



Collaborating Organizations: Population Studies and Research Institute,
National Council for Population and Development, UNFPA

Non-existent migration and urbanization policy hinders Kenya's development

The continued interaction between migration and urbanisation in Kenya plays an important role in processes of urban change and development. It is therefore essential that policies and programmes reflect the existing interactions between areas of origin and destination, and more so, the value of the “urban” part of rural development and the “rural” part of urban development.

In essence, urban development strategies must take into account the rural links and context, and vice versa. The answer to urban development cannot be found in the urban areas alone. Policies ignoring this matrix may increase the vulnerability of those groups for whom the urban-rural divide is an important part of their life and survival strategy. Irrespective of the urbanisation challenges experienced in Kenya, cities will continue to have critical roles in the economic and social development of the country. Urbanization is critical for economic growth, reduction of poverty, stabilization of population growth, and long-term sustainability¹. However, realizing this potential requires a different mindset on the part of policymakers, a proactive approach and better governance that is guided by a robust migration and urbanization policy.

This policy brief is a product of locally-generated knowledge for a better understanding of the issues of internal migration and urbanization in Kenya, thereby advocating for appropriate migration and urbanization policies to harness the existing opportunities. The information in this brief will support the formulation and implementation of migration and urbanization policies and programmes for the promotion of development in Kenya.

Migration, Urbanization and Development

The colonial administration era instigated labour migration in Kenya, triggering rural-urban migration which is now the most common type of migration, and is the major driver of urbanisation and urban growth in the country. People migrate to towns in search of employment; better opportunities, infrastructure and services; and because of family and social networks. Rural-urban migration is conspicuous because it underlines the disparity between the two locations². Internal migration not only affects the sizes of the populations of the areas of origin and destination, but also affects their demographic characteristics. In addition, the receiving areas, especially urban centres,

are likely to experience the challenges of urban growth and development, such as pressure on existing resources (including infrastructure and services); conflicts in resource use; and competition for job and economic opportunities.

Kenya Vision 2030 recognizes that the country is moving towards a predominantly urban population, requiring planning for high quality urban livelihoods. In a broader national context, Kenya's Vision 2030 – the national long-term development blueprint – aims to transform the country into a newly-industrializing, middle-income nation providing a high quality of life to all its citizens in a clean and secure environment³. This recognition is, further, enhanced by the Dhaka Declaration of Global Leadership Meeting (2013), which declared that “Population dynamics are at the centre of the main development challenges of the 21st century, and must therefore be addressed in the post-2015 development agenda”. The declaration notes that the concentration of people in urban areas provides an opportunity to deliver public services at low per capita cost than if people were more geographically distributed.

Unfortunately, Kenya lacks a comprehensive national urban policy. This presents a major challenge in achieving sustainable urban development. Policies and strategies related to urbanization have traditionally been formulated within the framework of broader national/sectoral development plans and policies. For example, the spatial distribution policies adopted by the Government of Kenya in the post-independence National Development Plans were aimed at reducing the rapid population growth in the major urban centres, promoting the growth of small and medium-size urban centres, and encouraging rural development⁴. There are also various Acts of Parliament that have guided urban development such as The Local Government Act (Cap 265). “Urbanization is the core to economic growth and development, but only if planned and well managed, using appropriate policies.”

Effects of Migration on Urbanization

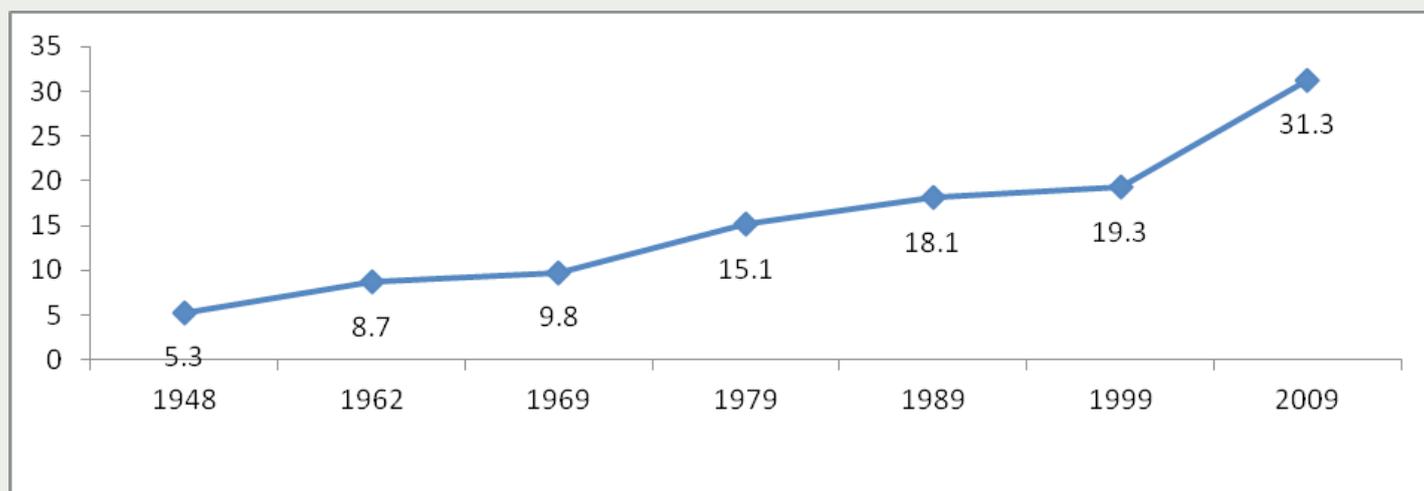
Kenya's Urbanization Trends

Urbanization in Kenya is almost entirely a twentieth century phenomenon and largely a product of British colonial administration⁵. As shown in Figure 1, the growth in the number of urban centres and their populations accelerated after independence when Africans were allowed to migrate to the urban areas without any legal and administrative restrictions. As a consequence, the urban population grew to 1 million people by 1969 representing 9.8 percent of the country's total population, with Nairobi and Mombasa accounting for a relatively larger share (67%) of the urban residents. The influx of Africans into the urban areas subsequently reduced the proportion of non-African population in most towns. By 1979, the overall level of urbanization had risen to 15 percent of the total population. This urban population of 2.3 million was living in 91 urban centres across the country with most of them concentrated in Nairobi and Mombasa.

Although the urban population increased from 2.3 million in 1979 to 3.8 million in 1989, the growth rate had fallen to 5.2 percent, compared to the 7.7 percent in the previous decade. Over the same period the number of urban centres increased to 139, with major increases being recorded in Nyanza (7 to 19), Western (6 to 14) and Central (13 to 19) regions. The increase in the number of urban centres and their populations raised the proportion of the population living in urban centres to 18 percent in 1989. In 1999, about 20 percent of the national population lived in urban areas, with more than half of them living in Nairobi, Mombasa, Nakuru and Kisumu. While the urban population share of Nairobi and Mombasa fell to 32 percent, the numbers of urban centres increased to 180 with a total population of 5.4 million people.

In 2009, the number of urban centres increased to 230 with a total population of 12 million people. The urban population as a percentage of the country's total population stood at 31.3 percent, meaning that one out of every three

Figure 1: Urban Population Trend in Kenya, 1948-2009 (Percent)



Source: 1948-2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census Reports



An aerial of Nairobi from Kibera informal settlement

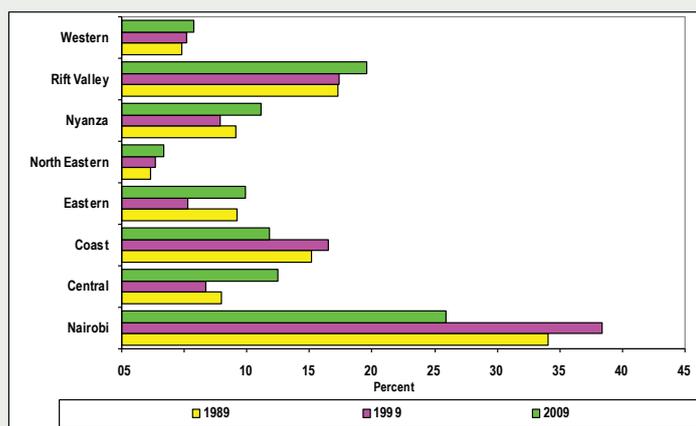
Kenyan lives in urban areas. From the time Kenya gained independence, the period between 1999 and 2009 yielded the highest urban growth rate of 8.3 percent.

The immense growth in Kenya's urbanisation, as shown in Figure 1, has resulted in social, economic and spatial development challenges, such as increased levels of poverty and economic vulnerability⁶ and food insecurity⁷. In 1992, the prevalence of poverty in the urban areas was estimated at 29 percent compared to 42 percent in the rural areas. In 1997, the urban figure had risen to 49 percent compared to 53 percent in the rural areas⁸.

The urban population of each region, as shown in Figure 2, has been increasing except for Eastern region, whose share fell sharply between the 1989 and 1999. Over the years, Nairobi has remained dominant with the largest share of the urban population, with North Eastern having the least share of not more than 3 percent. On the other hand, Rift

Valley and Western have had consistent increases in their shares while those of the other regions fluctuated.

Figure 2: Urbanisation trend in Kenya by Regions



Source: 1969-2009 Kenya Population and Housing Census Reports

Outcomes of Migration and Urbanization

The continued increase in urban population as a result of rural-urban migration has led to considerable strain on existing urban infrastructural facilities, leading to proliferation of informal and unplanned settlements (slums), resulting in declining quality of life and standards of living. According to the 2009 Census, 15 percent of Kenya's urban population lives in informal settlements. Kisumu leads with a high proportion (47%) of informal settlements' population, followed by Nairobi (36%), Mombasa (24%), Eldoret (23%) and Thika (11%) respectively⁹. In addition, there has been deepening social differentiation and inequality, polarization, and segregation and fragmentation of the cities; inadequate and poor provision of services (housing, water and sanitation, security), especially to the urban poor, sometimes leading to privatization of urban services¹⁰. As an example, in about 96 percent of the 230 urban centres in Kenya, less than 25 percent of the households are directly connected to either the main sewer or to piped water. Additionally, only 3 of these urban centres have more than half of the households connected to main sewer.

Despite the increase in urbanization in Kenya, there is lack of comprehensive and coherent policies, strategies and programmes on migration and urbanization that would ensure the protection of human rights as well as the proper functioning of legal and administrative structures in the urban centres. This is exacerbated by the fact that existing development frameworks do not recognize and incorporate the effects of migration on the communities of origin, transit, and destination in order to harness development benefits.

Policy Implication

Internal migration not only affects the sizes of the populations of the areas of origin and destination, but also affects their demographic characteristics. In addition, the receiving areas, especially urban centres, are likely to experience the challenges of urban growth and development, such as pressure on existing resources (including infrastructure and services); increase in informal settlements; conflicts in resource use; and competition for job and economic opportunities. However, if well managed, urbanization can offer important opportunities for economic and social development. By anticipating an increasing urbanization and managing urban growth as part of national development planning, Kenya can address the challenges and harness opportunities linked to this growth. Unfortunately, this is not happening thus leading to environmentally and economically inefficient urban growth and increased vulnerability for the poor from urban sprawl, informal settlements and the creation and growth of slums and slum dwellers with inadequate access to basic services, housing and livelihoods. Unplanned urban growth under these circumstances also increases vulnerability to natural disasters and can exacerbate urban poverty. The starting point in reversing this situation is to urgently put in place comprehensive and coherent policies, strategies and programmes on migration and urbanization. This will provide guidance in managing migration and urbanization in Kenya.

Recommendations

Here below are two (2) key recommendations that will contribute to the effective and efficient management of migration and urbanization in Kenya both in the short and long term;

- 1) The Cabinet Secretaries of the Ministry of Devolution and Planning, and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Urban Development should spearhead the development, release and launching of the national migration and urban development policies backed up by reliable data that foster balanced urban, rural and regional development. This needs to be done by the first quarter of 2014 to enable other entities start implementation as soon as possible.
- 2) The Governors and Cabinet Secretaries of Planning in the 47 Counties should take a lead role in the preparation, implementation and monitoring of cities development plans that promote sustainable cities that would be able to enhance the resilience of Kenyans by providing accommodation to two-thirds of the urban residents, with affordable access to land, housing, water, sanitation, energy, ICT and transport as well as health, education and other essential services by mid-2020.

Implementation of the above recommendations will put Kenya on the right path of ensuring that migration and urbanization contribute to the overall social and economic development of the country.

NCPD is a semi-autonomous government agency that formulates and promotes population policy and coordinates related activities for sustainable development in Kenya.

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Conclusion

Migration and urbanization are inter-twined and are at the centre of the main development challenges of the 21st Century. This calls for designing new development policies, strategies, and programmes to address the dual challenge of development that meets the needs of current and future generations while ensuring the sustainable use of the natural environment. Even though the migration and urban development policies for Kenya are under formulation, their development to conclusion and launching needs hastening. The new policy should aim at guiding all aspects of urban development countrywide such as development planning, land management, urban investment and delivery of infrastructure and services.

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