

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO GLOBALIZATION AND UNEVEN URBANIZATION IN AFRICA\*

Authored by: Dr. Santosh Kumar Mishra\*\* (Ph. D.)

## Abstract

A striking feature of globalization is the very fact of social change expressed in a “*multiplicity of transitions*” occurring simultaneously at several and in some cases mutually contradictory levels. These multiplicities of changes occur in different ways for different economies, different cities and different agents within them.

This paper will examine how globalization has affected the provision of public good - water, sanitation and infrastructure - services in Africa that were the domain of governments until recently. The paper concludes that spatial and social fragmentations have serious implications for urban growth and competitiveness. The lack of foreign investment, negligible involvement in international trade, and the steep decline in export revenues coupled with limited domestic savings and investments that Bond has identified in his paper imply that the African region cannot share the same technological advances attained in modern era which are mostly urban based.

**Key Words:** Globalization, urbanization, and Africa.

---

\* Prepared for presentation at the Sixth African Population Conference, to be held at Burkina Faso, during 5 – 9 December 2011 (Hosted by the Government of Burkina Faso and the Union for African Population Studies, Web link: <http://uaps2011.princeton.edu/>, Email: [uaps2011@opr.princeton.edu](mailto:uaps2011@opr.princeton.edu))

\*\* Technical Assistant, Population Education Resource Centre (PERC), Department of Continuing and Adult Education and Extension Work, S. N. D. T. Women's University, Patkar Hall Building, First Floor, Room. No.: 03, New Marine Lines, Mumbai - 400020, Maharashtra, India, Tel.: 91 022 22066892 (O), 09224380445 (M), 91 022 28090363 (R), Email: [drskmishrain@yahoo.com](mailto:drskmishrain@yahoo.com), Web Link: <http://sndtcaee.com/index.html>

# AN INVESTIGATION INTO GLOBALIZATION AND UNEVEN URBANIZATION IN AFRICA

Authored by: Dr. Santosh Kumar Mishra\*\* (Ph. D.)

## 1. TO BEN WITH:

The phenomenon of globalization has many dimensions and it means different things to different people and in different academic disciplines. Economists see it as global capitalism; cultural studies sees it as a form of cultural hybridization; and political scientists see it as a process by which the nation-state is forced to surrender its sovereignty to regional and international political institutions. At the very fundamental level, what we mean when we use the term globalization is an increase in worldwide interconnectedness. It is a process that is fuel by the onslaught of market capitalism throughout the world and accompanying advances in electronic communication and transportation technologies.

A striking feature of globalization is the very fact of social change expressed in a “*multiplicity of transitions*” occurring simultaneously at several and in some cases mutually contradictory levels. These multiplicities of changes occur in different ways for different economies, different cities and different agents within them. The effects, which can either be positive or negative, are manifest in a wide array of contexts—from the social and cultural to the economic, environmental and political. While one section of humanity is growing and developing as a result of integration to global markets, the other wallows in increasing despondency and despair, including in those parts of the world that are believed to have benefited enormously from economic globalization.

---

\* Prepared for presentation at the Sixth African Population Conference, to be held at Burkina Faso, during 5 – 9 December 2011 (Hosted by the Government of Burkina Faso and the Union for African Population Studies, Web link: <http://uaps2011.princeton.edu/>, Email: [uaps2011@opr.princeton.edu](mailto:uaps2011@opr.princeton.edu))

\*\* Technical Assistant, Population Education Resource Centre (PERC), Department of Continuing and Adult Education and Extension Work, S. N. D. T. Women's University, Patkar Hall Building, First Floor, Room. No.: 03, New Marine Lines, Mumbai - 400020, Maharashtra, India, Tel.: 91 022 22066892 (O), 09224380445 (M), 91 022 28090363 (R), Email: [drskmishrain@yahoo.com](mailto:drskmishrain@yahoo.com), Web Link: <http://sndtcaee.com/index.html>

The presentation examines how economic globalization affects countries and regions within countries differently depending on a range of factors, including the level of integration of the local economy into the global economy, the national and local policy context and degree of decentralization of power; the influence of different institutions in each country and locality and demographic characteristics. Furthermore, the paper specifically looks at how uneven globalization reinforces preexisting social and economic differences within African cities.

## **2. THE ROLE OF CITIES IN THE GLOBALIZATION PROCESS:**

Historically, cities have occupied an important role in national development. Cities are powerful engines of growth, in many cases more powerful than national economies. Cities are centers of innovation by the very fact that they are home to the very forces that shape or drive globalization—finance, production, marketing, information, and knowledge production. The characteristics of cities—both infrastructural, regulatory and legal environment and the quality of human capital—in turn, help shape globalization. Over the past 25 years, increased in economic productivity, improvements in literacy, health status, and life expectancy have in most countries resulted from urban-generated economic surpluses.

At the present moment, two types of urbanization processes can be observed: ‘*urbanization with development*’ and ‘*urbanization without development*’ (or limited development). *Urbanization with development* occurs when national economic growth and development are present at the same time, including a national policy that integrates economic and spatial planning; a productive agricultural sector; growth of secondary cities and market towns to facilitate rural-urban interactions; thus leading to a manageable levels of rural-urban migration.

*Urbanization without development* (or limited development), on the other hand, occurs when overall national economic growth and development are inadequate to meet the needs of a growing population. This type of urbanization takes place in sub-Saharan Africa, low-income Asia and Central America. The key characteristics of *urbanization without development* are:

- weak agricultural sector;
- poor national economic performance;
- lack of national policy that integrates economic and spatial planning;
- relative absence of intermediate cities and market towns;
- over migration leading to growth of mega-cities with poor economic bases;
- and
- poor municipal capacity to provide minimum basic services.

If we follow the above categories of urbanization, we can clearly see that the effects of economic globalization (both good and bad) manifest themselves in different ways in different countries and different cities within them, depending on the quality of institutions, human resources, infrastructure, and the predictability and stability of policies guiding national and municipal development. Although many of the constraints in African cities have been historically determined, globalization tends to reinforce them, or instigate new contradictions and fragmentations.

The extreme urban concentration found in many developing countries does not have the same economic and institutional foundations that one observes in cities of developed economies. The rapid growth of cities in Africa is associated with absence of many of the benefits of accelerated growth in cities in the West. Many African cities cannot boast high levels of economic development or high standards of health, life expectancy or education. Poor agricultural performance, the lack of coherent national policy that integrates economic and spatial planning; poor municipal services and fragile fiscal base are characteristic more in line with 'urbanization without development'. Yet, Africans continue to be drawn to cities because they hope for a better job opportunities and education.

Contrary to the school of thought that sees globalization and urbanization as mutually reinforcing processes, many scholars now argue that pre-existing inequalities produced by the process of urbanization are further reinforced by macroeconomic and fiscal policies that accompany economic globalization. The 'spatial reordering' of economic activities - production, distribution, services, finance—is reshaping social relations, residential patterns, property values, labor markets, forms of urban governance, and access to essential services. Shanty towns are found a stone-throw away from gleaming skyscrapers and glittery shopping malls. These changes occur not only in cities that hosts the control centers of globalization, but also in those cities that play a subordinate role in global and local economy. This is particularly evident in the provision of basic services such as water and sanitation that were the domain of governments until recently.

### **3. THE URBAN CHALLENGE IN AFRICA:**

Like many other regions in the world, sub-Saharan Africa is confronted with the challenge of rapid urbanization in the context of economic stagnation, poor governance, and fragile public institutions. By the year 2010, it is estimated that approximately 55% of Africans will be residing in cities (UNDP, 1991: 1). This rapid urban growth has brought with it a host of problems, including unemployment and underemployment, a burgeoning informal sector, deteriorating

infrastructure and service delivery capacity, overcrowding, environmental degradation, and an acute housing shortage. The rapid expansion in urban population has occurred without the needed expansion in basic services and productive employment opportunities. The problem is compounded by weak urban government structures with very limited capacity to stimulate economic growth, mobilize resources and provide the most basic services.

Despite these alarming trends, there is a persistent tendency by development planners to focus solely on rural poverty. Policy makers have tended to equate urban life with a small group of national elites who govern the country. In his 1977 persuasive book, *Why Poor People Stay Poor: Urban Bias in World Development*, Michael Lipton argued that to invest in urban areas is to undermine rural development, the mainstay of many developing countries. This argument has helped shape the anti-urban bias in African development strategies, which continues today. The result has been a neglect of the particular problems of the majority of urban dwellers, especially the poor who live in squatter settlements or slums.

The anti-urban bias goes against the prevailing view that sees urbanization as a progressive process and as one of the key forces underlying technological innovation, economic development and socio-political change. Urbanization has been found to have positive impacts on fertility, mortality and other demographic trends. The current resurgence of interest in and attention to urban management, and the view that cities are the engines of national economic growth and development in general, is in part, based on this pro-urban perspective. This is particularly true today in knowledge-intensive globalizing economy where cities have played a central role as agents of innovation diffusion and socio-economic transformation.

#### **4. DIMENSIONS OF THE URBAN CRISIS IN AFRICA:**

Since the early 1980, large numbers of African countries have had to implement market-oriented economic and institutional reforms under the watchful eyes of the IMF and the World Bank. Public provision of basic services - the hallmark of the developmentalist theories of the 1950-1970s - has particularly been targeted for major restructuring, bringing it in line with a market-oriented approach. On the pretext of increasing efficiency and reducing cost, such reforms were used to dismantle the historic construct of the state as a developer. Yet, the promised advantages of economic restructuring and integration into global markets have not been borne out in the majority of developing countries. Most obviously, poverty, mass unemployment, and inequality have mushroomed alongside recent

advancement in technological developments and the rapid expansion of trade and investment.

Most cities in Africa are experiencing deepening and cumulative patterns of inequality. These inequalities predate the current phase of globalization, but are further reinforced by globalization processes of the post-1980s. Increased competition among cities to attract capital and businesses for generating employment and sources of tax revenues has led to widening inequalities between cities and social groups within cities. These inequalities are manifested in the following way:

- ***Increased urban-rural imbalance:*** There are sharp disparities between the urban and rural areas of Africa. The rural areas have become marginalized from the mainstream of national development. Low levels of agricultural production, the lack of non-farm employment opportunities, and the absence of vibrant small and medium-size urban centres facilitating interaction between rural areas and major cities, and the disparities in the level of services provided collectively accentuate the rural exodus to primate cities. It is estimated that, by the year 2020, over 55 percent of Africans will be living in cities. Once migrants reach the city, however, they confront some of the same conditions of low productivity, joblessness, and poor income that they encountered in rural areas, now compounded by overcrowding, pollution, and other urban problems.

The most significant rural-urban imbalance can be seen in the disparities in the provision of basic services. Access to basic services, infrastructure, education and health are unevenly distributed between capital cities and their rural hinterlands. For example, in 2002, 55 percent of urban residents had access to sanitation compared to 25 percent of rural Africans. For drinking water, 39% of urban household have water connection compared to 4 % of household in rural areas.

A striking difference between middle-income Asia (particularly the NICs) and Africa is that the engine of agricultural production—the mainstay of African economies—is simply not sufficiently powered to increase growth and employment. Besides excessive rent-seeking, post independent governments have failed to develop small market towns, with the transport communication infrastructure, and appropriate political-administrative structures necessary to kick-start an agricultural revolution in Africa. Low

agricultural productivity in turn leads to poor conditions of life in rural areas, further compelling people to migrate to the cities.

- ***Growing poverty and inequality:*** A large proportion of Africans today live in absolute poverty. Increasingly, however, poverty is becoming an urban phenomenon and is growing rapidly. The causes of urban poverty are interlinked, stemming from such factors as *employment insecurity*, sub-standard housing, poor health, low levels of income generation, vulnerability to market shocks, and limited education. Yet, until very recently, the scale and depth of urban poverty were generally underestimated by governments and international agencies because their preoccupation with defining poverty based on a ‘poverty line’ income which tends to underestimate the dimensions of poverty. Poverty lines do not identify who is lacking adequate water and sanitation, or secure accommodation and health care.

Growing differences and competition which are reflected in residential location, social mobility, and quality of life all tend to increase *segregation*. This segregation manifests itself in the vast differences in the levels of service infrastructure that is accessible to residents of poor neighborhoods versus those of the upper- to middle-income areas of any city. The poor living in informal settlements typically lack access to municipal electricity, water, transportation, sewage and garbage collection services. Social and spatial fragmentation of many African cities is further exacerbated by the current wave of concern with the issue of security and violence.

The failure to address these problems at the municipal level frequently results in the exacerbation of intra-city tensions, community alienation, erosion of social cohesiveness and overall demoralization. As both the physical and conceptual divisions between urban communities become more acute, a concern for social cohesion and traditional community values is replaced by a narrow focus on overall economic growth. This orientation of priorities ultimately reduces the capacity of a municipal government to fully recognize and successfully address the diverse needs of constituencies.

- ***Increasing ruralization of Cities and informalization of the economy:*** As African cities continue to grow both spatially and demographically under conditions of economic stagnation and institutional collapse, they take on more of the qualities of their rural hinterlands: increasing importance of urban agriculture by disobeying restrictive land-use controls—paving the way for more diverse use of urban space; the spontaneous growth of illegal

settlements and of petty commodity production; and the maintenance of rural economic links and regional and cultural identities on the part of urban migrants. Urban agriculture is practiced extensively in many African cities, with the result that the economic and cultural differences between city and rural areas have become blurred. Remittances are very important components of many rural economies and household survival mechanisms, providing a critical source of capital. Declining urban incomes and increases in poverty are beginning to have a significant impact on such flows and on rural change.

The urban informal sector has become a powerful force for employment creation in virtually all African cities. Although reliable statistics are hard to come by, the proportion of the urban labour force employed in the informal sector has increased dramatically since the economic crisis of the 1980s. The urban poor are organizing themselves to meet their shelter needs, mobilize funds to build roads, clinics, and their own rotating credit systems to start up a whole range of businesses in spite of the fact that formal municipal regulations try to outlaw these activities. Through collective action, the losers in global restructuring attempt to rewrite the rules governing urban political economy in their favour.

- ***Deficiencies in infrastructure and basic services:*** As African cities continued to grow in size, their declining economic situation has led to dramatic deterioration in the supply of basic infrastructure and urban services. The breakdown in public transport service, refuse collection, road maintenance, drainage clean up, electric and water connections, has in turn affected urban productivity as well as the well being of urban residents. The resources necessary for roads, sewers, water systems, schools and hospitals cannot keep up with the needs of the growing urban population. This has spread existing services and infrastructure even more thinly.

The most visible manifestation of the urban crisis in Africa is the lack of access to basic water and sanitation of by the poor. Despite the importance of water and sanitation in the fight against poverty, however, African governments have paid scant attention to the need to formulate appropriate framework to guide the water and sanitation sector and to accelerate investment in order to expand service delivery effectively and efficiently. Low cost water and sanitation receive only between 1% (sub-Saharan Africa) to 3% (Latin America and the Caribbean) of government budgets. Water and sanitation budgets, which normally fall under environment



ministry, struggle for allocations, especially where basic social services as education and health are prioritized. What little investment there is, the scope of coverage and the efficiency of the delivery mechanism have been far below than is adequate.

In addition to the urban water supply problem, provision of adequate sanitation is perhaps the most critical problem in many African cities. For example, over half of the households in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia had neither private nor shared toilet facilities in 1997, resulting in an indiscriminate use of drains, open spaces and waterways where people also wash. Another 25 percent share pit latrines with other families. Emptying of latrines is a problem in most towns due to the absence of desludging vehicles (vacuum trucks). Addis Ababa's first sanitary sewer system serves only the commercial areas and perhaps 15 percent of the higher income population. Waterborne sanitation, however, will remain unaffordable to the vast majority of household for many years to come.

As water scarcity became severe and the marginal cost for supplying rose steeply, national governments and municipalities increasingly turned away from public provision of basic services in the 1980s. But, privatization has neither reduced costs nor expanded the coverage of water supply to previously unserved communities. Indeed, higher costs to and service cut-offs of persons unable to pay higher rates have been more common. The emphasis on cost recovery has produced a situation whereby those who are too poor to pay are denied basic services. Furthermore, privatized monopolies are reluctant to apply cross-subsidies to meet the needs of those residents who cannot pay full cost for water supply. As a result, the urban poor are overexposed to environmental risks and life threatening diseases associated with inadequate water provision: diarrhoea, cholera and other water-borne diseases.

- ***Growing health and environmental crisis:*** In most African countries, the urban poor are over exposed to environmental risk and life threatening diseases that are preventable. Existing environmental infrastructure is woefully inadequate of providing clean drinking water or hygienically treating household liquid and solid wastes, much less minimizing or treating hazardous and toxic industrial waste. Low income areas not serviced by access roads often wallow in pools of open sewage, mountains of stinking garbage since trucks cannot get there and drainage channels hardly exist.

In addition to poor water and sanitation services, each day liquid waste (including toxic substance and industrial waste) is disposed of using inadequate on-site methods. Airborne particulate readings in the developing world are often ten times higher than peak levels allowable in the United States. This situation endangers the health and productivity of the urban poor, especially women and children.

In cities and neighbourhoods with inadequate provision of water and sanitation, mortality rates are commonly 10 to 20 times higher than neighbourhoods well served by piped water and sanitation. Occurrence of malaria and cholera, often associated with poor rural areas, has now become a common feature many urban centres in Africa. In the 1990s, for example, cities including Nairobi, Lusaka and Addis Ababa experienced outbreaks of cholera, malaria and other communicable diseases due to poor water and sanitation services. The growing health and environmental crisis have further been accentuated by the effects of structural adjustment programs in many African countries as public provision of essential services was replaced with private provision in the name efficiency and minimizing costs.

The resources that municipalities need to provide minimum acceptable levels of basic services, maintain water supply systems and existing fleet of garbage trucks are severely limited. This can be particularly severe when responsibility for water and sanitation service delivery is decentralized to local administration without the corresponding devolution of financial authority. For instance, only 22 percent of the solid waste in Dar es Salaam was collected in 1988 as a result of the lack of refuse trucks (Kulaba, 1989: 236-237). In the late 1980s, the municipality of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia had as many as 40% of the fleet of garbage trucks being inactive at any given time for lack of spare parts.

It is difficult to imagine how significant progress can be made for many of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) without first ensuring that poor households have a safe, reliable water supply and adequate sanitation facilities. This will require efforts from many parties. Much of the workload rests on governments at local and national levels. But they are not alone. Civil society, the private sector and external donors will have roles to play. All of these actors need to find new resources and improved ways of working together.

- ***Poor governance and weak municipal institutions:*** Despite the growing economic importance of the cities in national development, the policy and institutional framework for managing urban growth in many African countries remains weak or inhospitable. Besides the persistence of inappropriate macroeconomic policies at the national level, central government control of national development policy has paid little attention to critical responsibilities of local government institutions, such as operation and maintenance of infrastructure, and the establishment of incentive and enabling legal environment for private economic actors to operate.

The problem of central control has been compounded by weak capacity in municipalities to plan and manage urban development in a sustainable way. What passes for planning at the municipal level are rudimentary forms of land-use, zoning, and licensing regulations, exclusively concerned with limitations and regulations, instead of enabling and empowering local communities. In many cities, current by-laws restrict a host of economic activities because the activities are considered traditional, etc. Housing codes and zoning regulations - inherited from colonial administration—outlaws certain types of housing and business activities. These legal and regulatory environments hamper the productivity and resourcefulness of poor urban residents. As a result, the enormous economic potential of African cities remains untapped.

- ***Diminishing municipal revenue base:*** Like many US cities, urban areas in Africa suffer severe fiscal distress. This became obvious in the 1980s, characterized as the "decade of adjustment". Shrinking revenues were matched by expanding responsibilities. How to pay for new infrastructure investment, provide affordable services without fiscal distress, recover costs, and improve administrative efficiency are all daunting but not insurmountable challenges.

The fiscal crisis of African cities is compounded by failure to solve the central government-local government jurisdictional issue. Central governments have tended to institute and maintain significant financial, legal and regulatory controls, leaving little room for innovation by local authorities. Municipalities lack powers required for effective political and economic decision making, particularly in such critical areas as investment in urban infrastructure, service delivery, revenue generation, and promoting urban economic development. Where central governments do not allow

municipal authorities to tax or borrow, and yet hold them responsible for provision of services, non – delivery is the end result.

*Finally*, the financing gap in the water and sanitation sector is further hampered by the heavy debt burden that many African countries suffer from. The continued outflow of badly needed resources in the form of debt service payment undermines the capacity of national countries to cope with the devastating health impact of cholera, dihorrea and other communicable diseases that so prevalent in crowded urban centers and slums. Full cancellation of poor countries debt could produce additional resources that can be directed toward improving water and sanitation delivery in the urban areas of Africa.

## **5. CONCLUSION:**

The spatial and institutional patterns identified above in turn generate social polarization, between rich and poor, between urban and rural areas, and between different cities. In socio - cultural terms, tensions also exist between poor and rich and between racial and ethnic groups.

Local authorities are, therefore, being pressed from above by the invisible forces of globalization, and from below by social forces that are losing out in the process of market - oriented economic reforms. Different cities and different communities within them are responding to the challenges posed by globalization in different ways. It is important to capture alternative urban management practices in different cities around the world and testing their effectiveness in protecting promoting and fulfilling the right to adequate housing.

In addition, spatial and social fragmentations have serious implications for urban growth and competitiveness. The lack of foreign investment, negligible involvement in international trade, and the steep decline in export revenues coupled with limited domestic savings and investments that Bond has identified in his paper imply that the African region cannot share the same technological advances attained in modern era which are mostly urban based. In the end, globalization ends up reinforcing the pre-existing process of ‘urbanization without development’ whereby inequality and fragmentation continues to worsen, setting the stage for the breakdown of the social order, and making African cities ungovernable.

## References:

1. Allen, J. and C. Hammett (1988), *A Shrinking World? Global Unevenness and Inequality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
  2. Amis, Philip (1995), "Making Sense of Urban Poverty", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 7, No.1.
  3. Attahi, Kofi (1989), "Cote d'Ivoire: An evaluation of urban management reforms", in R. Stren and R. White (eds.), *African Cities in Crisis*, Boulder: Westview Press.
  4. Baker, Jonathan (1992), *Small Towns in Africa*, Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.
  5. Beall, Jo (2002), "Globalization and Social Exclusion in Cities: Framing the debate with lessons from Africa and Asia", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 14, No.1.
  6. Beckerl, C.A. Hamer, and A. Morrison (1994), *Beyond Urban Bias in Africa*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
  7. Bromley, Ray (1978), "Introduction: The Urban Informal Sector: Why it is worth discussing", *World Development*, Vol.6, Nos. 9/10.
  8. Bubba, Ndina and Lamba, Davinder (1991), "Local government in Kenya", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol. 3, No. 1.
  9. Cairncross, Sandy et al. (1990), *The Poor Die Young: Housing and Health in the Third World*, London: Earthscan.
  10. Cheru, Fantu (1989), *The Silent Revolution in Africa: Debt, Development and Democracy*, London and Harare: Zed Books.
  11. <http://www.international.ucla.edu/media/files/57.pdf>, Accessed on June 25, 2011.
  12. Global Water Partnerships (2003), *Financing Water for All*, Report of the World Panel on Financing Water Infrastructure, chaired by Michel Camdessus (March 2003).
  13. Hoogvelt, A. (1997), *Globalization and the Postcolonial World: The new political economy of development*, London: Macmillan.
  14. ILO (1973), *Employment, Incomes and Equality: A Strategy for Increasing Productive Employment in Kenya*, Geneva: ILO.
  15. Jaglin, Sylvie (2002), "The right to water versus cost recovery: participation, urban water supply and the poor in sub-Saharan Africa", *Environment and Urbanization*, Vol.14, No.1.
  16. Jamal, Vali and John Weeks (1988), "The Vanishing Rural-Urban Gap in sub-Saharan Africa", *International Labour Review*, Vol. 127, No.3.
  17. <http://ww2.unhabitat.org/istanbul+5/brochure.pdf>, Accessed on June 25, 2011.
-