

## Directing Research Efforts to Rurban Areas – Experience from Africa

### **Introduction:**

In rapidly transforming countries, examining the flows and interdependencies between the rural and the urban is crucial to understand how the current development trajectory has differential implications for different people and systems. With growing urban centres and changing rural dynamics, the need to explore 'Rurban spaces' as research themes becomes more imminent. Furthermore, given the dynamism of rural-urban flows, it is important to undertake frequent and robust research efforts to identify the latest trends and features of 'Rurbanism', eliminate myths and misleading assumptions, and contribute to a corpus of evidence on these new arenas.

### **Background:**

Africa currently has a low proportion of its population living in cities and towns. However, this is rapidly changing. By the middle of this century, it is predicted that the majority of Africans will be urban residents. This reinforced the need to understand the connections between rural areas and cities to plan for the future needs of the residents of Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries. Knowledge of the ways in which Rurban systems are changing in a globalizing world is central to an understanding of rural livelihoods and rural poverty reduction. In line with this, dedicated research efforts were required to be able to gauge the extent of rural-urban flows, the possibilities of Rurban growth and the barriers to Rurban development. Evidence generation was seen as crucial for building and shaping policies in spatial development and Rurban planning in the African context.

For this purpose, the European Union (EU) commissioned the African Rural-City Connections (Rurban Africa Project) in 2012 to further the evidence creation and policy development processes in African Rurban research. The overall objective of this project has been to explore the connections between rural transformations, mobility, and urbanization processes and analyse how these contribute to an understanding of the scale, nature and location of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

### **Details of the Intervention:**

The Rurban Africa Project has been in operation from April 2012 to March 2016 and has focused on four sub-Saharan African countries: Ghana, Cameroon, Rwanda and Tanzania. Research was led by the University of Copenhagen and organized into four thematic work packages; Agricultural Transformation, Rural Livelihoods, City Dynamics, and Access to Services; and two work packages working on dissemination and policy dialogues and management and syntheses. Analyses of secondary data, collection of empirical data and work package wise analyses have been undertaken with similar methodologies in all countries and facilitated comparisons at various levels.

The Rurban Africa research has developed insights into how rural-urban connections form social transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa. This has included critically scrutinizing the assumption that migration from rural areas to cities is one of the major development challenges faced by national and local governments in their efforts to stimulate economic growth and curb poverty.

**Impact:**

The Rurban Africa project has brought together multi-disciplinary teams in four countries, covering a large number of case study locations in both rural and urban areas. The project has advanced the state-of-the-art understanding of rural-city connections in SSA. Further, the case study based research with its focus on regional and city wise development offers important insights into the spatial transformations in SSA.

By selecting a focus on dynamic rural regions and primate & secondary cities in all cases studied countries, the project brought together different perspectives to document how urbanization dynamics and rural transformations are inextricably linked. On one hand, this helped create a robust evidence base to develop future Rurban policies in the four countries under review, and in other countries where such lessons may be applicable. On the other, the research has helped avoid certain misleading assumptions in policy making- for example, the assumption that rural-urban connections are unidirectional from rural to urban, which then undermines both rural and urban economies. This study has shown that city growth dynamics are less directly affected by the flow of poor migrants to the city and reinforced the fact that rural transformation in dynamic rural regions attracts urban based investors, which point to the importance of moving beyond the myths.

*Source: University of Copenhagen. (2016). Final Report Summary - RURBANAFRICA (African Rural-City Connections). European Union.*