the men and women absentees involved in a rural-rural transfer did so in more or less equal numbers, the people moving to the towns were largely males and had a sex ratio of 168 (males per females). With respect to age the movement out of the rural areas has been shown to take people mostly in the 10-30 years cohorts. The younger members of this group (largely in their teens) tended to be left in rural destinations whilst the relatively older migrants continued on to the towns. The largest

single ten-year age group for the urban-destined migrants (37%) was the 20-29 years cohort. This compares with the 10-19 years category for the rural-rural migrants which accounted for 43% of those people. As regards marital status there was little difference between urban- and rural-bound migrants. Most of the men were single whilst most of the women were married, although of those women who were still single, three-quarters had moved to the towns. Most absentees had moved by themselves - and especially the males, 80% of whom had taken no member of the household with them. Those who did were the married ones as half of the married men (though not many in number) had taken a wife with them.

One of the major reasons for moving to the towns in many parts of Africa is paid employment and this is distinctly shown in the occupations of the migrants. They left an area where almost all the active males were involved in agriculture. Only 10% of those people who had moved to the towns were still considered to be in the same occupational sector. For the largely illiterate,

unschooled migrant the major economic opening is to be found as an unskilled labourer and 65% of the migrants under consideration were working as such. Almost a third of the male migrants (29%) were still considered to be unemployed.

Reasons For Migrating

As the survey on absentees was undertaken in the rural home villages it was not possible to question the migrants themselves. However, by questioning members of the absentee's household - and very often this entailed the whole adult household - it was possible to build up a pattern of reasons why the migrant had left the village. Apart from asking directly for any specific reasons causing the move, the household was asked to decide to what degree various pre-determined factors¹¹ were associated with the move of each absentee being considered. Various distinct patterns emerged. Above all, the reasons appeared to be economic and were more of a rural-push nature than an urban-pull. By far the most important single reason appeared to be "hardship" and this reason was given as strongly associated with

80% of all male moves. Among the men the next most important reasons were the "lack of local jobs" (strongly associated with 49% of all male moves), "dullness of life in the village" (42%) and a "dislike of farming" (37%). The "attraction of town life" was an important reason for the males to move (39%) as was the "desired to see new places" (40%). The towns would provide the best opportunity to earn "money to make specific purchases" (40%). In the area under study diamond mining was usually considered a strong attraction for making money although the "possibility of finding diamonds" was considered to be strongly associated with only a third (36%) of all moves made by the men. "Stories told by friends and relatives" of life in the town influenced a good number of moves (30%). A similar number of men (35%) had actually moved with a friend or relative and a quarter of the men (25%) had moved to relatives already in the destination areas. Education was a limited attraction to move. Only 11% of the men had moved "to gain education" and even fewer (7%) were away or had initially been sent away to attend school. Trading, too, was not an important reason for

moving (3%). Disputes and conflict with authority or family, over land or women were not associated with many moves of the men - the most important (9%) being a "dispute with the family". "Fear or witchcraft" appeared in a significant number of cases (16%).

With the women going to the towns the reasons associated with their moves were broadly similar to those of the men. "Hardship" was still the most important single reason but not in so many cases (53%). Several reasons were more strongly associated with female moves than with males - especially "trading", and "family disputes".

Urban-Rural Links

In several parts of Africa urban immigrant populations have been shown to maintain close connections with their villages of origin, to which they ultimately return.¹² Despite growing numbers who regard the town as their permanent homes, few remain as town-dwellers all their lives. The links with their home villages and households are maintained in a variety of ways and are

probably viewed best from the rural end of the process. In the settlements under consideration an attempt was made to determine whether the absentees owned a house in the village, whether he had a right to farm in the locality and, indeed, whether a farm was actually maintained during his absence. An enquiry was then made into remittances -- in both cash and kind -- that were made to the village household during the previous year. This was followed by examining the frequency, timing and duration of visits made by the absentees to their rural homes as well as the movement of the migrants' relatives to the absentees in the destination areas.

Of all the male absentees enumerated only 5% owned a house in the home village. However, as most of the males belonged to the "children" category of the household, a high percentage could not be expected. Almost all (94%) were considered as having the right to farm in the locality although few (15%) made use of the opportunity. Those who did were found in the older age groups and were married. As such they were able to leave a wife and children behind to maintain their farm.

As regards the topic of remittances made by the absentees, any accurate measurement, whether in cash or goods, was difficult to make. The monetary remittances were probably underestimated though details regarding their amounts and frequency of transfer proved of interest. Seventy percent of the absentees were considered to have never sent any money back home. The remaining migrants had sent an amount at some time including 23% who had made a remittance to the home household during the previous year. The female migrants fared better in this respect than the males: more than 40% had sent money home. This is probably a reflection of the female absentees generally being married (unlike the men) and with dependents (i.e. children) in the villages of origin. On average, those absentees remitting money probably sent an amount between Le.10 and Le.20 each time. The amounts sent however varied considerably between male and female. All the females sent amounts less than Le.20 and half less than Le.5. With the men, however half sent amounts greater than Le.20 and on occasions sent amounts greater than Le.50. In financial terms, each household in the village probably benefitted

by an average total remittance of less than Ls.10 per year. Money, however, was not the most common form of remittance sent back to the village. Specific items (mainly in the form of food and clothing) for the household as a whole or for individual members were often preferred. If sent back with a second person goods had a greater chance of arriving and, moreover, many of the items sent were not available for purchase in the village even if cash had been transmitted. Of the foodstuffs remitted rice was by far the most common although tinned milk, sugar and salt were also high on the list of receipts. Clothes, however, along with footwear and blankets were received more often than food.

The absentees themselves returned periodically to their rural homes and nearly half came back once a year. Some returned home quarterly (10%) but few returned at shorter intervals. A relatively large number - especially amongst the men(30%) - were considered as returning only rarely despite sending various items back to the rural household. Of those who did return there appeared to be a distinct seasonality in their visit. This was

particularly true for male absentees. There seemed to be peaks around June/July - at the beginning of the rains - and between November and January at the beginning of the dry season. On the farms these periods co-incide with the times of planting and harvesting although not at the peak labour season of brushing. On returning the absentees generally spent between a few days and a month in their village with the women tending to stay for longer periods than the men.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate with evidence from a sample area in central Sierra Leone how considerable circular migration takes place between the rural areas and various urban centres of the country. The equivalent of 12% of the resident village populations were absent from their rural homes and two-thirds of these people had migrated to the towns. It has been shown how widespread such migration is throughout rural society as 70% of all households had at least one person away. Migrants tended to come from the larger households and were very often the children or

young brothers of the house. That those children who migrated were rarely the eldest or even the second eldest suggested a possibility of a critical household size being reached before out-movement takes place.

Those people who did move illustrated well the selectivity of migration and those involved in a move to the towns were quite different as a group from those migrating to the rural areas and also from those people remaining in the villages. The migration to the towns largely took young, single males and their reasons for moving were basically due to economic factors in the rural areas - hardship and lack of local jobs. Once the urban destinations were reached a variety of new occupations were generally taken up, especially in the unskilled and semi-skilled categories. Almost a third of the migrants however, did not appear to have been successful in securing employment. Whilst away various links were maintained between migrant and the home village. Money and goods were remitted at intervals and the migrant generally returned home at least once a year - very often at important times in the farm

calendar, though the timing may have been more a product of urban factors.

Rural-urban migration in Sierra Leone, therefore, does not appear to be a one-way movement to the towns. Important links are maintained by the migrants with their villages of origin and there appears to be a constant movement of returnees moving back, often seasonally, and for varying lengths of time. Such circular migration may be economically beneficial to the rural household with receipts of cash and urban purchases. That migrants are often the younger members of the adult household might suggest that the agricultural economy of the household unit is maintained and may even benefit from having fewer people to support. In a smaller household however, agricultural production could very easily suffer from a reduction in household size. Further research is therefore required to consider the relative merits of migration as a factor in the household economy. What may be beneficial at the household level, with easing of overcrowding and reducing the numbers to be supported on a rural household budget for example, may not necessarily be beneficial at the national level. Thirty percent of the absentees were considered as unemployed in urban destinations. Most of those in jobs were employed in the unskilled or semi-skilled sector and a substantial number were away as illicit diamond miners. If, as was indicated, it was "hardship" and "lack of local jobs" that largely encouraged out-migration then development in rural employment may well reduce the circular migration to urban unemployment.

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3. An evaluation and bibliography of some of the most relevant studies on labour migration are given in H. E. Panofsky, "Migratory Labour in Africa", The Journal of Modern African Studies, I,4, 1963, pp.521-529.
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7. See J. C. Mitchell, "Wage Labour and African Population Movements in Central Africa", in K. M. Barbour and R. M. Prothero, Essays on African Population, London, 1961, pp.193-248.

8. Ten villages in Tonkolili District were chosen randomly from those covered by the Kono Road Project of the Institute of African Studies, University of Sierra Leone. An interdisciplinary team is measuring the effects of a newly constructed highway between Matotoka in Tonkolili District and Koidu in Kono District and population data has been collected for all persons in 77 sample rural settlements.
9. The new road from Koidu had reached the area under study by 1967.
- 10., For this study the threshold figure of 1,000 persons for a town was that used by Harvey in J. I. Clarke, Sierra Leone in Maps, London, 1965, p.48. There were 160 such settlements enumerated in the 1963 census of which seven were greater than 10,000 persons.
11. Members of the absentee's household were provided with a list of 21 factors influencing migration. For each factor they were asked to indicate whether it was "strongly associated", "associated" or "not associated" with the absentee's move.
12. See W. Elkan, "Circular Migration and the Growth of Towns in East Africa", International Labour Review, Vol.96, 1967, pp.581-589, and I. Schapera, Migrant Labour and Tribal Life: A study of Conditions in Bechuanaland Protectorate, London, 1947.