

# ASSESSMENT OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION DECISION EFFECT ON AGRARIAN TRANSFORMATION AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY: SUB- SAHARAN AFRICA EXPERIENCE

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## ABSTRACT

*The economic activity in the rural locale principally focuses on the exploitation and utilization of land resources for the production of arable and cash crops. However to date, production, and supply of food fall short of the demand requirements for the growing population in developing countries which has been partly attributed to the migration effect and the impact of climate extreme related events. This presents a complex issue surrounding the movement from rural to urban areas, and hitherto, agri-food sector transformation call. The most important point of call on rural-urban migration is grounded in the persistent disparity and gap in the allocation of social and economic resources across rural and urban communities.*

*This paper, therefore, presents a discourse on the challenges facing agrarian development in relation to migration situation in Africa using in-depth historical review research design (historiography) to advance an adequate understanding of the current situation using past background knowledge. The study contributes to the empirical literature on rural-urban migration effect on the agrarian sector in sub-Saharan Africa, and to fill the existing gap on what the current situation is, and seeks to inform research and rural development policy experts to urgently address rural-urban drift in the context of African agricultural transformation towards promoting economic inclusion and empowerment. Importantly, it is very appropriate to create conditions for vulnerable agrarian people and communities to thrive and live with dignity, failure to do this will likely trigger conflict, instability, hunger, poverty, and forced migration; hence, the need to break the cycle between conflict, hunger, poverty, and migration in rural areas to achieving agrarian development and transformation in sub-Saharan Africa becomes very important and urgent.*

*The study recommends various nations in Africa to put up sound and feasible policies that will discourage the growing circular and seasonal migration between places, to avoid the prediction of negative spill-over effect on the economy of origin and destination countries.*

**Keywords:** Rural-Urban; Migration; Agri-food Sector; Food Sovereignty; SSA.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background Narrative

Agriculture is a key component of growth and development in African society because the inhabitants majorly depend on agriculture and agricultural related livelihood activities for sustenance (Ohis, 2014). This places agriculture in a significant position to foster the needed rural

development and transformation of any economy. However, this much needed agriculture-led growth is significantly hindered by migration, chief of which is rural-urban drift among the economically active groups of individuals. Consequently, this creates a set-back for the realization of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of achieving responsible and sustained production, zero hunger, and slashing poverty among individuals. To banish hunger in most African countries, the focus must be on the promotion of sustainable agriculture and rural youth development which can potentially facilitate food security and improved nutrition. Complimentarily, accelerated development in agri-food sector through human resources training was equally emphasized by Amusan and Ajibola (2019) as the only solution to Africa's problem of food insecurity and sovereignty. In Africa, investing in rural development and trainings in agriculture holds a special promise to offer rural youths an alternative to migration drift to the urban areas.

Migration, according to Ofuoku and Emerchi (2014) implies the movement of individuals from one place to another, either for short or long period, perhaps for economic motive (Ofuoku & Chukwuji, 2012). In Nigeria for instance, agriculture experience a boom many years ago, but attention was shifted to Oil immediately after Nigeria got independence. The oil boom largely led to urbanization in the oil exploration regions of Niger Delta region, through migration of people especially able bodied youths, abandoning agricultural activities to work in the oil sector. Consequently, the agricultural sector suffers to labour loss with consequential effects on agricultural productivity output. Based on the submission of Iruonagbe (2009), migration is regarded as an alternative to diversify livelihoods because of individuals' vulnerability, low resilience capacity and the perceived low income from the farm activities. The author also noted that configuration of entitlements to assets and productive resources, life cycle factors, gender-role barriers, lack of education, lack of financial resources, and training opportunities, gender norms on mobility and individual aspirations are notable barriers responsible for the vulnerable economic condition, which often dictate which members of the family considered for migration. Similarly, migration is also assumed to be largely driven by 'network-mediated' factor. In most cases, social networks mediate the nature and migration causality of rural migrants (Battistella, 2003 as cited in Iruonagbe, 2009).

Most empirical works on rural-urban migration suggest that individuals migrate for better economic motives, so as to escape the unfavourable living conditions, in physical, economic and social terms. To corroborate this, Ofuoku and Emerchi (2014) noted that individuals naturally get pushed away from the geographical landscape of limited opportunities to places where economic benefits abound. In most instances, rural-urban migrants are usually young, learned, low risk preference, more concerned about economic achievements, and in most cases, have healthy relationship and network with people or peers in other places. Be that as it may, the rural-urban migration effects on the agrarian community development and transformation, as well as farming households' welfare is in no small measures. Therefore, the need to focus on this topical issue becomes imperative to prevent agriculture from going into extinction through labour movement (labour deficit) from rural area to urban area.

Specifically, the purpose of this discourse is to contribute to the empirical literature on rural-urban migration effect on the agrarian sector in SSA, and to fill the existing gap on what the current situation is because, most related works appear to be outdated, and the wave of things may have changed due to evolution of several events. Besides, the research focus is the least studied demographic phenomenon in Africa (Mercandalli, 2019). In lieu of this, the research adopts an in-

depth historical review research design to advance an adequate understanding of the current situation using past background knowledge. The historical research design approach is synonymous with the processes involved in historiography. Consequent on this, the research hypothesized that the caveat of labour flow in the Lewis dual sector of economic development does not hold in totality anymore in the present day contemporary African settings.

### **THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS: TREND AND FALL-OUT OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION IN SSA**

Many rural areas in Africa have lost labour force to the urban centers in pursuit of the presumed improved living conditions there (Aromolaran, 2013). This movement impairs so much directly on the rural economy and indirectly on the urban settings too; the migrants focus so much on the immediate gains they would derive from such process. In line with this, Braunvan (2004) noted that people are attracted to the areas of where opportunities abound and migrate away from areas with fewer opportunities such as rural areas. However, the high expectations from non-migrant individuals in terms of perceived benefits usually impact further on the migration trend (Aromolaran, 2013). This in many cases has resulted in excessive human capital flight and deterioration of rural economy in the many agrarian communities in Africa. Yet, looking at many nations in Africa, most policy debates and engagements give less attention to these potential migrants (Aromolaran, 2013).

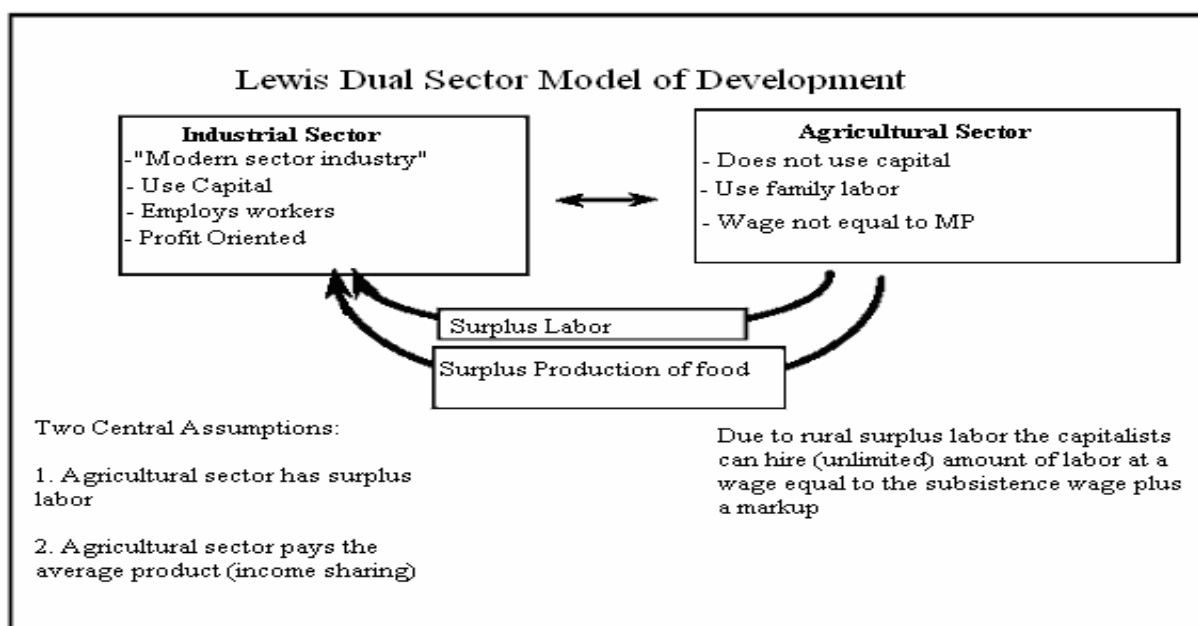
Theoretically, migration is triggered by the desire of people in less developed areas to move into the modern economy for peace and prosperity purposes. To corroborate this, the models according to Lewis (1954), as well as Ranis and Fei (1961) established that “migration is a response to the high demand of labour by an industrial sector, which assures workers, greater levels of productivity, and, for investors, positive profits superior to the opportunities found in the traditional agricultural sector”. Providing theoretical arguments for rural-urban drift, the following three important models provide critical insights and dissections of the rural-urban migration trends and pattern, as well as its associated consequences: First is the Lewis dual sector model of economic development; second, the household migration model, while the third is the Todaro’s model.

However, there exists other models that have also explained the process of migration, but emphasis will be placed largely on the earlier highlighted three models because they have drawn attentions from many notable literatures over time (McCatty, 2004). Considering the Lewis dual sector model, the proponent noted that there are majorly two sectors scenarios: agricultural sector and industrial sector class of struggle. In the agricultural (rural) sector, there is abundance of labour (excess labour) which necessitates people, especially youths in this contemporary society to migrate to the industrial sector for employment purpose and to enjoy enjoying better wages. By implication economically, at this wage in the urban/industrial sector, there exists elastic supply of labour, because the surplus labour in the agricultural sector suggests that upward pressure on the wage demand in the industrial sector seize to exist. The firms in the urban/industrial sector are able to earn more profits and reinvest such, since they enjoy the economies of surplus labour force and offer relatively wage in turn.

The proponent further emphasized that agricultural/rural sector is equally characterized by zero marginal productivity of labour, while the urban/industrial sector has a high demand for labour and offers wages that are relatively higher than what is obtainable in the rural areas.

Similarly, the proponent put forward some assumptions that the rural sector is purely skewed towards subsistence farming, and characterized by low productivity (because large outflow of workers to the urban/industrial sector, will obviously have no impact on the aggregate output), as well as surplus rural labour (redundant) whose contribution to the production output is of no obvious significance. The assumptions also have it that the rural sector is noted for its low income, vicious cycle of poverty, and disguised unemployment. Meanwhile, the industrial/urban sector was tagged as the technological advanced sector capable of operating with enormous investments. This suggests that increased investment and savings (because of a rise in income) apparently triggers the desired economic development in the urban/industrial sector, while the rural sector suffers.

In line with the aforementioned assertion, Figure 1 illustrates a typical Lewis model showing the flow of labour in the dual sector model of economic development.



**FIGURE 1**

### **LEWIS DUAL SECTOR MODEL OF DEVELOPMENT (McCatty, 2004)**

In the family/household migration model, the proponent opined that migration decision largely involves immediate and/or extended family and not an individual decision per se. Suffice it to say that family plays a vital role in the migration decision of individuals (McCatty, 2004). On the other hand, economic decisions cum rationality were emphasized by the proponent of Todaro's migration model as the major drivers of migration of individuals. Although, all these models are characterized by their strengths and weaknesses; as pointed out by many critics who provided necessary justification in each instance.

Similarly, Todaro (1969) as well as Harris and Todaro (1970) noted that rural-urban migration in less developed countries, and majorly in Africa is premised on the disparity of the "expected wage from migration (urban wage) and the agricultural wage". The expected wage is similar to the actual industrial wage weighted by the probability for a migrant obtaining a job in

the modern urban sector. In terms of human capital, migration theory posits that migration is driven by factors such as the education, cognitive ability, vocational skills, and capacity to take risk, and face challenges ahead (Taylor & Martin, 2001). Apparently, this appears as a statement of fact, because the highlighted attributes raise the expected-income differential between migrants and non-migrants individuals. By extension, it encourages the propensity to migrate (Taylor & Martin, 2001). This leads to the widely accepted contestation of “migration hump”, which suggests that “at low levels of development, there is little migration, but as development (with income and wealth rises), so does migration”. Such behavioral pattern and decision can be likened to what Bicchieri and Dimant (2019) described as Nudging. Simply put, nudges imply a well-known behavioral approach, relying on the assumption that people make sub-optimal decisions which influence them to behave in certain beneficial ways (Bicchieri & Dimant, 2019); “this works in a simple and economical way by reframing the choice architecture to redirect behavior, without forbidding any option or significantly changing economic incentives” (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008 as cited in Bicchieri & Dimant, 2019).

### **EMPLOYMENT DYNAMICS OF RURAL-URBAN MIGRATION AND URBANIZATION EFFECT IN SSA**

An important attribute of livelihoods in African countries is centered on the pursuance of a better standard of living, and this triggers migration process. Meanwhile, “traditional push-pull factors” (such as famine, long period of drought, low crop productivity, and disguised unemployment) as well as the “pull factors” which attract individuals to move away are importantly central to the migration flow process of people out of rural to the urban (Miheretu, 2011).

Many past literatures in Africa have demonstrated that livelihood engagements in most urban settings are not enough to match with the increasing demand as a result of migration. Most individuals’ high expectations on job opportunities, good income and better-life opportunities are short lived (Mabogunje, 1980). Consequently, disappointed with the situation, most migrants are left with no choice than to be living in “shanties or informal settlements” without enjoying the actual urban experience (Mabogunje, 1980). Nevertheless, experience of this nature does not still discourage migration of people in many African communities. Migration could also be linked to individual’s responses with a high expectation in search of better opportunities which are economically sustainable (Mazumdar, 1987). According to the author, push and pull factors always trigger hopeless individuals’ mobility in search of a new life.

In particular, Todaro (1969) as well as Harris and Todaro (1970) came up with probabilistic models, where they demonstrated that higher wages expectation which is not obtainable in agrarian setting pull many people away from rural to urban areas. Specifically, Todaro (1969) noted that the expectation of migrants is always high to the extent that he is willing to trade high wage urban employment for lower wages for a start with the believe of getting employed at the urban modern sector in the nearest future. The scenario usually attracts “sluggish agricultural growth”; and, with this limited growth and development, agrarian setting will continue to be characterized with productivity decline, increased rural poverty, and disguised unemployment. In sum, the migration trend from the rural areas to urban will perhaps continue given the fact that there is a significant “rural-urban income differentials” is wide and highly lucrative jobs are associated with the urban settings.

Beyond the traditional wage differential model described so far, interesting pathways have recently been introduced to explaining the trend of rural-urban migration in Africa, which bothers on the possible differences and reasons that may account for rural-urban migration (especially, the seasonal migration trend) across various countries in Africa. Mercandalli et al. (2019) noted that the greater diversity of African migration patterns is also due to the presence of gradually more connected societies and growing population densities which contributes to the spatial and sectoral restructuring through new connections between rural and urban spaces. First and foremost, rural households diversify their employment and income strategies engaging in a multiple range of non-farm activities that used to be part of the urban domain (Bryceson, 2002). Accordingly, many households are multi-sited: some household members reside and/or work across the urban-rural divide (Tacoli, 2002; Losch, 2015). Moreso, cultural references and practices in rural areas are also changing, due to improved transportation networks, and the spread of communication means such as mobile phones, internet, and television (Losch & Magrin, 2016). In the same vein, Ruysen and Rayp (2013) presented a comprehensive human capital model of migration which integrates the economic drivers of migration, specific demographic, socio-political and environmental factors of countries of origin and destination, as well as characteristics of the regional context. The model also highlighted the role played by network effects as well as natural, cultural and infrastructure factors in the migration process; likewise, factors such as geography, transport, communication and psychological costs of migration were also pointed out as drivers of migration decision (Ruysen & Rayp, 2013). In fact, SSA migration presents a diversified picture in terms of mobility patterns and destinations at both internal and international levels through a multidimensional set of factors.

Reportedly, above 50 percent of the world's individuals reside in urban settings, with a projection that by the year 2050, this statistics on urban growth is likely to increase to about 75% across Africa and Asia (Awumbila, 2017). Migration is regarded as a significant driver of urbanization process leading to urban growth as individuals move from rural to urban cities for social and economic opportunities. However, the carrying capacity of most urban areas is limited in terms of amenities to accommodate the migrants and accommodating them, which presents a big threat to most urban cities as their inability attracts various forms of social vices. Notwithstanding this challenges and the negative perception about African urban growth and development, the urban areas are "becoming not just the dominant form of habitat for human kind, but also the engine-rooms of human development as a whole" (UN-Habitat, 2014 as cited in Awumbila, 2017).

### **MIGRATION IMPACTS ON AGRARIAN DEVELOPMENT AND HOUSEHOLDS' WELL-BEING**

The causal impacts of migration could be explained in either direction (positive and negative), according to Adewale (2005). First, movement across rural to urban settlements portrays negative effects on the rural livelihood and quality of rural life. Importantly, farming households are badly affected by the movement of young individuals in search of better lives. In the absence of economic capability to engage hired labour as a result of labour loss, farmers may consequently reduce the cultivated farm holdings to a manageable size which hitherto affects productivity output and income (Ofuoku & Chukwuji, 2012). However, some literatures are of the opinion that rural income and living standard can be raised, while poverty can equally be slashed from remittances

obtained by households from migrant individuals. Suffice it to say that the global challenges on migration are all interconnected. In line with this positivist opinion on migration, Wouterse and Taylor (2008) also noted that households with access to remittances from migrants' family members seem to have comparative advantage in terms of income and basic well-being than the households which do not enjoy remittances. Adams (2006) as well as Airola (2007) also buttressed this position, revealing that consumption expenditure on durable goods and productive assets is always higher among the households that enjoy remittances compared to households without remittance benefit. Similarly, Oberai and Bilsborrow (1984) asserted that rural areas can benefit from technological improvement as a result of migration events through stimulating effects of new ideas introduced by the migrants in the event that they return back to the rural areas.

An undeniable fact is that most rural/agrarian settings enjoy natural endowments, which include land and forests resources and other environmental natural assets. However, migration from rural to urban areas has to do with humans, which hitherto has constant relationship and engagement with the environment. This has led to growing interest in studies involving human population, migration and environment nexus as well as its socio-economic impacts (Carr, 2009). Qin (2010) also emphasized on socio-economic effects of individuals' migration in many agrarian areas. This is because farm income and natural resources and endowments are all essential components of agrarian livelihood process. Livelihood encompasses the "capabilities, assets (natural, physical, human, financial, and social), and activities required for a means of living (Carney, 1998)". Consistently, land, labour, economic markets and institutional framework have been pointed out by extant studies as contributory factors to the development of agri-food sector and structural change. The striking importance of migration and its socioeconomic and political implications, in West Africa.

Similarly, Food and Agriculture Organization have consistently reiterated that conflicts, climate extreme events and economic slowdown are some of the reasons why hunger is on the rise worldwide, which is commonly experienced in Africa countries. To break this cycle and build resilience against these bad events, agri-food sector must undergo transformation, where youths are empowered to actively engage in agricultural production because youths are touted as the next generation of farmers. There is an urgent need to provide them with opportunities, tools and training they need to succeed in agriculture. Through youth empowerment, African continent can achieve the sustainable food sovereignty, food security, and zero hunger. Promoting sustainable food and agricultural systems will reduce the number of poor, curb migration, help combat climate change, and preserve our natural resources. African government must ensure a secure future of food for everyone in Africa because the actions taken today dictate people's future. Transforming food and agricultural systems is synonymous to transforming people's future. And, if we do not create conditions for communities to thrive and live with dignity, this may trigger conflict, instability and forced migration. There is a need to break the cycle between conflict, hunger and forced migration.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The fact still remains that African countries do not produce sufficient food; neither do they have food reserves that can cushion the effect of famine and other livelihood shocks. There is no sufficient investment in smallholder farming in terms of knowledge and empowerment; and to worsen the situation, there are no significant social impact investments in the food system

(Lohnert, 2017). Discontinued agricultural policies become the order of the day due to political reason, which renders agriculture an unattractive business to most economically active youth; consequentially, they seek solace in migration from rural/agricultural sector to urban/industrial sector.

More so, despite the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) Malabo declarations and commitments by African Union, specifically, to achieve accelerated agricultural growth and transformation for shared prosperity, and improved livelihoods through projected annual agricultural sector growth (in GDP) of at least 6 percent, proviso on a benchmark of 10 percent commitment of the public investment for each country's budgetary allocation to the sector (Sidler, 2017; CAADP, 2018; Amusan, 2019), the transformation in Africa agriculture still appears to be a mirage. In addition to this, other commitments also include, strengthening inclusive public-private partnerships for agricultural commodities with strong linkage to smallholder agriculture, and creating job opportunities for at least 30% of the youths involved in agriculture (Sidler, 2017).

Worthy of mentioning is that the agricultural sector in Africa is not getting the requisite and sustained investments; in fact, there is no visible and feasible implementation plans in Nigeria at the moment, on keeping up with the commitments (Olomola & Nwafor, 2018), perhaps because of corruption, lack of foresight and political reason, leaving the agri-food sector to become a toddler grappling in the dark. Rather, most African countries now rely on food aid and assistance; however, the politics of humanitarian food aids given to global south countries by the developed nations are touted to be the major contributory factor to underdevelopment and vitiating food sovereignty plights of the African continent (Amusan, 2019). Apparently, what this suggests in almost certain likelihood is that any nation relying on food imports and humanitarian assistance from the developed nations for the survival of its citizenry is confined to an embodiment of give and take principle, which in most cases is at the peril of the recipient nations. This scenario presents a good opportunity and avenue for African citizens (especially the economically active youths) to migrate to urban/industrial sector for greener pasture.

Since agricultural sector still continues to suffer labour force drift to the urban/industrial sector in many SSA countries, the hypothesized caveat of Lewis model of dual sector economy still holds till today but not in totality, as this cannot be generalized to all the countries in SSA. This is because of the observed differences in rural-urban migration pattern in African countries; besides, regulatory restrictions on migration also differ across African countries. Plausible evidences abound in the cases of South Africa, Kenya and Nigeria. Therefore, to avoid prediction of negative spill-over effect, and to guard against the growing circular movements in recurrent migration between the place of origin and the places of destination, as well as its consequential impacts on these places *vis-a-vis* (for instance, food productivity decline, labour shortage and human capital flight, food insecurity, economic woes, crimes and terrorism, amongst many others), the global south countries must design appropriate inter-sectoral policies to discourage the growing migration drift, drive and accelerate agricultural growth especially within young population, in a bid to banish hunger and achieve zero threshold, shared prosperity and improved livelihoods through agricultural transformation and development.

## RESEARCH LIMITATION



Unavailability of census-based panel dataset represents a major limitation to inform a sound quantitative analytical approach to the current trend of migration and its impact at the national or even cross country level.

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