

Understanding the Drivers of Rural-Urban Linkages: The Case of Meme Division, Cameroon

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Abstract:- The flows of goods, people, ideas and services between urban and rural areas are collectively known as rural-urban linkages. This interdependence makes one area unable to develop in isolation from the other. In Meme Division, Cameroon, the rural areas (Mbonge and Konye) and lone urban area (Kumba) depend on each other for goods, food, labour and other basic services. The magnitude of rural-urban linkages determines the level of development of both the rural and urban areas. Therefore having a critical analysis of the factors that drive these linkages between them is crucial for development and livelihood sustenance. It is in line with the aforementioned that this study seeks to identify the primary drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme, Cameroon. The stratified random sampling technique was used in questionnaire administration among the urban and rural inhabitants of Meme Division. A three point Likert Scale questionnaires were used to collect data on the drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme. Descriptive techniques like tables were used in the presentation of the data. Findings reveal that complementarity (demand-supply relationship) in the form of demand for specialized health services, the market potentials of both rural and urban areas, the demand for higher education services and the state transport infrastructure (transferability) are respectively the most significant drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division, Cameroon. The paper advocates for an awareness of the crucial factors of rural-urban linkages by development authorities as a pathway for rural and urban development in Meme Division, Cameroon.

Keywords:- Rural-Urban Linkages, Drivers, Complementarity, Transferability, Intervening Opportunities, Meme Division.

I. INTRODUCTION

Nationally, rural and urban areas are interdependent economically, socially and environmentally (United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, UNCHS, 2004). The UNCHS and the European Union Committee of Spatial Development adopted the concept of rural-urban linkages to emphasise the visible and invisible interdependence between urban and rural areas (UNCHS, 2004).

This article defines rural-urban linkages as the flow of people, capital, goods, ideas and information between rural and urban areas (United Nations, 2005). Article 10 of the Preamble of the UN-Habitat II Agenda states that cities, towns and rural settlements are linked through the movements of goods, resources and people and those urban-rural linkages are of crucial importance for the sustainability of human settlements (UN-Habitat, 2004).

Several factors may enhance or deter rural-urban linkages worldwide. They are either economic, social and/or physical needs and demands between rural and urban settlements. According to Okpala (2003), adequate infrastructure such as transportation is the backbone of the urban-rural development linkage approach. Adequate investments in infrastructure, particularly transportation infrastructure, improve rural productivity and allow access to markets, jobs and public services. Von Braun (2007) also noted that the development of infrastructure has the potential to lower transportation costs and improve access to markets for both urban and rural consumers and producers.

Moreover, Ndenecho (2011) observed that the adequacy and efficiency of infrastructure provision to a large extent, determines the success or failure of relationships between towns and their hinterlands in Cameroon. Therefore the quality of transport and other infrastructure linking Kumba and its surrounding rural areas of Mbonge and Konye could determine the efficient movement of goods and people to meet demand and access services for their sustenance.

The Problem

According to the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements, UNCHS (2004) because urban and rural areas are interdependent, there is need for an integrated approach to promote balanced and mutually supportive urban-rural development. Furthermore, the United Nations had concluded that the premise of a complementing rural and urban development lies in strong and mutually supportive rural-urban interactions (United Nations, 2005).

Moreover, as Fombe and Balgah (2012) observed, the development of both rural and urban areas depends on the volume of spatial interaction taking place between them. In Meme Division, Kumba, the lone urban area depends on fresh foods from the surrounding rural areas of Mbonge and Konye. The rural areas act as markets for urban manufactured goods while Kumba act as education and health centres for the rural residents. It is on this basis that this study attempts to fill the gap in literature on the factors driving rural-urban linkages; on which lays the development of both rural and urban areas.

Meme Division is one of the six divisions of the South West Region (SWR) of Cameroon. It is made up of five sub-divisions; Kumba I, II and III (largely urban) and Mbonge and Konye (dominantly rural). Kumba is a commercial town and performs other service functions while Mbonge and Konye sub-divisions are major cocoa and food production areas in the SWR.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Rural-urban linkages refer to the growing flow of capital, people and goods, ideas, information and diffusion innovation between urban and rural areas (Okpala, 2003). According to Ghiurca & Mihai (2012) the movements between the city and commune, and vice versa, occur for different reasons: demographic, economic/commercial, administrative/legal, cultural, financial, health care and jobs. This may favour the mutual transfer of labour, resources, information and values amongst others. The above literature provided information on key drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division, Cameroon.

The Habitat III (2015) added that disparities in spatial development form the crux of why strong urban-rural linkages are essential in distributing equal opportunities and benefits of the urbanisation process. With increasing urbanization and connectivity, the linkages between urban, peri-urban and rural areas intensify and differences are reducing. This is precipitated by the increased flow of knowledge, economic activities and information between urban and rural areas. From the above review, the study was able to identify key drivers of rural-urban links like economic, commercial, finance and health drivers amongst others.

The ideas of Zewdu & Malek (2010) perceive the growth in nonfarm economic activity as an important facilitating factor for rural urban linkages. Nonfarm income activities allow resources like labour and capital to transit functionally and spatially from agricultural to nonagricultural activities, facilitating rural-urban linkages which in turn lead to rural transformation.

Tacoli (2004) postulated some of the driving forces of rural-urban linkages as follows: declining income from farming due to lack of land and other inputs pushes people to engage in nonfarm activities, which are often located in urban centers; Successful and commercial farmers need direct access to markets and these markets are usually located in urban centers. Better access to markets can increase farming incomes and encourage shifts to nonfarm engagement and may also create markets in the rural areas for incentive goods. This review emphasised access to markets as an important driver of rural-urban linkages economically in Meme Division.

According to Fombe & Balgah (2012) the roles of spatial interaction apply to the relationship that exists between the town and the countryside. There is the existence of a mutual relationship because of the benefits derived by the town from its rural surrounding settlements in terms of foodstuff, cultural activities, low paid and unskilled labour and above all a market for its goods. These factors can be better understood if discussed as economic, social, cultural and environmental. Economic interaction entails the exchanges of goods and services in the various markets.

Social interaction involves specialised services like administration, modern medicine, education and communication; while rudimentary services include things like traditional medicine from rural areas. Towns are endowed with higher institutions of learning such as high schools and professional training institutions which attract a lot of rural population. Literature reviewed by Fombe & Balgah (2012) elaborated the different factors of rural-urban linkages as economic, social, cultural and environmental; which applies in the case of Meme Division.

Okali et al. (2001) added that rural-urban interactions are affected by four groups of factors: historical, political (policy), economic, socio-cultural and environmental, each of which includes several elements. Distance from an urban centre will affect the type and frequency of 'flows' between village and city. Their postulate gave the current study insight on the drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division.

According to Lynch (2005), agriculture depends on manufactured goods both for the transformation of produce and for the consumer goods which are in demand as agricultural incomes rise. This study identifies demand and supply (complementarity) as key drivers of rural-urban linkages in the world and why not Meme Division, Cameroon.

The UN-HABITAT (2004) noted that the links between cities and the countryside depend on the infrastructure connecting them. Improve the infrastructure network, and rural production increases, giving people in the countryside better access to markets, information and jobs. Poor infrastructure and inadequate infrastructure services are among the major factors hindering African cities to serve as engines of development locally and to compete in the international markets (Gantso, 2008).

The most important factors affecting rural-urban interaction in spatial development specialists' opinion were as follows: availability of public transport and quality of roads, national government financial support, and local business activity (Bulderberga, 2012). The development of infrastructure has the potential to lower transportation costs and improve access to markets for both urban and rural consumers and producers (Von Braun, 2007). The above reviews emphasise the role of transport infrastructure in rural-urban interactions in Meme Division.

As Ndenecho (2011) noted, the adequacy and efficiency of infrastructure provision to a large extent, determines the success or failure of relationships between towns and their hinterlands in Cameroon. In Meme Division, poor road accessibility between Kumba and its surrounding rural areas provide a great challenge to economic opportunities and access to services. This is likely more crucial during the rainy seasons due to the unpaved or earthy nature of the roads. Indirectly, this may hamper the strength of rural urban interactions/linkages.

According to Okpala (2003), adequate infrastructure such as transportation is the backbone of the urban-rural development linkage approach. Adequate investments in infrastructure, particularly transportation infrastructure, improve rural productivity and allow access to markets, jobs and public services. With reference to the Food and Agricultural Organisation, FAO (2009), in rapidly urbanising countries, agriculture produces strategically important food for the growing number of urban residents, thus ensuring food security at prices that are affordable. This review reveals the economic interdependence between the lone urban and rural areas of Meme Division.

Functional links between urban and rural areas are determined by market forces and demography. Information society, business and societal networking also play an increasing role in shaping urban-rural relations because communities are less and less geographically constrained when developing linkages (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, CEMR, 2013).

Agbortoko (2015) also undertook a study on strengthening rural-urban interactions as a contemporary paradigm to sustainable development in Meme Division, Cameroon. The author observed that the Kumba urban market harbours traders from different areas amongst which are shop owners dealing mostly with manufactured goods and makeshift owners who are dealers of mainly foodstuffs produced directly from the farms. These findings further

reveal complementarity as a key driver of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While rural-urban linkages are specifically flows of goods, people and services between rural and urban areas, spatial interactions are flows that occur at a larger scale. Edward Ullman in the 1950s postulated three bases of spatial interaction between two places. These are complementarity, transferability and intervening opportunities. Complementarity refers to a demand-supply relationship between two settlements. For two areas to be complementary, their demand for a particular item or service must be backed by supply. The demand for market, fresh foods, labour, more specialised education and health services, administrative functions and capital between the predominantly urban centre, Kumba and its surrounding rural areas implies both areas are complementary.

According to Ullman, intervening opportunities tend to reduce interactions between two distant complementary areas. Besides complementarity and the absence of an intervening opportunity, the third condition under which spatial interaction occurs is transferability. Transferability by Ullman refers to the ease with which goods and people can be moved from one place to another. It is measured in real time and money costs. If the friction of distance is too great, interaction will not occur in spite of a complementary supply-demand relationship. This theory reveals three key drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division. These are demand (complementarity), the state of transport infrastructure (transferability) and the presence or absence of an intervening opportunity between Kumba and its surrounding rural areas of Mbonge and Konye.

IV. METHODOLOGY

The target population of this study constituted the residents of Kumba, Mbonge and Konye sub-divisions. The main reason why Meme was chosen for this study is because its lone urban centre, Kumba has an extensive sphere of influence. It influences several surrounding rural areas in Mbonge and Konye sub-divisions. The population of Kumba is dominantly involved in commerce with its surrounding rural areas, requiring an understanding of the relationship and rural-urban linkages that exist between them.

Multiple sampling techniques were employed to select respondents for the study. First, clustered sampling was employed where in, the researcher divided the target population (Meme Division) into two clusters: Kumba and Mbonge/Konye which constituted the urban and rural clusters respectively. To select the rural and urban sample units, purposive sampling was applied. By using three criteria; population size, distance from Kumba and site/situation, 11 villages were selected from the rural cluster to constitute the rural sample. These are Ekombe-Bonji, Marumba II, Bai Panya, Boa, Bekondo, Bole, Big Ngwandi and Ediki in Mbonge sub-division and Ikiliwindi, Matondo

II and Wone villages in Konye subdivision. Based on the extent of commercial and service functions in some neighbourhoods in Kumba, the study also selected Kumba Town, Fiango, Kumba Mbeng and Pulletin to constitute the urban sample.

Thirdly, random sampling was employed. A total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to acquire data on the drivers of rural-urban linkages. Fifty respondents in the rural areas versus 50 respondents in the urban area, Kumba were randomly selected. A three point Likert Scale questionnaires were used to collect data on the drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme. Descriptively, tables were used in the presentation of the data.

V. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Generally, the factors of rural-urban interactions can be better understood if as economic, social, cultural and environmental (Fombe & Balgah, 2012). These economic factors include population increase (backed by demand), market, employment, transport infrastructure and government or administrative functions. According to Ghiurca & Mihai (2012) movements between the city and commune and vice versa, occur for different reasons: economic, commercial, legal, financial, health care and jobs. Towns provide service, market and administration functions to their surrounding rural areas (European Spatial Planning Observation Network, ESPON, 2010). Table 1 demonstrates the drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division.

5.1 Health and Market potential

Findings reveal that the demand for more specialized health services is the most important driver of linkages between rural and urban Meme; with a highly significant majority of the respondents (99.6%) affirming to the observation. Table 1 shows the primary drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division.

Secondary to the demand for health services is the market potentials of both the rural and urban areas of Meme. Another very significant majority of the respondents (99.4%) perceive the complementary demand and supply relationship between Mbonge/Konye and Kumba as the second factor responsible for rural-urban linkages in Meme Division (Table 1). Urban manufacturers and/or consumers on the one hand rely on the rural populations as markets for their manufactured products. Rural dwellers on the other hand rely on the urban populations as markets for their fresh food produce.

According to Lynch (2005) market places are an arena in which urban and rural populations come into direct contact. They are the central rural-urban interface in food chains, whether they are urban-based, drawing on a range of rural areas, to supply a city's retail and wholesale markets or rural markets that draw traders from a number of cities and farmers from the surrounding area. The interaction between the commune and the municipality is enhanced by the presence of economic activities (Ghiurca & Mihai, 2012). Moreover, Dabson (2007) postulated that the urban areas constitute the end market for rural production.

Mulongo et al (2010) in their study of rural-urban interlink and sustainability of urban centres in Kenya also found out that the link that exists between rural and urban areas is purely socio-economic. A case of Malaba town illustrates that, rural people depend upon small towns in rural regions for agricultural productivity, rural goods/services and distribution centres for commodities. Rural farmers depend on urban residents as markets for their farm produce and on the other hand, urban manufacturers also depend on rural residents as markets for their manufactured items.

Table 1: Drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division by respondents (percentage)

Indicators	Agree	Don't know	Disagree
Increase in population	97.4	02	1.6
Education	98.7	0.9	00
Health	99.6	00	00
Market potential	99.4	00	0.5
Transport infrastructure	96	1.4	2.5
Employment	89	5.7	5.3
Administrative functions	80	17	3.3
Physical/cultural attraction	61	31	7.5

Source: generated from field data (2019)

5.2. Education/ Population increase

The study observed that the demand for better education is the third most significant factor driving rural-urban linkages between Mbonge/Konye and Kumba; with a significant majority of the respondents (98%) affirming the observation (Table 1).

Findings reveal that there is a significant positive link between population increase in Kumba and its socio-economic relationships with its surrounding rural areas. A

significant percentage of the respondents (97%) perceive population increase as a key driver of rural-urban linkages (Table 1). Rural and urban areas cannot live in isolation from each other. There is bound to be linkages to meet diverse social and economic needs or demands. Examples of such demands include on the one hand the flow of fresh produce into urban markets and on the other hand the flow of processed goods from the urban area into the rural markets, the demand for health and education services, recreation and other urban/rural attractions. Dorosh et al

(2010) in their study of rural-urban transformation in Ethiopia observed that peripheral areas with limited market access and lower population densities will remain left out of the urban economic linkages developing in the central areas of the country. Functional links between urban and rural areas are determined by market forces and demography (CEMR, 2013).

5.3 Transferability

A significant proportion of the respondents (96%) perceive efficient transport infrastructure as a key determinant of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division as presented in Table 1. Transport infrastructure is a significant driver of both economic and social interactions between urban and rural areas. There could be demand for goods and services but supply may not be met if there is no available road infrastructure to move freight and people from one place to another. Transportation thus influences both complementarity and intervening opportunities.

Road infrastructure is very crucial for economic and social linkages between urban and rural areas. It hampers the quick transportation of produce from farms to markets, rural access to better education and health services in Kumba, the flow of processed goods from Kumba to these rural areas. It also results to several other challenges of rural-urban distribution such as food decay, goods damage and delays in the supply of commodities. This challenge is similar with that in Romania when Ghiurca & Mihai (2012) said 'the quality of transport infrastructure has a very important role in the degree of rural accessibility.' Lack of connectivity in transportation is a common problem faced by urban and rural areas (CEMR, 2013).

5.4 Employment

In search of skilled employment many youths migrate to Kumba temporarily or permanently. Majority of the respondents (89%) rated the search for employment as the 6th factor that drives rural urban interactions in Meme Division, Cameroon (Table 1). Just as many rural residents migrate to cities in search of economic opportunities, city residents also seek seasonal jobs in the countryside. For instance, in Colombia, some of the temporary workforce for the coffee harvest comes from the cities (Cohen & Garrett, 2009). The urban areas offer diverse job opportunities for rural populations (Dabson, 2007).

5.5 Administrative and physical functions

Some people live in Kumba (the urban area) and commute to work in the rural areas and others reside in the rural areas and commute to work in Kumba. Majority of the respondents (80%) rated administrative functions as the 7th factor responsible for rural-urban interactions (Table 1).

According to Fombe & Balgah (2012) cultural factors such as parental advice, native language and home crafts from rural areas, though minute and the demand for recreation facilities among urban and rural dwellers, also constitute an important area of interaction. Dabson (2007) adds that urban dwellers are attracted to mountains, wide-open spaces, pristine rivers, wildlife, and quiet special

places in rural America that offer opportunities for reflection, recreation, spirituality, and reconnection with nature. Others seek out the music, literature, art, and architecture that form part of the nation's rural cultural heritage. Physical/cultural attraction is the least factor that accounts for rural-urban linkages in Meme. Majority of the respondents (61%) view physical and/or cultural attraction as a factor propelling linkages between Kumba and its surrounding rural areas socially (Table 1).

Those withstanding, intervening opportunities have also been observed to trigger rural-urban linkages in Meme Division. According to Ullman (1950) an intervening opportunity tends to reduce interactions between two distant complementary areas. A trader responded that '*... I often leave Big Ngwandi market to buy at Bekondo market. But once at Bekondo market and I cannot find what I need, I move down to Ekombe-Bonji market. If I still cannot find what I need to purchase, then I move down to Kumba main market...*' (N. Masango, personal communication, April, 2019) So, in cases where the trader buys at Bekondo, then Bekondo market has acted as an intervening opportunity between Big Ngwandi and Ekombe-Bonji. When he/she buys at Ekombe-Bonji, Ekombe market is an intervening opportunity between Big Ngwandi and Kumba. This means Ekombe-Bonji village is an intervening opportunity between Bekondo and Kumba; and Bekondo, an intervening opportunity between Big Ngwandi and Ekombe.

More findings reveal that rain gates acted as artificial barriers to rural-urban interactions. Rain gates virtually tend to limit/check rural urban movements in the rainy season. It is a government measure to check movements from the urban area into these rural areas during the rains especially when the roads are impassable. The complete absence of electricity in some villages and poor road infrastructure also impairs rural access to urban health and education services. Intervening opportunities did not significantly influence rural-urban interactions socially because almost all the rural education and health services are equally of sub-standard.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several factors account for the pattern of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division, Cameroon. Complementarity in the form of demand for specialized health services, market potentials of both the rural and urban areas, higher education and the state of transport infrastructure are respectively significant factors driving rural-urban linkages in Meme Division. This is preceded by factors such as population increase, employment opportunities and recreational attractions. However, the study noted that the primary reason why rural dwellers migrated to the urban area (Kumba) is to access better health services meanwhile the primary motive of urban dwellers moving to the rural areas is to have access to fresh foods (rural market).

Since the development of both rural and urban areas simultaneously depend on the magnitude of the rural-urban interactions taking place between them, therefore, having a keen understanding of the very factors determining the

intensity of these inter-linkages is utmost crucial. It is against this background that the study sought to provide a detailed analysis of the various social and economic drivers of rural-urban linkages in Meme Division, Cameroon. This study is very crucial for rural and urban planning in Cameroon and other developing countries at large.

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