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Rural-urban Migration in South Africa

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1. Introduction

The South Africa apartheid system has historically aimed to restrict and control the population movement and settlement patterns of the population in the country. Certain laws were imposed such as the infamous and well-documented Influx Control, Group Areas Acts, and associated pass laws resulted in an enforced impermanence in the urbanisation process of the Black population. These inept regulations resulted in inadequate urban planning in urban areas as well as a diversion of urban settlements into sprawling peri-urban areas. The system forced Black people to live in ethnically homogeneous homelands where limited access to land, inter alia, yielded a transition from an agrarian to a cash-based rural economy ready to provide large numbers of labour migrants. According to Francis Wilson, “The very process that guaranteed wealth in the economy (i.e. the migrant labour system) simultaneously produced poverty and patterns of unemployment that still hobble South Africa. Many people, particularly the poorest, most vulnerable members of society, remain trapped in the legacy of the apartheid homeland policy, and find it difficult to escape this situation. Migration is, in many ways, a response to structural disequilibria between and within sectors of the economy, or between countries. Deepening and widening inequality in income and opportunities within nations, and an absolute increase in the numbers of people enduring poverty and extreme hardship, add to the pressure for people to migrate. Migration and urbanisation are often viewed as negative or undesirable processes that have to be avoided, slowed down or even reversed (Marchetti, 2012). These processes are closely related to ruptures, environmental disaster, economic exploitation, political or civil tension and violence, and are often perceived as being a cause of problems such as environmental degradation, health problems, “brain drain”, political and social instability and the general unravelling of social support structures (Gong & Pizzoli, 2007). However, policy makers often fail to understand that migration is often central to households” livelihoods. Indeed, migration takes various forms in different settings, each with unique health and socio-economic outcomes. Migration offers hope for the future, and can play a vital role in redressing past inequities. Migration patterns and trends impact on the social and economic situation and natural resources of the country, making these spatial mobility processes extremely important in the context of sustainable development.

2. South African Perspective

South Africa has adopted the process of urbanisation like the rest of the developing countries. Between 2001 and 2011 the urban population increased from 57% to 63%. In the context of a growing population, this represented an increase in 6,789,711 million people living in urban areas and a small increase of 161,073 people living in rural areas (Statistics SA, 2011). There are complex migration patterns and relationship that exists between urban and rural areas lying behind these statistics.
(Murcott & Hadingham, 2012) defines rural areas as sparsely populated areas in which people farm or depend on natural resources, including villages and small towns that are dispersed throughout these areas. Furthermore, they include large settlements in the former homelands, created by apartheid removals, which depend considerably on migrant labour and remittances for their survival. ‘Rurality’ is defined by (Noble, 2009) as a way of life, a state of mind and a culture which revolves around land, livestock, cropping and community. Some analysts have stressed the need for a more nuanced definition of the rural. Defining rurality in terms of land and agriculture alone does not help one understand the dynamics in the communities and the growing number of rural people whose livelihoods are not linked to the exploitation of natural resources (Alemu, 2012).

Mostly, the rural has been associated with certain geographical spaces. This has presented challenges in the understanding of poverty and inequality in South Africa. Nabudere (2010), for instance, has stressed the unequal relationships that exist between the different sectors of the South African society and its economy. So ‘rurality’ is not very much to do with physical-geographical space. It has become more about exploitation, exclusion, poverty-creation and impoverishment of majorities by the rich minorities in these socio-economic spaces called the ‘rural’ and ‘urban.’ It is a dichotomisation of the same reality. The lesson from Nabudere (2006) is that there is exploitation and marginalisation within the same geographical spaces. Understanding this will ensure that programmes and initiatives that are meant to benefit the communities will be properly designed to make sure they are not captured by the rural elite.

The development of rural areas in South Africa has posed challenges for past governments as well as the present government. Of particular concern is the fact that the South African economy has, and continues to, develop and generate extreme income and developmental inequalities between and within geographical spaces. The poverty facing rural areas in South Africa today can be understood to be as a result of the way apartheid shaped access to economic opportunities and government services through rigidly enforced tenure, settlement and labour policies (Gwanya, 2010).

The challenges that are affecting the rural areas in South Africa as identified include the following:

- Under-utilisation and/or unsustainable use of natural resources,
- Poor or lack of access to socio-economic infrastructure and services, public amenities and government services,
- Lack of access to water or lack of water sources for both household and agricultural development,
- Low literacy, skills levels and migratory labour practices,
- Decay of the social fabric of societies,
• Unresolved restitution and land tenure issues,
• Dependence on social grants and other forms of social security, and
• Unexploited opportunities in agriculture, tourism, mining and manufacturing

3. Purpose for this study
The study tries to unpack the economic effects around urban-rural migration, the economic drivers and general impact it has in the economy despite interventions by different sectors and what has been done to reverse the deprivation structures and segregation caused by apartheid system.

4. Historical urbanisation trends
Figure 1 below shows the historical urbanisation trends for the four main population groups and the total population of South Africa for the period between 1904 and 2001. The urbanisation rate of Indians, Whites and Coloureds has historically consistently outstripped that of Black Africans. Africans lower level of urbanisation is indisputably at least partly due to strict influx control measures applied by the apartheid government. As can be seen in the graph below, Black Africans appeared to be urbanising faster than any other population group as trends just prior to 2001 show. This may be partially due to the freedom of movement that was established by the new dispensation since 1994 and the scrapping of influx control in the late eighties, but also to the virtual saturation of urbanisation levels in the other population groups. Nevertheless, the increase in the level of urbanisation for the Black African population is expected to continue.
The 2001 urbanisation figures by population group are presented in Table 1. The table shows that only 47% of Black Africans were urbanised in 2001, compared to 87% of Coloureds, 97% of Indians/Asians, and 90% of Whites.

Table 1: Population group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urbanisation levels by population group 2001-2004</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Urban Population</th>
<th>Rural Population</th>
<th>Proportion Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>35 433 492</td>
<td>16 820 234</td>
<td>18 613 258</td>
<td>47.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>3 987 419</td>
<td>3 460 376</td>
<td>527 043</td>
<td>86.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian/Asian</td>
<td>1 113 183</td>
<td>1 085 279</td>
<td>27 904</td>
<td>97.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>4 285 683</td>
<td>3 851 681</td>
<td>434 002</td>
<td>89.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>44 819 777</td>
<td>25 217 571</td>
<td>19 602 206</td>
<td>56.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Migration from rural sending areas

Migration studies in South Africa are typically framed in demographic and economic terms. In demographic and economic terms, during the twentieth century, the migration process in South
Africa has comprised urbanization as its primary strand. Most often in the second half of the twentieth century, urbanization took place in terms of step-wise gravity flow. The major counter-influence which has been called displaced urbanization was rooted in apartheid-motivated constraints on the free movement of members of the African ethnic group in the country. Consequently, numerous urban places located in the periphery of South Africa's space economy grew in the former homelands. This apartheid ideology was shed in 1994 when a new South African democratic government was established.

Since that date which heralded freedom of movement within the country for all citizens, migration flows have become more complicated. In the first place, the vast majority of members of the two minority ethnic groups of Whites and Asians were urban residents at this time and subsequent migration has been frequent and predominantly between urban places, between major metropolitan areas in particular. The third minority ethnic group, the Coloureds, though already more than 50% urbanized, includes a significant minority of rural residents residing in the south-west of the country. Within this group, urbanization continues though at a slower rate than earlier and, significantly, not toward the metropolitan area of Cape Town, but toward regional towns in this region (Bekker & Cramer, 2003).

The African ethnic group in South Africa is majoritarian and, though significantly urbanized, still comprises a majority of rural residents. It also comprises the large majority of poor households. Huge population shifts are taking place within this ethnic group. Though people are moving on a massive scale from rural to urban places, it appears that shifts from rural to rural are even more massive. One result of this process is intense competition for land in areas that are densifying. In spite of the amount of available land in South Africa, the historical and demographic results of apartheid land deprivation have led to high levels of artificial rather than spontaneous densification for the poor African rural population, and to acute demand for living sites in areas with advantages in terms of economic access to the developed economy (Cross, 2000). In effect, South Africa's rural population is becoming more concentrated in dense clusters, many of which may be classified as dense rural informal settlements in which cultivation and stock-farming is rapidly disappearing. Institutionally, accordingly, these settlements increasingly fall under the category of 'other rural' rather than 'traditional rural'. Poor rural people are leaving more remote rural areas toward a range of destinations. This is a move away from a collapsing land economy toward the nearest location of the developed cash economy. In addition, migrant labour is in sharp decline thereby diminishing possibilities for oscillatory migration (DBSA, 2011).

Three additional reasons may be given for these flows. In the first place, unemployment rates are high in both urban and rural areas. Accordingly, in a city, job competition is so high that it is predominantly the urban resident with urban networks who has a fair chance to find employment. In the second place, deterioration of living conditions in the homeland rural areas is so severe that established households are been forced to migrate, and return migration is diminishing. In the third
place, the new South African state has been providing infrastructure on scale for the South African poor, in metropolitan areas as well as in other urban and rural places (Muller, 2010). This infrastructure (which typically includes a residential plot, funding for a house, and allied residential services) acts as a significant 'second-best option' for poor individuals and households in the migration stream. In effect, if one believes that jobs are unavailable in potential receiving areas, such infrastructure becomes the main attractor. Simultaneously, if information is received of job opportunities elsewhere, a decision to relocate may well be taken – jobs remain the first option. In effect, such 'moving on' fuels continuing population shifts.

These population shifts in South Africa affect the three institutional sectors – the commercial, the traditional and the 'other' – differently and affect different rural regions of the country differently as well. If the commercial sector is viewed a socio-economic institution – a way of life for all those involved in commercial agriculture – levels of living as well as security on a commercial farm are generally significantly higher than their equivalents in the traditional and 'other' rural sectors or, for that matter, in dense urban informal settlements where unemployment is particularly high (see Bekker, 2003; Cross, et al. 1999; Johnson & Schlemmer, 1998). Of primary importance, is the fact that typically at least one member of the on-farm worker household is employed full-time within this institution. Though this sector has been shedding on-farm labour and farm worker dependants over the past thirty years, off-farm employment offers farm workers (and their households) equivalent advantages, especially if these are compared to individuals and households without fixed employment and residing in dense rural informal settlements. Not all farm worker households however retain job ties with a commercial farm after a move and, in these cases, find themselves within a changed institutional framework, within the 'other' rural sector more often than within the traditional sector (Muller, 2010).

The traditional sector relies on institutions that emerge from and rely on generations of face-to-face relations, on interactions based on micro-level governance. In a local rural area within this sector, as population instability – migration streams out of, and to a lesser extent others into, the locality – increases, interaction and governance on the ground become harsher and more impersonal, with potential for disorder and exploitation. In short, rising migration streams undermine the efficacy of traditional micro institutions in this sector. Recent research (Cross, et al. 1997; Cross, et al. 1999) indicates that such migration streams have reached extraordinarily high levels in traditional rural areas on the Eastern seaboard – in the former KwaZulu, Transkei and Ciskei in particular. Simultaneously, the rural economy in this sector is not predominantly agrarian. Nationwide, only a minority of residents still cultivate, and the rate has been falling (DBSA, 2011).

The other sector may be viewed as comprising settlements which fall under neither the commercial nor the traditional institutional sectors. Free-standing rural densification accounts for the largest share of dense rural settlement, and is not linked closely to any level of urban centre.
Some of this dense settlement relates to local-level locational advantage, but much of it seems to have no spatial rationale other than apartheid's historical preference for displacing black settlement to remote areas away from the urban core (World Bank, 2010).

However, in aggregate, this category of rural dense settlement represents the extreme outer rim of the mobilized cash economy. In terms of access to infrastructure and particularly to transport, schools, shops, and other services, these areas usually offer a weak form of urban access (Muller, 2010). In addition to better chances of obtaining water and electricity, moving closer to transport access gives some cost advantage over living in outlying areas where long and expensive trips are required to reach schools and services, buy food, collect pensions or perform other urban-related tasks (World Bank, 2009). These areas appear to develop when rural households reach the stage of needing their own housing site, and take the opportunity to move a short distance to a locally advantaged area. People who remain in these rural densifying areas are typically the old and the poor, those whose rural assets are important to them, or those who do not have the urban experience and contacts or the resources needed to mobilize a move to a more advantaged area.

A recent study estimates that this sector comprises at least 7 to 8 million residents (Cross, 2000). It is appropriate at this point to estimate the relative sizes of the three rural institutional sectors we put forward earlier. We assume the population of rural South Africa is 20 million. It is known that both the number of commercial farmers and farmworkers (together with their dependants) involved in the commercial sector has been dropping. Numbers of white farmers dropped from 115 000 in the 1950s to 65 000 in 1985 (Lipton, et al. 1995:407) to a figure below 60 000 today. Employment in commercial agriculture likewise dropped from some one and a half million in the 1970s to less than a million in the 1990s (Vink, 2004). Since rural African household sizes have been dropping and were estimated at 5 persons in 1995 (Stats SA,2000:29), it would seem that as a maximum not more than four and half to five million farm workers and their dependants find themselves in the commercial sector. Most but by no means all these persons moreover are resident on commercial farmland, that is, as on-farm rather than off-farm workers together with their households.

The other two rural institutional sectors the traditional and the other probably comprise approximately the same number of persons since the 'other' sector was estimated above to include 7 to 8 million residents. As a rough estimate, accordingly, the proportions of all rural residents found in these three institutional sectors are:

6. Rural-urban migration

Population movement for the period 2001 to 2006 reveal that larger towns and cities are generally witnessing a net gain of people, while rural areas are experiencing a loss. Metropolitan areas are experiencing the highest influx rates, followed by secondary cities (Phulisani, 2009). Although most urban-bound migration has traditionally originated in rural areas due to the high rural-urban income differential and the fact that urban (especially metropolitan) areas traditionally provided
more employment opportunities than rural areas of origin, there are distinct signs that this migration stream is slowing down, or at least diverting (University of Stellenbotsch, 2009). The difficulty of finding employment in cities, coupled with the low agricultural returns in rural areas, are increasingly forcing many individuals to move to urban or peri-urban closer to their rural areas of origin (Muller, 2010). There are at least two reasons for this trend: first, the cost of migration (as well as the cost of living in smaller towns or peri-urban areas) is lower than that of living in the cities, and there is better access to government-supplied welfare, services and national transport. In addition, such a move allows some level of access to natural resources. Second, migration to closer areas may make it easier to retain links with home areas, providing assurance from kith and kin in the event of unemployment or illness (Makgetla, 2010).

Various authors maintain that migrants are attracted by the combination of the availability of infrastructure and the possibility of a multiple livelihood strategy in the areas of destination. Fast growth of smaller urban centres and the resultant inadequate delivery of infrastructure, however, often serve as pitfalls to migration. The beginning of the 21st Century has brought with it increasing demand for skilled labour, and hence strong competition with the growing ranks of urban unemployed. An analysis of individual migration between 1992 and 1996 showed that the traditional rural migration sending areas have lower migration rates than the more urbanised areas (Stellenbotsch, 2004). The study also finds that migration from these rural areas is constrained by poverty, unemployment and poor education. The inability to migrate thus becomes a measure of vulnerability. Areas with higher migration rates are typified by higher educational standards, service and infrastructural development and better employment opportunities. Despite this relative slow-down, rural out-migration remains strong (World Bank, 2009).

It is important to point out though, that the failure to escape the consequences of poor services, high population densities, and poor economic prospects in rural areas would have a detrimental impact on human well-being in those areas. It is for this reason that the Spatial Development Framework proposes a strong focus on education, health care and basic service delivery in such areas. Another strategy followed by poorly equipped rural residents is to migrate to nearby towns in search of better service delivery prospects and possibly housing. These movements often exacerbate already-high levels of unemployment (Storper, 2010).

7. Economic drivers of urbanisation

The main reason for rural–urban migration in South Africa is the same as in most parts of the world, namely differences in economic opportunity. Cities have consistently outpaced the rest of the country in terms of economic employment growth. This is because they tend to be more productive in terms of the value of the goods and services they generate and the efficiency with which they are produced. This partly reflects the ‘agglomeration economies’ that benefit large concentrations of economic activity, including: matching business requirements for labour, premises and other resources; sharing infrastructure, services and information; and mutual
learning between firms and other institutions (Duranton and Puga, 2004; World Bank, 2009; Storper, 2010). Cities also accommodate higher-value functions such as corporate headquarters, financial and business services and manufacturing, and high-order public services, such as national and provincial departments, universities and major hospitals. They have also been home to most of the foreign direct investment that South Africa has attracted in recent years, such as in motor-vehicle manufacturing and call centres. Figure shows the contribution of different places to South Africa's total economic output (or Gross Value Added (GVA)). The five large metros dominate the national economy, accounting for over half (52 per cent) of total economic activity. Among them, the three Gauteng metros account for almost a third (32 per cent) of national output. Gauteng is by far the most important geographical concentration of economic activity and increasingly operates as a single functional region.

8. Figure 2: Share of total GVA in South Africa

Figure 2 shows the level of economic output (or Gross Value Added (GVA)) per person. This reflects the level of productivity (output per worker) and the proportion of the population in employment. Each of the nine main cities has higher average output than the country as a whole. The levels of GVA per person in the largest metros are between 50 and 80 per cent higher than the national average, reflecting their higher-value functions and the higher rates of employment than elsewhere. The Gauteng metros and Cape Town have substantially higher average output than the rest. 

Figure 3: Gross Value Added per capita, 2010 (Rand, 2005 prices)
The availability of employment varies greatly across the country between different types of settlement, with a marked divergence between the metros and other areas (Figure 3). Employment has increased by approximately 25 per cent in the metros in the last 15 years, but it has barely increased in the secondary cities. It has fallen slightly in the former Bantustans and declined by more than 10 per cent in the commercial farming areas. Almost all the net increase in employment in South Africa over the last 15 years appears to have occurred in the six metros. The impact of the recession is clear everywhere, however (Figure 3) cities have proved no more resilient than other places. Nevertheless, urban conditions are still much better than elsewhere. According to the 2010 General Household Survey, 53 per cent of individuals in the metros aged between 15 and 64 were in employment, compared with only 29 per cent in the former Bantustans. Furthermore, of those in employment, only 11 per cent of workers in the metros earned under R1000 per month (about US$125), compared with 28 per cent in the former Bantustans.
Differences in availability of employment are reflected in differences in the sources of household income in different places. Figure 4 above compares the main sources of income for households in cities and rural areas in 2002 and 2010. Two-thirds (66 per cent) of households in the cities secured their main income from wages and salaries in 2010, down from 71 per cent in 2002 because of the recession. In rural areas the proportion was only just over two-fifths (42 per cent) in 2010, down from 46 per cent in 2002. The high proportion of households in the rural areas dependent on transfers (pensions/grants and remittances) is even more revealing. The wide gap in employment between urban and rural areas is reflected in a big disparity in average incomes, which helps to explain the strength of rural–urban migration pressures. It has been estimated that at least two-thirds of households in the former Bantustans survive on less than US$2 a day (a common international poverty line) compared with 40 per cent in the metros (Makgetla, 2010).
Figure 5 shows that a third of rural households relied mainly on social grants from the state in 2010, up from a quarter in 2002. Basically, grants supplied to pensioners and children have become the main income for entire families. Only one in seven households (14 per cent) in the cities relied mainly on social grants in 2010. Rural households also rely heavily on transfers from other family members (‘remittances’).

Between 2002 and 2010, social grants in rural areas grew mainly at the expense of remittances – either compensating households for shrinking transfers from relatives or reducing the pressure to remit funds home. Remittances are bound to have been even more significant in the heyday of the migrant-labour system. Overall, urban economies are clearly stronger and more self-sufficient than rural economies, although employment levels have not kept pace with growth in the working-age population. In rural areas, employment levels are much lower and even if people have jobs their earnings tend to be very low. This leaves rural households heavily dependent on transfers from government or family members. Such transfers help to alleviate poverty but do not compensate for the lack of self-sustaining economic activities. High levels of poverty in rural areas are also associated with substantial food insecurity. According to the 2009 General Household Survey, 24 per cent of households in the former Bantustans said they sometimes ran out of money to buy food, compared with 15 per cent in the metros.

Another implication of this evidence is that stronger economic growth in large urban areas over the last decade has effectively funded the expansion on a large scale of social programmes to towns and rural areas. As a result, the fortunes of city and rural economies have become more interdependent. Other synergies between urban and rural areas include the supply of agricultural products to urban markets, and the growth of tourism and recreation in rural areas originating from the cities.
Policymakers have often overlooked such connections, and viewed rural and urban areas in isolation. There is an unproductive discourse that perceives spatial issues in either rural or urban terms, and ignores their interdependence. This diverts attention from the bigger picture of a national territory that is becoming increasingly integrated, and in which different places perform different roles and functions that complement each other and support the expansion and development of the overall economy. Rural areas have potential for increased tourism, mining and alternative energy generation, in addition to agriculture and agro-processing. The geography of the economy has not featured prominently in mainstream policy since 1994. Macro-economic concerns with inflation targeting, fiscal prudence and stability have taken precedence over micro-economic measures to stimulate investment and growth, including industrial policy and spatial economic policy (Turok and Parnell, 2009). Centralised systems of government planning, coordination and negotiation have been supported over regional and local institutions.

The notion of a developmental state has begun to feature more in the policy discourse, but generally as a centralised entity without much sensitivity to diverse regional and local circumstances and relationships with business and other stakeholders (Turok, 2010). A range of ad hoc national projects have been introduced over the years targeted at different types of area (such as particular rural localities and urban townships). This is based on an understandable tendency to focus on socio-economic need, but little apparent recognition of the need to support distinctive economic strengths and potential as well, especially if national employment growth, competitiveness and employment are to be maximised. Meanwhile, in many parts of the world there has been a sea change in attitudes towards cities. Many national governments are vigorously supporting investment in their major economic centres on the basis that they offer the best returns in terms of productivity, enterprise, innovation and the solution to many of their greatest social and environmental problems (Glaeser, 2011; Turok, 2012).

9. Conclusion
South Africa’s experience since 1994 holds important lessons for other countries undergoing urban transition. Formulating progressive policies, passing laws and creating city-wide municipal institutions are not enough to harness the potential of urbanisation and to ensure integrated urban development. Broad policy aspirations and sectoral programmes need to be translated into focused city-level strategies that deliberately align housing, transport, land-use and economic decisions within a long-term vision of a better future. Such strategies also need to engage local communities, the private sector and other stakeholders, in order to channel their energies in common and constructive directions. A broader lesson from South Africa’s historic experience is that the processes of urbanization and industrialisation are politically mediated and may not automatically improve the livelihoods of rural migrants. People moving to cities may have to organise themselves to press for the removal of barriers that prevent them from securing better living and working conditions through
access to urban labour markets and well-located land on which to settle. The creation of constitutional rights for the poor can help to promote their cause, especially if backed by political will and sufficient government resources to meet their basic needs. Equally important are determined city-level leadership and investment plans to manage urban development more effectively, to boost jobs and livelihoods, and to work with poorer communities to improve essential. In order to deal with the problem of unemployment and job insecurity which seem to be among the key drivers for migration.
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