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Shall we go home? Increasing Urban Poverty in African Cities and Migration Processes

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In many African countries, economic decline in the 1980s, and the impact of IMF structural adjustment programmes, combined to devastate the real incomes of a very large proportion of the urban population. The impact has not necessarily only been felt amongst those who were already poor, although undoubtedly they have tended to suffer the most. Many public sector workers, previously often considered to be part of the so-called 'labour aristocracy', were reduced to incomes which only covered a fraction of the absolute necessities of existence, or, worse still, lost their jobs. Urban service provision has also declined, often dramatically. The gap between real rural incomes and real urban incomes has often narrowed considerably. It appears that the rate of urban growth in some African countries has slowed considerably, and there is also some evidence that new forms of 'reverse migration' from urban to rural areas have occurred. An attempt will be made to assess this evidence, drawing on examples from different countries, including Zambia, Uganda and Tanzania.

KEY WORDS: Sub-Saharan Africa, real rural and urban incomes, reverse migration, urbanization.

THAT THE COUNTRIES OF sub-Saharan Africa have been urbanizing rapidly since the 1960s is very often accepted without question. It was common in the 1980s for Africa to be characterized as the continent with the lowest levels of urbanization, but the highest urban growth rates, (the fact that many African countries had higher urbanization levels than South Asia was rarely remarked on, although see O'Connor, 1991: 44). Yet the 1980s was also the decade of structural adjustment, of falling per capita urban incomes, public sector retrenchments, and deteriorating urban infrastructure – in short, a period during which the urban poor, who make up the majority of the population of nearly all sub-Saharan African towns and cities, experienced a massive decline in their living standards. Given these circumstances it seemed increasingly puzzling that urban growth rates, and rural-urban migration, were not generally felt to have been much affected by the squeeze on urban incomes and employment, which, as this paper will demonstrate, was of a truly dramatic nature in many African cities.

During the 1970s rapid urban growth in the face

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of rising levels of unemployment (measured in 'formal' terms) had exercised the minds of academics and policy-makers, but had generally been explained in terms of a generalized 'Todaro' model whereby migrants assessed their lifetime's earning potential in urban versus rural areas, and the burgeoning informal sector. As the 1980s wore on and more and more reports and academic analyses appeared of the huge gap between formal sector monthly average earnings and even the most frugal necessary expenditure on food alone in many major sub-Saharan African towns, these explanations for rural-urban migration no longer seemed to make much sense. Yet the urban growth reported for most countries appeared to show rates which suggested continued significant net in-migration. These reported rates were usually derived from World Bank or United Nations published data, and have been endlessly regurgitated in the mainstream literature on Third World or African urbanization. On the other hand, the incidence of 'return' migration, whereby urban residents moved to rural areas, received increasing mention in writings on urban Africa, particularly in relation to the impact of structural adjustment. Thus contradictions in the evidence about the nature of rural-urban migration in Africa have become apparent. Common sense and much of migration theory suggested that lower rates of in-migration and probably significant rates of urban-rural migration should be occurring, yet the image of persistently high rates of African urban growth, unaffected by drastic economic decline in the cities, largely remained. A re-evaluation of the evidence on the nature of recent urban growth in Africa, therefore, seems timely.

A major purpose of this paper is to assess whether, and to what extent, migration processes between rural and urban areas have adapted to the altered economic circumstances engendered by Africa's debt crisis, and the ensuing rounds of structural adjustment. In the process of doing this, it has been found necessary to re-assess and often substantially challenge the common view that rates of urban growth in Africa have remained as high as they undoubtedly were in most countries in the 1960s and much of the 1970s, let alone the idea that 'the pace of urbanisation continues to accelerate in Africa' (Gilbert, 1993: 721). Furthermore it is here argued that establishing that urban growth and migration processes have been affected by Africa's economic recession, is of some significance to the debates about the appropriateness of the fairly uniform package of structural adjustment measures implemented in African countries in the 1980s. It is not intended to detail these policies here, since they have been endlessly reviewed in the literature (e.g. see Loxley, 1990; Jamal and Weeks, 1994; Adepoju, 1993; Weeks, 1992; Cheru, 1990; Sparr, 1993; Dixon, Simon and Närman, 1995); the significant point for the purpose of this paper is that they deliberately targeted the urban sectors on the grounds that urban bias in past government policies had, and was still, leading to 'overurbanization', and excessively high urban wages and living standards. Part of the evidence supporting this view was the erroneous idea that rapid rural-urban migration was continuing unabated, and urban numbers were still soaring. A major thesis of this paper is that there is strong evidence that African urban growth rates and migration processes do adjust to urban economic conditions. Indeed evidence will be presented to show that in countries such as Ghana, Zambia and Uganda where economic recession and the debt crisis hit early and hard, they had already adjusted during the 1970s. As a consequence it is argued that international financial institutions imposed unnecessarily harsh and undiscriminating conditions on the urban sectors in the 1980s, causing unwarranted hardship for millions, because their understanding of African urbanization processes was misconceived.

It should be noted that this paper is not arguing that new levels of reverse migration and slowing rates of urban growth are due to structural adjustment policies alone. If they were, the IMF could claim some success in terms of its narrow aims and conception of the problem. Instead it is argued that sustained and drastic urban economic decline, however caused, is reflected in changing migration processes in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the data are scarce, the evidence suggests that where sustained economic decline preceded the imposition of IMF programmes, then these changes had already occurred. The further savage cuts in urban living standards associated with structural adjustment then hugely exacerbated these changes. It is difficult, of course, to disentangle the impact of the debt crisis per se from that of structural adjustment, once the two are operating in tandem. Furthermore, in many countries in Africa in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, other factors influencing rural-urban migration and urban growth rates have swamped even these economic factors. War has been one devastating influence which has led to millions fleeing to the urban areas in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, Sudan and Liberia. Yet in other countries, such as Rwanda and Somalia, war has had the opposite effect and major urban centres have experienced a dramatic loss of population. Prolonged droughts and associated losses of rural livelihoods have also affected city growth in Sahelian countries such as Mauritania where Nouakchott's population is estimated to have increased fortyfold between 1965 and the end of the 1980s (Hardoy and Satterthwaite, 1989: 242); during one drought year alone in the mid-1980s the population actually doubled (O'Connor, 1991: 112). Drastic famines have also played a part in displacing rural people to urban areas, often in the very same countries where there has been long-term war, which may be the root cause of the famine or prevent appropriate government responses to short-term droughts. In these circumstances no matter how savage the impact of structural adjustment, the cities have exploded, because the alternative to a desperate urban lifestyle may well be death. Clearly, therefore, the urban experience of these countries in the recent past has to be excluded from any sensible attempt to analyse the impact on urbanization and migration of economic decline per se. Another special case is South Africa, where again extremely rapid urbanization caused by rapid rural-urban migration has certainly been occurring during the 1980s and 1990s. Here, however, circumstances are quite different from those characteristic of the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. The influx of migrants has been in part a response to the ending of decades of restrictive apartheid legislation which artificially held down the level of urbanization. Also South Africa has not experienced the sort of economic decline typical of so much of the rest of the region. Very similar circumstances pertain for Namibia, where very rapid urbanization is also occurring.

The next section of this paper will review briefly the situation in Africa regarding the rural:urban income gap as this is a factor on which so much of migration theory and the justification for standard structural adjustment policies depends. Next the author will examine the causes and nature of the widespread confusion about the rate of urbanization in Africa in the past 15 to 20 years. Finally the new urbanization and migration processes which have developed in sub-Saharan Africa will be discussed. A picture of adjusting urbanization is built up from many pieces of, often anecdotal, evidence, combined with analysis of urban census data. These suggest that the supposed contribution of rapid net in-migration to sub-Saharan Africa's urbanization rates in recent years is often difficult to support. In a small number of identifiable cases there has in fact been 'ruralization', whereby certain urban centres have experienced long periods of growth at rates lower than the average for the total population. (Ruralization in this context is being defined as the opposite of urbanization in its demographic sense i.e. the proportion of the population defined as urban in a particular district or area will have declined over an intercensal period. It should be noted that this assumes that the surrounding rural population has continued to grow at around the national average.) The evaluation of the sorts of migration processes involved in cases like these is fraught with definitional problems. Furthermore, census data for many African countries is not available, and even when it is it must be used with great caution. The latter sections of this paper are devoted to discussing the nature of the data, establishing the case for slowing urban growth and unprecedented levels of urban-rural migration based on census data and a wide variety of urban case studies, and analysing the new 'return' migration streams in the context of Africa's long history of strong and persistent rural-urban links.

The rural:urban gap and urban living standards

Urban formal sector wages increased in real terms in the immediate post-independence era in most countries, sometimes significantly. In Zambia, real average urban wages are estimated to have increased by 40 per cent between 1964 and 1968, compared to a three per cent rise in farmers' incomes; in Tanzania, the real urban minimum wage increased nearly fourfold between 1957 and 1972 (Jamal and Weeks, 1994). An important element of the World Bank and IMF's economic restructuring programmes which have hit Africa's urban populations so hard was the idea that the scale of the rural:urban income gap was too large, and that this was part of the cause of inefficiencies in resource allocation. The belief that there was a significant overpaid urban 'labour aristocracy' meant that falls in real urban incomes were necessary. Reductions in the rates of net rural-urban migration were also hoped for. Unfortunately for Africa's urban populations the IMF programmes were only too efficacious in decimating their incomes; even more unfortunately for them, their supposed privileged starting point was largely exaggerated.

The labour aristocracy thesis has been shown to be misleading by Amis (1988; 1989; 1990) and Jamal and Weeks (1994). This thesis argued that the urban sector in sub-Saharan Africa was characterized by high wages and many privileges (e.g. subsidized food and housing). The resultant 'labour aristocracy', massively subsidized by resources transferred from rural production, was seen partly as a political strategy, since there was a need to develop a 'responsible elite ... to act as moderate bulwarks and politically stabilize an inherently fragile situation' (Amis, 1988: 17). According to the theory this sector was able to defend its privileged position through organized activity (e.g. trade unions), leading to a position in the 1980s whereby 'African governments are ... frightened of, and in coalition with, a well organized and relatively privileged urban labour force and as such unprepared to accept austerity packages' (Amis, 1988: 30). However, Amis argues that whilst this theory had some validity in the 1960s, it may have been a historical anomaly associated with the decolonization process. In the 1970s the rural:urban income gap narrowed rapidly, and the supposed ability of urban labour to protect its privileged position soon evaporated as African governments moved to repress and/or coopt the trade union movement (Sandbrook, 1982). The assumption that there was 'an' urban sector was also very misleading, since economic differentiation was already well established by the 1970s as the informal sector grew, and wider gaps were established between skilled and unskilled wages, and the private and public sector. Thus by the 1980s a 'new urban poor' had developed – a highly vulnerable group which often embraced the majority of the urban population. (The term, the *new African urban poor*, was used for a series of workshops focussing on the emergence of a new strata of poor African cities faced with the effects of national economic decline and structural adjustment programmes, held at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London in the late 1980s.) Contrary to the labour aristocracy thesis, therefore, when faced with IMF conditionality African governments were more likely to be 'concerned about further alienating an already dispossessed urban populace from whom spontaneous "populist" revolts [were] a real possibility' (Amis, 1989: 389).

Jamal and Weeks (1988; 1994) have charted in exacting detail how the rural:urban income gap in Africa collapsed in the 1970s and 1980s – furthermore they argue that in many cases the earlier rise in urban incomes were mainly necessary adjustments to make some allowance for urban workers' family consumption needs – since colonial wage-setting practices had tended to ignore these for large sections of the urban African labour force, and had geared wages to the needs of the 'single' worker. In other words they argue that these increases did not necessarily mean wage-workers had more disposable income for non-essentials, since the rises often merely covered the essential costs of maintaining a family in town. (In this interpretation of the value of rises in wages associated with labour stabilization, Jamal and Weeks seem to differ from Amis, who believes that really significant gains accrued to the African urban labour force in the 1960s, which did achieve a certain 'labour aristocracy' status, although he believes these gains soon dissipated in the 1970s.) Certainly the post-colonial era in most African countries saw an extremely rapid change in the nature of urban populations, as the heavy bias towards adult men, typical of the urban population pyramid (particularly in Eastern and Southern African), was 'improved' by rapid female/family inmigration (O'Connor, 1983; Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990a).

The fall in real urban incomes has been devastating. By far the best and most comprehensive data sets available on this issue are those compiled by Jamal and Weeks (1994). The following paragraphs, therefore, rely heavily upon their seminal work, supplemented by other more scattered evidence about urban incomes. As already discussed, it is important to note that the fall in incomes often began several years before direct IMF intervention – thus directly challenging any idea that urban bias and urban privilege should have been major targets of that intervention.

In Uganda where the real minimum wage was equivalent to an index of 29 in 1957, and 100 in 1972, it had fallen to only six in 1980, and was still only ten in 1990 (Jamal and Weeks, 1994). In Zambia real minimum wages rose from an index of 56 in 1960, to 128 in 1970, but fell to 83 in 1985 (before successful introduction of IMF policies in the later 1980s), and continued to fall thereafter (*ibid.*). Similar calculations for Tanzania show a rise from 100 in 1957 to 206 in 1972, and a fall to 37 by 1989 (*ibid.*); and for Ghana a rise from 100 in 1970 to a peak of 149 in 1974, and a fall to 18 in 1984 (*ibid.*). In Ghana there was a subsequent small improvement with the minimum wage reaching an index of 34 in 1986, but Jeffries (1992: 211) reports that it subsequently fell again by 45 per cent in real terms from 1988–90, which a 30 per cent rise in 1990 only partly made up. Gefu (1992) reports that the minimum wage in Nigeria remained the same in local currency between 1981 and late 1990, but reduced in real terms by 90 per cent.

Jamal and Weeks calculate that, during the 1970s and 1980s, the rural:urban income gap in many countries either vanished or shifted in favour of the farmers. In Nigeria, for example, they argue that the ratio of average unskilled wages to average rural household incomes was one to one in 1978–79 (*ibid.*). The average non-agricultural wage in Sierra Leone in 1985–86 is estimated to have been 72 per cent less than average rural household incomes (*ibid.*); and in Uganda the average farmer's income was 30 per cent higher than that of an urban minimum wage-earner in 1984, even when all other income sources are taken into account (i.e. 80 per cent of the wage-earner's income assumed to come from non-wage sources) (*ibid.*). For Tanzania they similarly calculate that the 1982 average smallholder income was 21 per cent more than the minimum wage in that year (*ibid.*). (It should be noted that unskilled wages and non-agricultural wages are not exclusively urban income indices, but have been used by Jamal and Weeks as surrogates which give a reasonable indication of the sorts of incomes commanded by the low paid in urban areas.) It is possible to quibble with their methods of calculation, particularly in terms of how it relates to the income gap perceived by potential rural-urban migrants. (Weeks and Jamal's calculations normally compare average rural household incomes with the urban minimum wage. There are a number of reasons why this may not be a very good surrogate for the income gap perceived by migrants. These include the fact that migrants are frequently young people, perhaps single or recently married with a young child, and that they are very unlikely to command the average rural household income at this stage in their domestic life cycle; that household sizes are usually smaller in urban compared to rural areas which increases the per capita urban household income *ceteris paribus*; and that their methodology assumes that multi-member migrant households expect only one member to earn any income, which is frankly unrealistic in contemporary urban Africa.) Nevertheless their analysis is clearly indicative of major changes in the relative position of the urban poor. There is also supporting evidence from other sources. Thus Riley (1988: 7) contends that by 1986 the Sierra Leonean urban poor were 'a deprived group with fewer income or equivalent earning opportunities than the rural poor'. For Nigeria, on the basis of quite different data sets from those utilized by Jamal and Weeks, Collier (1988: 778) calculates that from 1980–81 to 1984–85 the average real incomes of the urban self-employed fell twice as fast as average rural incomes, so that by 1984–85 the urban self-employed had lower incomes than rural households (and this does not take into account higher urban prices).

The evidence for the terrible hardships inflicted on African urban families as incomes from wages slipped completely out of line with the minimum income required to keep a family (or in many cases even an individual) fed, let alone sheltered and clothed, abound in the literature. Wide-ranging analysis of the devastating impact of structural adjustment programmes in the Third World was provided early on in Cornia, Jolly and Stewart (1987), and the vulnerability of the African urban poor was often highlighted. In Uganda, for example, the minimum monthly wage by the early 1980s could only buy about one week's supply of food (Jamal and Weeks, 1994). By 1989 a more specific example of the urban income crisis in Uganda is given by the example of Isma in Kampala:

> He is 35 years old, married, and has six children. Isma is employed by an Asian shop owner ... He earns approximately Shs 4000 a month – and that is considerably more than many government employees' monthly income, who have put in several years of loyal service .... .Isma attempts to provide for his family three meals a day ... nothing fanciful. At breakfast all he needs is sugar, bread, tea and, of course, water, which he must purchase. Sugar, half a kilo costs him Shs 200, half a loaf of bread at Shs 250, a portion of tea leaves at Shs 100 and a jerrycan of water at Shs 5. Lunch consists of mainly the staple diet, matoke taken with a sauce made of beans. The latter cost Shs 250 per kilo, whereas the former may cost him Shs 500 per stick of matoke. Supper may cost just as much, subject to certain variations, when the family chooses to eat sweet potatoes or cassava, with groundnut sauce. Add of course, several jerrycans of water to drink..... Put simply, Isma spends more than half of his monthly income on a day's meal for himself and his family. Assuming of course he has paid up the rent for the two rooms they occupy. Each room costs Shs 3000 a month.
>
> Mutasa, 1989: 11

Mustasa goes on to estimate that Isma needs 60 000 Shs per month to cover his family's basic needs, but 'even government ministers do not earn that much'.

By 1988, in Sierra Leone the average monthly urban wage only covered a week's food for a family of four (Jamal and Weeks, 1994). Supporting evidence for the gross insufficiency of Sierra Leonean urban incomes at this time is found in Riley (1988: 5). Drawing on UNICEF data and his own estimates of the sort of diet that urban families had been reduced to by 1987 (a diet of significantly less nutritional and calorific value than that common in pre-structural adjustment times), he calculates that the minimum wage could only cover the cost of ten meals a month. Riley (1988) suggests that declining urban incomes in Freetown must have had adverse consequences for infant mortality rates and malnutrition, a contention supported by a UNICEF study in 1989 (Jespersen, 1990). In Tanzania the minimum wage in 1985 did not cover the cost of one month's maize meal for a family of five – by 1990 it was just sufficient for this and nothing else (*ibid.*: 95). Tripp (cited in Jespersen, 1990: 35) has calculated that an urban household of six could only cover its costs for three days on the average monthly income by the late 1980s in Tanzania. In Kenya, in 1988, it is estimated that 30 per cent of urban wage earners could not buy the minimum amount of calories needed for a family of five (Jamal and Weeks, 1994). In Zambia food prices rose steeply in the 1980s, and many items were often unobtainable except at black market prices. Tragically this has led to increases in child morbidity and mortality:

> the urban poor are the most severely affected. A survey of 100 households from different townships of Lusaka showed that as prices rose, poor families stopped buying meat, chicken, fish and bread. They also cut back on vegetables and even on mealie meal. Most families reduced from two to one meal per day in order to save money and this has had an adverse affect on health especially that of children.
>
> Mulenga, 1991: 45, citing Clark and Allison, 1989

Increases in child malnutrition in urban Zambia in the late 1980s are also reported in Jespersen (1990: 44).

In Ghana, in 1990, the minimum wage was about 400 cedis per day. A chicken cost 2500 cedis, a loaf of bread 250 cedis, and a small fish 250 cedis. Jeffries estimates that an urban resident on this income could just about feed him or herself, although no other necessary expenditure could be covered, nor the subsistence needs of any dependants. He gives an example of a single man working as a clerk in Accra who found that he often had to go hungry – in other words he was barely surviving (Jeffries, 1992: 107). It is worth pointing out that Ghana is supposed to be an important success story for the IMF, and by 1990 it had followed its economic reform programme closely for some years. Yet

> it is ... clear, however, the majority of urban inhabitants in the lower income groups have experienced very little, if any, improvement in their real incomes, and that some – it is unclear how many – are probably worse off than they were six or seven years ago. Complaints that life is hard and getting harder are regularly heard ...
>
> Jeffries, *op. cit.*: 207

For Nigeria Peil (1991: 102) estimates that the minimum wage of N150 per month in 1989 would buy a total of one half tin of local rice, one tin of garri (dried cassava), one tin of powdered milk, a litre of groundnut oil, two small loaves of bread and six eggs. She points out that many employees in small firms would receive less than this minimum wage, as would many of the self-employed; this of course is true of all the other countries so far cited.

The evidence is thus overwhelming – it is not only that urban poor have become much poorer in many countries, but that their lives have become an almost incredible struggle. The huge gap between wages and minimum necessary expenditure has been termed the 'wages puzzle' by Jamal and Weeks (1994): how are people surviving?

Urban household strategies for survival

Two major coping strategies within the urban sector have now been well documented, to explain how the urban poor in sub-Saharan Africa have attempted to manage the changes in their economic circumstances. As they have received much attention elsewhere in the literature, they will be only briefly described here.

The first involves a great increase in informal sector activity, with previously non-earning household members entering the petty commodity sector, as well as wage-earners taking on supplementary cash-earning activities (see, for example, Jespersen, 1990; Bibangambah, 1992; Bigsten and Kayizzi-Mujerwa, 1992; Maliyamkono and Bagachwa, 1990; Tripp, 1989; Kanji, 1993; Roe and Chilowa, 1990; Adepoju, 1993 and, for a general review of evidence for such strategies in Third World cities, including Africa, Gilbert, 1994).

The second involves the development of food-growing by urban households on any available patch of arable land within and around the urban area (e.g. Bowyer-Bower *et al.*, 1994; Freeman, 1991; Gefu, 1992; Holm, 1992; Mbiba, 1994; Mlozi *et al.*, 1992; Mulenga, 1991; Sanyal, 1985). These processes have been typified by Jamal and Weeks (1994: 72) as 'regression to a primordial stage of society in which the division of labour begins to break down', and the former wage-earning class evolves into a 'trade-cum-wage-earner-cum-shamba class'. Neither of these strategies can be undertaken without significant costs for the household. The burden of extra work is usually unevenly distributed amongst household members, with women shouldering a very significant additional burden. This has important implications for childcare and the women's own welfare, and in turn women and children's health. Both urban agriculture and informal sector work can also bring the participants into increasing conflict with urban authorities.

A third survival strategy involves the strengthening and adaptation of the rural-urban linkages which have always been such an important part of urbanization processes in sub-Saharan Africa (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990a). An element of this strategy, the 'return' of people to their rural 'homes', has received little direct attention in the literature, and is of central significance to this paper. It is to this issue that this paper now turns. The following sections analyse the evidence for reductions in urban growth in a number of African countries, and the role of changing migration patterns in this. The analysis shows that there have been significant changes in migration processes to and from urban areas which are clearly related to urban economic decline.

Urban growth rates and urban-rural migration: the census evidence

The tendency still to characterize sub-Saharan Africa as very rapidly urbanizing was discussed in the introduction to this paper. An assessment of contemporary urbanization and migration in the region needs to address how and why this characterization has persisted, since were it the case then the thesis contained in this paper would largely be disproven. Furthermore it is important to challenge the idea that urban growth rates are unrelentingly rapid, because of the relationship between the theoretical underpinnings of harsh structural adjustment policies in urban areas, and convictions about excessively high urban growth and the need to tackle ever-burgeoning rural-urban migration.

Frequently the data on which such characterizations rest are misleading. They are often projections based on assumptions derived from periods of previous rapid growth, usually the 1960s. Census data from the 1970s and 1980s indicate that for some countries, including some usually portrayed as 'rapid urbanizers', these projections were incorrect. It is an odd fact that the projections still frequently crop up in influential publications such as the World Bank Development Reports, and United Nations Population Division forecasts, even when the census data have been published – which admittedly frequently takes some years in Africa. The facts that rates of urbanization in the developing world tend to be exaggerated, and that commonly used projections are inaccurate have been painstakingly analysed by Hardoy and Satterthwaite (1989). They also note (p. 235) that:

> there may also be counter-urbanization in many poorer nations or regions of the Third World .. in some cities in the poorer nations or nations facing serious economic decline, counter-urbanization may be taking place because of people moving from cities to rural areas to improve their chances of obtaining sufficient food to survive.

Nevertheless, whilst agreeing that UN projections in the 1980s for cities such as Dar es Salaam, Nairobi and various Nigerian centres were unrealistic, they also agree that urban growth in Africa over the last four decades has been spectacular. Furthermore they suggest that a number of countries – Chad, Zaire, Central African Republic and Ghana are specifically mentioned – experienced rapid urban growth in the 1960s and 1970s during periods of slow economic growth, whilst this rarely occurred in Latin America and Asia. As will be seen, for the case of Ghana at least, this was not in fact the case.

Jamal and Weeks (1994), on the other hand, use 1990 World Bank data on African urbanization almost uncritically in their otherwise highly illuminating study of the rural:urban income gap, and contend that migration from rural to urban areas has hardly abated in the 1980s, and thus that changes in migration processes have not been one of the adaptations occurring because of the new economic circumstances in urban areas. However, examination of census data makes such a conclusion hard to support. (Weeks and Jamal do draw on census data for one country and here they note that Uganda had experienced a dramatic drop in its rate of urbanization in the 1970s.) Gilbert (1993: 723), draws a similar conclusion from World Bank data stating that:

> In Africa, of course, we are observing a continuing flow of people and a 77 per cent increase in the urban population in 10 years despite the recession ... In sub-Saharan Africa, rapid migration has continued despite a terrible and sustained recession.

Gilbert does, however, note that there has been a slowing of urban growth in Latin America and the Middle East, much of which has been 'due to the decline in real urban incomes' (*ibid.*), and he supports the belief that the migration process is rational and susceptible to fluctuations in urban economic opportunities. He also mentions that signs of reverse migration have appeared in Africa. The fact that World Bank data support a rational migration process for other regions, but not Africa, is probably because data for those regions are based on more frequently published censuses, rather than any real difference in rationality of migrants. The importance of census data rather than projections was alluded to by Gilbert (1992: 6) when he said 'The pattern of rural-urban flows during economic recession is one fascinating issue which will be clarified by the hopefully prompt publication of the 1990 round of census data'.

One writer who has drawn attention to the changing nature of urbanization and migration in sub-Saharan Africa is Amis (1988; 1989; 1990). His work, like this paper, made much use of vital economic data which Jamal and Weeks were producing (e.g. Jamal and Weeks, 1988); although at the time he felt that whilst there was good reason to expect migration rates to decline, the evidence for this was unclear and the evidence for reduced urban growth only partial. As emphasized in this paper, a major hindrance to a more definite analysis was 'the lack of reliable data and censuses' (Amis, 1990).

A range of census data on urbanization for selected African countries is presented in Table I, with comparisons with the World Bank projections used by Jamal and Weeks. The choice of countries has been very largely determined by the availability of census data for relevant periods; unfortunately very few countries meet even this simple criterion, and in some cases (e.g. Sierra Leone) the data were deemed too unreliable to be worth analysing. Whilst it is acknowledged that African census data should be treated with some caution, it is contended that the evidence of a significant slackening in the rate of population increase in a number of cities in a range of countries, combined with the fact that those countries which have suffered the worst urban crises have recorded the greatest fall in urbanization rates, suggests that a real trend is being identified.

Ghana was one of the first countries to suffer serious economic decline, and it is evident from Table 1 that it also experienced very limited urbanization during its second post-independence intercensal period for 1970–84. Accra's growth, which had generally been thought to be very high, was only 20 per cent higher that national population growth rates (compared to more than double that rate from 1960–70). It is difficult to know what natural increase rates are in most African cities, but it is here assumed that they are not very different from national rates. This is because whilst there does tend to be lower fertility in African urban compared to rural areas, there are other demographic factors which help to compensate for this differential. Thus the difference between urban birth rates and death rates (i.e. the natural increase rate) compared to the difference between national birth and death rates (which will be skewed towards rural rates in most African countries since most of the population is rural), may not be much. The fact that urban death rates tend to be lower than rural helps to offset the lower fertility, as does the fact that urban birth rates (which, unlike fertility, are influenced by population composition) are boosted by the more youthful composition of the urban areas, with a higher proportion of people being in childbearing age-groups. Unbalanced sex ratios used to reduce urban births, but by the 1970s sex ratios in many major cities were often about parity. Furthermore, the tendency for lower fertility in urban areas is not as marked in Africa as elsewhere in the world. On this basis, therefore, it is argued that the Ghana census data in Table I show that the net rural-urban migration slowed very significantly. Indeed for Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi, the second and third cities, this period must have seen a net out-migration of urban people to rural areas.

For Uganda the picture is equally clear for the 1970s – reverse migration for major towns, and the capital city not growing much above the national population rate. The rate of out-migration from Jinja from 1969–80 must have been particularly high, since it even exceeded the population gain from natural increase. The 1980s have, however, seen a return to net in-migration and higher urban growth rates.

For Zambia a similar picture emerges of significantly reduced urban growth by the 1970s, although in this case the capital city, Lusaka, has maintained a high growth rate and must have experienced significant net in-migration for the whole post-independence period. The very high growth rate for 1963–69, it is worth noting, occurred during a period of economic boom in Zambia, when copper prices were very high, and much of the urban growth was employment-led. The rapidity of Zambia's urbanization and the concomitant rural-urban migration in the 1960s has been much commented upon, but very few analysts have noted that the Copperbelt towns have tended to grow more slowly than the national population since then – in fact their experience could be typified as counter-urbanization. Zambia's economic decline began in the early 1970s, with the usual exigencies of a debt crisis hugely exacerbated by a dramatic collapse in copper prices, and expensive transport problems caused by regional political instability and its principled opposition to White majority rule in neighbouring countries. Throughout the 1980s it was common to characterize Zambia as the first sub-Saharan African country to have reached a 50 per cent urbanization level, but in fact the 1990 census showed that the level had increased a mere two per cent from 40 per cent in 1980 to 42 per cent in 1990. The reductions in growth in many Zambian cities are obvious from Table I.

It is contended that Zambia is a particularly significant example of what is, after all, an expected relationship between economic growth and urban growth. That migration processes must have adapted to cause the reduced urbanization rates is evident. It is also regarded as highly significant for the arguments proposed in this paper that Zambia has been one of the World Bank's and IMF's prime exemplars of what was, supposedly, wrong with African urbanization and urban policy. Zambia is frequently cited in discussions of 'urban bias' in Africa, and Bates, whose analysis of the bias against the rural sector in Africa (Bates, 1981) was influential in policy-making circles in the international financial institutions, was in turn much influenced by his earlier research on that country's migration processes and Zambian government policies of 'urban bias' in the early post-independence period (Bates, 1974 and 1976). (The influence of Bates' work on the nature of structural adjustment policies and the perceptions of the World Bank are spelt out in Amis [1988: 7–9].) There is no recognition in his later works that fundamental changes had occurred in Zambian urbanization and migration from the early 1970s. Bates' determination to show Zambia as a rapidly (and permanently) urbanizing society is evidenced by his introduction to *Rural responses to industrialization*, published in 1976, in which he states (p. 1):

> To a greater degree than the vast majority of the nations of the world, Zambia has experienced rapid, precipitate, and comprehensive change.....Once characterized by village society, the territory that is now Zambia contains a score of cities of 100000 or more persons, and these cities contain over 40 per cent of its people.

In fact there were a mere five centres with populations over 100000 in 1969, and this had only increased to seven by 1980. As already noted, the urbanization level was only just above 40 per cent by 1990. It is not altogether fanciful to suggest, therefore, that an important influence on the nature of the structural adjustment policies which have caused such suffering to the African urban poor has been a seriously erroneous impression of what has been happening in Zambia in the past 20 years. As can be seen in Table I, the World Bank believed that the urbanization rate in that country in the 1980s was nearly 81 per cent higher than its real rate, and was still citing a rate for the 1970s which was 25 per cent above the rate established by a census taken ten years before. On this basis Zambia was characterized as a country where net in-migration still contributed well over half of national urban population growth in the 1970s and 1980s during a period of serious urban economic decline, when in fact it was already under half in the 1970s, and perhaps 10–15 per cent in the 1980s. Thus Zambia is a particularly important case study, and one in which there has obviously been reverse migration from a number of major urban centres. Yet the structural adjustment policies implemented since 1989 have taken no cognizance of this fact, and have been exceedingly harsh in trying to 'correct' an imbalance which no longer existed. (Although Zambia had begun IMF programmes three times prior to this in the 1980s, on each occasion the IMF suspended disbursements and the programme ended because the government refused to fulfil all the conditions.) It seems quite probable, therefore, that out-migration in the 1990s is occurring even more rapidly.

The situation in Tanzania is much less clear cut than in Uganda and Zambia, for although there is clear evidence of a reduction in the growth rate of Dar es Salaam and many other individual cities in the 1980s compared to the 1960s and most of the 1970s, the census data indicate that net in-migration is still contributing significantly to growth in most urban areas. Table I shows that for Tanzania there has been a fall in the rate of urban growth, at least for the major centres including the capital city, but there is no evidence of net out-migration, as in some other countries. Given that Tanzania has also experienced serious economic decline and the impact of structural adjustment programmes, this seems to weaken the case being made that significant changes in migration processes are occurring as a result of deteriorating economic circumstances. It is thus considered important to analyse more closely the nature of this country's census data, as there is no desire to perpetuate inconsistent and erroneous impressions about the urban experience of one of Africa's better-known nations.

There are a number of problems in interpreting the census data for Tanzania. In a number of cases, e.g. Mbeya and Mwanza, where the reported 1967–78 growth rates for individual towns are particularly high, the population growth was partly due to massive boundary changes which incorporated a large number of rural people – and was thus not truly indicative of a process of urbanization. The author is indebted to Tony O'Connor for this information. These problems of interpretation are not insurmountable, and there is other evidence about recent urbanization processes to supplement the picture. For example, Table I shows that the national urban growth rates reported in World Bank tables compare well with Tanzanian census data (i.e. 11.7 per cent for 1965–80 compared to an intercensal growth rate of 11.4 per cent for 1967–78, and 11.6 per cent for 1980–88 compared to a reported intercensal growth rate of 10.7 per cent from 1978–88), but it is actually very unclear how the census defined and enumerated the total urban population; it is even difficult to establish where many, if not most, of those classified as 'urban' in the 1988 census were actually residing, except for the largest towns. The final census report for 1988 is published as regional profiles. For each ward in each district the population is divided into urban and rural categories, but it is only possible usually to attribute urban residents to a specific settlement in the case of the larger centres – there is usually one large centre for each region. For most of the smaller centres in the Tanzanian urban hierarchy it is not possible to make meaningful comparisons between the population in 1978 and 1988 'as a result of irregularities in defining the urban, rural and mixed categories for the...census' (Holm, 1992: 240). The growth rates of the major urban areas, shown in Table I, however, clearly suggest a much lower overall urban growth rate than 10.7 per cent. Holm (*ibid.*) has managed to manipulate the census data to establish realistic growth rates for some other urban size categories for five specific regions: Iringa, Kilimanjaro, Arusha, Morogoro and Mbeya, which are also shown in Table I. Whilst high (between 5.6 per cent and 7.0 per cent), these still do not suggest a national rate of urbanization of over 10 per cent a year. It may be that the establishment of *ujamaa* nucleated villages in the 1970s led to the reclassification of very large numbers of new settlements as 'urban' by 1988, and that this explains this seeming anomaly.

Some evidence about migration processes at the lower end of the urban hierarchy is available, which does support the idea of adaptation. The study by Holm cited above focuses on migrant survival strategies in a small town of about 15 000 people in 1988, and the results yield a further clue to understanding the Tanzanian urban 'growth rates' – for farming turned out to be not just a supplementary activity for many migrant household heads, but the dominant occupation by far, representing 58 per cent of all the different economic activities undertaken by household heads. Over a third (37 per cent) of the household heads were solely farmers. It is worth emphasizing that these were not villagers who had become 'urban' through boundary changes: they were in-migrants to the town, yet their 'urban survival is based on a rural subsistence economy' (*ibid.*: 248). Availability of farming land in close proximity to the town has, therefore, rendered the rural-urban linkages, for which Africa is renowned, complete – both temporally and geographically. In these circumstances the significance for rural-urban migration of the impact of urban recession on urban wages and food prices is understandably small. If this case study is representative of urbanization and migration processes at the lower end of the hierarchy in Tanzania, then the census-recorded rate of urban growth becomes more explicable. It helps to explain how the pressures for returning to rural areas are moderated in the specific context of these smaller towns, and points to the importance of detailed case-study material for interpreting census data, as well as the need to be aware that adaptations to urban economic decline may vary across the urban hierarchy.

The drop in Tanzania's urban growth in the 1980s has been noted and discussed by Barke and Sowden (1992), who ignore the total urban population as recorded, and focus on the growth rates of the main towns. They contend that the drop is particularly due to the slowing of Dar's growth, and that 'elsewhere, urban areas continue to grow very rapidly' (*ibid.*: 9). In fact the data in Table I show that most of the other large towns grew more slowly than Dar. Dar's 48 per cent growth rate implies fairly significant net in-migration has continued anyway. Barke

TABLE I

Selected African countries: comparisons between AAGRs of national, total urban, and selected city growth rates: census data and WB data

Country/ Urban area	*Dates* 1960s	1970s	1980s	1990→
Ghana				
National population	**2.4** (60–70)	**2.6** (70–84)		
Total urban: census	**4.8**	**3.2**		
WB estimate			*4.2* (80–88)	
Accra	**5.4**	**3.15**		
Kumasi	**4.4**	**2.2**		
Sekondi-Takoradi	**2.7**	**0.3**		
Tema	**15.6**	**4.6**		
Nigeria				
Lagos (a)	*12.5* (63–74)		*6.6* (74–88)	
Tanzania				
National population		**3.3** (67–78)	**2.8** (78–88)	
Total urban: census		**11.4**	**10.7**	
WB estimate		*11.7* (65–80)	*11.6* (80–88)	
Dar es Salaam		**9.7**	**4.8**	
Mwanza		**11.1**	**4.5**	
Tanga		**4.9**	**2.9**	
Mbeya		**17.9**	**5.5**	
Morogoro		**8.5**	**6.6**	
Arusha		**5.0**	**6.4**	
Moshi		**6.2**	**6.3**	
Tabora		**11.2**	**3.2**	
Dodoma		**6.2**	**6.2**	
Iringa		**9.2**	**4.0**	
Mtwara		**8.2**	**4.7**	
Kigoma		**8.0**	**4.0**	
Data for selected regions (b)				
Regional HQs (35 000–175 000)			*5.6*	
Intermediate towns (10 000–34 999)			*7.0*	
Small towns (5500–9999)			*6.4*	
Uganda				
National population		**2.8** (69–80)	**2.5** (80–91)	
Total urban: WB estimate		*4.7* (65–80)	*5.1* (80–88)	
Kampala		**3.0**	**4.9**	
Jinja		**–0.6**	**3.4**	
Mbale		**1.6**	**6.1**	
Masaka		**7.6**	**5.0**	
Entebbe		**0.0**	**6.6**	
Fort Portal		**11.7**	**1.9**	
Tororo		**0.4**		
Zambia				
National population	**2.5** (63–69)	**3.0** (69–80)	**3.2** (80–90)	
Total urban: census	**8.9**	**5.8**	**3.7**	
WB estimate		*7.2* (65–80)	*6.7* (80–88)	
Lusaka	**13.8**	**6.5**	**6.1**	
Ndola	**9.5**	**4.0**	**4.0**	
Kitwe	**8.4**	**2.6**	**2.4**	
Chingola	**9.6**	**2.1**	**2.5**	
Kabwe	**6.3**	**6.6**	**2.0**	
Mufulira	**5.0**	**2.1**	**1.2**	
Luanshya	**4.2**	**1.3**	**2.8**	

TABLE I (*cont.*)

Country/ Urban area	*1960s*	*Dates* *1970s*	*1980s*	*1990→*
Zimbabwe				
National population		**4.1**$^{(62-69)}$	**3.1**$^{(69-82)}$	**3.1**$^{(82-92)}$
Urban population: census		**3.1**	**5.4**	
WB estimate			*6.0*$^{(65-80)}$	*6.2*$^{(80-88)}$
Harare		**2.3**	**4.6**	**6.1**
Bulawayo		**1.7**	**4.4**	**4.1**
Chitungwiza (c)			**20.7**	**4.7**
Mutare		**−0.2**	**4.0**	**6.5**
Gweru		**2.6**	**4.2**	**4.7**
Zvishavane		**0.1**	**4.1**	**−9.5**
Kwekwe		**6.0**	**3.3**	**4.6**
Kadoma		**3.8**	**4.6**	**4.1**
Chinhoyi		**7.9**	**4.7**	**6.0**
Hwange		**−0.1**	**5.2**	**0.8**

Notes: census data in bold. Intercensal periods indicated by superscript on national population growth rates (e.g. 60–70=1960–1970)
other estimates of growth rates in italics. Periods indicated in superscript.
(a) Estimates taken from Peil, 1991:19
(b) 'Cleaned' census data from Holm, 1992, Table 1
(c) Chitungwiza, Harare's dormitory town was first established during the 1970s

Sources:
Ghana census data from Ghana *1984 census provisional results*, 1984
Tanzanian census data from United Republic of Tanzania, Bureau of Statistics, President's Office, Planning Commission, *1988 Population census: National Profile, basic demographic and economic characteristics* (Dar es Salaam, 1992), and *Population census: Regional Profile; Dar es Salaam* (Dar es Salaam, 1992), and other regional profiles; Barke and Sowden 1992, Table 2; Holm, 1992, Table 1
Uganda census data from Republic of Uganda, *Report on the 1980 Population Census; Volume 1: provisional results by administrative area* (Census Office, Kampala, 1982); and Republic of Uganda, Statistics Department, *Final results of 1991 population and housing census (pre-release)*, (Kampala, 1992)
Zambia census data from Republic of Zambia, Central Statistical Office, *1990 census of population, housing and agricultural: preliminary report* (Lusaka, December 1990)
Zimbabwe census data from Central Statistical Office, *Census 1992; Zimbabwe preliminary report* (Harare, 1992)
World Bank data from 1991 World Development Report, cited in Jamal and Weeks (1993)

and Sowden's analysis has also been criticized by Briggs (1993) who contends that the census data for Dar were inaccurate, and an underestimate. However, his evidence for this is not clear cut, and both his data and calculations are flawed. Both Barke and Sowden and Briggs, were working with preliminary census data, whilst the data presented in Table I are calculated from the final report. Briggs also works with the figure for the Dar es Salaam region, rather than the figure for the urban area. He believes that the fact that the recorded population in 1988 was below the projected figure indicates that the census was inaccurate, however, given the general tendency to over-estimate African urban growth rates during the 1980s, this is a weak argument. Furthermore, he contends that the recorded regional population was 43 per cent below that projected, when in fact it was 21 per cent below. So it seems safer to assume that the census figure gives at least a general order of magnitude. The fact of continued net in-migration in the 1980s, albeit at lower rates, does not negate the possibility that there has been more return migration in the larger Tanzanian cities – as will be seen below.

Table I also provides some comparative data from Zimbabwe, which only gained its independence in 1980, and has only experienced the full-blown effects of structural adjustment in the 1990s. The impact of such policies has undoubtedly reduced the urban population's living standards, and caused significant suffering for the urban poor (Kanji, 1993; Tevera, 1995), but in comparison with the other countries under discussion Zimbabwe's urban economic problems have not so far been sufficient to induce all the desperate coping strategies described above. It is important to note that Zimbabwe's general economic performance in the 1980s was relatively good, with an average annual GDP increase of four per cent per year. IMF-inspired structural adjustment policies did not begin until 1990, and were imposed on an urban population which unusually for Africa, was not already reduced to desperate poverty levels. Thus for example, urban wage-earners in the 1990s are not, on the whole, having to find several other cash-earning activities in addition to their formal sector job. On the other hand, urban agriculture is apparently increasingly important. Urbanization during the first two intercensal periods shown in Table I (1962–69 and 1969–82) was powerfully constrained by influx controls imposed by the White minority regime (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990b); the impact of these is particularly apparent from 1962–69 when a general trend of counter-urbanization was experienced. Towards the end of the 1970s these restrictions began to break down and they were lifted in 1980. It was expected that the 1980s would see a huge surge in urbanization as the 'backlog' of migrants from the African rural areas moved to town on a permanent, or long-term basis. However, it is interesting to note that the preliminary figures from the recent 1992 census suggest that, whilst most of the larger centres have grown fairly fast, given that the national growth rate was over three per cent, the contribution of net in-migration has arguably been somewhat less than might have been expected. Even Harare, which has grown at a rate of 6.1 per cent, has been growing much less fast than projected (around 11 per cent in the mid 1980s, falling to about 8 per cent per year in the later 1980s), and the second largest centre, Bulawayo, appears to have had remarkably little net in-migration.

The fact that Zimbabwe implemented its own economic austerity measures from the early 1980s on (which avoided many of the harsher social effects associated with the standard IMF package), may have had some dampening effect on the expected rates of rural-urban migration. Certainly research on migrancy in the 1980s showed that rural-urban migrants felt very vulnerable in the urban areas, and many expected that they would eventually have to return to rural areas (Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990a). On the other hand, the comparative success of rural development policies in the 1980s is likely to have been another important factor. The new economic policies of the 1990s, which follow IMF prescriptions very closely, may have a far greater dampening effect on rural-urban migration. Our research on recent migrants to Harare in 1994, for example, indicates that they almost universally perceive the impact of current economic policies to be far worse in urban than rural areas.

In the light of the above data and discussion it is clear that rates of rural-urban migration in a number of African countries have been much lower than have often been projected, and it seems reasonable to argue that this has been significantly affected by the sharp falls experienced in real urban incomes. In a number of individual urban settlements in various countries, it is also evident that there has actually been net out-migration, with towns growing more slowly than the probable balance of births over deaths. Such 'return' migration has in fact been reported in a variety of sources, although it is usually in passing and rarely are any data produced to support the contention. This supporting evidence for elevated rates of 'return' migration (i.e. beyond those expected by 'usual' patterns of circular migration) is reviewed below, and its role as a coping strategy discussed.

Urban-rural migration as a coping strategy?

The most populous state in sub-Saharan Africa, which also has a much more complex and varied urban hierarchy than is typical for the region, is Nigeria. Its experience of urbanization and migration is, therefore, of great significance for Africa generally. Unfortunately it also has one of the most incomplete and unreliable sets of census data, and although a recent census suggests that its national population of around 90 million is much smaller than estimated, we still have no census data on urban populations. Estimates of modern urban populations in Nigeria tend to be fairly worthless, or even ludicrous (e.g. see Simon, [1992] for a useful discussion of the problems associated with Nigerian urban projections). Assessment of changing migration in this country must, therefore, rest on secondary surveys. Collier (1988: 778) states that the relative decline in urban incomes compared to rural incomes in Nigeria between 1980 and 1985, led to reversal of net migration to towns. He cites the results of four farm household surveys conducted in 1985 to support this contention. Forty per cent of these households had members who had returned from urban areas since 1982 (the beginning of the oil slump), and there was clear evidence that the decline in the urban economy had made a proportion of these return migrants cut short their migrant careers (this point will be returned to below). Collier's position is supported by Mosley (1992) who, in the context of a discussion of food production in Nigeria under conditions of structural adjustment, states that there is an 'explicit commitment to an agriculture-led growth strategy, and a reflux of labour from cities towards the rural areas is taking place' (*ibid.*: 235). The complete lack of census data for Nigeria for this period makes such claims impossible to verify. However, Peil's detailed work on Lagos means that her estimates of its growth are reasonably accurate, and she noted that it is now probably growing at a rate of less than five per cent, and that the 1990 population estimate was less than the forecast (Peil, 1991). She does not regard this as indicative of a trend for declining urban growth throughout Nigeria, however, for she states that 'the declining rate of migration to Lagos shows that people are aware of relative advantage, but are finding other towns where the social and psychological costs are lower' (*ibid.*: 96). Yet although Lagos exhibits particularly severe problems with poverty exacerbated by overcrowding and huge infrastructural deficiencies, declining urban wages and subsidies and public sector retrenchments will have seriously affected urban populations everywhere and it is quite possible that Lagos's experience is part of a national trend.

In Uganda, Jamal and Weeks (1994) accept that urban residents have migrated to rural areas as one coping strategy, despite their belief that in general rural-urban migration has not abated in sub-Saharan

Africa. Thus they allow that in Uganda recourse to informal sector jobs and peri-urban agriculture was not enough to explain the 'wage puzzle' – the difficulty of understanding how people survived, and why malnutrition did not overwhelm them, when average wages often bore no relation to a family's food needs, let alone other essentials. They state that in Uganda a further strategy was adopted whereby:

> wage-earner households re-established their links with the countryside, reversing the labour force stabilisation process of the 1960s. Trips back to the family farm (shamba) became common, and some members of urban households were sent permanently to tend farms. Further, urban households began to grow their own food, something that had always been practised to some degree, but had declined because of increased rural and urban specialisation, and the influx of migrants who had no access to cultivable urban land. With the departure of these migrants, Kampala became a more Baganda city.... Unlike in other African countries, urban migration actually slowed down or even changed its net flow up to 1985.
>
> Jamal and Weeks, *op. cit.*: 68

The incidence of urban-rural migration in Uganda is also noted by Bigsten and Kayizzi-Magerwa (1992). The result of their study of the strategies adopted by Kampala households to cope with the economic crisis largely parallel those of Jamal and Weeks, and they emphasize the diversification of income-earning opportunities, and the growth of urban agriculture. Although the return to rural areas which has so clearly been of major significance in Uganda received only passing mention: 'it may also be possible that households adjust by letting some members migrate to the rural areas to relieve the pressure of shrinking incomes', it is conceded that reverse migration was 'quite substantial' in the 1970s and early 1980s (*ibid.*: 1425). They go on to argue that this has now ended and that Kampala is once again growing rapidly, although their reported estimate of one million for the city's population at the beginning of the 1990s is in fact one-third higher than that actually enumerated by the 1991 census.

Despite the fact that other adaptations have attracted more attention in the literature, there can be no doubt that the strategy of urban-rural migration must have acted as an absolutely vital safety valve for urban Uganda. As Jamal and Weeks point out, there has been no massive crisis of malnutrition in the towns (although this is not to say that malnutrition has not increased). Some people survived by substituting cheaper foods for those previously eaten, and/or by growing food. There must, however, have been very many of the urban poor for whom these strategies were not possible – because they were already eating the cheapest diets possible, and could not gain access to cultivable urban land. Thus the increase in urban agriculture which has been noted throughout sub-Saharan Africa is not a strategy which can maintain the entire urban population: there is some degree of urban economic collapse for which the contribution of this sector to urban food needs is insufficient and reverse migration becomes imperative. The situation alluded to in Kampala in the above quotation appears to suggest that at this stage competition over land becomes an important factor in determining who can stay, and who must leave. Local land tenure conditions will, therefore, be an important factor in such situations; in Kampala the Baganda were clearly advantaged because land in the Baganda kingdom was partly privatized during the colonial period. The size of the city and the density of settlement within the urban area are other factors which may influence the efficacy of the urban agriculture solution, as has already been suggested above in the case of Tanzania. Large, densely-settled cities are less likely to give access to sufficient cultivable land for all those in need than small, spread out settlements. The latter type of urban settlement is, however, quite typical of much of Africa's urban hierarchy.

For Zambia the incidence of increased rates of return migration, as urban economic conditions deteriorated in the 1980s, has been noted by a number of analysts (Ferguson, 1990; Macmillan, 1993; Purbrick, 1990; Mulenga, 1991). Only Macmillan had access to the latest census material which showed so clearly that counter-urbanization was occurring on the Copperbelt – the other analyses rest on various surveys of migrants in rural and urban areas, and particularly of miners' plans for retirement. Mulenga's research focused on Lusaka's peri-urban agricultural sector. As previously noted Lusaka has in fact continued to experience significant net in-migration during the 1980s, in contrast to most of the other urban centres in the country. Nevertheless Mulenga asserts that 'it is true that some people are taking early retirement to the rural areas, [although] there is still some urban drift' (Mulenga, *op. cit.*: 41). In addition he notes (p. 192) that:

> some households have already been forced to migrate to their home villages during the rainy season in order to grow some food crops .. especially among the local tribesmen in Lusaka.

This is in contrast to Kampala, where Jamal and Weeks (1994) suggest that it is the non-local ethnic groups who tended to have to move out of the city. However, control of land in Lusaka has never been associated with local African ethnic groups, since the city had colonial origins, and the surrounding land was owned by European farmers – hence ethnicity probably has little influence on competition for agricultural land within the city boundaries. Why local people, in particular, in Lusaka should be the ones 'forced' back to their home villages to grow food is, however, not clear. Purbrick (1990) notes that the 1980 census already showed that urban growth had slowed significantly, and that it

> indicated a significant increase of urban-rural migration. Urban-rural migrants were identified as urban-born people with links in the rural areas, dependants of rural-urban migrants and retiring or unemployed migrants. The migration of urban-born people to the rural areas was a fundamental departure from trends in the colonial period and the first years of independence. It indicated that urban distress had mounted throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Increasingly people were looking to the rural areas for a viable survival strategy... unlike the depression of the early 1930s, the long-term nature of the 1970s economic decline has meant that a return to the land is the only option for many in the Copperbelt.
>
> Purbrick, 1990: 145–6

On the basis of surveys conducted on the Copperbelt in the mid-1980s Ferguson (1990) argues that unemployed and retired urban-dwellers were increasingly adopting rural strategies which involved them returning to rural 'homes', even if they had never actually lived there. Such clear associations with particular rural villages amongst even the urban-born in sub-Saharan Africa are so common as to be almost ubiquitous, so this is not quite as surprising as it may at first seem, particularly in a country such as Zambia where rural land shortages are not the major issue that they have become in some other countries such as Malawi, Zimbabwe or Kenya. Thus access to rural land for many Zambian long-term or permanent urban residents may not be too problematical. Clearly a return to a rural area when there is little chance of gaining access to land quickly, or even at all, would be a much less attractive proposition and would mitigate against urban-rural migration. The availability of rural land in their 'home' area must, therefore, also be a factor influencing the choices made by urban dwellers in the face of dramatic declines in their living standards. This will not only vary between countries, but will also vary between different groups of residents within any one city, since they will be drawn from or associated with regions with differing land resources and allocation processes. In addition there may be variations in the ease of access to land according to length of stay in the city, and how successfully the urban dweller has maintained his or her links with 'home' village.

The significance of land tenure in affecting return migration processes is emphasized by Andraes (1992) who studied textile workers in the Nigerian towns of Kano and Kaduna. They were living with their wives and children in town, but many of them expected to have to go (reluctantly) to 'home' rural areas if they were made redundant (an increasingly common phenomenon in urban Nigeria) – and 70 per cent of the workers in both towns had access to adequate rural land to subsist. The persistence of rural linkages and land rights for even long-term urban residents in Nigeria, is also supported by Gugler's research in South East Nigeria (Gugler, 1991). However, as Andraes points out, commercialization of land would very much affect return migration. Freehold title to land is now the norm for parts of Kenya, for example, and here Andraes believes that the 'high level of commercialisation of land ownership has closed this escape route for large sections of the urban working class' (*ibid.*: 219). (In support of this contention Andraes cites a paper by P. Kongstad and B. Mikkelsen, 1993, 'Fagbevaegelse og samfundsudvikling i Kenya' Den Ny Verden **17**, Copenhagen.)

In Ghana the drastic narrowing of the rural:urban income gap apparently made cash cropping appear relatively more advantageous than it had for many years. Ghana has had a major programme, funded largely by external sources, to mitigate the social costs of adjustment (PAMSCAD). Jeffries (1992) reports that some of the 46000 public sector employees made redundant between 1987 and 1990 took small loans from PAMSCAD, and that whilst some invested in small urban businesses, the large majority appear to have gone into farming. On the assumption that many if not most of these former public sector employees were formerly urban residents, this is indirect evidence of urban-rural migration in recent years, although the census data suggest this has been occurring over a considerable period for some centres. However, for Ghana an additional factor in migration processes in the 1970s and 1980s which must be taken into account is the importance of international migration. Tabatabai (1988) points out that Ghana's declining economic circumstances led to massive international migration after 1973–74 (the first oil shock), primarily to Nigeria and Côte d'Ivoire. He reports UNICEF data which suggests that from 1974/5 to 1981 about two million Ghanaians (approximately one-fifth of the national population) went to these two countries alone. Tabatabai points out that it was a 'fairly common notion in Ghana that the vast majority of the migrants were from the urban areas', which would suggest that the fall in the urban growth rate was not so much due to return migration (i.e. back to the original destination), but emigration. However, on closer examination it is clear that most emigrants must have come from rural areas, since, as Tabatabai points out, the urban population in the mid 1970s was only about three million. However, some of the migrants leaving urban areas probably would have been part of the emigrant flow. Interestingly, however, the major expulsion of Ghanaians from Nigeria occurred in February 1983, a year before the census. About 1.2 million people returned to Ghana in a couple of weeks. Had very large numbers of emigrants from Ghana's towns immediately returned to them then, this should have significantly increased the intercensal urban growth rates above those recorded. Whether the number of urban emigrants was large or small, it therefore seems that they mostly went to rural areas on their return. Tabatabai does in fact argue that the return stream was largely reabsorbed successfully into the rural sector, but makes no specific consideration of the impact on urban areas.

Even in Tanzania there is some evidence of return migration. In a paper which mainly focuses on the causes and effects of rural-urban migration in 1984–85, von Troil (1992) presents a postscript on the changed situation in 1990. For, on return to Tanzania after structural adjustment had been operating for some time, she noted that although goods were generally more available than they had been in the first half of the 1980s, now:

> [the minimum monthly wage] sufficed only to maintain a family for a few days .. in line with demands by structural adjustment policies, salaries and wages lag far behind the cost of living. This has resulted in a situation where it has been necessary to develop a variety of survival strategies. One of these has been a return to the village. As the prices offered to farmers for producing cash crops have become more attractive thus making cultivation more appealing, farming as the main means of subsistence had regained some of its attraction.
>
> *ibid.*: 235

von Troil's research on rural-urban migration in the mid-1980s had in part been conducted around the Makonde Plateau, where now she found 'many of the young men who had left earlier to try their luck in towns had been persuaded to return and take up farming' (*ibid.*: 235). Given the timing of her research visits, this may suggest that the impact of structural adjustment on migration processes in Tanzania has been fairly recent. Again this may have some bearing on the fairly high urban growth rates recorded from 1978 to 1988 which were discussed in the previous section. Mbonile (1995) who conducted a major migration survey of Makete district, Iringa Province, has also recorded return migration from Tanzania's large urban centres specifically due to the impact of structural adjustment. He states that the 'harsh economic conditions in urban areas triggered a massive flow of return migration' and that 'during structural adjustment, the urban forces that were strong in attracting migrants were equally strong in encouraging return migration' (*ibid.*: 142). However, his research also found a significant increase in short distance rural-urban migration in the 1980s to local smaller towns, which he attributes to improved business opportunities created by trade liberalization. The ending of food subsidies, and increases in transport costs were particularly problematical for residents of large towns, and some returned either to their area of origin or to 'neighbouring towns where it was easy to get land for cultivating food' (*ibid.*: 142).

Reverse migration or circular migration?

The census data and other evidence discussed above undoubtedly mean that there have been very significant changes in the nature of urbanization and migration processes in some sub-Saharan African countries. A form of counter-urbanization, which in this African context refers to a situation where the number of urban residents opting to leave the city and move to rural areas has exceeded the number of rural-urban migrants, has definitely occurred in some countries, although the incidence of this has been quite variable for the different centres in the urban system. The circumstances under which this process is occurring is of course quite different from the counter-urbanization which has become a familiar part of the urban scene in Western Europe and North America, whereby mainly wealthy urban residents are choosing to relocate from major urban areas in order to enjoy the more congenial environment and services of smaller settlements. Nor does it bear any resemblance to the process of urban decentralization described for South East Asia in Gilbert (1993: 728). In this region urban sprawl from major cities, combined with significant transport improvements has transformed the links between formerly rural hinterlands and such centres, leading to a slowing of urban population growth in the large centres but a greatly enhanced level of involvement in urban activities by the 'rural' populace. In Africa it is the poor and unemployed who are leaving town, and the level of formal urban economic activity is tending to contract rather than expand, so there is little opportunity for decentralization.

In many cases reverse-flow migrants in Africa will have moved back to their rural homes. However, the context of rural-urban migration and urbanization in sub-Saharan Africa for much of this century makes it imperative to address a number of definitional and conceptual issues, in order to try and explain more exactly what adaptations in migration processes might have occurred.

In the context of this discussion of the impact of declining urban living standards on African urbanization, the term 'going home' essentially refers to individuals who moved from rural areas into town, and then returned back to their place of origin (i.e. their 'home' – which will usually, but not necessarily always be their cultural 'home') because economic conditions developed which made urban life intolerable and/or rural life seem more attractive. In many cases the urban economic decline, as experienced by the urban poor, has been exacerbated hugely by structural adjustment policies. Thus, in circumstances where living standards, measured by income, for the majority of urban residents were often already very close to those of their rural counterparts, the IMF has imposed drastic austerity measures in essential services such as health, education and transport. These have not only devastated incomes, but also greatly increased the extra costs of urban living (e.g. transport, food), and undermined the former advantage for urban residents of greater accessibility to services. In some cases the advantage has even been reversed: thus in Zimbabwe it now costs significantly more to send a child to an urban rather than rural school, and maternal deaths in Harare have soared as the cost of delivery in the Teaching Hospital suddenly increased from a nominal fee to hundreds of Zimbabwean dollars (Economist Intelligence Unit, 1994).

If a decision is made to return 'home' then the availability of land via systems of customary tenure is regarded as an essential facilitating factor in this process of return migration. Urban-rural migration in this context could include very long-term urban residents, or even those who are urban-born, who opt to take up farming in rural areas; it would exclude those who take up farming as a supplement to urban income and remain resident in town. The essence of the adaptation then is that migration careers or intended plans for permanent urban residence, have been cut short or altered because of the collapse in urban incomes.

A major difficulty with proving that this process has taken place is that circular rural-urban migration has remained so common in sub-Saharan Africa, and rural-urban linkages so ubiquitous. Where appropriate data are available for African cities it is clear that even when migration is adding to urban growth, there has always tended to be a significant counterbalance of urban-rural migration to offset against the gross inward flow. How then can one prove that a return (i.e. urban-rural) migration event has occurred earlier than it would have done in the absence of urban economic decline? It is probable that often one simply cannot. In reality it is mainly a common-sense interpretation which relies on the undoubted evidence that long-term (frequently working-life) urban migration which included whole families had become increasingly important in the circular migration patterns found in sub-Saharan Africa. This is reflected in the very significant improvements in urban sex ratios from the 1960s throughout the region – thus for the vast majority of the urban centres in the countries considered in this paper the sex ratios are now at or near par, and indeed are often now in favour of women. The Ugandan urban sex ratio in 1991, for example, was 94, and in Tanzania in 1988 it was 99. A sudden fall in the rate of urbanization, particularly to levels below the rate of natural increase, must indicate that some migrants and their families are going back before the timespan which past migration trends had made the norm. It may also be that the urban economic decline has affected 'retirement' plans for migrants, which have always been a problematic issue for migration analysis. Thus although there is abundant evidence that many, and often most, African rural-urban migrants plan to return 'home' at the end of their working career in town (e.g. see Potts and Mutambirwa, 1990a; Peil, 1988; Gugler, 1993), it has rarely been possible to establish to what extent such plans are realized. However, it seems reasonable to assume that the economic conditions which have become typical of urban Africa in the 1980s will have greatly reinforced such plans, and encouraged their realization. In 1994 in Zimbabwe, for example, migrants who had arrived in Harare since the imposition of structural adjustment policies four years before were less likely to believe they were likely to stay permanently than migrants surveyed in the relatively good times of the mid-1980s.

However, reduced urban growth rates need not of course be caused by return urban-rural migration. Instead the most obvious cause is that there has been less rural-urban migration in the first place, and this indeed is probably the main change in urbanization and migration processes which urban economic decline and structural adjustment has brought about in sub-Saharan Africa. As suggested by the title, *Migrants No More*, this process has in fact been well described for one small area of Zambia by Pottier (1988), but otherwise this important topic has been very neglected.

A range of interactions between three factors – natural increase, in-migration rates and out-migration rates – can result in reduced urban growth, but the exact nature of such interactions for individual African countries or cities cannot be determined with currently available data. We can only speculate about the likely configuration of the factors for particular cities at particular times, on the basis of the city growth rate, and any available evidence about migrants' movements, behaviour and perceptions. A selection of possible scenarios is shown in Figure 1, which indicates how differing combinations of these factors can produce similar outcomes for annual urban population growth.

Scenario A High positive urban growth well above rates of natural increase, is represented by a demographic model which probably typified African city dynamics in the 1960s, and early 1970s. The level of natural increase is assumed to approximate to the national total (this assumption is maintained in all the scenarios); the rate of in-migration is very high and, although there is significant out-migration as well, indicating the persistence of rural-urban linkages, the balance is well in favour of in-migration. The contribution of net in-migration to urban growth also exceeds that of natural increase, as was typical for African urbanization in the early independence era.

Scenario B where the urban growth rate approximates to the natural increase rate is represented by four possible models. In the first there is no

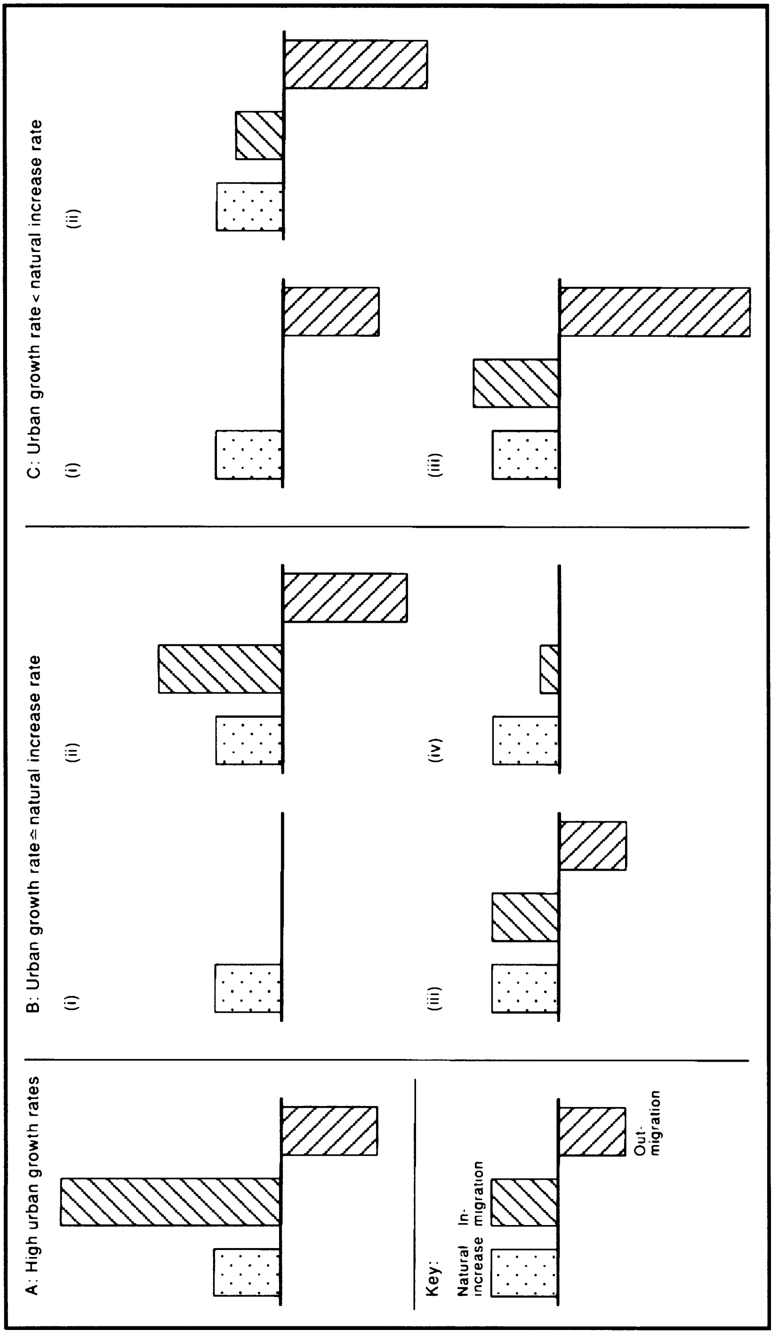

Fig. 1. Alternative urban growth scenarios for African cities: interaction of natural increase, in-migration and out-migration

immigration or emigration – all population growth derives from the differential between urban births and deaths. In the second model, fairly high rates of in-migration (but much lower than those depicted in Scenario A) are largely or entirely counterbalanced by similar rates of out-migration (which exceeds the rate of out-migration in Scenario A). In the third model, in-migration and out-migration similarly offset one another, but both are occurring at much lower rates. In the fourth model, very low rates of in-migration make a small addition to overall population growth, because there is no out-migration at all.

The second and third models of Scenario B are believed to be most typical of the changing processes of urbanization and migration discussed in this paper. Thus in the 1980s, and sometimes during the 1970s, in-migration rates fell significantly and at the same time out-migration rates rose. The contribution of net migration to urban growth was, therefore, greatly reduced or virtually disappeared. The exact relationship between immigration and emigration is infinitely variable, of course, and these models only indicate a selection of possibilities. Slightly higher growth could be produced by increasing immigration a little, or decreasing emigration, and so on. The main point of the illustrations is to indicate that the reduced urban growth described in this paper is likely to have been caused by both a reduction in rural-urban migration, and a simultaneous increase in urban-rural movement. It is worth stressing that a virtual cessation of in-migration is considered highly unlikely.

Scenario C depicts 'counter-urbanization' since the urban areas are growing more slowly than natural increase and thus, over time, will contain a lower proportion of the national population. In Model 1 this is produced by emigration offsetting natural increase with no compensatory inflow of migrants; in Model 2 higher emigration is depicted which, combined with very low immigration, means that net emigration still exceeds natural increase. Model 3 has drastic out-migration, which even a fairly high level of immigration combined with natural increase cannot counterbalance. Some variants of Model 2 and 3 probably account for the very low urban growth which has been described in this paper for some towns in Uganda and Ghana during the 1970s, and the Zambian Copperbelt in the 1970s and 1980s.

The dynamics of urban growth, as these models indicate, are complex. In many of the countries here discussed a return to high positive rates of urbanization could occur quite suddenly, should economic circumstances improve. Then in-migration rates could rise, and out-migration rates fall. An interesting question in these circumstances would be whether there was a high propensity for former migrants, who had returned to the rural areas 'prematurely', to then re-migrate to town. On the one hand, they might feel that their familiarity with the urban centre gives them an edge in the job search stakes over other migrants – a factor which would encourage migration. On the other hand the difficulties and disappointments associated with their urban experience might tend to discourage them from trying again. Some support for both hypotheses is found in Mbonile's research in Tanzania, where older return migrants tended not to wish to migrate again, because they felt that migration was no longer profitable. However, younger returnees were more prepared to try again, if they could raise enough capital to start a business elsewhere (Mbonile, 1995). Not only the incidence of return migration, but also its permanence or duration, are topics which need further research.

Conclusion

The main focus of this paper has been on the increase in urban-rural flows in African urbanization processes during the era of the debt crisis and structural adjustment programmes, and the implications for urban policy. To tackle this topic it has been found necessary to analyse in detail the nature of African urban data used by much of the academic literature as well as the important financial institutions, which it is argued has often disguised the real adaptations which have been occurring in African urbanization processes in response to economic change. This in turn has helped to cause distorted policy responses to the very real economic problems African nations faced in the 1980s.

It is contended that 'going home' (early) has been an important change in urbanization processes in sub-Saharan Africa – for, as described above, the evidence for it comes not only from census data but also from a large number of other types of surveys and analyses of a wide range of countries. Where there is definite evidence of urban centres growing more slowly than natural increase, urban-rural migration must be occurring. Where growth rates have reduced significantly but there is still some net in-migration, 'going home' may still be an important strategy for some people, since apart from being caused by much reduced rural-urban migration rates, this might also be due to very high rates of return migration offsetting somewhat lower rates of in-migration, with new selection processes operating to determine those who can stay in town, and those who must leave.

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