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RURAL URBAN DYNAMICS IN AFRICA: A CONCEPT PAPER

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A General Discussion of Rural Urban Linkages

Rural urban linkages consist of identifiable and recurrent patterns of communication and exchange between the urban core and the rural periphery. To the extent that these linkages are weak or non-existent in many African states indicates that the institutions responsible for communication and exchange operate at a sub-optimal level. The process of developing linkages in sub-saharan Africa then is fundamentally a process of institutional development and depends largely on the development of viable and compatible institutions at the core and also in the periphery. Linkage development also depends on effective and frequent contact between the institutions at the core and those at the periphery.

Equally as important as the institutional framework is the awareness that the interrelationships between the core and the periphery take place within and are conditioned by the total development process. In other words, since the countries of Africa fall at varying points along a "development continuum", they are likely to respond differently to identical policy initiatives. This suggests that the search for relevant development alternatives must be based not only on a better understanding of rural urban institutions, but more importantly, before donor agencies such as AID can take steps to address distortions in the social-political-spatial environment; they must be apprised of the specific development milieu in which they are operating.

With this as background, the next section identifies and discusses some of the major issues which might be addressed under the common theme rubric. Before proceeding, it should be noted that these topics represent only a set of possible areas of concern. They were selected because of the close relationship they have with Africa Bureau priorities and are

by no means intended to be exhaustive.

As specifically noted in the Africa Bureau Strategic Plan,

"The lack of adequate progress (in Africa) despite significant investments by donors and African governments means that we must reconsider the ways in which we have been trying to affect change. Basic economic growth, and all that that phrase implies in terms of growth in production, income, and employment is a necessary precondition if permanent and self sustaining changes in individual lives are to be made." ABSP, p. 16
(emphasis added)

In keeping with this, the six areas identified here are consistent with the current mood of re-thinking and re-evaluation. Furthermore, they are timely in the sense that they represent a concern with a "more balanced" approach, at a time when many linkage problems are just now beginning to surface.

The topics to be discussed here are: (1) Migration and the related issue of remittances, (2) Marketing and Distribution Networks, (3) Environmental Degradation and Resource Management, (4) Urban Food Consumption and the related issue of Food Security, (5) Employment Generation in Rural Industrial or Urban Informal Activities, and (6) Creation of Urban Service Centers and Rural Marketing Towns.

Issues Relevant to the Common Themes Initiative

A. Migration and the related issue of remittances

Scenario: "A recent survey by the U.N. shows that 50 percent of the less developed countries label growth of their metropolitan areas as excessive, and almost as many, 46% have formulated policies to divert migration away (from these centers). . ." Findley, p. 1

As a result of the growing recognition of data limitations associated with migration research, we have begun to realize that the entire process of population movement is very different from that portrayed earlier.

For instance, we previously assumed (1) stability of the rural and urban population; (2) that most migrations were permanent moves (or at least intendedly so); (3) that the economic motive was the dominant reason for moving; and (4) that there was a correlation between length of time in the city and degree of adjustment and assimilation, etc.

Most would agree that migration's role in the system can vary depending on the type of movement and indeed, different types of movement may prevail as conditions change with respect to wages, agrarian reform measures, etc. It becomes relevant to know not only who moves, and from where; but also what form the movement takes, why this form was chosen and what impact changing forms has on the place of origin and the place of destination and also upon the movers themselves. There is a need for greater attention to be paid to the perception that a temporary or permanent migrant has of him/herself and how this perception influences economic and social performance at the place of destination. There is also a need to assess the way in which the system affects the reasons for which the individual becomes a temporary or permanent migrant. It must be added that we also need to know much more about those who stay and who constitute a massive potential for future migration. Why do they not move? Who are they/under what conditions might they move? If they did move, what type of move would they make?

Links established through remittances in both directions, visits and return migration could have significant impact on rural development and on the pattern of overall development. This certainly needs further examination.

The place of squatters in the total urban social and economic structure needs fuller assessment and the extent to which squatting is attributable to migration itself or is also a function of high rates

of natural increase in urban areas needs closer study. Finally, strong emphasis on the economic aspects of migration is justified, but the goal of economic development also calls for a consideration of the social, political and psychological aspects of the absorption and assimilation process.

B. Marketing and Distribution Networks

Scenario: "It is reported that in countries like Nigeria and India, up to one-sixth of the crops can be lost for consumption because of inefficient transportation or lack of storage facilities. In the case of cereals, up to one fourth may be lost for consumption. . . " VanDam, p. 178

Unlike the situation which prevails for migration where researchers are constantly being inundated with "new models and theories"; most of the research on marketing and distribution in Africa was carried out in the late sixties and early seventies. Consequently, there is a vacuum in terms of what we know. Most would agree however that marketing and distribution systems/processes reflect the stage of economic development that prevails in a country. As such, before these aspects can be fully understood we need to give greater attention to the environment in which they take place. In addition to the environment, other considerations are (a) the "organization" of the economy (2) the marketing infrastructure, and (3) the market size and level of technological development.

The organization of the economy, particularly one that is divided into two sectors, adds a new dimension to what was previously known regarding marketing in Africa. In particular, it is now recognized that three types of distribution systems prevail: an upper circuit distribution system within the urban economy which is responsible for the management of export trade, modern industry, wholesaling, banking, etc.; (b) a "lower circuit" which has primary responsibility for distributing goods and services to the socially and economically segregated portions of the

population; and (c) the rural distribution system. The

The essence and character of this tripartite division is generally the same regardless of varying levels of economic development. The role that each of these distribution systems play in the larger economy and with other countries is an heretofore neglected issue however, and deserves further attention.

It is generally assumed that a fairly well developed marketing system exists in Africa for imported goods and exports. The extent to which that is true needs to be examined as there is some evidence to suggest that this is not the case. Determining exactly where the system "breaks down" and how it can be "propped up" is certainly an area that would pay off in terms of development benefits.

Furthermore, improvements in channels of distribution and physical infrastructure can reduce or eliminate unnecessary costs to the consumer. It is not uncommon for items to be handled six or more times before reaching the consumer. Six profits are added to the price the poor must pay.

There is a critical need for clarification of the role of marketing in economic development since public policy in Africa appears to be moving toward active public sector involvement in national market systems. Implicit in this is the assumption that marketing does have a potential role in fostering economic development. Some inquiry into how policy makers are using public marketing enterprises to achieve development goals is a much needed area of research.

The role, function and efficiency of periodic markets is another area worthy of further attention. As noted, the vast majority of urban households still depend upon indigenous marketing systems for the bulk of the goods and services they consume. These marketing channels are not

well understood and their potential for improvement and expansion to better meet demand and create opportunities for more increased employment and production have not been adequately assessed.

C. Environmental Degradation and Environmental Management

Scenario: ". . . around West Africa's Sahel region, trees are vanishing out to a radius of 50 miles. . . prices of firewood now equal or exceed the cost of kerosene. Gangs wage gunfights with rangers to plunder forests. . . Many families spend up to 30% of their earnings on wood. . . the current annual plantings of new trees is just 6% of the amount needed to stave off disaster . . . " World Development Letter, Vol 4, No 21.

In general, problems under this theme include depletion of the tropical rain forests, accelerating soil erosion, desert encroachment, chemical poisoning, the loss of cropland to non farming uses, etc. The process of deforestation has been noted as the major problem confronting many African governments. Most of the deforestation has come about mainly in the last two decades and is largely an action of the poor who, in their search for inexpensive, abundant fuel or agricultural land, indiscriminantly fell trees and thus, ultimately bring about global climatic shifts. Unfortunately there exists relatively little information on this fairly recent phenomena.

Despite greater availability of information on soil erosion and deterioration, most governments have not given much attention to this issue. Soil erosion results in falling crop yields, growing food deficits and a greater instability in the world food economy. Desertification, or the gradual abandonment of cropland may be at a record level due to population pressure on their fringes which lead to overgrazing, deforestation, and overplowing. High population pressure also requires that land be used for purposes other than production of food. Principal among these uses are urbanization, energy production and transportation.

Between desertification and land abandonment to alternative uses, the loss of cropland is now of major concern.

What we know now is that the most crucial and difficult problem is how to deal with the linkages between environmental degradation and the actions of the poor to meet their basic needs. Attention needs to be given to the economic and social interests of the poor, as it is largely their interests which lead to failure in environmental policies. More effort needs to be put in identifying the critical management issues in the policies adopted and the development of suitable management tools for various tasks. Implicit in this is a concern with how African countries can build up their own basic and applied science capabilities. A more practical avenue to pursue in terms of policy orientation is to begin to design supra national or global management mechanisms that can deal effectively with these sorts of issues.

D. Urban Food Consumption and the related issue of Food Security

Scenario: "Depressing trends in Africa -- in the area of food -- indicate that there will be a 20 million ton gap between consumption and production by 1990, which will require importing five times the amount of food imported in 1975. . ." World Development Letter Vol 4 No 22

The issue of urban food consumption relates not only to shifting demand but also to the related issues of food security and rural agricultural production. Regarding shifting demand, issues of concern center on the homogeneous nature of urban food consumption relative to rural consumption. The urban cereal consumption pattern in many African countries consists largely of maize and more recently, wheat and rice; whereas the rural food consumption patterns are substantially more diverse and involve consumption of several different crops. This has implications for two related areas -- (1) agricultural production and

(2) international food assistance. The conventional wisdom suggests that African economies are being adversely affected by the shift in urban consumption patterns away from traditional foodstuffs toward imported grains. This change in consumption has been exacerbated by the policies of African governments which have not taken the lead and have allowed subsidized imports to spoil local markets. This in turn has implications for international food assistance.

We are aware that this shift is occurring, but we are unaware of why it is occurring. Is it the result of shortages in supply or changes in demand? While the former is essentially a marketing and distribution issue, the latter is worthy of further investigation. In particular, what factors go into bringing about changes in demand? Is it to be encouraged or discouraged? What does it mean for the African small farmer? More importantly, what does it mean for African governments, currently beset by larger and larger fuel import bills.

The issue of food security is related to this and has just recently begun to receive attention in policy making circles. Food security may relate to anything from national food reserves to a stockpile held by an individual farmer. This notion of food reserves is deeply rooted in many existing cultural practices and is designed explicitly to offset the yield fluctuations in a marginal climatic environment. Appropriate management techniques certainly have a role to play in encouraging and institutionalizing this activity. They should be given some attention. Further, it should be noted that in terms of incentives, the best incentives to the farmer are not so much a guaranteed price or more sophisticated management skills; as an assurance of access to a steady market. Channelling urban demand through effective marketing techniques is certainly worth some effort.

E. Employment Generation in Rural Industrial and Urban Informal Activities

Scenario: ". . . the urban informal and rural non farm sectors include a large variety of people and activities . . . in Accra, it is estimated that 60 percent of all persons are employed in informal activity. . . in Dakar, 79% of the small firms in furniture making were non institutionalized. . . Sinclair, p. 86, 1978.

Governments and international agencies have recently become increasingly aware of the importance of designing effective strategies and policies for off farm industrial and urban informal small scale industries. Unfortunately, remarkably little is known about the composition and characteristics of these activities and more importantly, the impact they have on the larger development process.

In general, we know that these activities are important in that they generate significant employment; they provide linkages with agriculture and large scale industrial sectors; and they appear to be more efficient in terms of generating output and employment from a unit of capital. At the other extreme however, we do not have much information on: (1) whether or not demand for the products of these activities decline as domestic income rises. (2) What are the factors associated with the supply of small scale industrial commodities? (3) What is the justification (if any) for supporting small scale firms? (4) How do these activities figure in spatial decision making, e.g. the decision to migrate for instance? (5) If they are inputs into the decision making calculus of potential migrants, do they induce a particular migration response -- circular, permanent, etc.?

With regard to non farm activities in particular, the poorest groups of the rural population depend on these activities as a source of employment and income. Not only do these activities contribute to the growth of agricultural output and the improvement in living conditions in rural areas, but their concentration in rural towns localizes

employment opportunities for people who leave agriculture and thus, stimulates a degree of decentralization of urban growth.

The critical issue, from a policy perspective however is not whether they are relatively efficient in their present use of capital and labor resources, but as noted, what role they should play in development strategies emphasizing alleviation of poverty and employment growth. It follows that since the growth and concentration of such activities in the rural towns and villages raises substantially the demands for infrastructure, services, electricity, water, roads, schooling, banking and credit, and for the development of local urban institutions; some attention should be given to those aspects as a means of addressing this issue.

F. Creation of Urban Service Centers and Rural Market Towns

Scenario: "There is a new spatial system beginning to emerge in some areas of Kenya. It began to emerge first in the 1960s when rapid agricultural progress led to market increase in cash incomes. This brought with it the excessive rapid growth we are currently witnessing in the larger centers . . . Taylor, p. 9, 1973.

Many argue that if the quality of rural life is to be improved, not only must goods and services move up the hierarchy of central places, but also the reverse must occur. People in rural areas must be provided with basic services such as health facilities, sanitation, water, power, etc. The traditional thinking is to adopt a package approach and concentrate services in one place. Given limited resources, concentration ensures the most efficient use of capital and also facilitates interaction between places. In that it increases the effectiveness of organization structures or institutions, it has additional advantages.

In implementing decentralization and service center creation policies, the problem of scale is significant in that the minimum number of persons

for whom services are provided tends to increase over time. This results in the disappearance of many small service centers or certainly a decline in their function. Determining the threshold for certain functions is a much needed endeavor. In addition, a focus on horizontal linkages rather than vertical linkages is also needed. Closer coordination between relevant agencies will certainly lead to improved results and will allow for consideration to be given to the overall impact of different planning elements.

In total, creating a network of small urban centers may be a more effective strategy at this point in time to meet the overall development aims since it addresses a theme common to all spatial scales -- provision of essential services. Of course, the key to the success of a development strategy using small urban places depends on the linkages between such centers and their hinterlands. If they are to be used as injection points for innovation and change, then they must be places which are not only accessible but also attractive to the people in the hinterlands. Much work remains to be done on the relationship between small centers and their hinterlands. One particularly useful line of inquiry is in the field of perception. If an accurate idea of what attracts people to a given place could be obtained, then a greater understanding of the linkage processes would be achieved.

As already noted, the issues identified here are not nearly exhaustive of the areas which could benefit from policy initiatives to be pursued under the common themes framework. The next section puts forth some practical considerations which should be incorporated in a research plan directed toward implementing the common theme initiative.

Some Considerations for Systematically Addressing Common Themes Research Issues

This section describes some of the major considerations that should enter into the formulation of policies and programmes oriented toward the issues noted previously. Since these considerations relate to the larger context in which the common themes approach is based, other areas in which the approach provides linkage will emerge as the research considerations are discussed.

One consideration to be incorporated into a research methodology is the recognition that development problems do not exist in a vacuum and in fact are part of an oftentimes complex, intricate web that does not lend itself to separation and certainly cannot be treated separately. To the extent that this is true, past policies which looked at problems in isolation may actually have produced "distortions" in the geo-politico-socio landscape. The common themes approach argues for a policy orientation that would examine several aspects of the rural urban dynamic at once. As such, it provides policy linkage. In one multistate region for example, efforts might be directed toward an assessment of migration trends away from areas of high population pressure and further, determine the impact on informal and non farm employment. Thus, three issues (migration, environmental degradation and employment) are related to one another and addressed in a total systems framework. In another spatial context, the focus might relate the effectiveness of marketing and distribution networks to the creation of urban service centers and rural marketing towns or to urban food consumption. Again, a number of issues are interrelated and whereas in the past separate policies might have emerged, the common themes approach might result in only one policy.

A second consideration in designing a research plan for undertaking

common theme activities is to select projects and programmes which are clearly tied to Africa Bureau and S and T priorities. In fact, the final selection of issues and projects should be those that address issues of common concern to Africa Bureau Personnel, USAID field missions, members of the Co-operative Agreement and significant individuals in the host countries. In this way, the common themes approach provides bureaucratic and organizational linkage.

A third area of concern in implementing the common themes approach relates to site selection. As noted elsewhere, the countries of Africa fall at different levels along a development continuum but can be grouped in categories based on similarities in terms of development characteristics. As much as possible, policy initiatives coming out of the common themes framework should be geared toward groups of countries which represent common levels of economic and technological development. While there would be a definite advantage if the countries were all within the same region; this may not be the case and the overriding consideration should be on economic, social and technological commonality rather than region. To the extent that the two are consistent, the previous discussion would apply.

A final consideration relates to the scale of analysis from one development context to another. In particular, it is expected that some problems would best require treatment at the regional or even national scale; others at the supra national scale. Still others (i.e. environmental degradation) might best be addressed in the context of policy efforts underway at the global level. Moreover, since linkages often manifest themselves simultaneously across varying spatial scales (the national or macro level, the regional or intermediary level, and the local or micro level); they must be simultaneously examined in respect to each.

The final section of this paper briefly discusses the implications of the common themes approach for policy and research.

Implications

Aside from the short term increase in spatial, bureaucratic and policy linkages noted above, there are at least two other areas in which a common themes approach has implications. One is the area of methodology and the other relates to the long term programmatic benefits.

Regarding the methodological, it is expected that responding to the renewed interest in urbanization combined with a more "balanced" policy approach would give rise to a methodology that will allow for a rapid assessment of settlement systems. This rapid assessment technique will (as outlined in the McNulty memo of 8 August)

- (1) identify critical data required for systematic analysis of an issue,
- (2) provide a set of ordered statements about how these data are to be employed, and
- (3) suggest guidelines which would relate policy priorities and programming initiatives to specific statements.

The second area in which the common themes approach will impact relates to longer term concerns. In particular, past efforts have been "universalistic" in that they were oftentimes applied indiscriminantly to places which were dramatically different from each other. To the extent that the common themes approach will group countries based on similarities, and projects/programmes will be tailored to specific country needs; a greater match between country needs and AID resources will result. The implications of this are three -- (1) it allows for the best possible use of limited resources, (2) it will likely result in a higher success rate, and therefore lead to (3) a longer term mutually beneficial arrangement between the parties involved.