

URBANISATION, URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY, NATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND DISEASES BURDEN IN AFRICA: A RESEARCH AGENDA FOR SPATIO-TEMPORAL ANALYSES OF SUBREGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Richard Ingwe

Institute of Public Policy and Administration (IPPA)

University of Calabar

P.M.B 1115 Calabar, Cross River State. Nigeria

e-mail: ingwe.richard@gmail.com

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Abstract

Urbanisation, urban environmental quality, national socio-economic conditions and diseases burden in Africa: a research agenda for spatio-temporal analyses of subregional characteristics

The investigation of socio-economic, political and environmental aspects of urbanization in Africa is gaining research attention. Most recently, information on the patterns in urbanization, population growth, slumisation, among other aspects of urban Africa within the past quarter of a century or thereabout were reported. While this report elucidated on the relevant challenges, it was restricted to the regional patterns of the variables investigated. This report indicates that more information on the sub-regional aspects of these variables is required to elucidate on urban planning in the region and its sub-regions. Here, the ways forward in investigating these issues and variables underlying them are outlined. The theoretical, methodological, spatial and temporal aspects or requirements of the proposed research are discussed to provide a compass for future research.

Key words

Urbanization, population dynamics, Africa, sub-regions, socio-economic conditions, environment, theory, method, slumisation

1. Background

The proportion of the world's population living in urban centres reached half of the total (of the world's population) in the late 2000s. Apart from the implication that the remainder of the world's were rural dwellers, the conclusion that a large proportion of Developing World are still in the primary stages of the demographic transition thereby experiencing high rhythms of population growth is evidence that the world's population (and by extension the proportion of those residing in urban centres might have surpassed the point attained in the 2000s (Baum and Tolbert 1985), Institution of Mechanical Engineers 2011; United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT 2010). The increasing proportion of the world's population living in cities ought to have brought economic prosperity to Developing World's urban centres going by another report at about that time (i.e. the late 2000s). This was restatement of the resurgent thesis that cities stimulate as well as benefit from economic growth (World Bank 2009). This is a re-assertion reinforcing earlier hypothesis that highlighted the significance of the belief that increasing 'density' (concentration of people and agglomeration of economic activities) within cities facilitates supplies of services that promote economic growth and social development thereby transforming cities and diffusing such forces to hinterlands, new and smaller towns (Deichmann, Gill, and Goh 2011). Safe water, sanitation, health, among other services has been included in the list of the stimulants of urban-based economic growth and prosperity (Ingwe 2012). Related reports speak of high rhythms of demographic change including rapid population growth in Developing Countries (DCs). Africa has been identified as one of the world's regions where rapid population growth and urbanization combine with poor socio-economic conditions where the positive association between urban centres and economic growth are yet to be realized or are negligible compared to those obtaining in Advanced (Developed) Countries. Put differently, the contribution of rapid urbanization in Africa, like elsewhere in the DCs, to economic growth and its gain from the latter is beneath the optimum level that prevails in Advanced Countries. Although academic research efforts are being made to fill the knowledge gaps pertaining to the magnitude and nature of the challenges associated with urbanisation, and socio-economic aspects of urban sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

The prolonged socio-economic, political adversities suffered by SSA over several centuries –such as unequal trade, colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and neoliberalism-(Ingwe, Ikeji and Ojong 2010) have spilled into the region's ecological systems in form of the acceptance by some of Africa's heads of state that toxic waste be dumped in their countries in return for 'economic assistance'. Apart from this, it is known that poor people are propelled by their economic adversity to engage in economic activities and practices that do not place premium on environmental sustainability.

2. Sub-Saharan African (SSA) regional trend of urbanisation, urban slumisation, poverty, safe water / sanitation for the past quarter of a Century

However, recent application of spatio-temporal method to analyse data describing urbanisation, slumisation (growth of unlivable sectors of cities and urban areas), poverty, safe water/ sanitation in urban sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) for the past 25 years or thereabout found the following: that rapid rates of national population growth and urbanisation occurred nearly throughout SSA -from 1980 to 2005. This

averaged 93.8% with a range of 90.5% points. The lowest and highest rates were 40% (Lesotho) and 130.5% (Niger), respectively. High national poverty rates were widespread in SSA with less than 50% in about seven countries -this might have been similar in a higher number of countries had a large number of SSA countries had reported their 1993 poverty rates. There were high urban/rural poverty ratios (1.05-1.79 points range) between Nigeria and Benin Republics. High average rate (73%) of slumisation in SSA in 2001 (range: 96%) -lowest and highest rates being in Zimbabwe (3%), Chad and Ethiopia (99%), respectively. Sub-Saharan Africa's 2000 health adjusted life expectancy was generally low (about 38.8 years: it was less than 40 years in 24 SSA countries while use of safe / improved water/sanitation services were poor almost throughout SSA. The latter declined rapidly and ubiquitously from 72% (2000) to 55% (2002) (i.e. minus 17% points decrease in three years within individual countries with alarming declines -up to minus 69% points in Guinea. The report concluded that that the policy implications of its findings include the urgent and imperative need to massively implement urban improvement programmes designed to provide health-inducing services/facilities across SSA (Ingwe 2012, 17-30).

Although, the foregoing report was highly informative, ignorance persist regarding the sub-regional patterns of the problems. Although the latter study elucidates on important aspects (national socio-spatial or improvements in urban environmental sanitation, safe water supply/services and diseases in a more systematic way thereby informing on the condition at the regional scale, it amounts to a mere average of the statues of these variable. Other information relevant to understanding these variables were not produced in the report. For example, it is very difficult to apply the information provided in the report to compare the variables studied among the major sub-regions of Africa in order to understand the variability in urban management factors such as use of safe water, improved sanitation, among others. Yet, knowledge of the latter variables is useful for strengthening urban environmental management, which might be some of the programmes being implemented by some of the sub-regional supra-national political-economic, among other organizations that emerged in post-colonial Africa.

3. Information gaps on urban socio-physical and economic conditions under the context of supra-nationalisation of development management in Africa's sub-regions

After the era of attainment of political independence by most member-countries of Africa (i.e. between the late 1950s and the 1860s), the emergent post-independent African nations rapidly adopted supra-nationalisation of development management. This had started earlier and matured in the Western European sub-region leading to the popularity of terms such as European Union (EU) and European Commission (EC) for describing politico-economic and socio-cultural entities created for advancing the economic growth of the sub-region by states to address challenges that were commonly faced by individual nation-states. This strategy of enhancing development in Africa involves the creation of sub-regional organizations for addressing political and socio-economic challenges commonly faced by several member-states of specific sub-regions. However, the sub-regionalisations in Africa have not ignored the regions' political traumas such as political and economic colonization or domination by Western Europe. The continuous relations between post-colonial African countries continue to manifest in the greater bonding in political and socio-economic affairs among countries to the extent that some skip

their closest neighbours who have a different colonial 'ancestry' in order to maintain stronger ties with their former 'sister colonies' located further apart. How the latter might have caused variations among African countries in terms of their management of challenges enthroned by rapid urbanization is also poorly understood.

4. Objectives

The objective of this article is to propose a framework for undertaking further studies designed to generate information showing spatial and temporal patterns of urban environmental quality, socio-economic conditions and national disease burden in Africa's sub-regions: namely, North, South, East and West. Specifically, I propose to inform on sub-regional urbanization dynamics, urban environmental quality, before relate the latter to national diseases burdens.

In the rest of this article, I justify further studies of the sub-regional patterns exhibited by urbanization, national socio-economic and political conditions, and urban environmental quality in Africa. My proposed investigations arise from recent baseline study of the same or related variables at the more general African regional scale (Ingwe 2012, 17-30). The recent report, as well as the proposed research programme, represents the contributions of CRADLE, the African Institute for Sustainable Development, to economic resuscitation of Africa as currently under the management of this author. Then, I follow on by outlining some hypotheses capable of guiding the proposed research programme. I also propose multiple theoretical perspectives (pluralism, incrementalism, rational comprehensiveness, neoliberalism, among others) that promise to be relevant for studying urbanization related challenges in Africa. I also show how multiple methods such as aetiology, spatio-temporal analysis, among others (as well as multiple data) that could be applied for studying/explaining complications associated with phenomenal urbanization and demographic dynamics in Africa. Then I propose spatial units for implementing the various separate studies of the urban variables of interest, before commenting on further justification of the proposed research project. I expatiate on various data type, sources and temporal scales of the proposed research programme beyond – but related to those of the recent study (Ingwe 2012). Then, I conclude this particular article.

4. Justifying the proposed research project under the context of the perpetuation of neoliberal-capitalism

After the 2008 –and ongoing- global financial-economic crises, reports have indicated that economic growth has increased in Africa. However, the extent to which that growth is being applied towards implementing innovations of technological and socio-cultural types that Advanced Nations used to achieve a high level of social (human) welfare, consumerism (Demeny, and McNicoll 2006), among other dynamics, is poorly understood. The new information and knowledge on urban conditions in Africa and its sub-regions promise to provide environmental bases on which preparations for a virile socio-economic advancement could be constructed.

4.1 Hypothesizing inter-relationships among urbanization, socio-economic, environmental, and conditions in Africa's sub-regions

Some key hypothesis for investigating the relationships among urbanization and socio-economic, environmental and political conditions in Africa emerge as follows:

- Urbanization and socio-economic, environmental and political conditions in Africa exhibit patterns or characteristics within specific socio-economic sub-regions;
- The peculiar urbanization and socio-economic, environmental conditions patterns (characteristics) exhibited within specific sub-regions is determined by politico-economic initiatives of the respective organization of each sub-region.
- Arising from the foregoing, the patterns (or characteristics) of urbanization and the underlying socio-economic, environmental conditions exhibited within specific sub-regions translates into their variation from one sub-region to the other(s).

4.2 Using urban resuscitation to move Africa beyond reliance on aid from rich nations

One aspect of neoliberal-capitalism deserves comment in justifying the studies being proposed. This pertains to the ongoing habit of perpetuating neoliberal-capitalist *modus operandi* while devising strategies of refining its old forms in order to keep it and economies operating it competitive. Although, some proclaimed its demise in the aftermath -nay, at the break of the 2008 global financial-economic crises (Birch and Mykhneko 2010), the politico-economic and cultural system still holds sway in the United States of America (USA), United Kingdom (UK) – including Ireland, Germany, among other countries in the membership of the Organisations for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The most important relationship between the OECD countries and their counterparts in Africa has run through what might be described as previous, current and future politico-economic histories. As an indirect compensation for the domination of African countries through several centuries of unequal trade, Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, political-economic colonization, imperialism and neoliberalism, OECD nations have promised development assistance (aid) their African counterparts. It is noteworthy to note several fears that although OECD countries have done badly in terms of fulfilling their promises, numerous African governments have habitually relied on fractions of the assistance that came to them irrespective of delays associated with the process. Here, the prolonged failure of most OECD countries to recover from the 2008 global financial-economic crises has placed doubts in the capacity of some of these nations to fulfill their previous promises of aid and make new promises (Rodrik 2012, 48; Rajan 2012, 48). Therefore, the question posed by Thabo Mbeki, former President of South Africa and an African statesman: what does the 2008-and ongoing global financial-economic crises mean for Africa (BusinessDay 2011, Available online at: www.businessdayonline.com.) stands out. Specifically, this President Mbeki's question could be placed at the roots of economic growth stimulation by African cities. Therefore, the need for producing information necessary for strengthening the capacity of African cities to stimulate and gain from economic growth is urgent and imperative in the light of this new economic situation of the neoliberal-capitalist global economy.

5. Multiple theoretical perspectives relevant for studying urbanization challenges in Africa

The study presents cases for application of multiple theoretical perspectives that promise to contribute towards understanding of the issues at stake. The relevance of parasitic elitism – exploitation of the poor in the rural areas (and to a lesser extent, the urban poor) has been demonstrated in studies of justice in the city

(Harvey 1973). A most recent extension of this theoretical framework involved combining parasitic elitism with the rational choice theory as a means of strengthening the latter to handle (explain) the motives of decision makers and the policies they frequently formulate. As recently applied (Ingwe 2012), this theoretical adaptation is suitable for explaining nations whose urban systems present a contradiction between the rich economic resource base and the manifestation of exploitation of citizens on ground in form of deprivation. Example of this is Nigeria, which presents enormous slumisation of its numerous cities (Ingwe 2012). The manifold aspects and multi-dimensional characteristics of the study variables (urbanization, urban environmental quality, socio-economic conditions, diseases burden, and any other that might become necessary in the course of implementing the project), present opportunities for the application of the method of pluralism .

6. Pluralism Theory

The concern of this theory is with causation involving diverse influences - or factors - in the way phenomena occur. Pluralism has been used to connote a view of behavior. Some radical opinions in Politics and Philosophy argue that Marxist materialist monism believe in the multiplicity of factors leading to substantial opposition to this approach and the law-determined interpretation of societal development. Pluralism has also been used in an extended way to denote a doctrine pertaining to the diversity of cultural, ideological, radical, national, class, gender, among other characteristics. It has also been used to connote the contradiction of class theory and challenge to state-centrism arising from pressure arising from a diversity of factors within the political environment at different levels (national or international). Pluralism theory encompasses all the foregoing points of view has been applied to analyse domestic politics and international political systems as an alternative to the Marxist class perspective. It has been suggested that the theory (pluralism) does not only provide a framework (doctrine) for opposing Marxism but also offers an alternative for understanding the multiplicity of factors actually existing in society thereby imbuing it with varying degrees dynamism. The division of society into various social classes and the flourishing of modern electoral democracy, which was accepted by several revolutionaries before the “cold war” has been used to illustrate the relevance of pluralism in society. Pluralism was frequently used during the era of the “cold war” by the opposing schools of thought to absolutise their own “truths” (Igwe 2005).

Lincoln Allison suggests that Pluralism has been used in philosophical theories and systems of thought that appreciate the influence (involve) more than one ultimate principle contrasted to those with “monist” characteristics. It was used in the United States to legitimize or rationalize the country’s constitution by various ethno-cultural groups (African Americans, Jewish Americans, Indian Americans, and so on) instead of the delusive hope that such ethnic diversity would disappear through some action.

The term is used literally to refer to the belief in the coexistence of more than one entity, belief system, viewpoint and other things. The contemporary meaning of the term to connote the formation of modern society by diverse groups has been shown to be the major political essence of pluralism. The diversity of groups contrasts with the dominance of society by elitist ruling class. Here, horizontal distinction of society is more important than the vertical. The elites ignore and manipulate other constituents of society such as communities, villages, trade unions, Churches,

religious groups, among others (Allison 2003). The rejection by some sociologists of what some sociologists perceived to be prolonged hegemony of positivist orthodoxy (i.e. use of only one approach to social research), founded on a unified philosophy and methodology of social sciences in the 1970s, led to agitation by scholars for pluralism (diversification of theory and method, in the subject. In place of pluralism, researchers promoted a research approach that allowed many styles and methods. Some earlier works perceived as hegemonic positivist orthodoxy (also, methodological exclusiveness) were contributed by two eminent sociologists: Talcott Parsons (who was notable for developing theories of functionalism), while "abstracted empiricism" was attributed to Paul Lazarsfeld. Phenomenological and structuralist sociologies were created in conjunction with the splitting of Marxism into neo-Marxist factions as well as philosophical relativism. The terms epistemological pluralism or epistemological anomie have been used to describe the multiplicity of theories of knowledge or paradigms competing with positivist orthodoxy in sociological studies. Pluralism was justified by arguing that natural scientists frequently altered their research methods when necessary instead of sticking 'slavishly' to existing but ineffective theories and methods. Epistemological anarchy (i.e. application of various research methods and theories) in sociological research became increasingly promoted as a means of salvaging research from the tyranny of positivist orthodoxy. However, it is argued that claims that a hegemonic positivist orthodoxy existed has been debunked by asserting that the desired methodological pluralism already existed prior to the scholarly rebellion (agitation for pluralism) in the 1970s. This argument point to the application of several philosophical and methodological alternatives (among which were: Marxism, idealism, symbolic interactionism, to name but only a few), prior to the 1970s (Scott and Marshall 2005, 405; Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1988; Lazarsfeld and Katz 1955; Feyerabend 1988; Parsons 1951; Parsons and Shills 1951; Parsons 1966), Parsons, 1971, and Lazarsfeld, and Katz, 1955).

Pluralism theory is relevant to this study for several reasons. Its underlying philosophy, versatility, and amenability to application in most of the social sciences (politics, philosophy, sociology, among others), make it to match the multidimensionality of urbanization and the manifold sectors underlying it. Moreover, the view that it reflects real life existence of a multiplicity of factors, make it amenable to adoption in this study concerned with elucidating on the multi-disciplinary and multi-sectoral -economic, social and political ideas involved in sustainable development in Africa (Ingwe, Ikeji and Ojong 2010).

Recently, it was demonstrated that challenges bordering on effective management of environments that are by-and-large poorly known require the employment of rational-comprehensiveness as a policy that provides a foundation for the employment of geo-spatial information science/technology (Ingwe, Odu, Ojong and Angiating 2012). Therefore, poor information and knowledge on urban environmental quality and socio-economic conditions in Africa presents cases for rationalism (Igwe 2005). The persistence of squalid and poor urban environments in Africa nearly 50 years after political independence suggests the implementation of incrementalist policies in sectors related to these challenges in individual nation-states of SSA and nearly through-out the region present cases for applying the theory of incrementalism. The doctrine of neoliberalism promises to facilitate explanation of politico-economic and cultural variations in study variables (Ingwe, Okoro and Ijim-Agbor 2012; Ingwe, Ikeji and Mboto 2010; Ingwe, Odu, Ojong and Angiating 2012, among others).

7. Applying multiple methods (and data) for explaining complications associated with phenomenal urbanization and demographic dynamics

However, my interest in highlighting sub-regional urban environmental and socio-economic conditions in Africa presents a natural case for spatio-temporal analysis, as recently employed in the baseline study of the situation in the sub-Saharan Africa (Ingwe 2012). The variations that are naturally associated with regions and countries presenting various histories, geographies, socio-economic and political conditions beckon for the use of aetiology (Ingwe, Okoro, Ukwaiyi 2009).

Recent study of urban environmental quality in SSA (Ingwe 2012) used data on variables such as: urbanization, demography (population increases within a quarter of a century - between 1980 and 2005. Slumisation was captured by data on the proportion (per cent of total national populations that were living in such sectors of urban centres in SSA in 2001. Data on poverty -by national poverty rates- were based on surveys in various years (between about 1990 and 2001) and ratios of urban/rural poverty lines for 1993. Urban health-determining services were represented by data on use of improved sanitation services (per cent of the population) between 2000 and 2002 and use of improved water sources in 2002. Others were: health by adjusted life expectancy represented by years for 2000, welfare measures were as described by Ravallion et al., 2007. We used data on malaria to show one out of several diseases afflicting urban Sub-Saharan Africa and to indicate the severity of the problem.

The proposed studies will differ from the recent study (Ingwe 2012) in several ways. Apart from spatial sub-regionalisation of urban environmental quality and socio-economic conditions in Africa, subsequent studies will diversify (mostly extend their temporal scales by gathering and analyzing data covering more recent years, if possible, up to the past few years or at least up to 2010. For example, the analysis of urbanization and demography might be extended to include about six more years (i.e. up to 2011 or thereabout) to make it cover a total of about thirty years. Similarly, there is scope for extending the study of slumisation, among other variables of interest in this study by about six or more. It is needless to exclude Northern Africa from the proposed study; there is need to examine the situation of the study variables in the sub-region thereby providing a means of comparing it with those of SSA.

8. Organization and management of further studies on this research (sub)themes

With an area of area of about 30 million square kilometers, Africa comprises 57 countries while about four of her islands remain under the control of colonial European powers (UNEP 2007). This large area of Africa suggests that to ease the management of this research project –and reporting of findings arising from it- the region should be reorganized along subdivisions (or sub-regional scales). This might follow the foregoing list of sub-regions including: North, South, East and West Africa. Other studies might also be undertaken after this project –or if possible and necessary- during its implementation. Yet, it might become necessary to undertake comparisons of the nature, magnitude or other characteristics of the variables of interest to the study between (or among) two or more of these sub-regions.

8.1 Spatial units for analysing the urban variables of interest: Politico-economic organization, colonial footprints-Anglophone and Francophone- or both?

The significance of addressing environmental challenges at the supranational scale has been acknowledged in Africa where some political and socio-economic organizations, as well as those concerned strictly with environmental management in the region have been working. For example, the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) was created as the environmental arm of the African Union (AU). AMCEN's interest in mapping the environment was demonstrated by its collaboration with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to publish an atlas showing changing environment of Africa in the late 2000s (AMCEN/UNEP 2008).

8.2 Major politico-economic sub-regional organisations

Other major sub-regional organizations that have become well-known include the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), South African Development Community (SADC), East African Development Community, and to a lesser extent of sub-regionalisation within the rest of Africa, that of North Africa. One geographic listing –out of the several classifications- used by the International Governmental Organisation (IGO) UNEP shows that ECOWAS comprises 16 countries. Eastern and Central Africa comprise eight countries, respectively. While Northern Africa and Southern Africa have seven and 12 respectively, the Western Indian Ocean region has six (UNEP 2007). However, the foregoing sub-regional organizations are not the only ones defining the inter-relationships among African states. For another classification based on political regionalization is shown on (see Fig. 1) below.

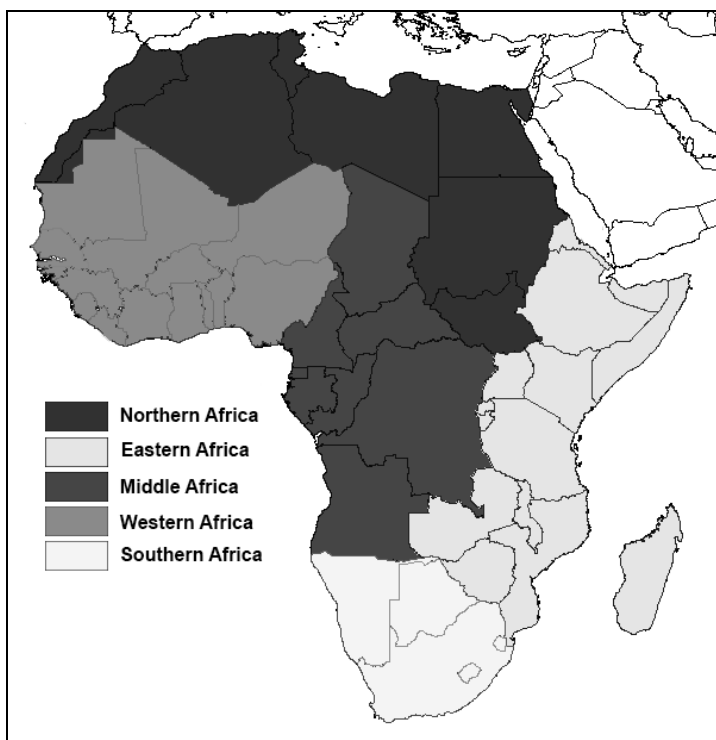


Fig. 1: Africa showing major sub-regions.

Other sub-regionalisations within and in-between the sub-regions exist. For example, Francophone West Africa comprising seven countries is shown on below (Fig. 2 and 3). Other political-economic sub-regions include the East African Economic Community, Central African Community, among others.

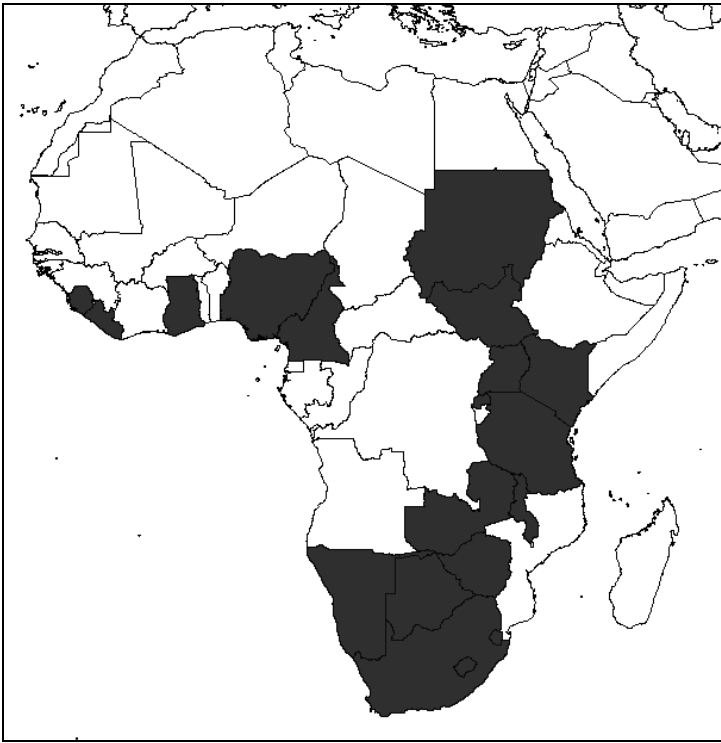


Fig. 2: Anglophone Africa-English-speaking countries.



Fig. 3: Francophone West Africa.

Whether one or another of the sub-regions described here is better suited for studying the variables of interest in this study is yet an undecided matter. However, there is need to cover all these sub-regionalisation classes (i.e. include all the criteria or bases used for creating them as a hypotheses of the influence on the performance on other variables. That is, after using political-economic regionalization for the preliminary studies, further studies would concentrate on colonial-linguistic history and regionalization arising there from, and so forth.

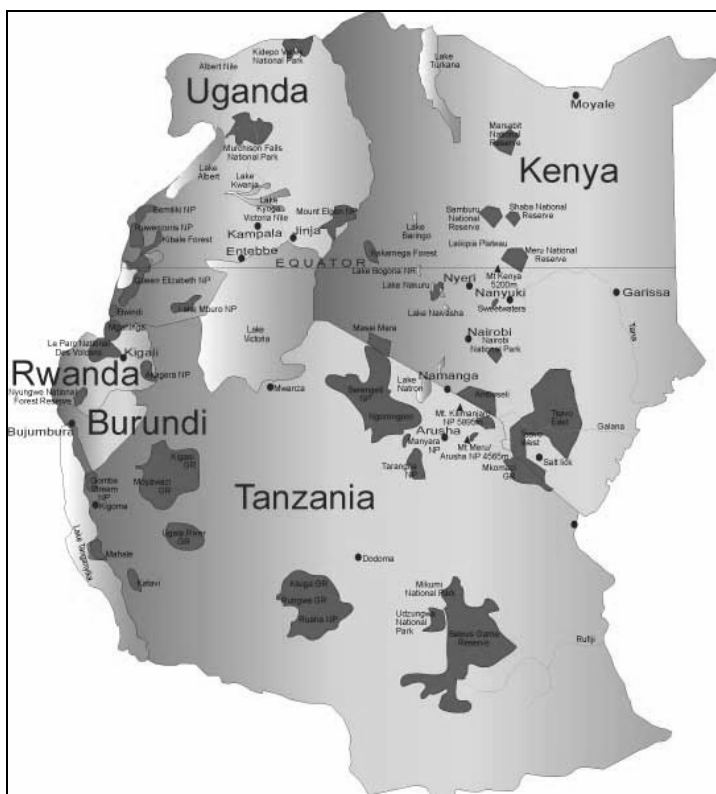


Fig. 4: East African Community.

A final decision might require establishing the strength of political bonding that has been going on between (among) the countries in the various unions. There is also the colonial influence at play within and beyond specific sub-regions. For example, in the ECOWAS zone, subtle differences exist among what is known as the Anglophone ECOWAS countries and their Francophone counterparts to the extent that the latter have extended their boundaries into Central and middle Africa-where several Francophone countries are located. Here, a question that might stand out in relief is: to what extent does colonial influence on urbanization outweigh or counteract the newer socio-political and economic organizations to make colonial influence a plausible factor in urbanization and related variables of these studies? Better understanding of the contribution of African urban centres to economic growth and gain from the latter would be achieved by answering the following questions: What are the sub-regional characteristics of urban environmental quality

and socio-economic conditions? What is the magnitude and nature of the urban environmental and socio-economic challenges as well as efforts made by the various political and economic organizations to address the challenges at sub-regional scales? Understanding (derived from information and knowledge on the existing sub-regional pattern) is necessary for strengthening policy at that spatial scale but also to support national level policy and programming that could be extended to sub-national government at state or provincial and local government levels.

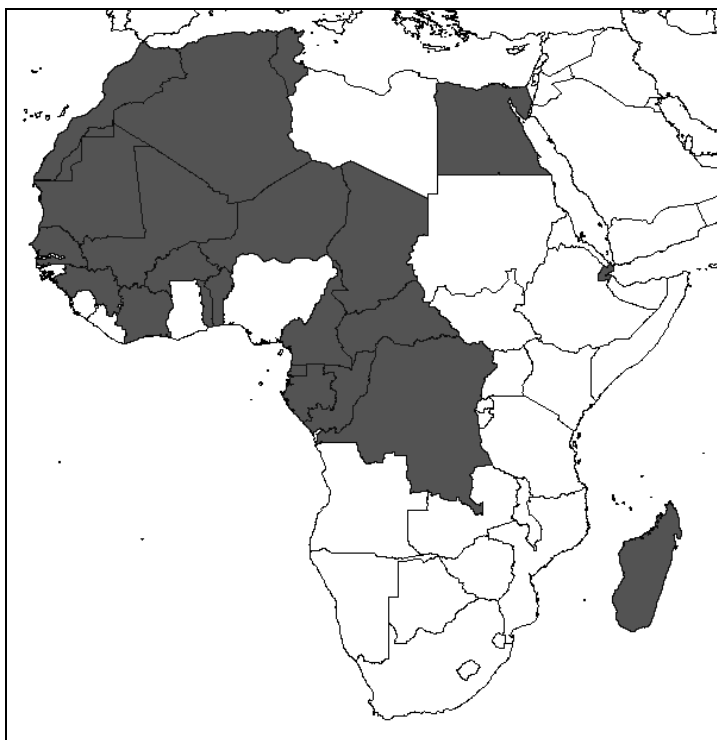


Fig. 5: Africa showing Francophone countries.

9. Conclusion

Reports of recent state of urbanization, urban environmental quality and socio-economic conditions in urban Africa have revealed phenomenal dynamics or changes. While these information and knowledge contribute valuable insights into the field of urbanization and socio-economic and environmental sustainable development, they indicate gaps in our current knowledge and understanding of the field. Related information on the sub-regional situation -or patterns- of the key variables (such as, urbanization rate, slumisation, socio-economic conditions, among others), promise to elucidate the field in ways that would strengthen sub-regional as well as national level policy-making that can be extended to sub-national scales. An agenda for so doing could apply some of the multiple theoretical perspectives and methods (most of which have recently been applied to related studies) indicated here. The spatial and temporal scales of addressing future scholarly investigation of these variables require expansion and calibration in order

to generate more of the required information and knowledge for supporting urban management in order to serve the purposes of socio-economic and environmental sustainability.

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URBANISATION, URBAN ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY, NATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND DISEASES BURDEN IN AFRICA: AN AGENDA FOR ANALYZING SUB-REGIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Summary

Having surpassed that of rural areas in 2008, the proportion of the world's population living in cities is projected to rise to 60% (8.2 billion) by 2030. This has provoked scholars of urban geography to seek for new knowledge on urbanization and sustainable development- especially in developing countries (including Africa) that are challenged by –and most vulnerable to –socio-economic and environmental adversities. This environmental and human settlement dynamic is viewed as not benign especially due to the high pressure that expanding cities are expected to exert on socio-economic-political systems as a result of the increasing demographic transition as well as urbanization globally but especially in Africa in the forthcoming 20 years. This urbanization trend is occurring coincidentally with increasing in momentum of the belief that cities stimulate, and gain from, economic growth. However, it has been demonstrated that this inter-relationship between urbanisation and economic growth is restricted to prepared cities i.e. it may not apply to regions experiencing the kind of urbanization characterized by disadvantages.

Unlike the global North's experience, Africa's rapid urbanisation has been dented by disadvantages (poverty, squalor, increasing slumisation –extensive emergence of urban sectors characterized by inadequacy of basic urban services such as: safe water, improved sanitation, among others). Research spanning recent 25 years (1980-2005) or thereabout reports sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)'s urbanization conditions reveals considerable changes. National populations increased –average: 93.8%/range: 90.5 percentage points, lowest and highest rates of change being: 40% (in Lesotho) and 130.5% (Niger), respectively). The proportion of national populations that lived in urban areas in SSA increased rapidly within ten years (1990-2000), from 28% of the total population in 1990 to 34% in 2000 – an increase of six percentage points. In nearly all sub-Saharan African (SSA) states, urban populations increased: by one per cent in Gambia, Lesotho, and Uganda to 14% in Mauritania: the range was 13% points.

Only Zambia experienced declining urban population (-4%) during that decade. Average slumisation of SSA was as high (73%) in 2001 (range: 96%) with lowest and highest proportions being 3% (Zimbabwe) and 99% (Chad and Ethiopia), respectively. The use of improved water and sanitation services in the region (SSA) was poor. Improved sanitation declined from 72% in 2000 to 55% in 2002: a decrease of 17 percentage points within three years! Nearly ubiquitously, individual countries experienced sudden declines in improved sanitation use. The decline was considerable (-69% points) in Guinea, while remaining constant (unchanged) in Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Ghana with rare improvements -in the following order of magnitude: by 44% in Rwanda -attributable to foreign aid following the genocide/ethnic cleansing of the 1990s; 20% in Mauritania, 12% in Benin, etc., while regional availability/use of improved water sources in 2002 was 80%; 32% (Somalia), 45% (Equatorial Guinea), and 100% (Botswana/Zimbabwe).

Disadvantaged urbanization of SSA, as impediments to economic growth warrant policy/decision making aimed towards improving urban management i.e. one designed to make African cities better facilitators of/gainers from economic growth hereafter. Research-derived information/knowledge on key urbanization variables at

disaggregated/sub-regional scales promise to increase visibility, comparability and understandability of the inter-sub-regional patterns of the key urban variables. Recent research emphasis on aggregate/regional characteristics of these urban variables provides scope for change because their disaggregated patterns/peculiarities are hidden by aggregation.

Disaggregating further research, in terms of re-calibrating spatio-temporal analytical units/scale aiming to elucidate on urban conditions of similar variables at Africa's variable sub-regions is important for generating required information/knowledge on urban development challenges. Historical factors deserving consideration in designing further research on this theme include: Africa's colonial rule within its insensitively fragmented units by European invaders from 19th Century to 1950s/1960s; creation of supranational (sub)regional organizations for facilitating socio-economic-political development following decolonization/political independence and democratization -transformation of military dictators into civil rulers. These histories underlie the spatial factors. With African Union, (AU) addressing regional-level challenges and sub-diving into Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Southern African Development Community (SADC), East African Community (EAC), etc., at various sub-regional levels, multi-sectoral projects/programmes -similar/related to urban policy/management underway, could be investigated. As African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), an AU programme, bifurcates with urban management, so might be those of sub-regional organizations be determining urban management variation. Ditto for organisations sustaining cultural interests/linkages among former colonies of European invaders thereby created: Anglophone and Francophone African sub-regions, etc.

These sub-regional organizations and their developmental engagements underscore their significance/potency in clarifying inter-sub-regional urban development variation. Therefore, they present factors deserving incorporation into conceptualising/programming of further research on mapping these variables. Additionally, further studies on Africa's urban conditions require specification of variables reflecting urban environmental quality and socio-economic conditions – including disease burden –perhaps beyond Malaria affliction or sanitation/water-determined diseases, obtainable from local-national authorities of African countries indicating/elucidating influences of the sub-regional organisations on these variables. There is need to extend spatio-temporal scales beyond those of recent/previous research to investigate/understand urbanization, socio-economic and political conditions in Africa's sub-regions.

The enormous variation of Africa's sub-regional characteristics or diversity of the variables (socio-economic, political and environmental, health, etc.), provides scope for applying pluralism theory among multiple-methods appropriate for analysing these variables. Findings of various aspects/phases of the further research promise to support/strengthen urban management at Africa's (sub)regional levels.