

THE TRADITION OF URBANIZATION OF POVERTY IN KENYA

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Introduction

The term 'urbanization of poverty' was first introduced in urban economics literature by Gerard Piel in his work titled: *The Urbanization of Poverty Worldwide*; first presented to the WHO symposium on "Urbanization-Global Health Challenge," in Kobe, Japan, March 18, 1996. Piel (1997) used the term to refer to 'an upheaval in the lives of the world's poor'. This 'upheaval' was discernible in the trend of poverty dynamics in developing countries where poverty persisted in rural areas among peasant groups immersed in local traditional economy.

From the 1950s these poor rural populations began an exodus from their traditional rural regions to urban areas where they found limited means of livelihood support thereby trans-locating rural poverty to urban areas. This is the process Piel (1997) termed 'urbanization of poverty' i.e. giving poverty an urban other than its known rural face. It is in this context that Ravallion *et al.* (2007) see urbanization of poverty as the extent to which 'poverty is in fact urbanizing in the developing world'. Similarly Ravallion (2002) deems urbanization of poverty as a situation where the poor urbanize faster than the nonpoor. It is a type of poverty that was completely different from the ordinary urban poverty hitherto experienced in the developed world.

By 'Worldwide' Piel (1997) essentially meant the developing world of which Chen and Ravallion (2007) broke down specifically into: East Asia and Pacific (EAP); East Central Asia (ECA); Latin America and Caribbean (LAC); Middle East and North Africa (MNA); South Asia (SAS) and; Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA). Urbanization scholars have tackled issues of migratory urbanization and poverty in different regions as specified above (see for instance Hossain 2013, on Dhaka, Bangladesh). This Chapter focuses on the SSA region. It builds on the contributions of scholars like Amis (1989), Jamal and Weeks (1994), Potts (1995, 2009), and, Onjala and K'Akumu (2016), among others.

The new and basic question this paper is asking is: given that Africa has been undergoing urbanization of poverty over the last 70 decades are there prospects of reversal in the near future? Do SSA countries have the potential to urbanize out of poverty with the current economic dynamics? To answer this question the chapter proceeds by looking into the characteristics of urbanization of poverty; discussing the causes of urbanization of poverty; assessing the implications of the economic dynamics of SSA countries and; concludes that SSA countries can in deed urbanize out of poverty in the coming decades. Essentially the chapter forecasts the way out of urbanization of poverty for African countries.

The Characteristics of urbanization of poverty

Piel (1997) in defining 'Urbanization of poverty' attempted a description of its unique characteristics. This description is summarized in Table 1:

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics that define urbanization of poverty

Attribute	Description
Housing	The migrants with self-sufficiency activities of their subsistence cultures from the villages. They construct their own housing on any vacant space they find in the city whether public or private owned. These are usually demolished making them to prefer hazardous land that is unfit for human habitation e.g. the lowlands and wetlands or hilly areas that cannot support ordinary buildings. They use any material they can find to build structures. These are usually non-durable materials disallowed by the city's building regulations hence making the structures illegal. In short they create informal settlements.
Water and sanitation	These informal settlements always lack potable water. At best water may be available at communal standpipes or piped into yard (not into dwelling) but both the water quality and a supply volume is unreliable. In most cases residents of informal settlements rely on dubious sources of water such as rivers, lakes, sea, ponds and hand dug wells. Secondly there are no adequate means of human waste disposal hence contact between these slum dwellers and human excrement is not broken leading to prevalence of all aspects of water related diseases. Children are the most vulnerable in this kind of unsanitary environment.
Trauma	Disasters are common in informal settlements mainly resulting from the hazardous nature of the land and inadequate building materials. Floods and landslides are common. Trauma may also result from unfinished buildings. Fires may result from dangerous cooking and lighting materials and means.
Informal economy	Almost everybody is employed in the informal economy since there are no job opportunities in the formal sector.
Crime	The informal economy thrives on anything including crime since these settlers are forced to subsist or face starvation.
Humanity	In their struggle to express their humanity the residents of informal settlements face life with courage and satisfaction. They find life normal and liveable in their circumstances and create their own social order that outsiders can tap into in the process of improving these dwellers' lives

Source: Piel (1997)

This summary is by no means complete. There are many works that have described the living conditions in informal settlements in developing countries. For further reference, these include: Adler (1995); Huchzermeyer and Karam (2006); Richards et al. (2007); MacFarlane (2008); Penrose et al. (2010); Sverdlik (2011); Wekesa et al. (2011) and; Dovey and King (2011), among others.

Causes of Urbanization of Poverty

There are various causes of urbanization of poverty; some historical others modern. Urbanization of poverty began in Africa in the early 1960s following the end of colonial urban administration. Every African country, except Ethiopia, was under a European colonial power until the late 1950s and early 1960s. The main colonizers were the French and the British. Others included Germany, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Belgium. The French and British started releasing their colonies as early as the late 1950s to early 1960s. Ghana for instance got its independence in 1958. The end of colonial rule had great implications for urbanization in post-colonial Africa.

Colonial administration had stringent migration and urbanization policies. The colonial city was not meant for an idle, unemployed native African. Only those who were meaningfully employed were allowed into the city. In some instances even family members of the workers including wives and children were not allowed into the city and workers were provided with 'bachelor's accommodation' or single rooms. Native Africans who did not live in cities but had 'valid' reason to visit the city had to obtain special permission through 'pass laws'. These restrictions kept the number of formally unemployed people in the city at minimum levels.

However with the attainment of independence these restrictions were lifted by the post-colonial administration. Independence meant freedom, including freedom of movement. The gates of the city were flung open to the free spirited native African—a commission that led to the influx migrants from the rural areas to the city. When these migrants came to town they had nowhere to work and nowhere to live marking the beginning of urbanization of poverty in Africa. Countries that unshackled the yoke of colonialism much later including Zimbabwe, Namibia and South Africa had the same experience of influx of migrants soon after attaining African self-rule.

Another cause or explanation of the urbanization of poverty is the *Labour Aristocracy Thesis* (Potts 1995). This thesis held that the urban proletariat enjoyed a higher income than the counterpart; the rural peasant. Additionally, as a worker, the urban proletariat enjoyed certain privileges over the rural counterpart such as belonging to a trade union with the ability to negotiate wages and other benefits and above all enjoying the benefits of modern life in the form of urban infrastructural services such as electricity, piped water, electronic media etc. this privileged position of the urban proletariat or the glitter of urban life is what is supposed to have attracted the rural inhabitants to abandon their homes and livelihoods and migrate to urban areas only to find that all that glitters is not gold and be condemned to a life of poverty. This thesis has been refuted by many scholars including (Amis 1989, Jamal and Weeks 1994, and Potts 1995). Nevertheless the general consensus is that it may not hold true today but it certainly held true for the original influx of migrants to the city following the end of colonial restrictions.

Subsequent to the phenomenon of the attainment of African self-rule, the influx of migrants to urban areas has been due to war drought and famine. War has had a devastating socio-spatial impact in Africa by uprooting millions of people from rural habitats to urban areas in the African landscape. Populations fleeing from war in countries like Angola, Liberia, Mozambique and Sudan escape to urban areas as internally displaced persons seeking refuge. In Uganda, for instance, Potts (2009) violent conflict was driving in-migration to Gulu and Lira towns.

Since they are not pulled or pushed to urban areas by any economic forces, they end up living in conditions of poverty in urban areas. In some cases war has had opposite effects of de-populating urban areas, especially where urban warfare is involved. In countries like Rwanda and Somalia war

caused urban dwellers to flee to foreign cities e.g. Nairobi for elites. However the proletariat trooped to refugee camps in foreign countries. That is how Daadab and Kakuma refugee camps became instant towns. Where cross-border migration is concerned the UNHCR and other non-governmental organizations have been instrumental in mitigating the poverty traps and risks for the war escapees.

Droughts and famine in Africa are cases where the livelihood support systems of peasants have completely failed leading to migration to urban areas in order to escape death by starvation. Drought and famine situations can be complicated by war. War might make it difficult for governments and other relief organizations to reach starving populations hence forcing the latter to migrate to urban areas. Droughts are not uncommon events in sub-Saharan Africa especially in pastoralist areas. They occur almost on yearly basis.

Complicating Factors

There are other factors that are not causes of urbanization of poverty but have complicated the urban poverty situation. These include the economic decline that seemed to dog every African country immediately after attaining independence. The inevitable examples are Zimbabwe and South Africa. In the 1970s and 1980s African economies experience economic decline owing to their own weakness of internal mismanagement and corruption and due to external forces such as the oil crisis. This meant that they lacked capacity to sustain the poor urban dwellers let alone to absorb the new migrants that kept on arriving in the city. If the economies of these countries were growing then new jobs would be created to provide incomes and sustenance to the urban poor and the new arrivals.

The second factor that has complicated the urbanization of poverty situation is the standard structural adjustment policies/programmes (SAPs) prescribed by the IMF and World Bank. According to Potts (1995) the IMF and World Bank economic prescriptions to Africa in the form of SAPs were based on the misconceived idea of *the Labour Aristocracy Thesis* that presumed there existed a large gap between the rural and urban incomes that caused inefficiencies in the allocation of resources. Due to this presumption it was thought necessary to initiate programmes like privatization of urban service provision in order to cause urban real incomes to fall. However the situation of high income gap was not true in the 1980 when SAPs were being prescribed hence they ended up complicating poverty situation in urban areas through retrenchment that led to more poverty and rising costs of urban services for the poor. Potts (1995) has argued that by the 1990s when the SAPs were being prescribed *the Labour Aristocracy Thesis* was already invalid and majority of the urban workforce was already engaged in the informal economy and lived in the informal settlements. The conclusion is that SAPs caused more economic damage in the urban areas by increasing the burden of the poor and expanding the scope of urban poverty.

In a recent paper Onjala and K'Akumu (2016) charted the annual growths in urbanization and GDP of various and observed that 1988–90 marked a turning point for many African countries. This is a period when the GDPs of these countries fell below the rate of growth in urbanization. For instance, in D.R. Congo the two variables remained on a par until the end of the 1980s when urbanisation shot above GDP. In Cameroon the GDP was higher than urbanisation until the late 1980s. The Kenyan story was similar to that of D.R. Congo, where GDP and urbanisation were more or less on a par until the late 1980s, while Zambia's case is similar to Cameroon's. They concluded that the structural

downturn may have been due to the impact of SAPs prescribed by the IMF and World Bank whose impacts were mainly felt in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

After reviewing the causes and complicating factors in the urbanization of poverty it is necessary to review the current trends with a view to speculate on the likelihoods of Africa urbanizing out of poverty in the near future.

To start with there is the “Africa Rising” narrative was started by the British economics magazine *The Economist* in its December 3rd 2011 release. Its story titled “The hopeful continent, Africa rising”, declaring that “After decades of slow growth, Africa has a real chance to follow in the footsteps of Asia”, drew attention of the world¹. Initially the magazine had always dismissed the black continent as hopeless (Floramonti 2014). The American *Time* magazine followed suit by running a similar cover story about “Africa Rising” in December 3rd 2012², exactly one year after *The Economist*. Around the same time *Forbes* published an article by Hannes van Rensburg, the Founder and CEO of Fundamo and Group Country Manager in Sub-Saharan Africa for Visa Inc., titled: “Africa Is Rising Fast”³.

The “Africa Rising” was similarly celebrated by another London-based Newspaper, the *Financial Times* (Floramonti 2014), that propagated the idea of “Africa Calling” to global investors⁴. In March 2013 *The Economist* returned to the fore with a feature article in 2013 by Oliver August⁵. This was a special report on Africa emerging as a hopeful continent. Its six talking points for the hope in the continent included: Tired of war (End to civil wars); Bye-bye Big men (End to dictatorships); The wealth beneath (Discovery of mineral resources).

End to Civil Wars

Under very few known instances have any two African countries gone to war against each other. More often than not African countries have fought within themselves. Since attainment of independence many African countries have been undergoing internal conflicts. Some conflicts have been short-lived such as the Biafra War in Nigeria while others have been long-lived as in the case of Angola, Sudan, and Somalia. Other countries with the recent scars of internal wars include Burundi, Chad, Ethiopia/Eritrea and Rwanda. Although a few African countries such as DR Congo, Somalia and South Sudan are still internally unstable, it can be said that there is a prevailing tendency for Africans to come out of these self-inflicted wars that are very destructive events to these nations.

First of all, civil wars disrupt economic activities: prevents people from practising agriculture and interferes with trade networks. Secondly civil wars hurt human resource development (that would have been useful in economic growth) through decimation and retardation of education and

¹ Economist 2011: <http://www.economist.com/node/21541015>

² Time: <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,2129831,00.html>

³ Forbes: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/teconomy/2012/11/09/africa-is-rising-fast/#3236eb6c3765>

⁴ Financial Times: https://www.ft.com/content/8968cbee-7f45-11e2-89ed-00144feabdc0?_i_location=http%3A%2F%2F

⁵ <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21572377-african-lives-have-already-greatly-improved-over-past-decade-says-oliver-august>

training. Thirdly civil wars channel to destruction scarce financial and capital resources that otherwise would have been invested in the fight against poverty or to provide services such as clean water and healthcare.

The cessation of civil conflicts therefore means freeing of economic activities so that the economy can thrive; freeing of human resources that can be developed and applied to enhance economic growth and the freeing of financial and capital resources to be invested in economically productive enterprises. More importantly in the context of this chapter, cessation of war would end the migration to urban areas and reduce the urbanization of poverty in areas where rural populations have been seeking refuge in urban centres to escape the dangers of war. It should be noted also that wars prevent state and non-state agencies to reach citizens suffering from drought or famine forcing the latter to migrate to urban areas. The cessation of war shall therefore prevent such migration.

End to Dictatorships

Since independence African countries have been ruled by dictators whether under civilian or military rule; what has been popularly known as the 'Big man syndrome'. Africans are now calling for the rule of law instead of the rule of man. The end of dictatorship has been seen in Nigeria a country that was notorious for military rule. Since then there has been peaceful political transitions in that country; the latest one being the transfer of power from Goodluck Jonathan to General Muhammadu Buhari after the latter defeated the former in the 2015 elections. The same circumstances obtain in Ghana after the rule of Jerry Rawlings came to an end. There has been some resistance to democratic change in other countries. For instance in Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda the strongmen in these countries managed to extend the presidential terms beyond the constitutional limits—what Abdoulaye Wade in Senegal and Blaise Compaoré in Bukina Faso tried and failed to do. In *Cote d'Ivoire* Laurent Gbagbo tried to cling to power after defeat in election and was pushed out. Most recently Yahya Jameh tried the same trick and went the same way. Unfortunately in Gabon Ali Bongo managed to retain power after the courts upheld his 'narrow lead' over Jean Ping in 2016. The positive aspect of it is that as every 'Big man' is shown the door other dictators are being served notice and whether they like it or not they will start listening to the people and strive to meet their needs.

The problem with dictators is that they build in cronyism whereby the friends and family members of the 'Big man' are the ones responsible for running the state and its agencies regardless as to whether they have the ability to do it right or not. This builds in inefficiencies in the allocation of resources. The Big man syndrome is also known for state corruption and looting of the economy as was best exemplified by President Mobutu in the 1980s. Lastly in dictatorships the rulers do not get their power directly from the citizens and so they are not accountable to them. In any case when citizens try to question any acts of omission or commission by the dictator this is usually followed by repression. For that matter dictators care little about the peoples' needs and hence have little incentive to solve their problems including the excruciating poverty conditions under which the ordinary citizens live.

Therefore ending dictatorships in Africa is good for the economy as it will increase efficiency in the management of state affairs, it will curb the loss of tax money through corruption and such monies can be invested back into the economy to provide for infrastructure, education and healthcare. End to dictatorships shall also make rulers more responsive to the needs of their citizens and help reduce

the poverty conditions they live under. In informal settlements this shall mean empowering the urban poor so they can solve some of their problems through responsive local governance structures. They can have channels of feedback to the government about their local problems and how these problems can be solved.

Discovery of Mineral Resources

New mineral resources are being discovered in Africa. For example the two East African countries Kenya and Uganda have discovered commercially exploitable petroleum deposits. Currently the two are busy establishing the infrastructure for the exploitation of these deposits. Revenue from these natural resources, if managed properly, can be used to improve the poverty conditions of the citizens of these countries (including urban areas) by providing both economic and physical infrastructure. Secondly the economic activities (industrial and commercial) generated by the exploitation of these resources will create employment leading to enhanced incomes both in urban and rural areas. New urban centres will be created and old ones invigorated by the resultant economic activities and employment leading to urbanization out of poverty as opposed to urbanization of poverty.

Urbanization with Economic Growth

Urbanization of poverty occurs in the absence of economic growth (Onjala and K'Akumu 2016). This means that people move to urban areas but do not get employment or alternative income sources and hence relive, in urban setting, the poverty they may have been escaping from rural areas. Onjala and K'Akumu (2016) used panel data to graphically portray the relational patterns between urbanisation and GDP in samples of sub-Saharan African countries over the period 1980–2012. Contrary to the established theoretical position that African countries experience urbanization without requisite economic growth, this study revealed new trends of urbanization and economic growth in Africa. In countries like Botswana, Uganda and Sudan the study revealed that rates of real GDP growth have recently surpassed those of urbanisation. The study also revealed another relational pattern where the GDP rate is lower than the rate of urbanisation but the former is closing in on the latter. If the trend continues the rate of growth will surpass the rate of urbanization as seen in the first group of countries above. The second category of countries included Zambia, D.R. Congo, Mozambique, Ethiopia, South Africa and Namibia. This should lead us to the conclusion that rapid economic growth, currently being experienced in Africa, will help the continent's countries to urbanize out of poverty if the trend continues.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion definitely we can conclude that Africa is on the trend of urbanizing out of poverty. To start with we have seen that Africa is ending its internal wars. By doing this the countries previously engaged in war shall be able to reconstitute their economies, revamp their human resource and improve on their physical infrastructure thereby attaining meaningful economic development. Also by ending wars these countries shall be able to end the rural to urban migration that was catalysed by wars, hence reducing urbanization of poverty. Secondly by ending dictatorships, countries that have been under the rule of dictators will open doors to more efficient and corruption-free economic management, and effective governance. These are requisite conditions to improving the living conditions in urban informal settlements. Thirdly the discovery of

mineral wealth will generate new economic, employment and income generating opportunities in new urban locales. This may even trigger urban to urban migration as people relocate from existing informal settlements to new or economically reinvigorated urban areas thereby depopulating existing informal urban settlements and reducing urbanization of poverty. The impact of rapid economic growth in Africa is real as contemporary studies have already revealed that economic growth in some countries is faster than urbanization thereby confirming the trend of urbanization out of poverty.

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