

RURAL AND URBAN LIFE*

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CITIES AND TOWNS in Rhodesia are largely populated by rural Africans who have been drawn into the urban economy. Many rural people, particularly men, are compelled to seek employment in the towns and other employment centres mainly because of the failure of the rural areas to provide an adequate living for their population. But in the towns and cities other social and economic forces continually drag many of these workers back to the rural areas. One such force is the lack of security with regard to residence in most urban areas. Other forces pushing workers back to the rural areas are: an acute housing shortage; the lack of social security in the form of unemployment benefits, health insurance, and old-age pensions; and the low level of wages. Furthermore, the regulations and legislation affecting Africans living in town create in many a feeling of being alien in the urban communities. This urban insecurity has largely led to circulatory labour migration, in which men seek paid employment away from their rural homes, possibly for some years, return home for a period then set out again, often repeating this process many times during their working lives.

Partly because of the constant movement of people between town and country there is a disproportion of men and women in most Rhodesian rural and urban areas.¹ In many rural villages there are more women than men, as can be seen in Table I which relates to the Mrewa Tribal Trust Land:²

* This article is based on a lecture delivered to the Vacation School held at the University of Rhodesia in August 1973.

¹ In Rhodesia as a whole the figures are: in Tribal Trust Lands, over the age of 14 years: 511 500 males to 781 500 females; in urban areas, total African population: 407 000 males to 235 150 females, Rhodesia, *Census of Population in 1969* (Salisbury, Central Statistical Office[1976]), Tables 3, 10. See also R. W. M. Johnson, *The Labour Economy of the Reserve* (Salisbury, Univ. Coll. of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Dep. of Economics Occasional Paper No. 4, 1964), 4; Sr Mary Aquina, 'The social background of agriculture in Chilimanzi Reserve', [*Human Problems in British Central Africa*]; *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* (1964), 36, 7; J. C. Mitchell, 'Factors in rural male absenteeism in Rhodesia', in D. Parkin (ed.), *Town and Country in Central and Eastern Africa* (London, Oxford Univ. Press for International African Inst., 1975), 93.

² G. L. Chavunduka, *Social Change in a Shona Ward* (Salisbury, Univ. of Rhodesia, Dept. of Sociology Occasional Paper No. 4, 1970), 13.

Table I

ADULT POPULATION OF SIX VILLAGES DISTRIBUTED BY AGE AND SEX

<i>Age</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>No. of People</i>
15-19	61	68	129
20-24	23	46	69
25-29	12	27	39
30-34	9	19	28
35-39	12	31	43
40-44	7	24	31
45-49	9	15	24
50-54	4	12	16
55-59	7	11	18
60 and over	30	43	73
TOTALS	174	296	470

On the other hand there are more men than women among Africans in most urban areas. Table II shows the age and sex structure of an old, well-established African urban community:³

Table II

SAMPLE ADULT POPULATION OF HIGHFIELD DISTRIBUTED BY AGE AND SEX

<i>Age</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>No. of People</i>
15-19	43	32	75
20-24	39	56	95
25-29	47	39	86
30-34	49	29	78
35-39	38	18	56
40-44	20	8	28
45-49	16	5	21
50-54	7	8	15
55-59	6	3	9
60 and over	8	4	12
TOTALS	273	202	475

³ P. Stopforth, *Survey of Highfield African Township* (Salisbury, Univ. of Rhodesia, Dep. of Sociology Occasional Paper No. 6, 1971), 5.

Both Tables show a disproportion of men to women in the age range 20-49 years: more women than men in the rural areas and more men than women in the urban areas. At the lower end of the range, many migrant workers are young, single men who have gone on their own to the cities. But there are also many older men who have gone to work in the cities leaving their wives at their rural homes: Table III shows that in the six Mrewa villages over half of the married women were living without their spouses:

Table III

MARITAL STATUS OF PEOPLE OVER 14 YEARS OF AGE

<i>All Villages</i>	<i>Males</i>	<i>Females</i>	<i>Totals</i>
Single	113	95	208
Divorced	5	18	23
Widowed	1	39	40
Married but spouse away	1	83	84
Married and living with spouse	54	61	115
TOTALS	174	296	470

The high number of divorced or widowed women in the Mrewa villages compared to that of men of a similar status is due to a number of reasons. One reason is that women who are divorced or widowed find it harder to remarry than men, because some men are reluctant to take on responsibility for a woman's children by a previous marriage and, furthermore, many of the widows are past the child-bearing age. Another reason is that many widowed or divorced women are reluctant to contract another marriage. A third reason is that widowed or divorced men find it easier to leave the village and settle in towns than women of a similar status.⁴

The disproportion of men to women in towns contributes to marital instability. Equality of numbers is, of course, no proof of marriage stability because many women may be living singly or in irregular unions. But in Rhodesia many married workers are in town without their wives as mentioned earlier. Some of those who bring their wives to town find it difficult to protect them from men without wives, some of whom struggle hard for the favours of unattached women and the wives of others.

It appears that the percentage of males absent from the villages has been increasing over the years. In the Mrewa villages the percentage of absent males between the age of 15 and 55 rose from 24.1 per cent in 1948 to 67.4 per cent in 1968 (Table IV). This overall increase in the number of males away from the villages has resulted mainly from an increase in the number of married males away. The percentage of single males away from the

⁴ Chavunduka, *Social Change*, 1.

villages has decreased since 1958. This is due to the fact that boys now stay in school longer than in previous decades. The increase in the number of married males away from the villages is mainly due to the rising standard of living.

Table IV
PERCENTAGE OF MALES ABSENT

	1948	1958	1968
Married males	12,3	49,6	62,1
Single males	70,7	83,4	71,3
Males aged 15-55	24,1	46,4	67,4

The Mrewa study shows that the mean age at which men make their first journey out of the villages to seek work has increased. The mean age at which men born before 1924 first left their villages to seek work was 20 years; for men born in or after 1924 the mean age was 20,8 years. The mean age at which men left to seek work between 1958 and 1968 was 22 years.

The period that men spend away from the villages on their trips to town has also increased, for a number of reasons: the difficulty nowadays of obtaining another job after a long stay in the villages; the improvement of wages in town; the improved transport facilities. This last factor is important, for it is now possible for most men to visit their rural homes nearly every weekend and on public holidays to supervise farming and to see their families without having to terminate their employment; also wives and other kinsmen are now able to visit the town more frequently so that the average urban dweller is constantly in touch with his rural kinsmen.

The disproportion in the age and sex distribution of the populations in town and country retards rural development in many areas. Since many of the able-bodied men are away from the villages most of the time, the rural areas are carrying a disproportionately large number of women, children and old people and the subsistence production there is maintained by these relatively unproductive elements in the population. As Mitchell points out, it is difficult to imagine how agricultural improvements can be introduced into these areas when most able-bodied men are absent.⁵

The argument that able-bodied men absent in wage-earning employment have the effect of increasing the net income of the rural community as a whole has been criticised. The argument assumes firstly that wages in town

⁵ J. C. Mitchell, *An Outline of the Sociological Background to African Labour* (Salisbury, Ensign, 1961), 11. Nevertheless in some areas labour migration does not pose serious agricultural problems because the labour force is divided in such a way that at any one time enough able-bodied men are available at home to perform the heavy tasks. Some urban men are also able to return home during the time of intense agricultural activities. The impact of labour migration on agricultural output may also be reduced by co-operation at the village level, and the use of hired labour.

are sufficiently high to allow a surplus over and above the living costs there for sending back to the rural areas, secondly that subsistence production is being maintained in the rural areas, and thirdly that men are staying in town long enough to make an appreciable contribution to the rural economy.⁶

While some urban workers in well-paid jobs are able to send money home, other urban workers are in fact subsidised by their rural families. Moreover, the more successful urban workers are not keen to extend financial help to kinsmen in the rural area.⁷ Some of them have a stake in town in the form of a house, and this provides the essential base from which they attempt to fulfil modern aspirations with relative security.⁸ The standard of farming in the rural areas is low. There is very little surplus for sale and many cultivators there sell no produce at all;⁹ possibly between two-thirds to three-quarters of rural families do not produce sufficient for their own requirements in a 'less than "normal" season'.¹⁰ There is some evidence that rural areas are reverting closer to a subsistence economy than they were in the past, in respect of the sales of agricultural commodities, except cotton; Smith shows that during the previous eight years sales of agricultural produce have declined by Rhs1.2 million per annum compared with the previous eight years.¹¹

Many rural women are attempting to fill the gap left by the absent men. Much responsibility both for food production and for bringing up of children now rests with the women and it is to this group that much extension education has been directed in the past. But I have argued elsewhere that much of agricultural extension education should be directed towards landholders in the urban areas.¹² Courses must be arranged for them in towns where they can learn improved farming methods and techniques and simple agricultural economics. There are a number of reasons why urban migrants must be involved in rural development. Firstly, the absent landholders are expected by their rural families to make important decisions regarding many aspects of farming; for example, many absent landholders decide how much land is to

⁶ Ibi., 11; see also his 'Structure plurality, urbanisation and labour circulation in Southern Rhodesia', in J. A. Jackson (ed.), *Migration* (Cambridge Univ. Press 1969), 72.

⁷ P. Stopforth, 'Comparative Differential Social Change: Highfield African Township and Chitepo Road, Salisbury' (Univ. of Rhodesia, Inst. for Social Research, unpubl. Research Report No. 5, 1973), 53.

⁸ The more securely placed townsmen usually make a number of rural investments in the form of commercial farms, shops and transport service, as in Nairobi and other parts of Africa; see A. M. Ross, 'Politics and Urbanisation: Two Communities in Nairobi' (Northwestern Univ., Ph.D. thesis, 1968); D. Parkin, 'Migration, settlement and the politics of unemployment: a Nairobi case study', in D. Parkin (ed.), *Town and Country in Central and Eastern Africa*, 145-55.

⁹ H. Dunlop, 'Land and economic opportunity in Rhodesia', *The Rhodesian Journal of Economics* (1972), 6, 1-10.

¹⁰ Rhodesia, *Report of the Secretary for Internal Affairs for the Year 1971* (Sessional Papers, Cmd R. R., 1972), 16.

¹¹ G. Smith, 'Agricultural development in Tribal Trust Lands', *Probe* (Salisbury, 1972), 1, 57.

¹² G. L. Chavunduka, 'Agents of change in the Tribal Trust Lands', *The Geographical Society [University of Rhodesia] Magazine* (1970), 1, 9-13.

the Land Husbandry Act.¹⁷ The Act was later repealed by the government because of its unpopularity. As I shall demonstrate, security of residence, for example, will largely remove the need to maintain a piece of land and livestock in the rural areas and thus relieve land and stock pressure. The tradition that it is the right of every adult to possess land and cattle will gradually be abandoned. But people can only abandon their land and cattle if they are offered alternative forms of livelihood and an alternative form of security to the traditional dependence upon cattle and the soil.

Then there is the need for the introduction of unemployment benefit schemes, medical aid schemes and old-age pension schemes. This will largely remove the need for dependence on rural relatives for support during times of crisis. The urban wage structure must be such that the urban worker will be encouraged to live in the urban area permanently and thus reduce population and stock pressure in the rural areas.¹⁸

A study carried out in Highfield African township provides some evidence in support of the above recommendations.¹⁹ The study compares differential change between Highfield and Chitepo Road.²⁰ Although Chitepo Road is in fact part of Highfield, socially it is different from the rest of the township in many respects. Accommodation on Chitepo Road is relatively more expensive and better than in most parts of the township. The people who live in Chitepo Road can also be differentiated from the mass of Highfield by such stratification criteria as income, occupation and education. While educational achievement for Highfield adults tends to peak between Grades Six and Seven, the select group of Chitepo Road shows a strong trend toward secondary and high school education with a high proportion reaching university status. Most of the household heads hold professional jobs, such as teachers, university lecturers, doctors, nurses and journalists. By contrast in the rest of Highfield most of the workers are in semi-skilled and unskilled employment. Income is also correspondingly higher in Chitepo Road than in the township as a whole. Average income among the Chitepo Road sample is almost five times that of the average worker in Highfield.²¹

Respondents were asked for the reasons for their intention of returning

¹⁷ Rhodesia, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Discontent in the Mangwende Reserve 1961* (Sessional Papers, 1961). For other reasons which led to the opposition to the implementation of the Land Husbandry Act, see K. Brown, *Land in Southern Rhodesia* (London, African Bureau, 1959); Garbett, 'The Land Husbandry Act . . .'; J. F. Holleman, *Chief Council and Commissioner* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1969).

¹⁸ Studies clearly show that the vast majority of African workers receive wages below the Poverty Datum Line; see G. A. Bettison, 'The Poverty Datum Line in Central Africa', *The Rhodes-Livingstone Journal* (1960), 27, 1-40; V. S. Cubitt and R. C. Riddell, *The Urban Poverty Datum Line in Rhodesia* (Salisbury, Univ. of Rhodesia, Faculty of Social Studies, 1974).

¹⁹ See P. Stopforth, 'Comparative Data for the Assessment of Processes of Social Change among Urban Africans' (Salisbury Univ. of Rhodesia, Inst. for Social Research, unpubl. Research Report No. 4, 1973); 'Comparative Differential Social Change'.

²⁰ Chitepo Road has been renamed Mangwende Drive.

²¹ See the relevant Tables in Stopforth, 'Comparative Data . . .', 8, 10. Other elite African suburbs in Salisbury are Marimba Park, Westwood, three other smaller localities in Highfield itself, Beatrice Cottages and some blocks of flats in Harare Township.

be cultivated each year and what crops are to be planted. Moreover, development of village agriculture is in their own interest since this would mean a reduction of the amount of money they have to send home from time to time. Any profits from the rural areas would also improve their own financial position. Furthermore, migrants are generally highly respected by members of their rural communities.

The circulation of people between town and country also impedes the development of commercial farming in many rural areas. It often leads to the fragmentation of land into uneconomic holdings. As Garbett has shown, obligations arising from kinship are sometimes considerable.¹³ A landholder has a duty to support his kinsmen some of whom may not have land rights in the rural area such as his deceased brother's wife and children, a divorced sister and his unemployed brother. When a person marries, a further series of relationships is established, with further obligations. Thus a landholder may be forced to allow former urban dwellers to live on his land each working a small area. This results in the available land being called upon to support many more people than the estimated carrying capacity. Kinship obligations may be dysfunctional in another respect. When a landholder's income increases, the number of kinsmen who will demand support usually increases as well. This discourages some cultivators from undertaking additional improvements.¹⁴

Others have suggested that these family or kinship ties should be destroyed in order to increase the rate of economic growth in the rural areas.¹⁵ Indeed, the destruction of these kinship ties would appear at first sight to be a method of increasing the rate of economic growth. This would mean, however, the destruction of the private system of aid which these ties make possible. The destruction of this private system of aid would make it essential for government to provide for those who become destitute. A good deal of the opposition to the implementation of the Land Husbandry Act was based on this.¹⁶ Because of the general insecurity in the urban areas, many urban dwellers feared that the Act would exclude them permanently from the rural areas. Furthermore, the government was unable to provide for those who became destitute. The Mangwende Report, for example, shows that much of the violence which took place in Mrewa had been perpetrated by young men from the towns who had been denied rights in terms of the provisions of

¹³ G. K. Garbett, 'The Land Husbandry Act of Southern Rhodesia', in D. Biebuyck (ed.), *African Agrarian Systems* (London, Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), 185-202.

¹⁴ It should be pointed out that although some lazy or parasitic people take advantage of kinship in order to get support, the integrity of many rural people is such as to use the system for security in the correct manner with abuse being the exception rather than the rule. I am indebted to Mr M. G. Reid for bringing this point to my attention.

¹⁵ A. F. Hunt, 'The economic position of the Tribal Trust Land in relation to agriculture', *Proceedings of the Rhodesian Economic Society* (1966), 11, 54-62.

¹⁶ The Land Husbandry Act (No. 52 of 1951) was designed to give each eligible adult male who was present in the rural area at the time of its implementation, a portion of land (about 8 acres) and rights to graze a certain number of cattle (about 6 head) in the grazing area.

to their rural homes when their working days are over. Seventy-five per cent cited land and security as their main reason (Table V). Chitepo Road residents who enjoy relative security in the urban area did not rate land and security at the rural home as a positive inducement to return home.²² The respondents were also asked whether they would prefer a pension or cattle on retirement. Seventy-eight of Chitepo Road respondents chose a pension rather than cattle on retirement. This is an indication of their willingness to withdraw from traditional rural forms of wealth and status and shows a commitment to modern urban standards. For the rest of Highfield 67.8 per cent preferred cattle on retirement (Table VI). Mainly because of job security and relatively higher wages, people in Chitepo Road were more prepared to cut their ties with rural relatives than were respondents in the rest of Highfield (Table VII). Eighty-three per cent of the Chitepo Road respondents, however, agreed that they would be prepared to help rural kinsmen in cases of emergency.²³

Table V²⁴

REASONS ADVANCED FOR INTENTION OF RETURNING TO RURAL ESTATE
OR OTHERWISE

<i>Reasons</i>	<i>Chitepo Road</i>		<i>Highfield</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Land and security at home	7	33,3	45	75,0
Easy life at home	12	57,1	7	11,7
Uncertain future in town			3	5,0
Preference for living with kin	2	9,5	5	8,3
TOTAL	21	99,9	60	100,0

$\chi^2 = 10,0069$ with 1 d.f., $p < .01$ (Land security — other reasons)

* N includes 3 'Don't know'.

²² Nearly all residents of Chitepo Road have now been allowed by government to buy their present houses and are in fact in the course of doing so.

²³ Another study carried out in Salisbury recently shows that urban people who enjoy residence and job security tend to give up their land rights, cut their rural kinship ties and become more urbanised. See V. Moller, 'Comparative Mobility and Urban Commitment in Three Salisbury African Townships: Harare (Hostels), Mufakose and Kambuzuma' (Univ. of Rhodesia, Dep. of Sociology, unpubl. paper, 1975).

²⁴ From Stopforth, 'Comparative Data . . .' Table Xa.

Table VI²⁵

PREFERENCE FOR CATTLE OR PENSION ON RETIREMENT

Preference	Chitepo Road		Highfield	
	N	%	N	%
Cattle	8	21,6	59	67,8
Pension	29	78,4	28	32,2
TOTAL	37	100,0	87	100,0

$$\chi^2 = 22,3035 \text{ with 1 d.f., } p, .001$$

Table VII²⁶

WHEN SHOULD RELATIVES IN TOWN HELP THOSE IN THE COUNTRY

Response	Chitepo Road		Highfield	
	N	%	N	%
At all times	2	5,4	49	56,3
In emergency	31	83,8	22	25,3
When financially able	2	5,4	8	9,2
With ploughing			5	5,7
Never			1	1,1
Other	2	5,4	2	2,3
TOTAL	37	100,0	87	99,9

$$\chi^2 = 35,7272 \text{ with 1 d.f., } p, .001 \text{ (At all times — In emergency).}$$

CONCLUSION

I have attempted in this paper to demonstrate the relationship between urban and rural life. When describing rural development one has to take

²⁵ Ibid., Table XVIIa.

²⁶ Ibid., Table XI.

into account the economic, political and social conditions in the urban areas. On the other hand when discussing urban stabilization, labour turn-over and unemployment one has to know something about the distance, and the social, economic and agricultural conditions of the home area from which migrants have come. In discussing the question of circulation of labour between town and country, it becomes necessary to talk not only about the aspirations of rural people, shortage of land or poverty of soil, but also the administrative policies of local and central government on urban stabilization, agricultural development, land and so on. Rural or urban development cannot be treated in isolation. Migrants form the main link between the two systems.

At the present time many rural people who come into town rarely find conditions which allow them to become real town-dwellers quickly. Thus they have a tendency to keep, at least partially, their former rural characteristics especially their links with the rural areas. This sometimes results in 'ruralization' of towns rather than urbanization — a phenomenon well worth serious study. On the other hand the constant movement of people facilitates the propagation of urban ideas of modernity.