

Multi-activity, Multi-locality and Small-Town Development in Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania

Griet Steel¹ · Torben Birch-Thomsen² · Ine Cottyn¹ · Evelyn A. Lazaro³ · H el ene Mainet⁴ · Fulgence J. Mishili³ · P. van Lindert¹

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Abstract This paper deals with the impact of livelihood diversification through multi-activity and multi-locality on small-town development in Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania. Based on a cross-country analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from ten different research sites, its central argument is that the tendencies of de-agrarianisation, agricultural commercialisation, livelihood diversification and the increased importance of rural–urban connections have accelerated an almost

✉ Griet Steel
g.steel@uu.nl

Torben Birch-Thomsen
tbt@ign.ku.dk

Ine Cottyn
inecottyn@gmail.com

Evelyn A. Lazaro
lazaroa55@yahoo.co.uk

H el ene Mainet
helene.mainet@uca.fr

Fulgence J. Mishili
fjmishili@yahoo.com; fmishili@sua.ac.tz

P. van Lindert
paulusvanlindert@gmail.com

- ¹ International Development Studies, Dept. of Human Geography & Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University, P.O. Box 80.115, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands
- ² Section for Geography, Department of Geosciences and Natural Resource Management, University of Copenhagen,  sterVoldgade 10, Copenhagen, Denmark
- ³ Department of Agricultural Economics and Agribusiness, School of Agricultural Economics and Business Studies, Sokoine University of Agriculture, P. O. Box 3007, Morogoro, Tanzania
- ⁴ CERAMAC, Maison des Sciences de l’Homme, University Clermont Auverge, Clermont-Ferrand, France



universal process of rural urbanisation. The paper casts innovative light on the discussions surrounding small-town development in Sub-Saharan Africa by showing that livelihood diversification and increased rural–urban linkages are not only crucial features in the urbanisation of the countryside but also of the transformation of small villages into emerging towns. This metamorphosis of livelihoods in rural regions, resulting from agricultural transformation, increased multi-locality and multi-activity, has contributed to the emergence and consolidation of small towns.

Résumé Cet article traite de l'impact de la diversification des moyens de subsistance, par le biais d'activités et de localités multiples, sur le développement de petites villes au Cameroun, au Ghana, au Rwanda et en Tanzanie. Fondé sur une analyse transnationale de données qualitatives et quantitatives dans 10 sites de recherche différents, l'argument central est que les tendances à la désagrarisation, à la commercialisation agricole, à la diversification des moyens de subsistance et à l'importance accrue des connexions entre zones rurales et urbaines ont accéléré un processus presque universel d'urbanisation rurale. L'article jette une lumière innovante sur les discussions au sujet du développement de petites villes en Afrique subsaharienne en montrant que la diversification des moyens de subsistance et le renforcement des connexions entre zones rurales et urbaines sont des caractéristiques non seulement cruciales de l'urbanisation des campagnes, mais également de la transformation de petits villages en villes émergentes. Cette métamorphose des moyens de subsistance dans les régions rurales, résultant de la transformation de l'agriculture, de la multiplication des localités et des activités, a contribué à l'émergence et à la consolidation de petites villes.

Keywords Rural transformation · Rural–urban connections · Livelihood diversification · Multi-locality · Small-town development · Sub-Saharan Africa

Introduction

Processes of livelihood diversification in Sub-Saharan Africa have contributed to rural transformation in the region. While agriculture remains the dominant feature in the livelihood strategies of many rural households, agricultural activities more and more often complement off-farm activities that take place simultaneously in different localities. At the very least, the increasing scarcity of productive agricultural land—as well as land fragmentation, land concentration, land grabs and new forms of agricultural production—have compelled rural households to diversify their livelihoods. Christiansen and Todo (2014) speak in terms of the ‘missing middle’—or the share of the population moving out of agriculture into non-farm activities—which indicates that the rural non-farm economy and small-town expansion have become increasingly important for poverty alleviation. However, as Haggblade et al. (2010) argue, these non-farm activities do not automatically align with pathways out of poverty. National policies thus have an important role to play: they can facilitate access to growing niche markets as well as markets where new labour opportunities



are shaped by seasonality and periods of increased labour demand. In addition, national and local governments are important actors who shape rural transformation processes, for example through the prioritisation of investments in productive capacity, land tenure reforms, infrastructure, and rural education and health—all to reduce the barriers and to turn non-farm economic activity into lucrative opportunities for the poor (Haggblade et al. 2010; IFAD 2016).

Rural dwellers have diversified livelihoods and areas of operation by engaging in economic activities outside of their places of residence. These patterns of multi-activity and multi-locality have established new connections between rural and urban areas. In fact, rural–urban connections are now part of the daily reality as rural households carry out diverse tasks: producing income both on and off the farm, maintaining a living space in the village, and shopping, accessing markets, working, and seeking specialised services in local and even distant regional towns. As such, these rural–urban linkages and interactions play a significant role in small-town development and livelihood transformation (Tacoli 2002, 2017). However, a better understanding is needed of the impact of rural–urban linkages on changing livelihoods and small-town development (Bah et al. 2003; Agergaard et al. 2009).

This paper, based on an analysis of the growing importance of livelihood diversification through both *multi-activity* and *multi-locality*, aims to better understand how each impacts processes of rural urbanisation and small-town development in Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania. The paper is structured around the main research question: How has increased connectivity (multi-locality) and livelihood diversification (multi-activity) contributed to small-town development and the urbanisation of the countryside? To draw conclusions, the paper builds on a cross-country analysis conducted within the framework of an EU-funded research project on rural–city connections in Africa.¹ Research teams, proficient in rural development at the regional level, selected 10 research sites in Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania for quantitative and qualitative data collection (see overview in Table 1). Sites were selected because each is a dynamic rural region characterised by new agricultural production systems, as witnessed for example by new labour regimes in agriculture, the expansion of larger-scale production and the commercialisation of agriculture through the introduction of new crops. In the first round of data collection, a questionnaire was used to gather baseline data on household characteristics such as expenditure and savings, mobility and remittances, as well as agricultural, livestock and other household assets. In the second round, data collection zoomed in on one particular site in each country and focussed at: (1) the household level, by recording migration narratives through in-depth interviews, and (2) the settlement level, through a diagnosis of the main functions of settlement(s) in the research areas on the basis of focus-group discussions. To collect the migration narratives, mobility maps were used as a tool to both structure the interview and provide a visualisation of household mobility patterns. For the local diagnosis, the analysis zoomed in on emerging urban centre(s) in each of the research areas by looking at the main functions of the settlements, the types of businesses and services

¹ For more detailed information about the project, see <https://rurbanafrica.ku.dk/>.



Table 1 Overview of research sites and applied methodologies

	Cameroon			Ghana		Tanzania			Rwanda	
	Bamboutos	Moungo	Noun	Ahanta West District	Kwaebibirem District	Njombe	Lindi	Northern Corridor	Bugesera	North-Western region (Musanze, Nyabihu)
Selection criteria: commercialisation of crop	Irish potato	Maize	Rice	Rubber	Oil palm	Irish potato	Sesame	Tomatoes	Rice	Tea
Household questionnaires (total #)	200	1136	200	200	200	200	201	218	*	85
In-depth interviews (total #)	25	*	*	*	28	21	*	20	16	54
Focus-group discussions	Babadjou Bafou Bengang	*	*	*	Asuom Abaam Takyiman	Ulembwe Igagala Iwungilo Ngalanga	*	Makuyuni	Nyamata Town Muyange	Byangabo Gasiza Cyasure Nyiragikorora



in operation, the predominant inflows and outflows of capital, information, people and resources to and from these settlements, and the role of institutions. For this paper, we particularly build our analysis on the case-study material related to multi-activity, multi-locality and small-town development. In addition, we carried out a qualitative analysis of the interview data where household mobility narratives gave an in-depth understanding of livelihood and mobility trajectories of the members of each household.

This introduction is followed by a theoretical discussion on multi-locality and multi-activity in Sub-Saharan Africa combined with a discussion on small-town development. The empirical part of the paper then elaborates on the socio-economic contexts and population trends for each research site in the four countries under study. The paper continues with an empirical analysis of the relationship between multi-activity and small-town development on the one hand and the relation between multi-locality and small-town development on the other. Finally, it concludes with a discussion of the main empirical and theoretical findings.

Multi-locality, Livelihood Diversification and Small-Town Development in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa is often portrayed as a mobile sub-continent. The numerous movements of migrants, pastoralists and traders, in combination with the multi-local strategies of households, challenge former assumptions that sedentary lifestyles are the normal way of living (Hahn and Klute 2007; Baker and Akin Aida 1995; de Bruijn et al. 2001; Simone 2003; Schapendonk 2011). Population movements in Sub-Saharan Africa are increasingly complex due to domestic, post-independence transformations in demography, urbanisation and policies as well as processes of economic and cultural globalisation which increasingly connect Africa to different parts of the world. This has resulted in a diversified picture in terms of mobility patterns and destinations (Bakewell and de Haas 2007), at both national (e.g. Beauchemin 2011; Tacoli 2001) and international levels (e.g. Adepoju 1995, 2008; Schapendonk 2011).

Within the livelihood approach, a focus on mobility has coincided with growing attention to the multi-locality of livelihood strategies (Brandao and Zoomers 2010; De Haan and Zoomers 2003; Paerregaard 1998; Steel and Zoomers 2009; Thieme 2008; Steel et al. 2011). These studies recognise that households construct their livelihoods within a broader socio-economic and geographical context by simultaneously using all sorts of social and material assets in different localities (Carney 1998; Ellis 2000). Households employ multi-local livelihood strategies to gain access to resources in rural and urban areas as well as to extend current networks beyond their particular communities of residence. This is why Berdegue and Cazuffi (2014, p. 5) argue that ‘the livelihoods of the majority of rural households, including smallholder farmers, are hardly only rural; “rural” defines the main places of residence, but no longer encompasses the spatial scope of livelihoods’. Indeed, rural and urban lifestyles cannot be considered as contrasting, opposite or incompatible. Instead, the rural and urban must be considered to be complementary spaces in



which to make a living. As Paerregaard (1997) indicates, people are trying to make the best of both worlds.

With this explicit focus on diversified and multi-local activities, the livelihoods approach offers a useful framework to study contemporary rural transformation and urbanisation processes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Owusu (2008, p. 459) describes three dominant views which occur in the discussions about the nexus of small-town development. The *functional spatial view* follows the positive discourses on urbanisation to argue that urban regions have a supportive, trickle-down effect on their hinterland regions. In contrast, the *political economic view* emphasises the negative impact towns have on their hinterlands due to significant mechanisms of exploitation. A more nuanced picture is embraced in the *intermediate view* where rural–urban interconnections and interactions are emphasised and the particularities of each small town and its hinterland are stressed. This view makes room for an interpretive analysis whereby the wider socio-economic particularities are considered and the role of small towns in regional development processes is a two-way street involving rural–urban linkages.

This multi-dimensional view is also elaborated by Tacoli and Satterthwaite (2002), who ascribe small and intermediate centres four potential roles in regional development processes. They argue that small towns can ‘act as centres for the production and distribution of goods and services to their rural region, act as markets for agricultural produce from the rural region, become centres for the growth and consolidation of non-agricultural activities, [and] attract rural migrants who might otherwise move to larger cities’ (Tacoli and Satterthwaite 2002, p. 2). In this way, small towns, performing a variety of functions ranging from exchange sites for goods and services to hubs of non-farm employment, become rural gateways. As such, they have the potential to positively influence the development of their rural hinterland. Owusu (2008, p. 465) also indicates that small towns perform important roles ‘as providers of services such as markets, secondary education, hospitals, banking, ICT, etc., facilitate and promote rural–urban interactions and linkages within districts’. These different functions positively influence the mobility of rural as well as more urban-oriented households who permanently transcend the rural–urban divide in search of socio-economic opportunities. In other words, the vast flows of people, goods, services and information strengthen the interaction between small towns and their rural hinterlands and can give shape to a flourishing regional economy (Satterthwaite and Tacoli 2003).

However, for Hinderink and Titus (2002), the role of small towns in regional development processes is highly dependent on the national and regional political contexts. They argue that general conclusions on the role of small towns in economic development cannot be drawn without first paying attention to context-specific peculiarities and the particular functions of small towns in the broader region. This aligns with the argument of Berdegué and Cazzuffi (2014), who show that only small towns with strong linkages with the rural hinterland have the potential to reduce rural poverty. While some towns operate as distribution centres for services, facilities and infrastructure, other small towns explicitly function as market centres that link local producers to national and international markets. To the extent to which small towns can fulfil their roles, Tacoli (2017a,



The regional settlement hierarchy

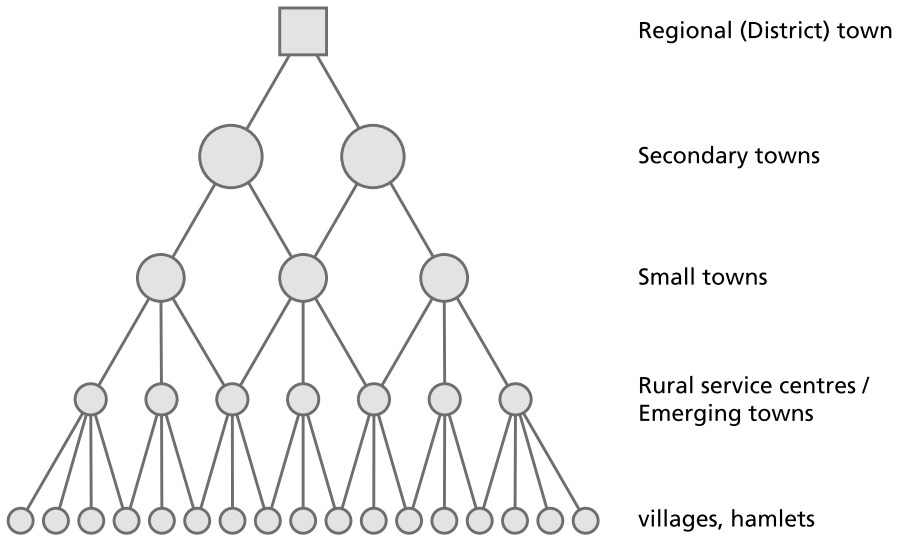


Fig. 1 The regional settlement hierarchy

b) emphasises the importance of contextual variations and the fact that, in addition to agricultural value chains, other drivers may be essential for small-town development. This includes for example tourism, mining or industrial clustering, depending on the resource base of the regions. The function of small towns in relation to their hinterlands is thus a critical factor in their potential contribution to regional development and as such deserves more attention in empirical research (Bell and Jayne 2006).

Zooming in on small-town development, it is important to recognise that there is great diversity and variation across regions in the numerical and functional criteria used to define small towns. Although small towns in Latin America and Asia might have a distinctly urban expression with up to 50,000 or even 100,000 inhabitants, small towns in Sub-Saharan Africa, hosting only a few thousand inhabitants, are often small service centres with value chains still fully linked to agricultural production systems (Tacoli and Agergaard 2017). In the dynamic rural regions selected for this study (see below), many of the small service centres are developing into emerging towns, as witnessed by a diversity of urban functions that are typically lacking in villages. In the context of the regional settlement systems, the focus of rural–urban interaction is most articulated at the levels of the small towns and the service centres (Fig. 1). These towns are those most strongly connected to their hinterlands through circular mobility patterns that characterise the multi-local livelihood practices in which many households engage (Parnell and Pieterse 2014). Apart from offering opportunities for non-farm livelihood diversification, these towns also become active nodes as a result of spatially dispersed livelihood strategies (see Table 2 for the regional settlement hierarchies in our research areas).



Table 2 Regional settlement hierarchies within the study sites

Regional settlement hierarchy	Bamboutos, Cameroon	Kwaebibirem, Ghana	Njombe, Tanzania	North-Western region, Rwanda
Regional town/district capital	Bafoussam	Kade	Njombe Town	Musanze
Secondary towns	Mbouda Dschang			
Small towns	Batcham Galim Babadjou	Asuom		Mukamira Byangabo
Emerging towns/rural service centres	Bafou Bangang	Tweapease Abaam Kwae	Igagala Ulembwe Ngalanga	Kora Kinigi Gasiza

In the following sections, we further situate small-town development within this rural–urban continuum and the regional (and national) settlement hierarchies in Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania. We use empirical illustrations of multi-locality and multi-activity to further scrutinise the emergence of new opportunities for socio-economic development as well as the transformations and processes of small-town development.

Rural Dynamics in Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania

Over the past 10 years, rural livelihoods in African countries have changed tremendously as a result of macroeconomic restructuring programs, agricultural commercialisation, neo-liberal public policies as well as socio-cultural processes of globalisation. Although there are notable differences in the way these rural transformation processes are experienced on the ground, this section starts by highlighting some striking and substantive similarities in the rural dynamics within the four countries under study. We do so by zooming in on ten distinct research sites (see Fig. 2); each research area is a dynamic rural region where transformation processes are guiding the everyday life of rural households.

Rural transformation and urbanisation processes vary from region to region and have strong historical components. The transformations have generally reacted to changes in global and local market demands. A change in local food demand is for instance a clear driver of rural transformation processes in Njombe and Mounjo. On the other hand, in other areas—such as Lindi, Kwaebibirem and Ahanta—an increased export demand for sesame, palm oil and rubber respectively directed transformations. In Rwanda, however, transformations in production methods and intensity in the rice and tea sectors are mainly driven by state intervention through the country's National Agricultural Policy and Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation (2004/2009). To realise a more productive and market-oriented agricultural sector, the policy prescribes land consolidation



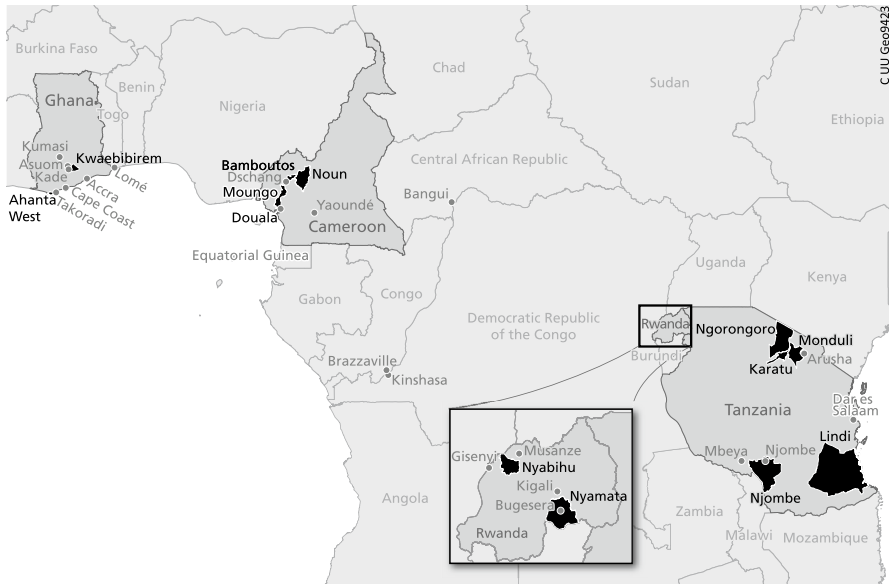


Fig. 2 Study sites: dynamic rural regions

and mono-cropping with a focus on cash crops and regional crop specialisation. General economic and demographic developments also play an important role in transformation processes. World Bank data show relatively high gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates for Rwanda, Tanzania and Ghana, even though absolute per-capita GDP figures for Rwanda and Tanzania are significantly lower than those for Ghana and Cameroon. Urbanisation levels are also much higher in Ghana and Cameroon, but with ongoing and high yearly rates of urban population growth in Rwanda and Tanzania (well above 5%), the ratio between urban and rural population will soon be balanced (Table 3).

As such, rural transformations have turned the sites into very dynamic rural spaces, defined by Hagglade et al. (2010) as areas that contribute to the development of existing and emerging small towns because they are shaped by permanent inflows and outflows of people, money, commodities and information. Agricultural market liberalisation has not only attracted many entrepreneurs from both in- and outside of the countries; increased privatisation and commercialisation of the agricultural sector has also occurred. The state's role has been subsequently reduced to ensuring a productive business environment through incentives, policies, rules and regulations that level the playing field and facilitate private investments. Only in Rwanda is the state a much more prominent actor through its profound agricultural reforms which are often enforced in rather coercive ways (Huggins 2017). Despite this, private investments and entrepreneurship in the sector are highly encouraged by the government.

Across all regions addressed in this study, land availability and accessibility are of primary concern in relation to household livelihood activities, with some



Table 3 Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania: national data on GDP and urbanisation (2017)

	Cameroon	Ghana	Rwanda	Tanzania
GDP per capita (current US \$)	1446.7	1641.5	748.4	936.3
GDP growth (%)	3.2	8.5	6.1	7.1
Urban population (% of total)	55.5	55.3	30.7	33.0
Urban population growth (%)	3.6	3.3	5.6	5.2

Source World Bank (2018)

households forced to move to more urban areas. In particular, the subdivision of land into individual plots, combined with different land tenure categories, makes it virtually impossible for many farmers to live on farm incomes alone. The constant fragmentation and degradation of land means that many members of farming households—especially the younger ones—have moved to urban areas in order to find alternatives to make a living. In addition, land is being increasingly commercialised and sold to external investors. In Ghana, for instance, many urban dwellers from the cities have come to invest in rubber production in the Ahanta West District. Several of them live in Takoradi, an easy commute to the district's rubber plantations; the town's proximity paired with good road infrastructure allows urban farmers in particular to connect easily to major and secondary cities and towns both near and far.

In this context, where land issues—pertaining to both quantity and quality—are predominant, and where the number of land seekers increases, rural households have been forced to look for other livelihood strategies. For the Maasai in the Northern Corridor of Tanzania, pressures on land lead to a transformation away from a purely pastoral system to a more diversified agro-pastoral system. More recently, increased cultivation on grazing land combined with changes in land tenure (from communal to individual ownership) has forced the Maasai to abandon traditional pastoralist activities or localities for new ones. While some migrate with their cattle to other places with larger and more favourable grazing lands, others combine agro-pastoralism with business. As with the other regions under study, the rural dwellers start to look for additional ways to make a living; some open small shops in the community, while others buy a Chinese or Indian motorbike and become a taxi driver, open up phone booths or invest in other productive businesses. In Cameroon's Bamboutos and Noun Regions, alternative livelihood opportunities have resulted from a booming construction sector. In fact, construction has become the main source of non-farm employment in the region. While construction work generates extra income opportunities in the region—in combination with trade and transportation activities—each is generally combined with agricultural activities. Overall, the introduction of tradeable crops has attracted a variety of merchants and external actors who have turned rural sites into attractive locations for investment. Several rural sites lure traders and businesspeople who want to invest in land and create additional labour opportunities for local people. In turn, these rural people earn a better income through which they can afford to go to town, cities or other rural areas to look for additional livelihood opportunities.



In this sense, rural dynamics, which result from agricultural transformation, trigger a variety of mobility flows and rural–urban connections that, as we further illustrate below, have accelerated processes of urbanisation (Table 4).

Multi-activity, Livelihood Transformations and Small-Town Development

In the rural areas under study, agriculture is still the predominant income-generating activity (see Table 5). While farmers produce food crops for subsistence and household food security purposes, the sale of cash crops and salaried employment (both casual and permanent) are important.

Small towns are important nodes in channelling this increased production to regional, national and international markets and as such have seen opportunities to grow (see also Karg et al. 2019). As we can see from the different cases, the dynamics created by the intensification and commercialisation of agricultural production have at least opened up a range of possibilities for livelihood diversification within the rural–urban economy, including new employment opportunities via small shops in town and other productive businesses. In the case of Cameroon, work opportunities in the construction sector or in so-called *bayam-sellam* activities have increased due to the many local traders who traverse the region in order to collect and distribute freshly harvested vegetables and fruit (Pasini 2018, p. 315). In the Mounjo Corridor, maize plays an important role for the area’s rural as well as urban populations. The region is situated between the densely populated areas of the Western Highlands and the Littoral Region with the metropolis of Douala accommodating many inhabitants from the Western Highlands and the Mounjo Corridor. The business of maize is different from that of other food crops as it is separated into two markets: fresh maize, generally of short duration, and dry maize, which covers a considerable part of the year. The relatively easy storage of maize means that rural and urban producers, retailers and *bayam-sellam* merchants can supply the market at optimal moments of demand as well as the financial needs of households. The Mounjo Corridor supplies towns in the West and the Littoral with fresh, off-season maize. This maize, roasted by women and children along road axes, is the basis for a very prosperous small business. As such, the production of maize has contributed to the intensification and diversification of services in small towns. Places like Manjo, Loum and Penja are some of the many stops on the national road from Douala to the Western Highlands which have developed from rural service centres into small towns; here a plethora of retail shops and services are dedicated to travellers’ needs and supplied with local produce such as maize, fruit and palm oil.

The same dynamics can be observed in the Bamboutos Region, formerly an important place in terms of coffee but now a flamboyant market garden of tomatoes, Irish potatoes, onions and a variety of other horticultural crops. Until the 1980s, Arabic coffee production, alongside subsistence crop production, used to be the most important income-generating activity. In the context of a post-coffee economy (although coffee production has not disappeared completely), farmers turned to market gardens and especially Irish potato, which is well adapted to the plateau and



Table 4 Comparative matrix: the contextual characteristics of the study sites

	Cameroon		Ghana		Tanzania		Rwanda			
	Bamboutos	Moungo	Noun	Ahanta West district	Kwaebibirem district	Njombe	Lindi	Northern Corridor	Bugesera	North-Western region
Geographic and connectivity setting	Well-connected volcanic plateau	Road-side development and trade corridor	Road-side development	Very well connected to urban centres and coastal towns	Relatively isolated but strong relations with hinterland	Strong town-hinterland relations within district	Relatively isolated coastal area but well connected by road to Dar es Salaam	Mountainous area with volcanic soils in a very high-density rural area	Relatively isolated, but in proximity to Kigali. One paved road connecting Kigali to Burundi	Relatively isolated, very fertile lands on steep slopes
Regional production characteristics	Medium-scale farming	Transport and commerce	Fishery and farming	Plantation, gold and oil extraction	Plantation and mining activities	Small-scale farming	New sesame boom and fishery	Agro-pastoral system	Small-scale farmers organised into cooperatives	Tea plantation and small-scale farming
Commercialisation of crops	Irish potato	Maize	Rice	Rubber	Oil palm	Irish potato	Sesame	Tomatoes	Rice	Tea
Markets	Periodic	Local and international (exporting to Gabon, Chad and Equatorial Guinea)	Regional and international	International rubber company	National, West African, and global	Periodic and local/national traders	International (exporting predominantly to China)	Periodic; local	Local markets and farmer organisations	Local (farm gate) and international tea company



Table 5 Main income-generating activities of households

Income source	Cameroon (%)				Ghana (%)		Tanzania (%)		Rwanda (%)	
	Bamboutos	Moungo	Noun	Ahanta West district	Kwaebibirem district	Njombe case	Lindi case	North-Western region (Nyabihu/Musanze)		
Agricultural production	69.3	46.8	67.8	48.0	72.0	70.0	55.3	48.8		
Livestock	9.6	11.4	9.7	0.5	1.0	0	6.7	11.6		
Self-employed	9.6	3.0	12.1	28.0	17.0	9.1	21.2	24.4		
Salaried employment (casual or permanent)	7.2	13.2	0.7	18.5	6.5	11.1	2.8	12.8		
Pension	0.3	6.3	1.8	0.5	1.0	0	0	0		
Remittances	3.3	19.4	7.8	4.5	2.5	7.6	1.7	0		
Other income sources	0.8	0	0	0	0	1.5	12.3 (no income)	2.3		



mountain climate. As a result, both landscapes and livelihoods have changed significantly. For example, the production area extended progressively from the mountain to the plateau, and market centres developed along the main roads. Irish potato has become iconic of rural–urban linkages, as this crop is no longer cultivated on a subsistence basis but is highly commercialised and integrated with manufacturing and services in rural service centres and small towns. As a result, the small towns of Mbouda and Foubot (in nearby Noun Region) have become key agribusiness centres which supply markets all around Cameroon as well as the sub-regional neighbouring countries.

In the other cases, rural villages (administrative units and settlement areas) are also transforming rapidly into trading, transport and communication nodes with the emergence of agro-input suppliers. Different types of investments, services and activities such as health centres, financial services and petty trade (traditionally regarded as urban based) are found in these emerging small towns. In the Kwaebibirem District of Ghana, the small town of Asuom is a good example of a settlement in a dynamic rural region that develops as a result of sustained economic activity in the regional hinterlands. With over 10,000 inhabitants (Ghana Statistical Service 2014), the town of Asuom is centrally located in the district and serves as a transport hub to a variety of service centres (e.g. Tweapease, Kwae and Abaam); it is also well connected to bigger towns and cities such as Kade (the district capital), Kumasi and Accra. The trade related to the expansion of oil palm and cocoa has visibly resulted in a diversified functional structure of the various small towns. In Asuom, and as with nearly everywhere else in our research areas, the main commercial and service activities are located alongside the roads that connect the town to other settlements, including two daily markets and a variety of small grocery shops and general stores, car-repair shops, hardware stores, mobile money kiosks, bars and a handful of guest houses. The town of Asuom also hosts the headquarters of the Serendipalm Company, which only processes organically grown oil palm produced by about 800 farmers engaged in the company's outgrower schemes (Santpoort and Vos 2015). These farmers spend a great part of their monetary income on goods and services in town. Town-based traders—or the producers of palm oil themselves—sell the product in Asuom, where small-scale enterprises process the raw material into a variety of detergents and cosmetics for local consumers. The many forward and backward linkages between the rural and urban economies increase their mutually interdependent relationships and intensify the role of small towns in the regional economy.

In the case of Irish potato-growing areas in Njombe, Tanzania, farmers' involvement in multiple spin-off activities has clearly triggered the development of small towns in the area. Due to several possibilities to sell value-added products, among others peeled potatoes and potato chips, local dynamics are very diverse. Whereas a vast majority of respondents indicated agriculture as a main activity to generate income (Table 5), diversification into other activities is important for contributing to the household budget. The implications of such dynamism are significantly increased rural–urban connections as well as many new income-generating activities and businesses started by rural dwellers in service centres and emerging small towns; these range from casual labour and petty trade in charcoal or peeled potatoes to timber businesses. In the studied rural service centres around Njombe, the



number of shops has increased from very few to between 14 and 32 within the past 10 years (Ortenblad et al. 2018). Livelihood diversification and the increased registration of shops have contributed to the urbanisation of the rural villages as they provide trade connections and operate as investment hubs for agricultural input suppliers. In addition, these rural service centres also provide other social services that are needed in rural areas such as mobile phone connection, access to mobile money and transport opportunities.

In Rwanda, 80% of the population has been relocated to grouped settlements under the villagisation or *imidugudu* policy (Hilhorst and Van Leeuwen 2000). This is in line with the country's mid-term plan for economic growth and poverty reduction, which envisions a new economic geography through a planned and controlled process of urbanisation. Through the creation of a nationwide and hierarchical network of urban and rural centres that provides services and attracts economic activities, planned urbanisation is seen as the driving force for economic and sustainable development. In order to achieve this, these centres are provided with infrastructure including hospitals, schools and electricity which appeals to many rural residents. This in turn is viewed by richer urban and rural households as a favourable business landscape which offers new investment opportunities. Although administratively converted into urban areas, in reality many households still rely to a large extent on agriculture for their livelihoods. As such, these settlements and their inhabitants struggle through the transition where both urban and rural characteristics remain prevalent (Cottyn 2018). While these transformations offer opportunities for livelihood diversification into non-farm areas, they have also necessitated many households to reshape their livelihood strategies (see also Cottyn and Nijenhuis 2016). For example, many of the respondents recounted that, due to mono-cropping and land consolidation policies, they struggle to make a living out of farming alone. Moreover, the amount of available farmland has decreased significantly as it has been converted into settlement land. In contrast to the other cases in this research, the development of emerging towns in Rwanda is driven by urban policies and planning which are in turn supposed to trigger agricultural spin-off activities and the development of other, non-farm sectors.

In each research area, we observed many people investing farming incomes into small businesses or trading, adding wage labour activities, or abandoning farming altogether. Households that did not diversify, and so still fully depend on farming activities, were however pushed away due to land scarcity and increased urbanisation. This became very explicit in one of our interviews in the village of Takyiman (Ghana). Here, many households were relocating to the nearby village of Dotchi to farm.

We [in Takyiman] have given all our lands for the settlement, mainly buildings and houses. So people prefer buying land in Dotchi for farming, rather than in Takyiman. We have used most of our farmland here for construction purposes. Because of the basic amenities we have here in Takyiman, such as water, electricity, all the neighbouring villagers prefer to come here and build houses (Santpoort and Vos 2015).



However, as we saw in the other cases, these farmers still connect themselves to rural service centres through patterns of temporary mobility (Ortenblad et al. 2018). Rural–urban connections, which are increasingly reliant on both rural and urban resources, are central to the development of multi-local household strategies. This is discussed in the next section.

Multi-locality, Rural–Urban Connections and Small-Town Development

While mobility is an age-old phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa (de Bruijn et al. 2001), absolute numbers of people on the move have escalated and involved increasingly connected rural–urban spaces and places over the last decades (Cottyn et al. 2013). When looking at the impact of these different forms of multi-locality on small-town development, it is important to make a distinction between movement durations. In this paper we refer to *long-term mobility* in cases where household members leave their home region for a long period of time, for example months or even years. In contrast, *short-time mobility* includes all types of daily and periodic commuting; for example, this mobility type includes farmers commuting to cultivate land and traders visiting markets and farm gates on a weekly or other regular basis.

Long-term mobility might contribute to the development of the home region as the migrated household members regularly visit their homes for family reasons or for holidays. In addition, a constant, bidirectional flow of remittances, both in cash and in kind, connects these migrated household members with other household members in the rural areas (Gugler 2002; Steel and Van Lindert 2017). However, our empirical results show that short-term mobility patterns contribute significantly to increased rural–urban connectivity and that these connections are even intensified with the proximity of small towns. First, rural people crisscross the region to gain access to crops, markets, services and labour opportunities. When certain goods and services are not available in a specific locality, people look for them elsewhere. For example, over the last few decades there has been an increase in mobile phone usage, but as certain communities lack access to electricity, people must commute to nearby service centres to recharge phone batteries. Throughout the different research areas, many people also move from one place to another to buy and sell food crops at periodic markets. This is one of the reasons why commuting contributes to the urbanisation of the countryside.

Second, the increased numbers of shops and services clearly attract successful producers to invest in these types of businesses and to commute between service centres and small towns to access supplies for their shops. They thereby provide ‘urban services’ to those in the rural hinterland who cannot travel themselves. In Rwanda, it is clear that not all actors shaping the dynamic growth of small towns are permanent urban residents. Analysis of the household mobility maps shows that many rural households rely on both rural- and urban-based resources to construct their livelihoods. Apart from offering potential opportunities for non-farm livelihood diversification, small towns also become nodes in spatially dispersed livelihood strategies and to access services and infrastructure, moving in and out. Indeed, the increase in local transport services is directly linked to rural–urban commuting.



While busses and trucks provide long-term connections, cars and motorbike-taxis have developed to supply the daily mobility needs of commuters who link rural hinterlands and small towns. People are more mobile, and this has led to the development of local transport services with small-scale operators often located in small towns.

Third, our empirical results show that the direction of commuting is irrelevant for the urbanisation pattern, as both rural–urban as well as urban–rural mobility contribute to increased connectivity and development of small towns due to increased demand for goods and services. Agricultural intensification has for instance increased the demand for day labour in seasonal markets. Especially in the Bamboutos and Noun Regions, there were more rural than urban commuters travelling to rural and small-town destinations. Moreover, commutes to destinations at higher levels of the regional settlement hierarchy, such as the district towns, were fewer in number. In the Noun Region, a higher number of household members work in villages as opposed to towns. In this rice-growing area, production does not solely rely on family labour. Paid day labour is also important and explains rural–rural commuter mobility as well as urban–rural and especially seasonal mobility. It also explains, in part, the development of services visible in rural centres and small towns that are geared toward farmers and commuters; this includes transport systems dedicated to rural–rural mobility (such as motorbike-taxis), micro-finance agencies or daily food supply and catering among others.

These rural–rural mobility flows and even urban–rural flows were also noticed in the other research areas. In southern Ghana, people move from the city to the rubber and palm oil areas as urban investors seek to cultivate land and secure retirement. In the Ahanta West District especially, there is a large number of urban middle class (for example doctors, managers, lawyers and businesspeople) living in the city of Takoradi; these commuters travel to the rubber area to cultivate land and to supervise the work of their paid plantation labourers. In Mounjo, the relatives of residents in the Western Highlands visit or migrate to the Noun. These migrants are not much involved in agriculture but rather in domestic work, service provision and construction work and as such contribute to small-town development. In Cameroon, they invest in ‘home’ villages but mainly in small towns in order to diversify their activities. Urban investments in small towns in the Mounjo or Noun areas are quite visible in the shape of hotels, restaurants and catering activities (Yemmafouo 2016).

In Rwanda, movement from and to rural service centres and small towns also contributes to urbanisation of the countryside. Most of the commuters do not move further than the district boundaries. In cases where work is found in more distant urban locations, household members construct their livelihoods by opting for multi-local arrangements in which some of the household members temporarily commute in an attempt to make optimal use of opportunities in different localities at the same time (Box 1). Thus, a large group of temporary urbanites influence the dynamics at play within these towns; through multi-directional and multi-purpose patterns of mobility, this type of mover makes optimal use of the opportunities that urban locations offer. This illustrates a form of urbanisation—clearly shaped by flexible, mobile and temporary urbanites—that flavours these small towns with a unique social infrastructure that stretches far beyond city boundaries.



Box 1 Multi-locality in Bugesera, Rwanda

Modeste is a 44-year-old man who lives in Rwanda's Bugesera District². After taking out an RWF 200,000 microfinance loan and investing in his wife's farming activities in Huye, Modeste moved to Nyamata Town to work in construction. During the week, he lives in Nyamata, where he rents a room. On the weekend, he visits his family in rural Huye (interview Modeste, Nyamata, 10 February 2015). Many other rural Rwandese similarly use these towns to work and access services and infrastructure, moving in and out in a circular pattern. As a consequence, these towns have many temporary urbanites. In fact, out of the 130 registered households in Nyamata I (a sub-village of Nyamata Town), only 60 were permanent in 2015 (interview village coordinator Nyamata I, 17 February 2015)

Tanzania's Njombe Region is highly attractive for external investors. These mainly Irish potato traders, and a steadily increasing number of timber growers, travel to the area temporarily and so connect rural areas with intermediate and district towns as well as the city of Dar es Salaam. These mobility flows also contribute to small-town development and emerging rural service centres. The flourishing potato and timber sub-sectors have contributed significantly to the development of multi-local dwellers by facilitating their activities.

Conclusions

By analysing the role of increased rural–urban connections (multi-locality) and livelihood diversification (multi-activity) at ten research sites in Cameroon, Ghana, Rwanda and Tanzania, this paper has focussed on rural urbanisation processes and small-town development in Sub-Saharan Africa. The empirical results clearly indicate that rural–urban linkages are a crucial factor in the livelihoods of the rural households under study. Indeed, for many rural households, rural–urban linkages are part and parcel of the daily reality of household members carrying out diverse tasks of producing income on and off the farm, in maintaining a living space in the village, and in going to local and even distant towns to shop, visit markets, work and seek specialised services. Whether short or long term, people living in rural areas travel to small towns and service centres in search of consumer goods, services and labour opportunities.

When studying small-town development in Sub-Saharan Africa, we have to be careful when considering these rural dynamics as new or a direct result of increased multi-activity and multi-locality. However, there are significant changes that deserve closer attention and wider debate. As a result of the increasing commercialisation and diversification of crops, new opportunities have emerged in the rural areas. These come in the form of new labour as poor farmers are displaced from the land and find employment on plantations and large-scale farms especially. In line with Christiansen and Todo (2014), we also observe a growing prominence of what is referred to as the 'missing middle', the share of the population moving out of agriculture into rural non-farm activities and informal jobs in the construction, transport or commercial sectors in small towns, which gradually also may increase their importance as regional nodes. The multi-functionality of

² Name has been changed to preserve anonymity



these small towns and rural service centres has transformed the rural areas into so called opportunity spaces (for more on the dynamics of emerging urban centres, see Larsen and Birch-Thomsen 2015). This is why certain rural dwellers decide to stay in the rural regions to interact with agricultural and non-farm dynamics. In addition, these booming rural zones have attracted the interest of external investors and urban residents who, on either a regular or irregular basis, seek livelihood opportunities in rural areas or engage in rural (or non-rural) activities. At the very least, a growing number of people who live in urban areas are coming to farm in dynamic rural areas because they see opportunities. These are urban dwellers who farm alongside their 'urban' professions in the town or city. They rent land in the rural hinterlands and cultivate in agriculturally dynamic places. At the same time, many of them prefer to live and invest in town, as witnessed, for example, by, 'tremendous improvements in housing type and quality' (Ibrahim et al. 2018, p. 94).

In this sense, and as we have also noticed elsewhere (Cottyn et al. 2013), mobility flows have become more complex due to increasing diversification in terms of spatiality, temporality and variety of actors. Nonetheless, the transformation of agriculture sometimes leads to periods of decreased mobility; this is because people tend to stay in the dynamic rural regions where better opportunities can be found in the agricultural sector and related spin-off activities (such as selling chips, peeling potatoes and other types of petty trade). In addition, there is a reverse mobility flow. Attracted by the economic opportunities offered by these rural dynamics, urban dwellers move into rural areas and so contribute to the development of the area. As a result, mobility flows are no longer one-way but instead constitute very complex and fragmented processes of resource inflow and outflow including people, money, goods and services. This is why urbanisation can no longer be considered to be the outcome of a unidirectional movement from rural to urban areas; it has instead been shaped by a chain of connections in which rural and urban livelihoods interact on a movement continuum and where small towns have become an important reference point in the urbanisation chain (see also Tacoli and Agergaard 2017; Mainet 2017).

However, and to a lesser extent discussed in this paper (but see Ortenblad et al. 2018), one risk of these dynamics is that not everyone can benefit equally from rural transformation and economic growth in the areas under study. For some households, restrictions in access to common pool resources and factors of production, particularly land, can have significant and negative impacts on household poverty levels and general well-being. It is especially these social stratification factors and social mobility indicators that deserve more attention in further research. How do small-scale and landless farmers, for instance, compete with urban investors and other external actors, and has the introduction of new actors resulted in the exclusion of smallholders from more dynamic markets? In other words, who are the winners and the losers, or who are the vulnerable actors at the fringes of these agricultural transformations? A concrete and empirically based answer to these questions would advance the debate on how multi-locality and multi-activity have contributed to rural development and poverty reduction processes in Sub-Saharan Africa.



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