

Baker, J. & Pedersen, P.O. (1992). *The Rural-Urban Interface in Africa*. Uddevalla, Sweden: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Reviewed by Jephias Mapuva

The book is a compilation of broad and significant economic themes by contributors who attempt to determine the growth and prospects of sustainability and improve livelihoods, notably in urban areas. The book commences by providing a theoretical framework on the conceptualization of small towns in an African context and how these have ignited sustainable development through such endeavors as rural-urban linkages, practicing urban agriculture, entrepreneurship and the development of entrepreneurial skills for sustainable development, improving living conditions, as well as how people can derive maximum benefits from existing labor markets. In the theoretical chapter, David Simon argues that development analysts and planners should adopt a holistic perspective when dealing with small towns and rural development, in contrast to the current situation where the focus is on actual settlements and physical planning. The author further notes that small towns and rural settlements should be viewed as elements of wider regional, national, and international systems, and factors, such as the impact of global restructuring and the debit crisis, which have profound effects, should equally be taken into account. The first section of the book points out that an assessment of the production and employment potentials in each industrial sector and in each region should provide the basis for more selective regional and urban development policies. The book takes cognizance of the relevance of various theoretical approaches towards the role of small towns, namely the growth pole and dependency approach, the functionalist approach, the territorial approach, as well as the “economy of affection” approach, all of which form the basis for the book and lay the ground on which various contributors base their arguments, revelations, and recommendations.

The second part of the book, discusses a case study of a small town of Sinkat, Sudan, which has provided a positive impact, such as a centralized social welfare and administrative services. Overall, the developmental impact of Sinkat on its hinterland has been presented as having been modest with future prospects and not being as encouraging. Another contributor, Peter Little, examines the importance of climatic seasonality in shaping economic and social linkages between rural populations and small towns in war-ravaged southern Somalia. The author notes that marked seasonal changes in rainfall and productivity in the region resulted in migratory behavior, with some urban-based businesses and traders being forced to relocate, temporarily, in pursuit of pastoral customers. The effect of these migratory habits have been that the rural-urban linkages have tended to be extremely fluid and unstable, further exacerbating the declining of the official markets and the prominence of unofficial trade and markets in Somalia. Citing the seasonal dimensions of rural-urban linkages with regard to market, investment, and the provision of inputs and services to herders, Peter Little demonstrates the positive contributions of small towns to rural productivity and development, as well as some of the negative aspects of rural-urban linkages (Baker &

Pedersen, 1992:22). On the same note, Poul Ove Pedersen takes a sectoral view of the agricultural processing and marketing functions in two of Zimbabwe's new district service centers where he notes that:

"... as in many other African countries, agricultural processing and marketing functions have been traditionally been centrally controlled through marketing boards and are therefore, little developed in small towns" (Baker & Pedersen, 1992:22).

In his pursuit, Pedersen makes an investigative analysis of the potential for the future development of the sector in Zimbabwe's small towns to showcase sustainable development and self-sufficiency, especially among the urban poor. Pedersen takes time to discuss the importance of the parastatal pricing regime of the government allocation procedures for scarce production inputs and foreign currency, as well as the branches of large national enterprises which play a significant role in the sustainable endeavors of small towns of Zimbabwe. Jonathan Baker explores how some ethnic groups, in parts of Africa, develop particular entrepreneurial skills to enable them to irk out a living on the face of an increasingly hostile and competitive environment, citing the Igbo of Nigeria and the Chagga of Tanzania. The contributor notes how some urban-based ethnic groups maximize their economic opportunities and enhance their status by maintaining close links with their rural areas of origin (Baker & Pedersen, 1992:22).

The book also investigates the extent to which entrepreneurs in Botswana, both indigenous and non-indigenous, have contributed to small town development. The contributor provides a historical account of entrepreneurship in Botswana and shows how local Botswana entrepreneurial initiatives have persistently suppressed throughout the colonial period. Back to Zimbabwe, the book also discusses the entrepreneurial milieu in the small Zimbabwean town of Masvingo and shows the extent to which it influences the behavior of individual local entrepreneurs. The role of indigenous NGOs in Ghana towards sustainable development and their propensity to support the activities of small enterprises have been explored by Sally Burrows, who argues that government support to small enterprises has been minimal and suggests that NGO interventions have enormous potential to assist small enterprises at the rural-urban interface.

The book concluded by exploring the macro-level constraints that urban dwellers encounter, as well as the growth of the agro-based informal sector, with Uganda being cited as a case study of how the informal sector can provide sustainable development. In this section, contributions address issues relating to labor markets and how people perceive of their living conditions and the measures they adopt, or might adopt, to improve them (Baker & Pedersen, 1992:23). In his contribution, Gunilla Andre raises a number of salient issues relating to wage-labor formation and its instability as a base for urbanization in the context of the two north Nigerian towns, Kano and Kaduna. Mogens Holm presents an empirical analysis of rural-urban links viewed in the context of the small towns of Makambako in southern Tanzania. Holm views migration to Makambako as a complex issue and considers migrants as a resilient and endowed lot with surplus resources, and as exhibiting rationality in their decision-making.

The book provides a critique of how local regional and national development and change in Africa have been encapsulated and inevitably bound up with a discussion of the role, nature, and repercussions of agriculture on other sectors of the economy.

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