Rural-Urban Migration and Socioeconomic Development in Ghana: Some Discussions

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the situation regarding rural-urban migration within Ghana, suggesting that migration has the effect of precipitating major social and behavioural change. The nature of Ghanaian urbanisation is examined together with the motivational factors that cause many to leave their rural homes. A distinction is made between those "committed urbanites" who readily adapt to urban life and the "situational urbanites" who experience greater problems in adjustment to the city. Following this discussion certain policy implications are then examined, including that of fertility control, models of development and protection of the status of the rural communities in the face of a 'brain drain' to urban areas.

Introduction

The past few decades have witnessed a rapid pace of urban population concentrations in the developing countries of Africa and elsewhere (Bell, 1986; Liebenow, 1986; Hance, 1970; Davis, 1969). In Ghana, for example, the urban population in 1960 was 23 percent of the total population. The proportion increased by almost 10 percent to 32 percent in 1984 (Statistical Service of Ghana, 1988). This has engendered both scholarly and policy interests and concerns. The concerns have emanated from the fact that the bulk of the urban population is constituted of migrants from rural areas and other small towns in the countryside. The loss of rural populations to urban centres is often bemoaned for its implied adverse effect on rural development. The empirical data have revealed that migration is generally selective of the young, versatile, and/or better educated members of the community (Ritchey, 1976; Browning & Feindt, 1969). This creates a form of "brain drain" on the rural populations.

At the points of destination, the deleterious consequences of rural-urban migration have been noted. With the demand for urban socioeconomic amenities exceeding their supply, the urban areas often become spectacles of multifarious problems such as overcrowding, congestion, inadequate housing, high rates of

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unemployment and underemployment, crime and other forms of delinquency. The quality of life at both the areas of origin and destination are, therefore, significantly affected. Liebenow (1986) has made the following observation about African rural-urban migration:

"The mass exodus...from the impoverished countryside leaves not only fewer hands to grow the nation's food but more mouths to feed...Many analysts view Africa's urban unemployment, uncollected garbage, carbon monoxide and lead-polluted air, and growing crime rate as time bombs soon to detonate, destroying the lives and dreams of those who expected a better existence after the achievement of independence...Over-urbanisation does become a real problem in the face of two other factors. The first of these is the rate of urban growth in states that not only lack many of the basic ingredients of industrialisation, but that are not able to produce the food required to feed their growing urban population...(Secondly) In the face of the general poverty of the African states, most large and expanding cities simply cannot cope with the management problems associated with garbage collection, disposal of human wastes, the provision of clean water, the regulation of traffic, and the orderly development of roads, lighting, and other services for a burgeoning population...(The rate of) urban crimes in most African cities is escalating, as are the problems of unemployment and lack of school facilities for the young, as well as prostitution, homosexuality, and other phenomena related to the imbalance between male and female ratios in the cities" (pp 180-84).

However, there is a counter view that sees a positive relationship between urban population concentration and national development. Drawing from Western demographic and development paradigms, urbanisation is viewed as a key variable in social and economic change (Zarate et al, 1975). Perhaps the most significant aspects of the change are the upsurgence of rational behaviour, innovations in social life and technology, in general, and the shift toward universalism and a nontraditional *modus operandi* (Wirth, 1938; Simmel, 1950). The alterations in social organisation and interpersonal relations are attributed to the large, variegated populations which are constantly evoking new and insatiable interests, tastes, and other cravings.

The demographic transition theory, for example, has established that urban social organisation induces changes in reproductive attitudes and behaviour. The literature has severally established differential patterns of fertility by rural, urban, and rural-urban migrant backgrounds (Bell, 1986; Twumasi-Ankrah, 1979). Generally, it has been shown that urban living tends to suppress fertility, one of the areas of major concern in African economic development planning.

The above discussion implies that the rural and urban areas, respectively, possess distinct social organisations that promote contrasting normative and behavioural standards. The world-view and behaviour of people who have been reared in either social setting are affected by their respective social structural impingement. As individuals pass through their formative years, the basic cultural norms and behavioural patterns are transmitted in socialisation. Ritchey (1973) has noted that the subculture provides support for the behavioural dispositions acquired through the structural configuration of social relationships in latter years.

For rural-urban migrants, therefore, a change of social environment is expected to generate conflicts when the structural mechanism no longer supports the value orientation nor the previously established behaviour. The need to resocialise the migrants for their successful adaptation to the new (urban) environment becomes imperative. This suggests that migration has the potential to effect substantial behavioural changes (Martines, 1975; Ritchey, 1973; Ritchey and Stokes, 1971).

The Ghanaian Situation

The extent to which the urban social environment in Ghana fits the general pattern described above and the degree of its influence on the behaviour of rural-urban migrants need to be fully assessed in a systematic manner. An attempt has been made in the subsequent sections of this paper to address this issue. In this endeavour, it is necessary to first examine the nature of Ghanaian urbanisation, the motives and characteristics of rural-urban migrants, and the nature of their social interaction. The last part of the discussion speculates on the policy and developmental implications of this migration in Ghana. To a large extent, the discussions, conclusions, and policy recommendations can be extended to other African countries with similar experiences.

The Nature of Ghanaian Urbanisation
Large agglomerations of settled communities existed in Ghana and other parts of Africa prior to the continent's domination by European colonial powers in the nineteenth century. It has been noted that the Ashanti capital of Kumasi, for instance, was large and densely populated in the eighteenth century (Liebenow, 1986; Bascum, 1955). Many of the early settlements served as tribal and religious centres. Although some exhibited the characteristics of the city as a community *"...of a relatively dense population...with or without manufacturing, but with some form of interdependence and specialisation of functioning"* (Walton & Carns, 1973:1), they did not completely live off an agricultural hinterland. They were part of the agricultural hinterland and catered largely to peasant agriculturalists and craftsmen. Social and economic activities were organised mainly on kinship and

familial lines. The settlements were, therefore, essentially the "preindustrial" type.

Colonial rule and the intensification of European investments and economic activities saw the growth of 'new' towns and the decline of some of the old ones. The new viable towns, such as Accra, Tema, Kumasi, Sekondi-Takoradi, Obuasi, and Tamale are either mining, administrative, trade or commercial centres. Since the colonial era, and especially after World War II, the Ghanaian population has generally experienced a very rapid growth. The country's population increased from 6,726,815 in 1960 to 13,391,076 in 1987 (Statistical Service of Ghana, 1988). Better nutrition, improvements in personal hygiene, health care, the control and eradication of several infectious and contagious diseases were instrumental in this development. While the towns have benefited from natural population increase, the influx of people from the surrounding territories and rural hinterland has even been more dramatic. Migration has remained the major source of growth for the towns and cities (Liebenow, 1986; Frazier, 1961).

The Push-Pull Factors

Ghana, like many other developing countries, suffers from the problem of uneven development and distribution of basic social amenities between rural and urban areas. Facilities for higher education, quality health care, major sports and entertainment facilities, telecommunication, and the modern economy, are all centralised in the regional and national capital cities. The dualism and disparities, themselves legacies of the colonial administration, still persist after more than three decades of political independence and implementation of numerous lofty rural development programmes by different national governments. The building of better roads and transportation systems have only served to facilitate migration from the rural areas. In Ghana, as in other African countries, the disparities in the distribution of resources help to explain this phenomenon.

Most of the rural-urban migrants of today move in response to the "push" from the vagaries of rural living and the "pull" of Western industry, commerce, and "bright lights" of the urban areas (Caldwell, 1969; Frazier, 1961). The educated person in Ghana is perceived as someone who belongs to the city (Caldwell, 1969). It has been said that the school curricula have undermined the traditional rural order by failing to teach the requisite skills for adaptation to the indigenous social environment. Education at all levels have orientated the recipients to town-life. However, the lack of prestige for farm work, the social degradation and stigma associated with rural living, lack of appropriate jobs, and the dearth of social amenities there affect the "educated" and the "uneducated" alike. The social background of the rural-urban migrant population in Ghana is therefore mixed. It is made up of people with different preparations for city life.

Migrants and Social Relationships

What is the nature of the migrants' social adaptation once they have decided to stay in the urban area? On one hand, we can find migrants who are considerably 'urbanised' at the time of migration. These tend to be young, well-educated, and upwardly mobile. The role of the school system in this process of "anticipatory socialisation" has been noted earlier. Caldwell (1969) found for his sample data that 53 percent of the intending rural-urban migrants and 46 percent of the actual rural-urban migrants, respectively, anticipated or encountered fewer adjustment problems and expected or found city life to be more manageable. This category of migrants is more prone to commit itself to urban living – the so called "committed urbanites".

According to Liebenow (1986), the "committed urbanites" have both physically and psychologically severed their rural roots, and tend to limit their kinship obligations to their nuclear, monogamous families that live with them in the city. These individuals usually have a strong achievement orientation, a condition that necessitates deliberate and purposeful behaviour. However, it has been observed that although the Ghanaian elite tend to modify their extended kinship obligations and interaction with the home society, the very successful ones show varying degrees of commitment to the homeland and kin. After achieving whatever there is to aspire to in their 'travels', some migrants return home for reconciliation with those that they deserted. Some build houses, contribute materially to major community projects, and help to educate young members of the extended family. In fact, such endeavours help to enhance the prestige and social standing of their benefactors.

It should be noted, however, that not every migrant who enters the city for a period of time expects to become urbanised. This category of migrants fits the description of the so-called "situational urbanites", who far outnumber the committed urbanites. Liebenow (1986:187) has observed that these migrants: *"...do not regard the urban milieu as a proper environment for the development of the whole gamut of social relationships and all aspects of one's personality"*. Although the migrants leave the rural areas for the cities primarily in search of jobs and increased economic consumption (Caldwell, 1969), 'status' aspirations may not be a primary motivation for migration to most people. As Liebenow (1986:187) has observed, many of them: *"...have no particular stake in having the city function for them as a dynamic, integrated political community"*. They continue to maintain strong kinship ties either through frequent visits to their home villages or by participating in urban tribal associations (Rubin & Weinstein, 1977).

By encouraging participation in tribal cultural activities, the associations maintain the ties of most migrants to the homeland. It has been noted that the lack of adjustment problems anticipated or experienced by some migrants in the urban

areas was in part due to the support of the tribal associations (Little, 1957, 1966; Mayer, 1961). Clinging to and operating within tribal or ethnic enclaves and frequent contacts with the homeland help to insulate the migrants from the total impact of the urban ethos and thus minimise their assimilation into the host culture.

Assimilation, as Ritchey (1973:2) has noted: *"...has depended on the availability of opportunities for economic improvement provided by the host population and the skills brought by in-migrants."* These two conditions are not sufficiently satisfied in the Ghanaian urban setting. Most (situational) migrants are only marginally employed. A large number of them remain "urban villagers" or "tribesmen" rather than "townsmen" on their arrival in the urban areas. This implies that the values and structural characteristics of the destination area may not impress firmly on most migrants. Sometimes tremendous kinship pressures are exerted on them: for example parents may dictate to their adult children in matters relating to nuptiality and childbirth (Jahoda, 1959; Little, 1966; Lloyd, 1967).

An argument can be made that a prolonged sojourn of the rural-urban migrants in the urban area can lead to changes in their behaviour. Under the social conditions described above, however, a counter argument can be made that the impact of the urban social environment may not be strong enough to produce marked alterations in the lifestyles of most of the migrants. Their total adaptation or adjustment to the urban social environment may not materialise. The anticipated conflict between present and previously acquired norms may be mitigated and result only in a marginal adaptation. The migrants may tend to adapt a lifestyle that is neither the same as that of the host society, nor that of their societies of origin (Twumasi-Ankrah, 1979).

Policy Implications

Certain issues have been raised in our discussion thus far. We have noted that:
1) rural-urban migration robs the rural areas of their young, educated and versatile population;
2) while some rural-urban migrants find employment and attain better standards of living than they had in their rural homelands, a large proportion of them remain unemployed or underemployed mainly due to their lack of appropriate skills or the absence of jobs;
3) the rural-urban migrants continue to maintain strong ties with their fellow tribesmen in the urban centres and their homelands which they find emotionally and socially rewarding; and that
4) there is not a big contrast between rural and urban social arrangements which may limit the migrants' assimilation and behaviour modification. These observations suggest the following policy discussions:

Assimilation and Fertility

The nature of the rural-urban migrant social interaction, as described above, would lead us to expect a debilitation of the efficacy of the anticipated urban social structural constraints that induces a decline in fertility. The reason for this is partly because of the relative ease of obtaining help with baby-sitting and child care in general. Most migrants can easily obtain help from the village, because they are frequently in contact with their relatives there. If the facility for baby-sitting is not available in the city, a relative or a maid can be recruited from the village for that purpose. The recruitment of a helper may be necessary if the woman works in an office or the modern bureaucratic sector. For self-employed women in 'petty' or retail trading at the markets, as many of them are, an elaborate arrangement for baby-sitting might not be necessary, since the presence of a child may not interfere with their work. It is a common practice for some migrant women to send their children off to be raised by their kin in the villages. Also since most migrants have limited 'status' aspirations, childbirth may not pose much threat to their economic well-being. In the urban area, as in the rural area, childbirth still commands status and prestige, especially for the women.

Policies for fertility control should take cognisance of the "urban villagers" and develop an awareness of the diversity of the urban population. It may be necessary and possible to formulate common intervention programmes for both the rural and urban poor. A simplistic classification of the national population as rural and urban in policy issues might be grossly inadequate.

Which Model of Development?

A perennial point of contention in the discussion on African development has been the extent to which Western or alien models can be replicated at home. It is not my intention to belabour that argument at this juncture. Rather, we see a considerable merit in the argument for indigenising socioeconomic and political planning to take cognisance of the unique and idiosyncratic features of the local social milieu. It is obvious that Ghana's social system presents certain points of departure from other cultural settings, especially those in the West. Typically, the industrialism and stratification system that characterise Western societies are in their nascent form in Ghana. National policy makers and planners should intensely study these differences and creatively respond to them.

The tendency to accept already-made solutions from foreign experts, some of whom have acquired their expertise from "long distance", can exacerbate development problems. The same argument can be made about rural development policies that are initiated and run by bureaucrats who live in the capital cities and who have limited knowledge of the communities affected by their policies. A

system of accountability should be instituted in which the career advancements of the incumbents of public offices would be tied to the success of their programmes. With the possibility of demotion, job loss, or even criminal prosecution looming over their heads, public officials would be more careful in the allocation of contracts and the supervision of rural projects. The end result would be to eliminate fraud, waste, and, importantly, speed up rural and national development.

Stemming The Rural 'Brain Drain'

Without the presence and contributions of young, educated and versatile people, rural development efforts will be abortive. To find an effective solution to this problem, policy makers should focus on why those people leave for the cities in the first place. A differential reward system that emphasises rural service would be a positive departure from the present approach that tends to penalise rural living. Higher salaries and pecuniary benefits, quicker promotions, easier access to bank loans with liberal terms, lower income tax rates, better housing, rural electrification, and good water supply are some of the possible inducements that can help build a high quality rural workforce.

Rural development programmes, initiated by or with the input of those who will use them, can generate strong identification and support for those programmes. In principle, the District Assembly concept initiated by the Rawlings administration in Ghana is a step in the right direction. But the absence of resources in most cases has hampered the success of this policy that appropriately emphasises local grassroots initiatives. In any case, the perception that one can attain economic success and career advancement in rural endeavours needs to be cultivated and bolstered through positive inducements. The school curriculum should make education adaptable to local needs and problem solving.

In the past, recommendations had been made in some quarters for the decentralisation of state-owned, state-sponsored and state-run industries and certain other centres of governmental administrative functions. It is encouraging that these recommendations are being revisited and attempts made to implement them in the structural adjustment and privatisation programmes in Ghana and elsewhere. As part of this endeavour, special incentives can be offered to private firms and companies that locate in rural areas and boost employment opportunities for the people by harnessing the local resources.

By curtailing the rate of rural-urban migration, the demand on urban resources could be eased. That can help curb urban unemployment, underemployment, and many of the problems associated with over-urbanisation.

Migrants' Contribution to Rural Development

Rural-urban migrants can contribute directly or indirectly to rural development in many ways. We know that urban employment brings economic and material gains to some migrants. Through their voluntary tribal associations, to which some of them have great attachment and commitment, the migrants, especially the successful ones, can help in the planning and implementation of various projects at their home towns and villages. In many cases, the tribal associations have contributed to projects including the installation of street lights, building and maintenance of roads, streets, schools, clinics and health posts, wells and other sources of water supply. These are some of the needs that should be addressed. Cooperative banking to provide loans to support housing and agricultural projects is another area of consideration. All activities find meaning in the traditional 'self-help' concept through which resources have been pooled for practical action.

Governmental initiatives can spur patriotic activities among the citizenry by the implementation of special citizenship awards and challenge grants. These may be presented to the associations, groups, individuals, and non-governmental organisations like the Voluntary Workcamps Association (Badu & Parker, 1992) for exemplary leadership and outstanding service to their communities. The initiatives may even be extended to citizens and nationals who live outside the country. Most of these people have shown strong commitments to their motherland, despite their absence from home. However, it is important that the laws on citizenship be reviewed, with the realities of the African 'brain drain' in the post-independence era and the new world economic and political order. The flow of resources, technical skills and ideas from this category of people could be maximised if the present restrictions imposed on those who have sought residency and citizenship in foreign countries were removed.

In sum, it is suggested that African governments should attempt to fully understand the intricacies and dynamics of the migration process among the important variables in their economic development planning.

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