

URBANIZATION IN AFRICA: COMMONALITIES AND DEPARTURES

By

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1.0 Introduction

Today Africa is dubbed as one of the most rapidly urbanizing region in the world, followed by Asia. It is expected that by 2050, about 50 percent of the African population will be urban (UNDESA 2014).

However, the rate of urbanization differs across countries and regions. Whereas countries with an urbanization level of less than 30 percent, experience an average of 4.68 percent growth in urbanization, most of the urbanized economies grew at an average rate of about 2.23 percent.

Also there are regional variations in the pace and level of urbanization in Africa with North African countries the highest level of urbanizing, while East African countries display a low level, but a rapid rate of urbanization.

The objective of this paper is three-fold. Firstly, is to review the literature on the role of cities in the context of agglomeration economies as hubs for economic development and structural change. Secondly, to analyze the nature of urbanization in Africa with a view to identity the communities and departures, when compared to other regions of the global. Thirdly, discuss the challenges posed due to the high rate of urbanization, while analyzing the coping mechanisms by policy makers and planners that are either in place of have to be embarked up to address the challenges.

Ultimately, a set of recommendations to address the challenges is inevitable. These range from rural-employment coordination poverty, joblessness, infrastructure provision to environmental resilience. In sum, these demand effective planning and management of cities. However, this can only happen if issues of urbanization were mainstreamed in a country's socio-economic and environmental development visions and plans.

2.0 Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

Urbanization is a process through which rural population become urban. It mainly features migration of people from rural areas into cities, development of secondary and tertiary urban industries, more and larger cities, and changing urban landscapes, including changes in consumption patterns. In this regard, urbanization is a social development phenomenon that emerged in the industrial era. And since then, it has undergone four waves. According to Jianwen (2015) whereas the first wave was led and associated with UK's industrial revolution during the 19th century and lasted more than 200 years, the second wave was led by the USA in the mid-to-late 19th century, and lasted for nearly 100 years,

The third wave was dominated by two sets of countries, those from Latin America (Brazil and Mexico) on the one hand, and Asian countries (Japan and Republic of South Korea) on the other. The urbanization in these regions began around after the World War II (WWII). The fourth wave, which began around the 21st century swept across certain developing in Asia and Africa, notably China and India, being the leaders.

It is important to bear in mind that the four phases of urbanization were driven by a number of factors. Whereas the drivers of the first three waves were; industrialization, colonial expansion, development of service industries and technological changes, the fourth wave, which is on-going, has been propelled by economic globalization, free trade, and trans-border capital flows. Accordingly, this current phase is expected to reach maturity in 2050 (UN, 2010).

The theoretical framework of urbanization is underpinned by economies of agglomeration which underscores the benefits of “sharing”, “matching” and “learning” (Harvey, 2009; AfDB, OECD and UNDP 2016). Sharing occurs when firms and urban inhabitants share indivisible facilities and achieve joint economies of scale in local infrastructure, service, risks and the production of specialized inputs and final goods. Matching arises from larger pools of employees, firms, buyers and supplies, which helps each firm or individual find specific attributes demanded. Learning is promoted by cities as density of economic actors, facilitates the diffusion of knowledge and technology (Duranton, 2009).

There are many ways to describe and categorize the benefit arising from agglomeration economies. Usually, a distinction is made between urbanization economies. That is, benefits from clustering of diverse economic activities. And localization of economies, those from clustering firms in the some sector. These mechanisms of agglomeration economies usher in three outcomes: they generate increasing returns to scale that arise from geographical concentration and co-location (clustering of firms and workers is central) via cumulative causation, people and firms are attracted to places where there is already a concentration of activities, thus reinforcing and propelling existing agglomerations, and path-dependency: a single firm or producer will not find it profitable to move from an existing cluster (Overman and Venables, 2005).

Further, agglomeration economies deliver a productive advantage to firms and spur innovation. In this regard, large and diverse cities in particular, facilitate the sharing of knowledge entrepreneurship and competition. Thus, playing a “nursery” role and enable firms to incubate while some firms succeed and grow, the less productive firms close, allowing for capital and labour to be reallocated to more productive activities. Consequently, creative destruction and the churning process of firms and factors of

production under the role of cities as engine of growth and development of countries (Duranton, op.cit).

Apart from the economic benefit of urbanization, cities offer many social benefits in terms of enhancing human development through improved access to education, health, water and sanitation. Empirical studies show that provision of cum access to these services is typically high in urban than rural areas, and such provisions are less costly to provide in an urban setting because of economies of scale (UN-Habitat, 2010b; UNDP, 2015).

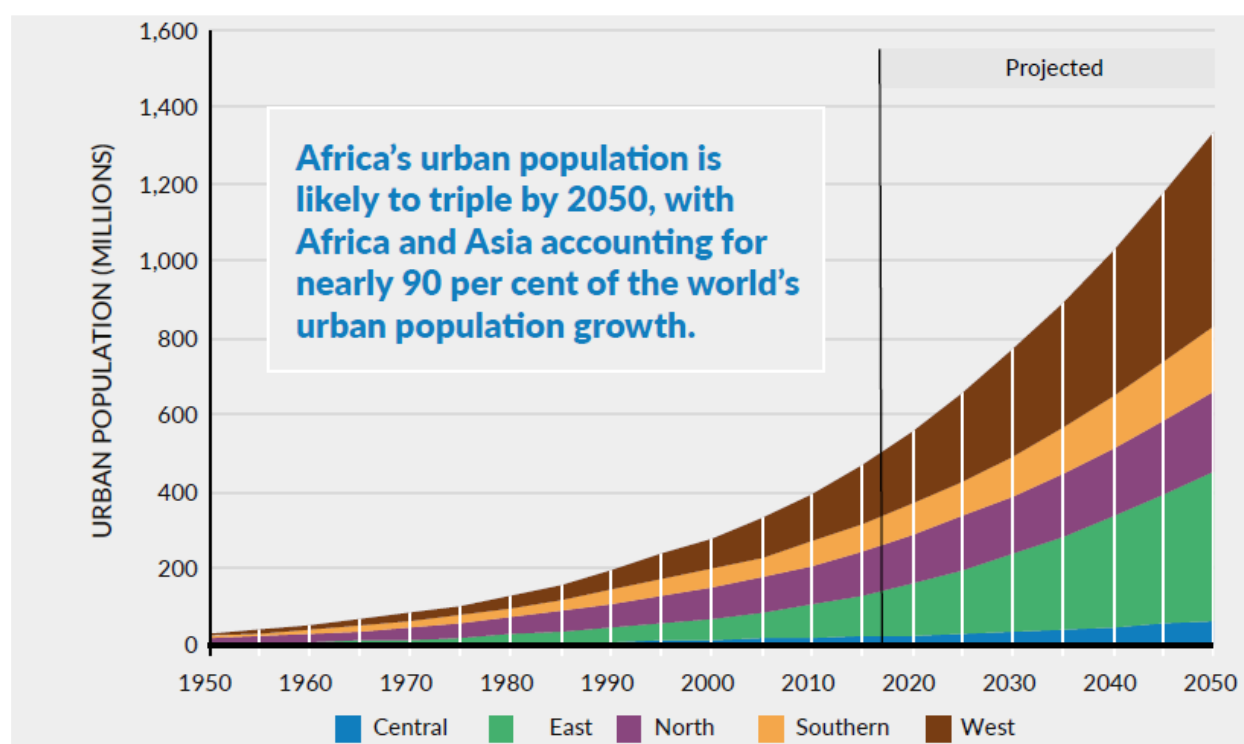
Environmentally, urbanization does offer benefits by reducing travel distances and preservation of land. However, urban agglomerations and industrial concentration in cities generate environmental costs and negative externalities. According to Khan (2006), at low levels of development or per capita income, cities lack the resources to invest in environmental amenities. Therefore, households and firms only begin demanding high environmental quality when they have reached a specific threshold of per capita income, high enough to afford paying for environmental amenities. Indeed, fast economic growth, as observed in Chinese cities can harm the environment. However, these impacts can be mitigated or even prevented if urbanization is well managed and planned.

Furthermore, both theoretical and empirical analysis, identify four drivers of urbanization; rural-urban migration, international migration, national population growth (reflecting mortality and fertility rates) and reclassification of rural towns to urban areas. The existence of these drivers in turn creates strong linkages between rural and urban in terms of the need to improve agricultural productivity, not only as a means for boosting productivity and competitiveness of urban sectors, but also as a strategy of triggering structural transformation of a country's economy. In other words, structural transformation or industrialization is associated with a faster rise in agricultural productivity and a faster decline in the share of agricultural output and labour force within the economy, leading to a more developed, higher productivity and more urban economy (Timmer and Akkus, 2008).

3.0 Urbanization in Africa: Trends, Patterns and Drivers

Today Africa is dubbed as one of the most rapidly urbanizing regions in the world, followed by Asia. It is expected that by 2050, above 56 percent of the African population will be in urban areas. Indeed, urbanization was rapid in the post-independence period, slowed in the 1990s and picked up again in 2000s (UN-Habitat, 2010). Urbanization in Africa, excluding North Africa, rose from 15 percent in 1960 – around the same time as Europe in the 17th century - to 38 percent today which is higher than South Asia. The number of urban residents in Africa nearly doubled between 1995 and 2015 and is projected to double again by 2035 (Barofsky, Siba and Grabinsky, 2016).

Figure 1: Urban Population by African sub-Region, 1950-2050

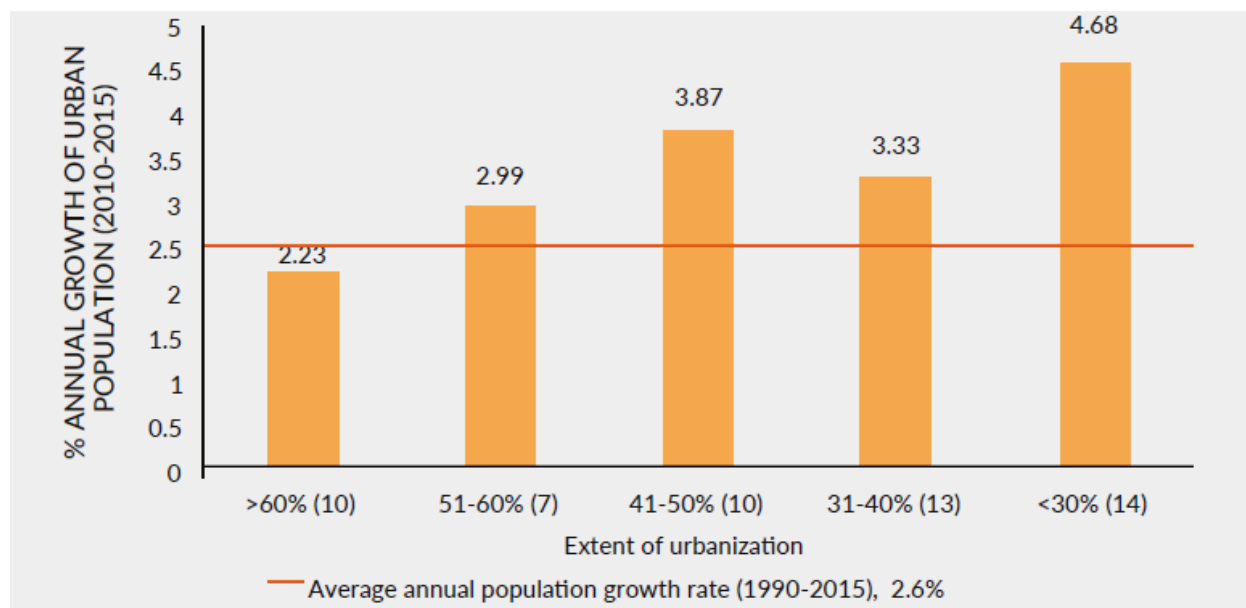


Source: UNECA (2017)

African sub-regions and countries are urbanizing at different speeds, as displayed in figure 2. For example, East Africa is the least urbanized and urbanizing fastest, while Southern Africa is the most urbanized and moving more slowly. Eight countries are largely rural with less than one quarter of their populations living in urban areas. However, the least urbanized countries are forecast to double their urbanization in 35

years *UNDESA, 2014). In contrast, a few countries are experiencing slow and even negative urbanization. These include Mauritius, Swaziland and Zimbabwe.

Figure 2: The Pace of Urbanization and the Extent of Urbanization



Source: UNDESA, (2015b)

The above figure illustrates that countries with low level of urbanization are urbanizing faster than those with higher levels of urbanization. It was observed that countries with an urbanization level of less than 40 percent, experience an average of 46.8 percent growth, while the most urbanized countries grew at an average of about 2.23 percent (ECA, 2018).

African countries differ in their spatial pattern of urban growth. Most of them have a higher share of their urban population in their largest city (“urban primary”) than other regions of the world, and a few have faster growth in their largest city than in their other urban areas, such as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Republic of Congo and South Africa. However, quite a few countries display most urban growth outside the largest city, with a decreasing trend in primary. This trend is observable in Benin, Gambia, Liberia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

Studies show that the main drivers of Africa’s urbanization are basically demographic factors, while rural-urban migration’s contribution has been decreasing overtime. During 1990 and 2000, on average it accounted for 1.07 percent. (Dyson, 2009), Fox, 2014; Jedwab, Christiaensen and Gindelsky, 2014. However, this phenomenon needs to be interpreted with caution given that heterogeneity exists among countries. It needs to be underscored that the “chaotic” nature of rural –urban migration is, to a larger

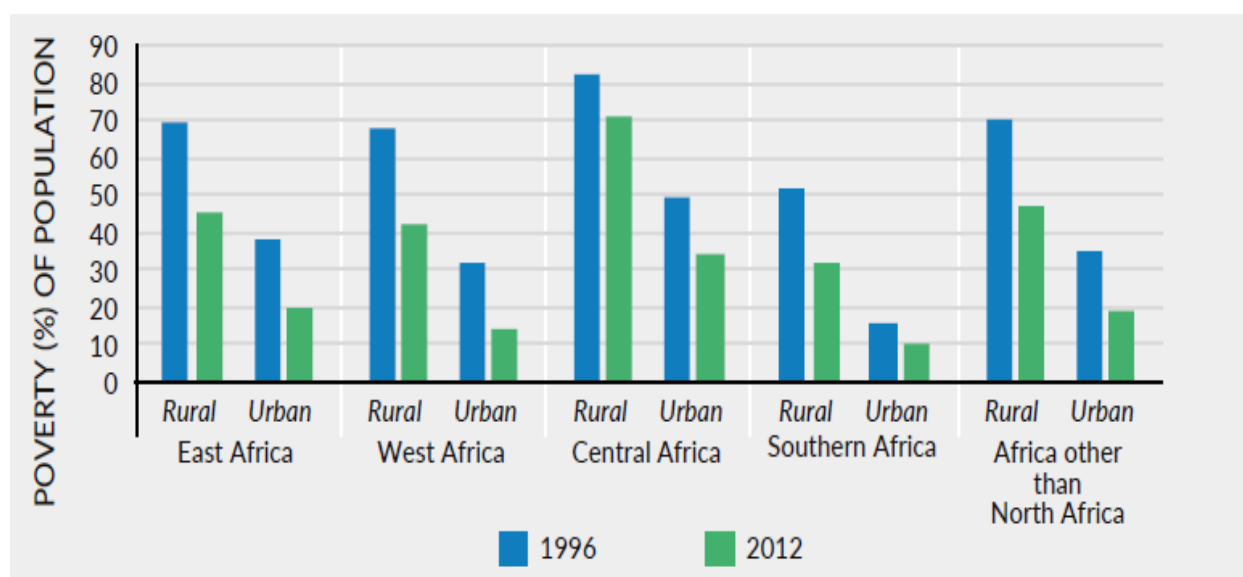
extent, fuelled by poverty and inequalities which happen to be higher in the rural than urban areas. Another driver of the urbanization process is reclassification. For example, Uganda had 33 districts in 1986, but currently the number has risen to 111 districts, and each of them has an administrative and a commercial town (Awumbisa, 2014).

4.0 Africa's Urbanization Characteristics: The Departures

The objective of this section is to search for commonalities and differences (departures) of Africa's urbanization process with a view to show how the continent's specific characteristics have influenced the results and outcomes of urbanization.

First and foremost, the economic growth in many African countries, in the last couple of decades, and especially since the early 2000's, has had less of an impact on poverty than expected. Whereas the continent's poverty headcount ratio declined from 56.3 per cent in 1990 to 41 percent in 2013, the absolute number of people in poverty is stagnating at the 2002 level, to the extent that more than 50 percent of the world's poor in 2013 were in Africa. This notwithstanding, in 1996 - 2012 poverty declined in all sub regions and faster in urban than rural areas, except in Southern Africa, which witnessed a marginal declined in rural poverty, as shown in the figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Poverty by Sub Regions in Africa



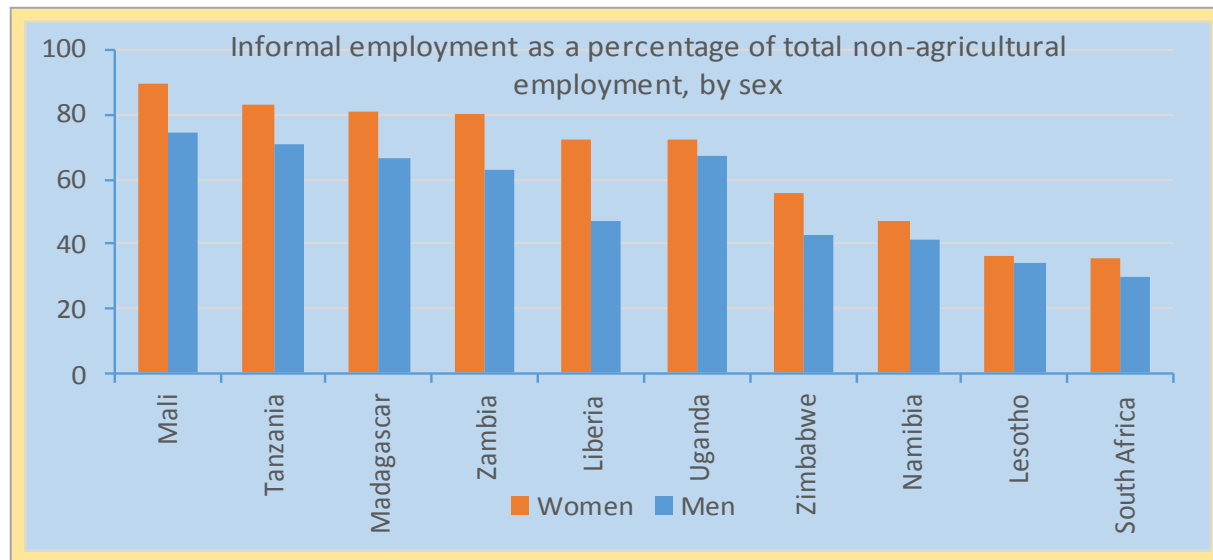
Source: World Bank, (2016b)

The economic growth in Africa has not been inclusive for a number of reasons; ranging from the depth of poverty, high initial inequality, mismatch between sectors of growth and employment, to rapid population growth and delayed demographic transition. The implication of this phenomenon, with regard to the relationship with urbanization, is that with weaker incomes, than other parts of the world, generates of a narrative of “urbanization without growth” (World Bank, 2001; Fay and Opal, 2000). In this context, and in comparison with Asia, which has similar urbanization rates at higher incomes, Africa is urbanizing while poorer (Freire, Lall and Leipziger, 2014).

The second characteristic is that the experience of many African countries structural transformation has been unfavorable. Globally, the share of manufacturing in total output tends to rise with per capita income. However, in the case of Africa manufacturing and urbanization were moving side by side during the early post-colonial period of 1960-1975 but manufacturing then declined, inhibiting structural transformation. Since mid-1990s, growth has rebounded, but without strong employment growth in manufacturing (de Vries, Timmer and de Vries, 2014). Ultimately, most African countries recorded a decline in their share of manufacturing value added in GDP, averaging 2.3 percent during 2000-2015. The unfolding deindustrialization process led to movement of labour from high sectors to low-productivity sectors, basically informal activities and services (Mc Millan and Rodrick, 2011).

The continued trend of urbanization in face of deindustrialization has a number of implications. First, it resulted in cities with poorer populations and informality. It needs to be recalled that 61 percent of men and 74 percent of working population in non-agricultural sectors are informally employed to the extent that, globally the share of informal employment is the highest in Africa, excluding North Africa. A survey of seven Francophone African cities revealed that the average income of workers in the formal enterprises is three times higher than those in informal enterprises, pointing to a wide productivity differential (ILO, 2009).

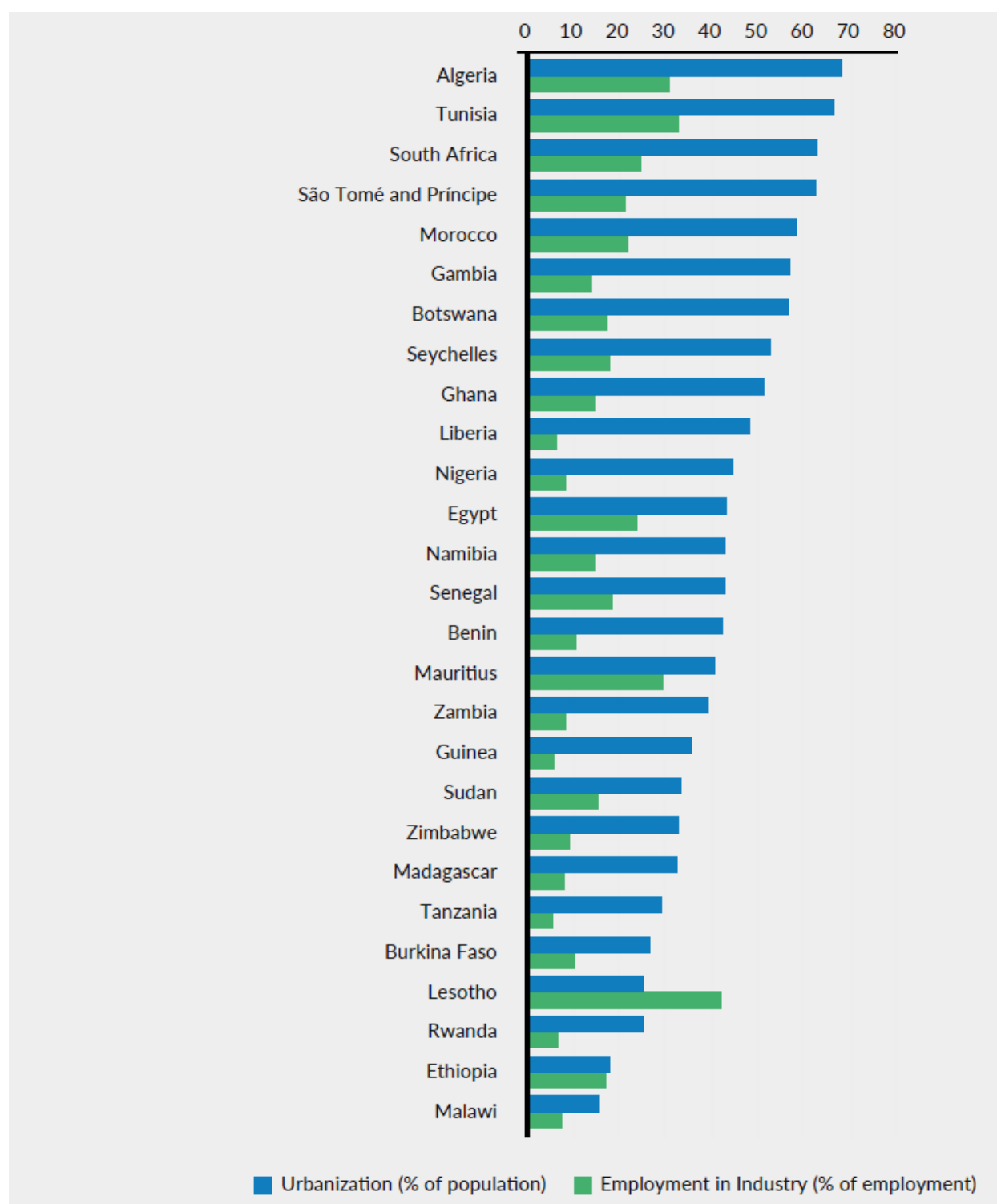
Figure 4: Informal employment is high in Africa



Source: Sinha (2018).

Secondly, decoupling urbanization and industrial development is problematic because industrialization is the most efficient path to sustained growth and economic convergence (AfDB, OECD and UNDP, op.cit). Thirdly, given the prominence of agriculture sector in African economies, in terms of household's livelihoods and contribution to GDP, its low level of productivity, at less than 56 percent of global average, weakens its supply and demand value chain links to the process of urbanization, to the extent that the urban-rural divide is widened rather than narrowed.

Figure 5: Urbanization and industrial employment, 2007 – 2015



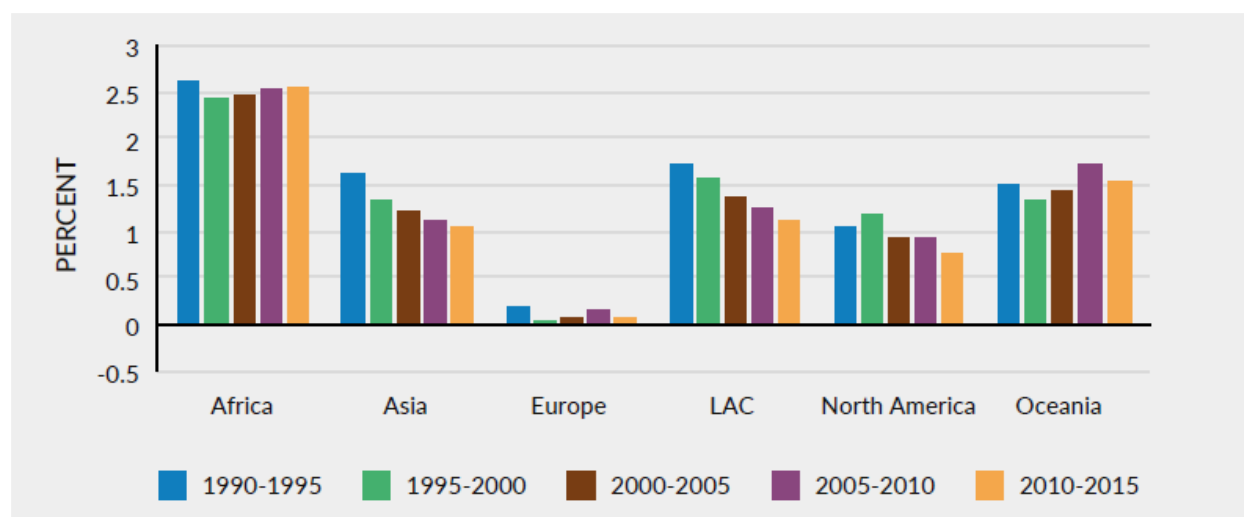
Source: World Development Indicators (2015)

The third characteristic is that most of African economies are rich in natural resources and therefore these constitute the major exports. McMillan, et al, (2011) claim that there is a very strong and negative association between a country's reliance on primary products and the rate at which structural transformation contributes to growth. Indeed, countries that specialize in primary products are at a distinct disadvantage. This is due to the Dutch disease, where low productivity labour of non-processed exports crowds out employment in higher value added sectors. This disadvantage associated with resource endowment, coupled with colonial histories, tend to high resource rents for African countries with better economic performance at a given level of to the urbanization (AfDB, et.al; op.cit).

At the city level, natural dependency feeds into disconnect between urbanization and structural transformation in prompting the term "consumption cities (Jedwab, 2013; Gollin, Jedwab and Vollrath, 2014). Consumption cities not only a product of premature urbanization, but also of shifting workers from tradable to non-tradable sectors. In the absence of job-rich industrial sector, Africa has yet to generate decent jobs to address the challenge of youth unemployment. It is important to note that consumption cities are very expensive, more so than cities in countries at similar income levels by a margin of up to 31 percent (Nakamura, et al, 2006), sweeping aside any assumption that industrial development in Africa will benefit from cheap labour and land. Further, the indirect costs of poor infrastructure provision puts Africa firms at a competitive disadvantage, with many firms in South America and East Asia paying 50 per cent and 70 percent less, respectively, for inland transport of imports and exports to and from ports, while African firms are losing up to 13 per cent of their working hours owing to electricity outages (Larossi, 2009).

Africa's rapid population growth is the subject of the fourth characteristic. The continent's population grew at an average of 2.6 percent annually in 1990-2015, more than twice the world average (UNECA and UNFPA, 2016). In the same, period Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean achieved rapid declines in annual population growth. Not only was Africa's annual growth rate the world's highest, but it has remained in the range of 2.4 – 2.6 percent since 1990. This state of affairs is unlikely to change in the short-run.

Figure 6: Average Annual Rate of Population Change, 1990 – 2015

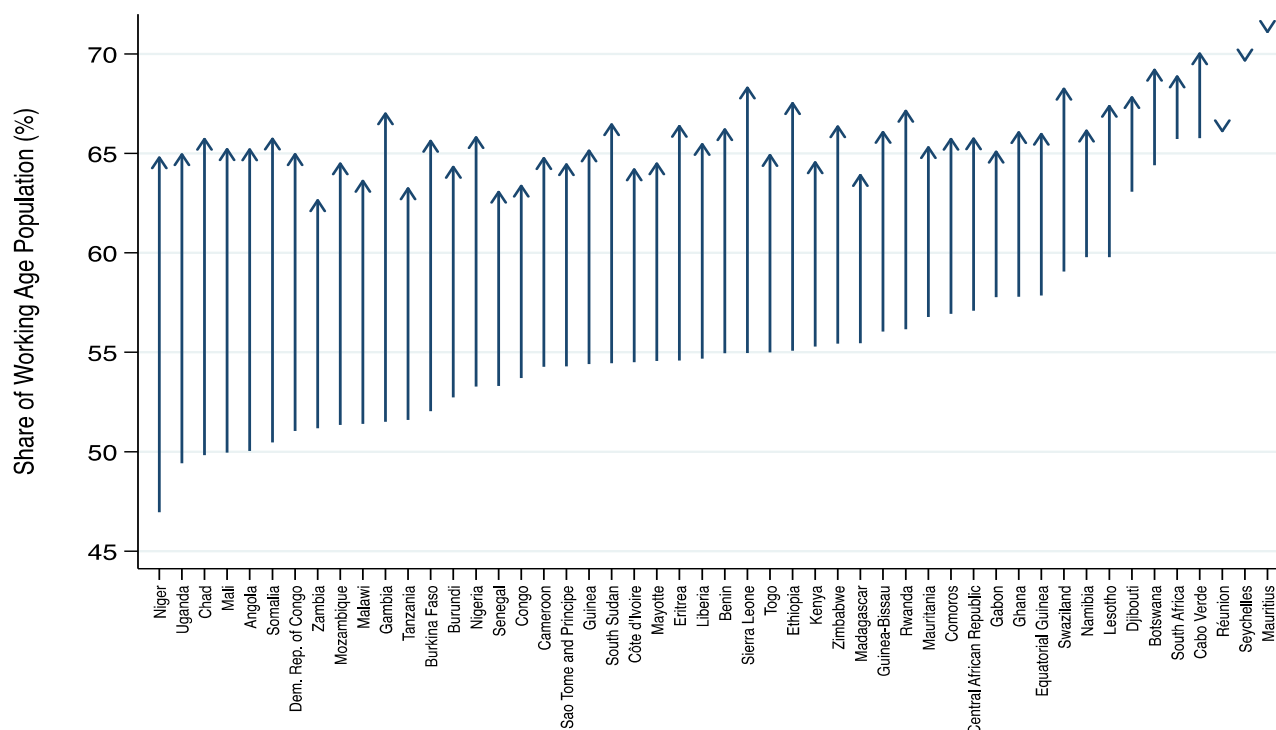


Source: UNDESA, (2015b)

The implication of the above is that, Africa's urbanization is driven more by natural growth than migration. Indeed, the continent's rates of migration peaked in the 1960's, declining after that. Unlike the experience of the United Kingdom during the industrial revolution, where natural urban population growth was lower in cities due to high death rates, contrary to the falling mortality rates in African cities (Annez and Buckley; 2009; Fox, 2014).

Notwithstanding the seemingly demographic dividend, African countries face an enormous challenge in creating a number of decent jobs for the young and expanding workforce to realize this dividend. Whereas the youth (15-24 age cohort) constituted about 35 percent of the working-age population in 2015, they represented three-fifths of those who were unemployed. In most countries, the youth unemployment is more than twice that of adults; in Nigeria, for example, the youth rate is more than five times the adult rate. In Botswana, the Congo and South Africa, more than one third of young people are unemployed, and the average youth unemployment rate is about 30 percent in North Africa, compared to the world average of 14 percent (UNECA, 2018).

Figure 7: Current and Peak Share of the Working Age Population in Sub-Saharan Africa, 2015-2100



Source: Borhat (2018)

The last characteristic of Africa's urbanization is with regard to "rank-size" rule. In many African countries the concentration of industry is predominantly in a single urban centre. This in turn leads to the creation of an urban system that is dominated by a primary city ("primacy"). Usually, systems of cities in developed economies tend to follow the "rank-size" rule, with cities decreasing in size by a common ratio (O'Sullivan, 2007). Whereas nearly all countries globally have cities with various sizes, African countries are characterized by unbalanced systems where economic activities and administrative functions are concentrated in the capital or largest city, more than expected under the rank-size rule. This tendency is contrary to what is observed in rest of the globe. Moreover, the average share of population in the average country's largest city in Africa, excluding North Africa, is higher than the corresponding city in other regions.

One commonly cited explanation for Africa's excessive primary is centralization of power and favoritism in resource allocation, which can negatively affect the quality of life, including child mortality and education in towns and cities outside the capital (Henderson, et.al; 2001). In such systems small and medium-sized cities play little role in hosting rising urban populations and urban investments, unless they reach a minimum competitive size threshold or unless large cities become unlivable (ibid).

Figure 7: Cost of living, Africa's 15 most expensive cities

RANK IN AFRICA	CITY	GLOBAL RANK	COUNTRY GDP PER CAPITA (\$)	MORE EXPENSIVE THAN...A
1	Luanda, Angola	2	4,102	Zurich, Switzerland (\$80,215)
2	Kinshasa, DRC	6	456	Shanghai, China (\$7,925)
3	N'Djamena, Chad	9	776	New York City, United States (\$55,837)
4	Lagos, Nigeria	13	2,640	Seoul, Republic of Korea (\$27,222)
5	Victoria, Seychelles	16	15,476	London, United Kingdom (\$43,734)
6	Abuja, Nigeria	20	2,640	Dubai, UAE (\$40,438)
7	Brazzaville, Congo, Rep.	23	1,851	Copenhagen, Denmark (\$52,002)
8	Libreville, Gabon	28	8,312	Chicago, United States (\$55,837)
9	Conakry, Guinea	36	531	Washington, DC, United States (\$55,837)
10	Djibouti, Djibouti	40	1,813	Paris, France (\$36,248)
11	Accra, Ghana	47	1,381	Milan, Italy (\$29,847)
12	Yaoundé, Cameroon	50	1,251	Vienna, Austria (\$43,439)
13	Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire	56	1,399	Amsterdam, Netherlands (\$44,433)
14	Douala, Cameroon	70	1,251	Doha, Qatar (\$74,667)
15	Cairo, Egypt	91	3,615	San Jose, Costa Rica (\$10,630)

Source: Mercer (2016); World Development Indicators (2015)

It needs to be underscored that the presence of primary cities, is not a problem in itself. This is because large cities are important to the urban system due to their role in spurring growth by engendering innovation and entrepreneurship, among other advantages. However, there are both benefits and costs to large cities, and both increase with size. The same forces that drive clustering of businesses and people in cities also push cities to be too large (Annez and Buckley, 2009), assuming that cities have an optimum size, a diverse national system of cities seems to be preferred, since it allows firms to select a large city with good urbanization economies or a smaller city with lower economies of agglomeration but also lower costs and congestion. This being the case, the optimal location will vary by type and maturity of firm. Therefore, having a functioning economic system of cities will go a long way in improving the chances of firms to maximize the matching of their location-based requirements.

5.0 The Way Forward

This section attempts to chart the way forward by proposing a set of policies, strategies and measures that need to be taken on board, by national development planners, with a view to unlock the growth and development potential embedded in urbanization, while addressing the observed challenges of that process.

The starting for ensuring that the urbanization is well planned and managed is to mainstream the process in national and regional development agenda. This stance is informed by the recognition that urbanization is irreversible and has immense potential for economic diversification and rural transformation. Currently, most of the African countries have visions and plans to promote industrialization as a way of achieving structural transformation of their economies, as well addressing the challenges of poverty reduction, inequalities and joblessness of the youthful population. This being the case, urbanization becomes an indispensable vehicle for achieving such visions. However, in order to attain the goals and objectives embodied in the in the visions and development plans issues of urbanization have to feature more conspicuously and compressively in the formulation of implementation strategies. These will be discussed briefly hereunder.

First, to the extent that rural-and urban development are complementary, given that there are multi-faceted economic and social linkages between the two areas, it crucial to ensure that both areas are accorded their deserved attention in the allocation of resources. It needs to recalled that well-functioning urban economies have benefits for rural areas too. Likewise, well performing rural economies are suppliers of agricultural products and labour to cities, while at the sometime they are markets for industrial products. This symbiotic relationship between the two areas, if adequately exploited, would definitely lead to a balanced growth. Currently, this is yet to happen given the urban-bias development model adopted by most African countries as evidenced by the low agriculture productivity and low provision of infrastructure, as well as economic and social amenities in rural areas. Indeed, the allocation of requisite resources to the rural areas will have positive spillover effects, not only in reducing rural poverty and inequalities, but also curb unplanned migration to urban areas.

Second, in appreciation of the economic potential of cities as drivers of structural transformation in general, and industrialization in particular, African countries should place undue importance on the quality and form or urban development. However, this must be addressed early enough to avoid severe economic, social and environmental challenges in the long-run. In this regard, policies should aim at making cities, both primary and secondary, efficient and competitive, both domestically, regionally and globally. Indeed, having such policies in place will reconnect the link between

urbanization and industrialization, which is currently missing in Africa's urbanization trajectory.

Third, in analyzing issues of urbanization emphasis has been placed on a single sector or specific challenge facing cities. This form of approach tends to ignore the bigger picture, both in terms of policies and strategies, and ultimately fails to address the fundamental problem(s) facing cities, in the context of urban development. In the future, the approach to be adopted is that of a broader or holistic picture cum lens which is underpinned by understanding the complexity and interplay of different urban sectors, including the public and private sector's roles, as well as the economics and social aspects of the urban development. However, in order for the adopted approach to be effectively implemented, it has to be informed by a development paradigm which appreciates the critical role played by both governments and the private sector (free market) in the creation and promotion of efficient cities. Further, in order to effectively manage the complexities, putting in place a cross-sectoral coordination mechanism becomes an imperative

6.0 Concluding Remarks

Globally, the role of urbanization as an engine of growth and development is highly acknowledged. Specifically, urbanization is closely linked to structural transformation, industrialization and rural development. The paper has attempted to analyze how Africa's urbanization has been unable to benefit from or tap the opportunities embedded in that process. In that regard, the analysis focused on identifying the main characteristics of Africa's urbanization process which have hindered or muted the realization of the continent's aspirations of economic diversification, industrialization, social development and enhanced per capita incomes, when compared to other regions in the world. The characteristics are in fact the departures which distinguish Africa's urbanization when compared to other regions. Indeed, there are also some areas of convergence with other parts of the globe, such as the imperativeness of the process.

The findings show that Africa, to a greater extent has failed to unlock the opportunities of urbanization for a number of reasons. These range from premature urbanization, poor planning and management of the process, deindustrialization, disconnection between urban and rural development, to the predominance of primary cities. These departures have not only resulted in delayed structural transformation of African economies, but also in jobless economic growth, poverty ridden and expensive cities. Moreover, and in most cases, such cities lack the basic economic and social infrastructure.

These deficiencies, notwithstanding, and due to the fact that urbanization is an unstoppable force which will continue to change Africa's landscape, putting in place an effective urbanization planning and management becomes an imperative. The framework should not only address issues of urbanization in a more holistic manner, but also enhance coordination and integration of economic, social and environmental issues in the urban development agenda.

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