

Urban Plus Rural

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Vice Chancellor Professor Lwoga, Government leaders, Members of the Sokoine University of Agriculture faculty and administration, my dear colleagues, alumnae; students; ladies and gentlemen:

As an alumnus of this university and as native of Tanzania, it is indeed a great honour to be asked to address this Convocation as Guest Speaker. For both the honour and the opportunity I am deeply grateful.

By now, many of you know that I am both an agricultural economist and Executive Director of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme, UN-HABITAT. I can hear you thinking, “How is it possible that a rural development specialist, by training and life experience, can be turned into an urban development specialist? I can also imagine you, as disciples of *Ceres*, thinking, “...and why would one wish to be?” I will try to answer these questions in the next few minutes by laying out some realities of today’s world that must be dealt with, not through the polemic of “urban *versus* rural” but through a holistic “urban *plus* rural”.

To many people, both here and away, African is glorified as the last great unurbanized continent on earth. Even today, two-thirds of the total population of sub-Saharan Africa is rural – two hundred years after the beginning of the industrial revolution. Most of us imagine that this will always be true. Because our rural roots grow so deep, we believe and hope that they will continue to sustain us, no matter what the economic circumstances at the surface.

When I was growing up in northern Tanzania, agriculture was the past, present and future of East Africa. When the day finally came for me 30 years ago, I left the countryside for Sokoine University, determined to become a successful professor of agriculture – little dreaming that I was part of a great transformation then taking place in the world, a rural to-urban movement that was then barely perceptible in Africa.

We begin life in the village but, because of one thing or another – a push or a pull, a local calamity or a personal dream – we awaken one morning to find ourselves in the city. We quickly learn that it is both a frightening and wonderful new environment, promising many opportunities but also full of new challenges and risks. Despite these difficulties, friends and families follow until whole communities are resettled in a new urban habitat.

The process of urbanization has washed over the planet like a flood, beginning with the industrial revolution in the North and cresting now, 200 years later, in the South.

Two hundred years ago the total number of city dwellers in the whole world was perhaps 30 million. Today it is 3 billion.

Eighty percent of the total population in the highly industrialized countries now lives in urban areas. The rate of urbanization in those countries – that is, the percentage rate, per year, by which the urban share of the total population is expanding – has slowed to nearly zero. In contrast, cities of the least developed countries, the so-called LDCs, contain only a small percentage of the total population. Rather than treat rural and urban as different and competing development spaces, it is imperative, I would submit, that they be seen as a whole – as a dynamic system – and their linkages strengthened. One cannot do without the other.

The most important rural-urban flows are economic – goods, services and labour. Economically, rural and urban areas are linked by the reciprocal exchange of unprocessed and processed products, with both areas acting as mutually reinforcing markets. Strengthening this linkage requires, in many countries, decentralization through the promotion of medium-sized cities and hierarchical networks of places. These can increase the access to agricultural inputs by farmers, while at the same time provide the necessary marketing infrastructure like bulk collection points and periodic markets.

In order to reduce poverty and inequality, sectoral policies need to address the main structural defects in both city and countryside, including: urban and rural landlessness and insecurity of tenure; unfair terms of trade between urban and rural areas; and insufficiency of income, partly resulting from lack of diversification of jobs in rural areas.

Rural-to-urban migration does have positive impacts, since towns and cities absorb excess population from overpopulated and ecologically fragile regions. As agricultural productivity rises, surplus labour is shed from rural areas into the city. Ideally, in due course, this labour would be absorbed into new and better paying city based occupations.

I should hasten to point out at this juncture that the organic linkage between urban centers and their rural hinterland cannot be taken for granted. For a society such as ours in Tanzania, with its particular history of urbanization the rural-urban linkage is asymmetrical and non-complementary, and it is embedded with serious structural distortions in the relationship have not been rectified.

Consequently, the process of urbanization in countries like Tanzania is taking place without the corresponding development of industrialization and the associated increase in urban income levels. At the same time, the productivity of rural areas has either stagnated or even regressed. Jobs in the cities of the developing world have not been easy to obtain. Most of the newly arrived city migrants have not been able to find decent shelter or sufficient livelihoods. Their hope for a better life have not been realized as they are trapped into a vicious circle of urban poverty, social exclusion and deprivation. The majority have had to accept squalid living conditions in unplanned settlements – popularly known as slums – without basic services, such as water and sanitation, and so,

are without dignity and without good health. These are places where HIV/AIDS breeds and spreads rapidly. Under such idleness and hopelessness, a good number of young slum-dwellers become drawn into anti-social behaviour, and many, particularly women and girls, become its victims.

How great is this problem? Today, UN-HABITAT estimates that 72 percent of all city residents in sub-Saharan Africa are slum dwellers. Compare this to 32 percent for the rest of the world, which includes Latin America and Asia. The percentage of urban Africans living without adequate access to water is today about 18 percent. Those without adequate access to sanitation is around 57 percent. Then, add to the economic flow of migrants directly into our cities' slums a percentage of all 3.3 million refugees from our continent's many armed conflicts. We believe that, without serious policy and planning interventions between today and 2030, the number of slum dwellers in Africa will rise from about 200,000 million to around 500,000 million within just one more generation.

At the United Nations Millennium Summit held in New York on 20 September 2000 World leaders committed to work towards 8 goals, the first being to eradicate poverty and hunger and the seventh to ensure environmental sustainability. Target 11 of the Millennium Development Goals specifically aims to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by the year 2020. This sounds ambitious but is actually only 10% of the current 1 billion slum dwellers. Clearly we have to do better if we are to avert the looming urban slum crisis in countries like Tanzania. This alumni holds some of the key answers to this puzzle. But why and how?

It is my proposition to you that the quest for poverty eradication and sustainable development will be a quest for balancing rural and urban solutions. Premature urbanization, not accompanied by rises in rural productivity and improvements in transport and marketing infrastructure leads to food insecurity in cities. Everywhere in Africa, urban and peri-urban agriculture is mushrooming. While acknowledging its potential, it is not without problems for city planners and city dwellers alike. Clearly, attempts to accommodate urban farming as a new fact of life has meant sprawling cities, with radiuses above 25 km. This has in turn made the provision of infrastructure to remote parts of town difficult, exacerbating an already difficult situation.

Moreover, urbanization is not simply the growth of populations living within legal administrative boundaries of towns and cities. It is also a transformation of lifestyle, both urban and rural. By the 21st century, technological improvements, initially in transport but more recently in telecommunication, have allowed people in rural villages to become urbanized without necessarily migrating to towns and cities. As their access to modern infrastructure and services increases, they become less dependent on living in towns and cities to meet their economic and social needs.

Nonetheless, cities, towns and villages are all experiencing significant socio-economic, spatial and environmental transformations that are likely to intensify during the first few decades of this century. The impact of globalization on human settlements is an issue that needs to be analyzed – and appropriate policy responses formulated. It is already

clear that policies encouraging the upgrading of slums and the bolstering of urban economies are certainly necessary – but not sufficient – for sustainable national development. We must also take a much wider territorial view, creating both horizontal and vertical linkages among settlements at the sub-national, national and international levels in order to improve the viability of small towns and rural regions. It is no longer a question of how they integrate into the national economy, but how they do so into the global economy as well.

I welcome this opportunity to lay before you, however brief and incomplete, a challenge for your consideration – that rural-urban linkages need to be understood and addressed in the context of increasing African urbanization. The strength of these linkages will, to a large extent, determine the living conditions of people in both urban and rural areas of Africa. It is therefore incumbent upon institutions of higher learning throughout the continent to broaden their curricula so that both of these critical habitats for humanity – the city and the countryside – can be joined as one crucial object for scholarly pursuit. Clearly, such disciplines as agricultural economics need to be linked to urban economic through regional development planning methods, cultural anthropology, geography, social research, ecology and engineering.

In closing, I should hope you see clearly state that my continuing career path has not forced me to leave behind my sentiment for the heartland – to abandon my rural roots for the city. I have been engaged in a continuing adventure of learning and problem solving that embraces both rural and urban development. I am indeed fortunate to have discovered these to be bound together, inseparably, in so many complementary and wonderful ways.

I thank you for your attention

