

Rural-Urban Inter-Relationships in an Urbanising World: The Literature Perspective of Nigeria

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Key words: Development; Land management; Nigeria; Rural-urban continuum; Socio-spatial; Territorial development.

SUMMARY

The study presented in this paper evokes a renewed discourse about urban-rural continuum from a spatial functional perspective in a highly urbanising. Rural areas in Nigeria are “usually” traditional in character and smaller than urban areas in size. Urban areas are “normally” equipped with more infrastructural facilities (schools, health, shopping, roads, among many others). However, this relationship is growing into a more interdependent one. This study examines rural-urban interrelationship to show the literature evidence of how cooperation between urban and rural areas occur. By way of methodology, the study used e-Focus Group Discussion to gain opinions about what exists in literature in regards to rural-urban interactions in Nigeria. The study notes that the dichotomous relationship between rural and urban areas exist in Nigeria because, right from the birth of formal planning systems in Nigeria, different agencies (including procedures and remits) for the management of rural and urban space were created. It also notes that there is increasing interactions between urban and rural areas. It outlines the various modes of interdependencies observable in rural urban inter-relationships in the country. It recommends a paradigm for understanding rural and urban areas based on their differences and commonalities.

Rural-Urban Inter-Relationships in an Urbanising World: The Literature Perspective of Nigeria (UN-HABITAT GLTN) (10001)

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1. Introduction

“Nigeria contains some of Africa’s oldest and newest cities, hosts five of the 30 largest urban settlements on the continent, and is estimated to have the biggest urban population on the continent. Yet many of the basic ‘facts’ about spatial-demographic trends in Nigeria have been contested” (Fox et al., 2018: 947). About half of the country’s more than 189 million population is split between urban and rural areas (United Nations, 2018).

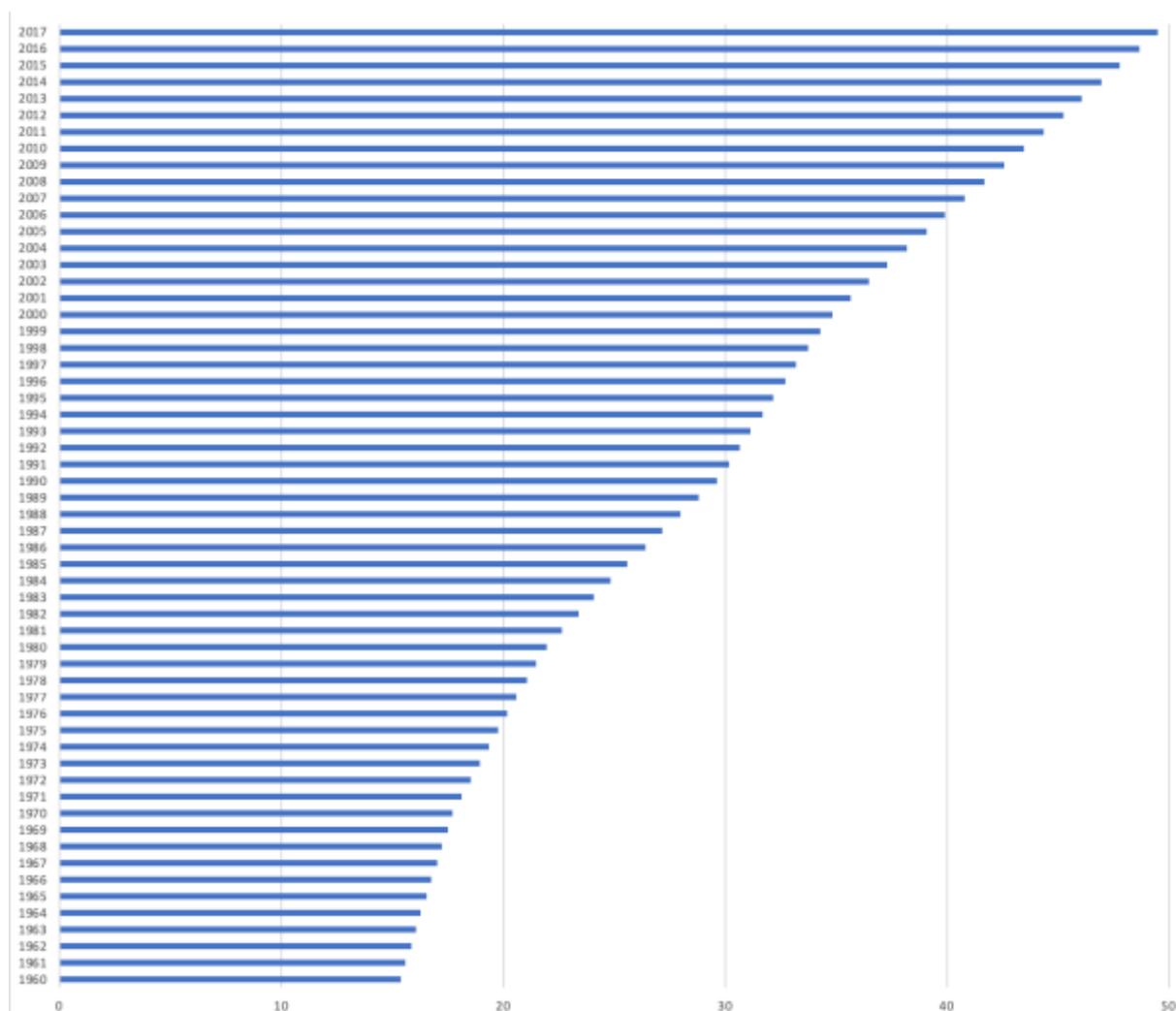


Figure 1: Urban population (as percentage of total) of Nigeria (Based on World Bank, 2019). Data is based on the 2018 Revision of World Urbanization Prospects produced by the Population Division of the UN DESA.

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This situation could have been predictable considering that Nigeria's population has maintained a consistent rise in urbanisation ever since the 1960 when it gained political independence (See Figure 1). Nigeria's urban population (as percentage of total) has risen from 15.41% in 1960 to 49.52% in 2017. This increase is a combination of two main factors. They are rural-urban migration and high rates of urban births (Chigbu, 2013a-b). However, there are other factors that are worthy of note. For instance, ever since the beginning of formal planning system in Nigeria, there has been a dichotomous relationship between rural and urban areas. Rural and urban areas are viewed in isolation from each other. Rural areas in Nigeria are known to be "usually" traditional in character and smaller than urban areas in size. Urban areas are "normally" equipped with more infrastructural facilities (industries, schools, jobs, health, shopping, roads, among many others). As a consequence, rural-urban migration has become a driving force for urban population growth. Both rural and urban areas are important spatial development components for Nigeria's development — and both of them are facing serious development challenges.

Rural areas contribute substantial amount of GDP to Nigeria through Agriculture. In the past five years, agriculture have contributed to more than 20% to Nigeria's GDP each year¹ (National Bureau of Statistics of Nigeria, 2017) and more than 70 to 80 percent of livelihood earning jobs through agriculture (Ebenehi et al., 2019). Yet, they remain significantly cut off from the basic amenities of decent living in the country (Chigbu, 2013a). It is also the location of nearly 80% of the poverty in the country (Chigbu et al., 2012). Specific land related challenges inherent in rural areas include gender inequality, tenure insecurity, women disempowerment, inappropriate land interventions for development, loss of culture and poverty (Chigbu and Klaus, 2013; Chigbu, 2015; Chigbu et al., 2018/2019; Chigbu, 2019a-b). Efforts towards improving rural situations in Nigeria have proved difficult. This has been attributed to ineffective concepts and implementation of rural development approaches.

The urban (including peri-urban) areas of Nigeria are the locations of industrialisation, non-farm jobs, real estate wealth, administrative capitals, commercial centres, and are the hubs of governments taxation. Urban areas have very high political significance in the governance framework of Nigeria. Despite its relevance, urban areas have their problems. They include: lack of housing, unemployment and growth of informal settlement. "Poor social services and population challenges are other problems common in Nigeria's urban areas. In addition, indiscriminate conversion of neighbouring rich rural agricultural land for urban uses is becoming a norm" (Chigbu, 2013a: 3). These are observable in large Nigerian cities, such as Abuja, Lagos, Aba, Benin, Abuja, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, Enugu, Jos, Kano, Ibadan and Kaduna (among many others). High land values are also one of the biggest constraints on the capacities of most urban dwellers to gain decent housing or absorb poor rural-urban migrants. Specific land related challenges inherent in urban (including peri-urban) areas include high rates of land conflicts, inadequate basic services, tenure insecurity, poverty, lack of energy, environmental degradation, scarcity of land and inappropriate land interventions for development (see Aduwo et al., 2016; Aliyu and Amadu, 2017; Fasakin et al., 2018; Enaruvbe and Atafo, 2019; Yao et al., 2019).

¹ Before the past five years, agriculture, agriculture used to contribute between 30-45 percent of GDP. The rise of information technology in Nigeria has brought additional impetus to the non-oil GDP contributions.

For Nigeria to develop sustainably, it is important that rural and urban areas are equally (or at least equitably) developed. In accordance with the need for balanced development, it has become necessary to understand the relationship rural and urban areas share. Therefore, this paper examines rural-urban interrelationship to establish a theoretical (and practical) understanding of how cooperation between urban and rural areas occur as inter-dependent spatial units. The first section of the paper is the introduction. The second part explains how the data used in this research was collected and analysed. The third part provides an understanding of the role of rural towns in and urban-rural development. It also presents rural-urban interrelationship for rural-urban development. Finally, the paper (in the fourth part) presents the conclusion drawn from the paper, and the steps going forward.

2. Methodology

This study is part of mixed (desktop and online qualitative survey) carried out on rural and urban planning and development in Nigeria. The online qualitative survey carried out for the study was done using e-Focus Group Discussion (e-FGD) to gain insights and narratives into how urban and rural interactions in Nigeria based on literature. An e-FGD “involves the use of information and communication technologies to gather people from similar backgrounds or experiences to discuss a particular topic of interest” (Chigbu, 2019a: 43). The e-FGDs were created in the online portal, *LinkedIn*² (as a closed group). All participants were invited to participate during a period of one month (from August 6 to September 7, 2018). *LinkedIn* was used for the e-FGD because it supports the formation of interest groups whose membership can vary from 1 to 744,000 persons. There are tools available for group managers or owners to moderate discussion within groups, including tools to restrict, remove, invite or allow participation in e-group discussions. The e-FGD was restricted to specific participants to enable purposive selection of only individuals who have knowledge on the subject under investigation, and thereby restrict others from interrupting the e-discussions. For more details on e-FGD as a research methodology, see Chigbu (2019a). Concerning the online platform used for the e-FGD, *LinkedIn* is a professional-oriented online social networking platform. The e-FGDs involved 12 researchers with professional backgrounds (in both theory and practice) in surveying, land management, urban and regional planning and land (or spatial planning and development); rural development, and urban and rural sociology.

The e-FGD was based on three questions. They are: (1), Which of rural and urban is superior in the development paradigm of Nigeria? (2) Do rural and urban areas have a relationship as different units of development in the country, if so what relationships do they share? (3) In what ways can a relationship between urban and rural areas be leveraged on to effect balanced development in Nigeria? The e-FGD helped in evoking discussions on the various perspectives on the subject. In conducting the e-FGD, it was necessary to define four important terminologies — urban, peri-urban, rural and peri-rural — in order to create a common understanding of definitional aspects of the subject under discussion for all participants of the e-FGD. Based on the various definitions available in literature (Woods, 2009; Chigbu, 2013a; Chigbu, 2019a: 43) the paper distinguished between rural and urban areas from a continuum perspective — that is, reflecting their similarities as well as their differences. In order to distinguish the rural from the urban, the paper provides an explanation of what may or may not constitute urban (Figure 2).

² LinkedIn is a professional networking service that operates at www.linkedin.com and mobile app.

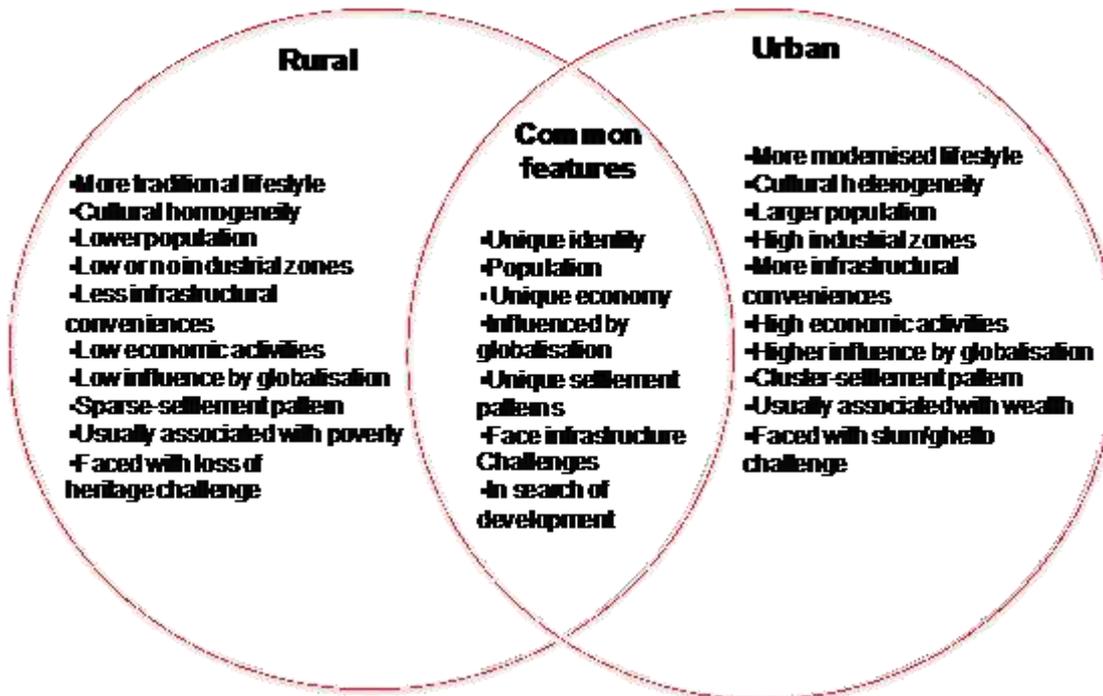


Figure 2: Identifying rural and urban based on differences and commonalities (Chigbu, 2013a: 11)

Figure 2 “suggests an availability of differences and commonalities between rural and urban, as spatial units” (Chigbu, 2013a: 11). Despite the use of these descriptive definitions, this paper does not assume “a clear geographical distinction can be made between rural and urban areas on the basis of their socio-spatial characteristics” (Woods, 2009: 5). In the context of development -as in rural development, urban development, peri-urban development and peri-rural development – this means “all activities done for improving the socioeconomic conditions” “people” living in within these spatial units, as well as “the environmental conditions” within these units (Chigbu, 2013a). Content analysis was used to produce meaningful outcomes from the e-FGD and desktop reviews. The outcomes have both theoretical and practical aspects.

3. Role of rural towns (in rural areas) and rural centres (in urban areas) in urban-rural development

Despite the urban and rural divide, even within the rural areas there exist small towns or urban centres. In the urban areas, there exist centres or areas of rural lifestyle. Together, these places form important part of the socio-spatial, socioeconomic and political fabric of the rural and urban entities. Village centres and rural towns provide the functions of urban good supply within the rural areas while the rural market centres and some informal settlements provide the functions or rural areas within the urban. In the context of rural areas, these urban nodes (village centres and rural towns) ensure that the rural place is spatially, economically and socially networked with the urban areas (bigger cities) by serving as entry points for urban goods and services for rural people. As pointed out by Chigbu (2013a: 17):

“In a country like Nigeria, they are ancestrally (kinship and family ties) connected to neighbouring villages. They are rural in character, smaller than urban areas and located in rural regions or territories. Their demographic trends are partly rural and urban, but are neither sprawls nor fringes of a major urban area. They are usually equipped with more infrastructural facilities (schools, health, market, roads, etc.) than in interior villages. They form the centres of economic activities due to the citing of employment-generating rural industries within their boundaries. They serve as administrative centres for municipal authorities and political activities. They also have markets and availability of several services that are not available in the villages. So, it is part of the rural system, but provides urban functions to the villages. In Nigeria, most of such towns develop as a result of the citing of a municipal headquarter or some other important government organisation in such places.”

The many rural towns in Nigeria which are helping rural areas (or regions) to access urban goods and services have been referred in literature in various ways. Mulongo et al. (2010) called them “small towns”. Watts (1983) called them “indigenous towns”. Irrespective what names these spatial units adopt, what is important is that they “serve as rational spatial strategy for promoting rural development so that villages can gain access to services and infrastructure that cannot be economically located in them” (Chigbu, 2013a: 17). Furthermore, the rural towns serve the urban purposes in rural regions or areas because “There are rural users of urban services, or consumers of urban products; and there are urban consumers of rural produce and services” in the rural areas (UNESCAP and UN-Habitat, 2002: 12). These constitutes spatial exchanges that flow between rural and urban areas. These exchanges apply to infrastructural uses (including, cinemas, shopping malls, libraries, banks, museums, urban touristic attractions, post offices, to mention a few). All of these also apply to rural centres in urban areas. Figure 3 shows the different interdependencies that co-exist between rural and urban areas. It is literature evidence that “lifestyle and community reflect individual blends of urban and rural value, culture and living standard” in rural and urban areas (Chigbu, 2013a: 19).

Urban system functions	Interdependencies	Rural system functions
Agricultural, trade/transport centre (with further linkages outside region)	↔	Agricultural production (changing) and productivity (increasing)
Agricultural support services: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • production inputs • repair services • production credit • information and innovation 	↔	Agricultural intensification influenced by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rural infrastructure • production incentives • education and capacity to adopt/adapt innovations
Non-agricultural consumer markets: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • processed agricultural products • private and public services (education, health, etc.) 	↔	Rising rural incomes for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • services • non-agricultural goods
Agro-based industry	↔	Diversified agricultural production
Non-agricultural employment	↔	All of the above functions are involved

Figure 3: Literature depiction of interdependencies (Chigbu, 2013a: 19; Douglas, 1998: 1)

The rural-urban exchanges depicted in Figure 3 allow to identify directions for building interrelations between rural and urban people. According to Chigbu (2013: 19-20):

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“The patterns of rural- urban flows of human and social capital may have positive outcomes for civil society on both sides. Generally, the trend is such that the duality of urban-rural linkages determines the living conditions of people in rural areas and in urban centres Such linkages are good for dealing with service deficits, migration issues and shared experiences. Sustaining such linkages will lead to cohesion between rural and urban areas.

In the urban context, these exchanges are possible because of the many rural nodes which supply the urban areas their rural needs. For instance, it is not uncommon to see rural markets in Nigeria -e.g. non-Timber Forest Products in the urban areas of Port Harcourt, Akure, Lagos, Kano, Enugu and Calabar (see Chigbu et al., 2012). There are also specialised vegetable markets places in the urban areas from where urban residents go to buy their food needs. These places provide food security for urban needs. There are also informal settlements in the cities of Nigeria where rural lifestyles are prevalent.

Rural-urban interactions are not always positive. The urban or rural can have downward economic pull on each other. For instance, the FIG (2004: 14) notes that “cities and their metropolitan extensions absorb productive agricultural land, exploit water resources, pollute the rural environment”. This is a situation that can lead to disparities in various aspects of development or uneven development. By “uneven development”, this can manifest if what happens in the urban is not in tune with what is happening in the rural, and vice versa (UNESCAP and UN-Habitat, 2002: 7). Hence there is need to maintain even or balanced development by (re)aligning rural-urban interactions to be mutually beneficial to both.

4. Conclusion and next steps going forward

What this article (or paper) has done is to specifically show that there re rural parts of the urban regions and urban parts of the rural regions. And that, both serve functions that make rural and urban areas co-exist for mutual benefits. Steps going forward requires that the important functions of rural and urban areas be viewed from the perspective of a continuum. Urban and rural serve important functions to the regional and national economies in Nigeria. Hence, specific approaches are needed to ensure both spatial units complement each other’s’ development. In Nigeria, rural areas “form the base of land-based livelihood, employment and productivity. The urban area is the base of commerce, manufacturing and services” (Chigbu, 2013a: 2). A comprehensive approach to both rural and urban development is important.

This paper therefore suggests a paradigm shift from rural-urban disparity to a conscious territorial approach that is based on sensitising more rural-urban linkages. This implies planning and developing rural and urban areas from the perspective of a continuum in planning and development. It will eschew the dichotomous relationships that may exist between rural and urban areas. For instance, national development planning and implementation can desist from planning (and development) that put focus on separation of “agencies” in the management of rural and urban space were created.” This drew a dividing line between the two sectors. In this century when the new urban agenda (Caprotti et al., 2017) and the SDGs (Caballero, 2019) have become core development agendas, it is important to promote even or balanced development by emphasis development approaches that encourage rural-urban interrelationships.

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