

49634

Distr.
LIMITED
PPUD/WP/10
25 August 1964
ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

ECONOMIC COMMISSION FOR AFRICA
Workshop on the role of physical
planning and urbanization policies
in development
Accra, 28 September - 5 October 1964

THE HUMAN ASPECTS OF URBANIZATION^{1/}

by

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^{1/} Document submitted to the African and Malagasy Economic Conference, Marseilles, 16-18 April 1964 and reproduced with the authorization of the Office of Overseas Scientific and Technological Research.

This study and that of Mr. Althabe^{1/} examine some of the main economic, social and human problems caused by the existence of large towns in African countries.

We shall talk mainly of towns, but shall constantly bear in mind the relative position of these towns to the country as a whole. Further, our perspective in analyzing these problems will be that of sociologists. That is to say we shall not analyze those aspects of the theoretical problems of organization or planning which are the responsibility of the administrator, the politician, the town planner, etc., but shall try, by using concrete studies, to take a position as it were opposed to the official point of view and to see what happens in reality. In his inaugural address, the Chairman, Mr. Buron, referred to the loss of tension which occurs along a line. Along the line uniting rulers to populations we are going to place ourselves on the side of the latter to observe, not exactly a loss of tension, but rather the reactions of these populations to the intentions of their rulers. We shall then see how they interpret their situation in a manner peculiar to them and how their reactions are sometimes entirely different from those intended.

In the first part, we shall make a general assessment of the problem of towns in Africa relative to what it is in the rest of the world.

The second part will deal with certain more properly sociological problems posed by urbanization and in particular with the rural exodus.

I. THE PROBLEM OF TOWNS IN AFRICA

An attempt to form an idea of the problem of towns in Africa confronts us with facts which are contradictory and not always easy to interpret.

A. The urban phenomenon in the world and in Africa

In the first place, if we go back in history we find that very large towns are of relatively recent appearance in the world; in 1800, there was not a town of one million inhabitants.

^{1/} See PPUD/WP/11.

At that time, large built-up areas occurred mainly in Europe and in Asia. In Africa, however, there were two - Fez and Cairo - of more than 100,000 inhabitants. It was during the nineteenth century, with industrial development, that the map of large urban areas began to take its present shape. There was considerable development in Europe, and in North America the very large towns with which we are familiar started proliferating. The strangest phenomenon, however, occurred not in America but in Asia where, the appearance of very large agglomerations was noted in the south, the south-east and the east.

In Africa, particularly in Algiers, Tunis, and Alexandria in North Africa and in Johannesburg and Capetown in South Africa, new centres merged with old.

Between 1900 and the present time, no new conurbation, at least of world scale, has appeared on the map. Large towns are growing bigger; world-scale conurbations are developing and spreading. In Africa, except on the Mediterranean coast and in South Africa, the growth rate of large towns has been considerably lower. In 1940, for example, the only inter-tropical centres with 100,000 inhabitants were Ibadan, Lagos, Khartoum and Tananarive.

From the angle of the number and size of towns, therefore Africa's situation may be regarded as reassuring for Africa appears as the least urbanized continent of the world. Unfortunately, these figures do not give a complete idea of the situation, for they describe only the actual state and not the evolution of affairs. If we now consider the growth rate of towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants, that is to say the percentage of inhabitants by which these towns increase each year, we find a completely different state of affairs. Using this criterion we find that between 1940 and 1952 European towns increased by 1 per cent per year, that is to say by 1,000 per 100,000 inhabitants, and that the towns of the super-states, the USSR and the USA, increased by 2 per cent. In developing countries we find much higher rates, all exceeding $3\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. And this time we find that it is Africa, with 3.9 per cent for towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants, that has the highest rate of the world, ahead of Asia with 3.8 per cent and South America with 3.7 per cent.

These data show that although its problem of excessive urbanization is not yet irremediable, Africa is nevertheless at the beginning of a very distinct process which affects the whole continent. Although the danger point may not have been reached (it is very difficult to define an urbanization optimum), the chances that Africa will soon reach a level similar to that of other continents are great. For instance, Nigeria's urban growth rate is now the same as England's was on the eve of the industrial revolution.

Such, briefly, is Africa's position relative to the rest of the world in so far as urban development is concerned.

B. The single town phenomenon

If we now try, limiting ourselves this time to Africa, to characterize this urban development, one fact appears characteristic: the absence or near-absence of secondary and small towns. Most often, each State has one very large town which serves as capital, often also as maritime port or at least as a trans-shipment point. In the most urbanized countries there are sometimes two or three of these large towns, but in any case - and this is the important point - there are no intermediaries between these very large centres and the secondary towns which, with some exceptions, are merely administrative posts with, sometimes, a market, but the majority of whose populations maintain their rural activities.

This phenomenon, which is, no doubt, normal in Africa's present condition, is certainly responsible for some of the apparently most disturbing characteristics of the continent's urbanization. It is responsible in particular for the concentration of rural migrants in a single centre. The question may therefore be asked whether the exceptionally high growth rate of African towns is not merely an impression created by the small number of large towns.

More detailed analysis will enable us to clarify these ideas. In the first place, according to censuses it is mainly the second world war, with what has been called the war effort, followed by the post-war period with its massive investments and its first attempts at development, which have led to the massive arrivals of populations in towns. Taking the population as a whole, however, the consequences of this rapid and continuing urbanization, are not yet very marked. In 1956, only 9 per cent of Africans lived in centres of more than 5,000 inhabitants. From that date on, however, very appreciable regional differences began to appear and urban population rates of 20 per cent were reached and sometimes exceeded in the most urbanized regions.

These urban populations are grouped mainly in the principal towns. In 1956, there were in Africa south of the Sahara 26 towns of more than 100,000 inhabitants and 40 towns of between 45,000 and 100,000 inhabitants. At that time, the most urbanized regions were South Africa, the Bight of Benin, Rwanda-Urundi and Congo (Brazzaville).

These figures, which are already eight years old, are now largely out of date.

C. Urban phenomenon - significance

The phenomenon, however limited, of the rapid growth of towns already causes several problems, not only at the level of towns but also at that of rural areas. The manner of tackling these problems varies largely, however, with one's idea of the town and its role in the country. I shall not dwell on this question which Mr. Althabe will discuss later on; it is however, necessary to raise it now in order to interpret correctly what is going to be said later.

In the colonial era, while ideas about the relationship between the mother country and the colony varied from colonizer to colonizer there was agreement on the fact that there were no intentions of setting up large towns or of settling large masses of the local population in these towns. According

to the so-called complementary economy principle, the mother country had to supply the needs of its colony and the latter had no need of industries or important services, that is to say of the secondary and tertiary sectors of the economy. Administrative posts and trading points, for the purchase of local foodstuffs and the sale of manufactured products were all that were required. In the mining regions, there were also compounds to house the labour force which was changed at regular intervals.

During this era, which extended up to the pre-war period, population concentrations in towns occurred partly without the knowledge, and in any case against the will, of the governing power. Even after 1945, when large-scale equipment programmes were being implemented, the administration was worried by the danger of uncontrolled influxes of population and wondered how to employ these populations which had outgrown the economic possibilities of the urban areas. Later governments have inherited, at least partially and for similar reasons, this tendency to lay the blame, so to speak on the town and the urban phenomenon.

Gradually however a new idea, which is at present gaining ground, of the town has emerged. In Africa as in Europe it is linked with the success of the idea of planned development which, stemming from the socialist countries on the one hand and from industrial schemes used in capitalist countries on the other hand, allots to the town, in the country taken as whole, a role quite different from that of former times. According to this new idea, the large African town is no longer regarded as useless and superfluous but, on the contrary, becomes the driving force, the principal pole of the nation's development.

It is from this angle, and in so far as they affect the population, that we shall examine certain phenomena of the growth of towns.

II. URBANIZATION - SOME HUMAN ASPECTS

In this second part we shall first rapidly review the positive aspects of urbanization and then, as one of its negative aspects, we shall examine the phenomenon of the rural exodus, considering first its effects on the town which is the arrival environment and then its effects on the rural areas, which are the departure environments. Finally, we shall turn our attention to some rural areas which seem to have resisted this depopulation movement in favour of the town, and try to determine the causes of this resistance.

A. The positive aspects of urbanization

There is often a tendency to consider only the excessive or pathological aspects of urbanization. Emphasis must also be placed on the fact that the large town also presents favourable aspects and creates irreplaceable conditions which are at the origin of phenomena which otherwise might not have occurred. There is no doubt that in Africa, as elsewhere, large towns have played a considerable part in the development of civilizations. Even in pre-colonial Africa some of the most evolved forms of social life had developed in the towns on the Bight of Benin.

Even nowadays, it can be said that in Africa the large town is often the only point in the country with modern amenities in the sense at least in which we understand this idea. It therefore offers the populations, in finished form, not only new products and equipment but also new ways of living and thinking; it imposes on its inhabitants, rich or poor, living conditions completely different from those of rural areas and traditional environments. As Georges Balandier shows, it is the centre in which new cultural models, new forms of life, be they of European origin or of original local creation, are evolved and whence they spread to the rest of the country.

This transformation effected by the town is extremely profound. Analyses of tests commonly known as "intelligence tests", have shown that, in the United States as well as in Europe or Africa, town dwellers always have better results than country dwellers. This certainly does not mean the town dwellers are always and inherently, as it were, more intelligent than rural dwellers. It does mean, however, - and this is what is important in considering the role of large towns - that the stimuli which the people receive in urban areas, the examples they see and the tasks they are called upon to perform, constitute a sort of intellectual training which might be compared to the physical training of an athlete. Simply because they are in better training, therefore, it is normal that town dwellers should be better suited to intellectual tasks than country dwellers. In large towns, this stimulus, which results from contact with human beings, things and ideas, is associated with two elements: first the presence of an intellectual élite which is not found in the country, and which serves as an example and as a driving force; secondly, the existence of facilities for acquiring knowledge in its highest forms. These are the conditions which have permitted the rapid formation of generation technicians, civil servants and politicians in Africa, and it is certainly to big towns that Africa largely owes the rapidity of its post-war political evolution.

Even nowadays, despite the problems - which we are now going to study - caused by urbanization, the large town has not completed its role and Mr. Althabe will later show us how, on the contrary, the town has new functions to fulfill in the development of the country.

B. The rural exodus - consequences at town level

It must be admitted that alongside these favourable aspects of the establishment of large towns there are also negative or, more precisely, excessive aspects of urbanization. The most general of these factors is without doubt the massive rural exodus, which is responsible for the

enormous growth of towns and for the corresponding depopulation of rural areas. We shall now consider, taking a case which we consider significant, the effects and short-term and long-term consequences of this exodus at town level.

We shall take as our example Brazzaville where Mr. Althabe and I spent several months between 1957 and 1959 investigating the unemployment problem. A study of certain population problems in the town had been made some years previously by sociologists and geographers. Their study had been made however at a time of prosperity whereas we arrived at the most critical moment of the crisis. Comparison of these various studies has revealed phenomena of social dynamics which otherwise might have remained hidden.

Generally speaking, it may be said that Brazzaville has long held great attraction for the populations of the rest of the Congo. The great demographic growth of the town dates, however, from the post-war period. From 1945 onwards, and for at least five years, large industrial works, the installation of a port, the building of a dam and the development of the town caused a continuous influx of approximately 3,000 to 4,000 persons per year from the rural areas. In 1950 the town numbered approximately 70,000 persons and the urban population rate of the Congo reached 20 per cent, i.e. one of the highest in Africa. Even at that time this massive rural exodus disturbed the authorities and as long ago as 1949 a member of the "Grand Conseil" requested that serious attention should be paid to the question.

A sample survey made in 1951 showed that from 64 to 90 per cent of Brazzaville Africans were born outside the town; considering that a rate of 45 to 50 per cent was regarded as more or less satisfactory, that percentage was extremely alarming. Following the opening-up of work yards, all able-bodied men hurried into the town to try to find work and at that time the majority of immigrants were adult, particularly young males. In 1950, more

than half of the men of the town were aged between 19 and 38 and the town had that air of a labour camp which Georges Balandier has described in his well-known work on the black spots of Brazzaville.

The first signs of a crisis which was to become very serious and result in considerable unemployment appeared as long ago as 1951 with the completion of the work undertaken and the relative exhaustion investment resources and, it must be admitted, the absence of a programme for economic development in depth. In 1957 we estimated that 8,000 persons, that is to say one-third of the active population, were out of work in Brazzaville. The question which then confronted us was to know how the relatively unstable population of the labour camp described by Mr. Balandier behaved during the five years of crisis. To find an answer to this question we shall compare the results of two censuses, one dating from 1950/1951 at the height of the period of prosperity, and the other carried out five years later at the lowest point of the crisis.

Generally speaking, the total population of the town seems to have grown fairly considerably during these five years, since it increased from 70,000 to 85,000 inhabitants. This, however, is partly due to the fact that the members of a religious sect, the Matswanistes, had refused to reply to the 1950 census whereas large number of them did reply in 1955.

Bearing this remark in mind, one perceives that the number of men over the age of 15 remained relatively stationary between the two censuses. This means that when the crisis occurred the exodus of adult men practically came to a halt and that a first phase of the migratory movement ended. It also shows, however, that despite unemployment those men who had arrived before 1950 remained in the town instead of returning to their villages of origin.

Since the population growth cannot be attributed to the men, what did happen during this period? A comparison of the two censuses, concentrating this time on the women, shows that between the two periods the number of women over 15 years of age grew from 5,000 to 6,000 persons, a considerable increase when considered as a proportion of the population of the town. The bulk of the population growth was therefore due to a massive and continuous migration of women. The sex ratio underwent a considerable change,

increasing from 535 women per 1,000 men in 1950 to 732 women per 1,000 men, that is to say nearly half as many again, in 1955.

This confirms what the settling of the male population had led us to fear, namely, that the men who came during the period of prosperity not only established themselves in the town but made their wives come from the villages, thus creating, by induction, a second and still fairly large wave of population.

As might be expected, such a change in the composition of the town has had profound repercussions on the birth trend.

Because of special circumstances due to the dearth of women in the urban population, the nuptiality curve was not comparable with that of female immigration, having increased by only one-fifth during the period under consideration. On the other hand, and this is the second important indirect phenomenon revealed by a comparison of the two censuses, there was a considerable increase in the birth rate. During the same period the number of children aged between 0 and 5 years, that is to say children born during these five years, increased in round figures from 9,000 to 15,000, i.e. an increase of nearly three-fifths. From that time on therefore, and despite the low nuptiality, the volume of births is fairly high. It would be interesting to follow the effect of this up to the present day by analyzing the most recent censuses. It is reasonable to think, however, that from 1955 we are at the beginning of a third stage in the evolution of the population, characterized by the appearance of a large-scale natural movement which has already replaced immigration and which, even without the latter, will continue to ensure the growth of the urban population. The hope that the crisis will automatically lead to the disappearance of the surplus urban population therefore seems entirely unfounded. It may even be thought that the emergence of a generation born in the town will result in the establishment of a specifically urban population much more cut off from the rural population than were the male immigrants of the years 1945/1950.

Such are the serious medium and long-term consequences of uncontrolled and not easily controllable movements towards towns.

C. The Rural exodus (continued) - consequences in rural areas

The problems posed in the rural areas are equally important. To change the region, we shall on this point consult the works of English anthropologists who have studied some effects of the exodus to towns on rural areas in East and South Africa.

After the war the English anthropologist Monica Hunter observed Northern Rhodesian migrations to towns exactly comparable in nature and extent to the Brazzaville example we have just examined. At the time the author was making her study the East London sex ratio was even lower than that of Brazzaville, being 466 women per 1,000 men (instead of 535). This gives an idea of the seriousness of the demographic imbalance.

In some rural districts of the country the proportions of working-age male populations which had emigrated to the towns were as high as 30 to 50 per cent. The remaining women, old men and children were insufficient to offset this loss of energy. This resulted in the under-cultivation of arable lands, leading to a general fall in already mediocre living standards, to more or less permanent malnutrition and to a lowering of the technical standard of traditional agriculture.

One would normally have hoped that the large numbers of males who emigrated to the towns might have made some compensation, in the form of despatches of money or consumer products, to the rural areas from which they came. In fact, very precise surveys made at this time show that there was practically no compensation. Since their departure, 70 per cent, that is to say the majority of the migrants, had spent two-thirds of their life in towns. As they lived almost constantly in the town it is normal that they should spend most of their earnings there. The author has in fact calculated that only 10.4 per cent of these earnings returned to their families in the villages. This was obviously quite inadequate and it has been shown that the rural areas received little or no compensation for the loss of their manpower, giving on the whole much more to the town than they received from it.

These remarks may appear to give a very pessimistic picture of the situation. It may be wondered, indeed, whether the situation is not so serious as to discourage any kind of effort and if the authorities can hope to have effective means of influencing these phenomena. The problem here, therefore, is that of the chances of the success of a concerted development programme, for all planning policies - Mr. Althabe will revert to this later - first require that population movements should be controlled and that a large proportion of the population should be established in rural areas.

D. Developed rural areas and depopulation control

We now propose to complete these negative aspects of the problem by studying, still using the works of anthropologists, examples of rural societies which have succeeded in stabilizing their populations and even, in some cases, in creating immigration movements in their favour.

The first thing to point out is that the exodus towards the towns did not start for reasons as simple as even urban sociologists have sometimes believed. People have been questioned - we ourselves have done this - about the reasons why they came to the town and over-hasty conclusions have sometimes been drawn. It should moreover be pointed out that the present vogue of giving "motivations" - or what are thought to be motivations - as the ultimate explanation is not the work of sociologists and has no valid meaning for them. Obviously, the reasons people give are not wrong: when they say they came for such a reason it is of course true, but the explanation is inadequate.

In fact, for the desire to come to the town to be translated into fact, a peculiar situation, i.e. a whole series of conditions, of transformations, about which it is useful to say something, had to occur in rural societies.

These conditions differ from one part of Africa to another depending mainly upon whether the region are given over to mining or industrial cropping. It does seem, however, that in most cases the way to the "unhinging" of rural populations was greatly prepared by the introduction of two new factors attributable to colonization, the monetary economy and - an associated phenomenon - wage-earning.

On their own, however, these factors are no more sufficient than motivations in favour of the town to provoke a rural exodus. Indeed, it can now be said that all regions of Africa have more or less, and in different degrees, been affected by these phenomena. And yet - and this is the important point for us - there are at present in Africa rural populations which have, like others, been affected by the introduction of wage-earning and the monetary economy, which have come within the sphere of attraction of large towns and which have yet retained their populations and their balance. It is interesting to examine some of these populations and seek the reasons for their stability.

We shall here mention the case of two such populations, the Mambwé of Northern Rhodesia, near an industrial and mining region, and the Agni of Ghana, in a rich industrial cropping region. They belong to opposing political backgrounds, which is the reason why they have been chosen.

The Mambwé, about whom the anthropologist Wilson published a book entitled "Tribal cohesion and Monetary Economy" in 1958, are a population numbering about twenty thousand who live to the south of Lake Tanganyika. With the Mambwé we find ourselves in an extremely authoritarian colonial system, dominated by the rule of apartheid and where political and individual liberties are practically non-existent. Whatever one may think of this system and whatever its future may be, it is useful to examine how it operates and its results with respect to the problem with which we are concerned, even though one may wonder what will happen when it is replaced by a more liberal system.

According to the colonial system under which the Mambwé live, men, and only men, aged between 18 and 40 go to work in the town. Strictly speaking it is not a system of forced labour but there are extremely strong economic pressures owing to the low living standard of the population. At the same time, a certain ideology has developed within the Mambwé population itself whereby, since the elders went to the town, the young men must follow their example.

At all events, it can be said that nearly all Mambwé will during their lifetime spend several periods - some of them long but always broken by returns to the country - in the town, where they work as wage-earners for an appreciable part of their lives. At the age of 40 they are rejected by the labour market which gives them no further opportunities of work. They then return to their Reserves.

It seems that in spite, or because, of this extremely authoritarian system, these workers are, notwithstanding the fact that they have spent very long periods of their existence in the town and under the wage economy system, fairly easily reabsorbed into the rural society. This is an extremely interesting phenomenon if compared with the reactions of other populations - in the Congo (Brazzaville) for example - where the difficulty of returning to the rural environment is experienced very early, after a few years of urbanization.

Certain circumstances of this Mambwé reintegration should be specified. Despite his absence, the migrant retains the right to cultivate tribal land. On his return, he resumes his position in a very structured, very organized, both patrilineal and patrilocal society. Its chieftainry remains highly organized. The village chief distributes the land; he is also village banker and practically monopolises external trade. In addition, the technical level of traditional Mambwé society is relatively high.

It is fair to say that Wilson's conclusion on the future of this system is not very optimistic. In fact, he reveals forces of destructuration which are of two orders, first the appearance in the trade unions of opposition to the colonial structure as a whole, and secondly forces of internal disorganization due to the fact that the role of the land chiefs, on whom the cohesion of the system is based, is beginning to deteriorate. Nevertheless, and in the present state of affairs we have here an example of a rural population which, although it has been in close and continuous contact with an urban area has for many years been able to adapt itself to a new system while preserving its cohesion and to reabsorb, so far satisfactorily, the men it sent to work in the town.

Our second example, about which we shall be brief, relates to a Ghanaian population, the Agni. The Agni live in the rich cocoa-growing regions of the east of the country. As opposed to the Mambwé, who can subsist only in economic symbiosis with the town, the main source of the Agni planters' income is their land: not only do the Agni seem to be satisfactorily settled on their land but they have succeeded in building up an immigration movement towards their plantations.

The cause of their stability in a country in which large towns do exist seems to reside first in the extent of the income they derive from their cocoa plantations and then in the relatively unexacting work required of them for the upkeep of the plantations.

Other similar examples could easily be found in Africa, if only in neighbouring regions like the Ivory Coast, Togo and Gabon. They all tend, and it is this that is important to us here, to provide examples of rural populations which, given certain conditions, have remained on their land and spontaneously resisted the attraction of towns. It seems therefore that neither the appearance of the monetary economy nor the image of the town, although the latter exerts an essential influence, particularly on the young,

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are sufficient in themselves to uproot the rural masses irremediably and cause them to rush to urban areas. We consider it more accurate to think that these factors - among others - contribute to the building of higher aspirations. People think they will more easily attain these better conditions by coming to the town. It seems therefore that rural exoduses only become extensive enough to imperil national equilibrium when they occur in countries where the rural areas are exaggeratedly under-developed.

Reliable studies from very different countries confirm the idea we started out with at the beginning of this study, i.e. that the control of the exodus to towns and, thereby, control of balanced development must be achieved by action on the rural areas. To say this is not of course to solve automatically all the problems which will arise. But to have measured the difficulties that will be encountered is perhaps already a reason for action and hope.