

Urban *plus* Rural

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by

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

As an alumna of this university and as a 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, Africa 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, all cities contained less than five percent of the world’s population. Today that proportion is fifty percent and growing.

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 25 percent of their countrywide populations but are now facing an average 5 percent annual rate of urbanization.

In the context of Tanzania, the municipality of Arusha - with its seemingly expansive pastoral hinterland - has grown from 55,000 people in 1978 to 270,000 in 2002. At an average growth rate since 1988 of 11.7 percent per year, Arusha will double its population in just 6 years. Morogoro went from 60,000 in 1978 to 229,000 in 2002, growing at a rate of 5.4 percent per year since 1988. At this rate its population will double in less than 15 years. Similarly, we have seen Mbeya, Moshi, Dodoma, Mwanza and other towns grow at explosive rates over the past 15 years. In this same period, Dar es Salaam doubled its population to nearly 2.5 million.

Meanwhile, the total population of Tanzania rose from about 25 million to 35 million - a fifty percent increase. During the period from 1988, when the total population of urban areas in Tanzania was increasing by about 7 million persons, rural Tanzania was gaining only about 3 million, mostly through natural growth. When I came to this university in 1972, only 7 in every 100 of my compatriots lived in the city. Today, it is one of every three. By the year 2030, it will be nearly two of every three. Tanzania will have become what was unthinkable in my youth - an urbanized nation.

The cities of developing countries are now the locus of the fastest urban growth in the world, harvesting the countryside of Asia, Africa and Latin America of people who can no longer tolerate the limitations of rural life or who simply see urban life as presenting more options for livelihood. By 2010, Mumbai (Bombay), Lagos and Sao Paulo will be the world's second, third and fourth largest cities, each with 20 million people. Only metropolitan Tokyo will be larger. The kind of environmental stress, or the ecological footprint, that such mega-settlements put on their respective locations - and which finally spill over to other areas - is obvious.

There is no doubt that agriculture remains the dominant sector in Tanzania and a major contributor to the GDP. It cannot be disputed also that the level of productivity in the rural sector, including the carrying capacity of agriculture have not, as of now, reached the extent of releasing surplus labour that is compelled to seek alternative means of subsistence. Nevertheless, the dynamic of economic development in Tanzania and in the rest of developing countries, is such that more people will move towards areas of increasing industrial and tertiary activities. In fact, a bulk of the valorisation of agricultural products will take place through industrial and service complements that are mainly located in urban centres.

Indeed, urban centres will continue to have a higher share of national output than their share of the population. Lima, for example, has less than 30 percent of Peru's population but produces over 40 percent of its national output. Bangkok, in an even more dramatic example produces nearly 40 percent of Thailand's output with just 12 percent of its population, nearly the same ratio of production to population as Sao Paulo, Brazil. Here, one could engage in the urban versus rural debate that has been raging for more than two centuries, not only among economists and sociologists but also among poets and artists. Pro-rural and pro-urban sentiments have had a strong influence on development strategies. Among international development agencies, for example, investments in rural and urban areas have sometimes been seen as mutually exclusive and competing.

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 centres 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. As you may be aware, many of our urban centres evolved and functioned for a long time as extractive nodes, sustaining only a parasitic relationship with the rural areas. Many Tanzanian towns emerged as administrative centres and transport nodes for sustaining colonial extraction. These 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 hopes 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.

It is my proposition to you that the quest for 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 economics through regional development planning methods, cultural anthropology, geography, social research, ecology and engineering.

In closing, I should hope you see clearly stated 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.