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# RURAL URBANIZATION IN ITU LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF AKWA IBOM STATE: ANTECEDENTS, REQUIREMENTS, AND PROSPECTS

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## **Abstract**

*The paper focused on the antecedents, requirements, and prospects of urbanizing the rural communities of Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State with such potentials as demographic transition, infrastructural facilities, social amenities, private and governmental establishments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith based organizations (FBOs), employment opportunities etc. To achieve the goal of this paper, three (3) research questions were raised to guide the secondary data generation through the review of literature from books, archival materials, journals, unpublished monographs, etc. However, three (3) functionalist models of urban ecology (concentric zones, sector, and multi-nuclei), and conflict theory (new urban sociology) were adopted and used as frames of explaining the structure of urbanized areas and social relationships. In the light of this, the paper argued that rural urbanization processes in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State predated the colonial and post-colonial eras, but became more pronounced during these periods because of such factors as using centrally located and coastal villages as provincial capital and divisional headquarters as well as upgrading and conversion of these centres into state capitals and local governmental headquarters. The findings revealed that these colonial and post-colonial urban policies in addition to various urban planning and development laws are antecedents and requirements for rural urbanization. The paper recommends among others the harmonization of the colonial and post-colonial urban development policies, programmes and the relevant laws in order to facilitate rural urbanization processes in the Local Government Area and elsewhere in Akwa Ibom State.*

**Keywords:** *Rural urbanization; Urbanization, Urban growth, Rural areas, and Urban centre.*

## **Introduction**

Rural settlements have often been attracted to such social policies as rural development, rural electrification, rural road projects, rural water projects, rural industrialization etc. to address the perceived rural backwardness and rural – urban migration. While urban areas are usually attended to using such social policies, as urban development and maintenance, urban renewal, urban waste management, urban housing projects etc. aim at sustaining and accommodating the changing phases of urban areas for social progress. Looking through the perspectives of linear or evolutionary social theorists (Comte, 1877; Spencer, 1862; Durkheim, 1893; Tonnies, 1887; cited in Kirby and Kidd, 1997), social progress evolves through stages. For instance, Auguste Comte believed that society progresses through a number of stages reflecting the development of human ideas. According to him, the first two stages (the theological and metaphysical), represented eras when the clergy and philosophers were the ultimate arbiters of knowledge and showed Comte's view of the development of human society to that point. The third stage, positivism, represent the triumph of science in which scientific knowledge was necessary to effect changes beneficial to society.

In Herbert Spencer's thought as expounded by Haralambos and Heald (2001), the development of human

society is likened to the evolutionary development of biological organism from simple to complex, through the process of modification and differentiation. Ekpenyong (2000) noted in the light of this that, like an organism, human settlement has parts such as families, politics, economics, religious organizations etc, each performing specialized functions, but all integrated to move society from simple to complex social relations. Spencer's typology has been summarized with regard to human settlement:

- Society/human settlement begins as small collectivities and increase in size and complexity of structures;
- Out of these complexities grow some mutual dependence of parts on one another, so that the existence and survival of one depends on the other;
- The whole which these parts constitute is independent of the parts, lives longer than the parts, and increases in structure and functions.

Ferdinand Tonnies (cited in Fletcher, 1971) noted that the transition of society or human settlement from *Gemeinschaft* to *Gesellschaft* accounts for two distinct societies; a traditional society where man lives in a tradition bound mode of life (*Gemeinschaft*) transit to a complex society (*Gesellschaft*), where man exercises freedom in the conduct of his affairs. In a similar line of argument, Emile Durkheim (in Fletcher, 1971) still, noted that two societies exist with such behaviours as mechanical (rural), and organic (urban) solidarities. This then suggest the interpretation of the movement of society in history. According to Emile Durkheim, mechanical solidarity is a major feature of rural settlement or preindustrial environment, while organic society emphasizes social relations in urban or industrial environment. This social narrative present society as inevitably advancing from the pre-industrial to industrial systems. Thus, the development of industrial and advanced technologically driven economy has serious effects on the socio-economic and ideological life in both settlements (rural and urban).

Against this background, rural urbanization may connote transformation, industrialization, transition, infrastructural development, population growth, socio-economic development, and attitudinal change. Thus, Schneider (1969) in Offong (2007) observed that the presence of industrial establishments in a place would certainly attract the concentration of people to that centre for employment, commercial activities, exchange of specific skills as consultant, higher education, and provision of support services. According to Schneider, this trend discourages out-migration and encourages population growth at that centre of industrial activity, a feature of population urbanization and industrial urbanization and development. These social agitations can be spontaneous, planned, or and natural threats (disaster).

Scholars (Breckenfeld, 1977; Harvey, 1983 in Offong, 2011) argue that the term urbanization or urban area is typically used as a synonym for a city, but the two are not the same. According to these scholars, all cities are urban areas, but not all urban areas are cities because of size, population, activities, and socio-infrastructure facilities. Breckenfeld noted that urban is a statistical concept defined by a country's government. In other words, each government sets its own definition by declaring one or more settlements urban, regardless of the size or function. Thus, many countries based their definition on a threshold number of inhabitants which ranges from a few hundred as in Peru and Uganda, to more than ten thousand (10,000) as in Italy, Nigeria, Senegal, etc. Yet other governments agreed on a combination of criteria such as population density, political functions, or predominant activity of the areas. In the light of this, rural urbanization may first be considered from the perspective of population growth which is called "population urbanization which could attract commercial and agro-allied industrial activities as major factors in modern urban development. In this regard, the transitional rural area may not be considered as a city because of increase in population or demographic characteristics only, but there must be enforcement

of urban laws that reflect the zoning and other urban features.

The initial stage of the transitional rural areas may not be on equal rating with the long standing urbanized areas which had evolved into a city. This is because a city has a large number of people than the transitional rural areas (rural-urbanization) living in close proximity to one another, sharing complex political, economic, and social activities as stable features. This suggests that cities are centres of economic production, religion, learning, and diverse culture. Thus, they symbolize their nation's identity and political strength. Therefore, while city expansion can produce more urban centres, rural urbanization cannot. But, measures adopted for city expansion and the subsequent creation of urban centres could be replicated to facilitate rural urbanization. It is on the strength of this that, the investigation into the antecedents, requirements for urban system processes and development, and the prospects of urbanizing rural communities of Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State becomes a specific area of research interest.

### **Research questions**

- i. What are the antecedents of urbanization that can be adopted for rural urbanization in Itu Local Government Area?
- ii. What are the normative requirements for urbanization that can facilitate rural urbanization in Itu Local Government Area?
- iii. What are the resisting factors of rural urbanization in Itu Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State?

### **Significance of the study**

The findings of this paper shall be beneficial to the following groups – urban development agencies, researchers, rural authorities.

### **Urban Development Agencies**

These include urban planning and development agencies, urban maintenance and renewal authority; capital city development authority etc. Information generated from this work shall guide in the urban development blueprint or the review of urban planning strategy.

Researchers: The literature and theoretical frame of reference that are used to analyse and explain the variables of this study shall open a window that would trigger research endeavours and enlarge the frontier of knowledge in rural urbanization.

Rural Authorities: These authorities are the traditional and the governmental institutions. The local headquarters where few administrative and commercial activities are domiciled can adopt these findings to map out urban development roadmap or strategy (street numbering).

### **Concepts clarification**

Rural-urbanization: Rural urbanization is a statistical concept usually defined by a country's government by declaring one or more rural settlements urban, due to increase in population, regardless of size or function (Brekenfeld, 1977). Thus, many countries based their definition on a threshold number of inhabitants which ranges from a few hundred (250) as in Peru and Uganda, to a more than ten thousand (10,000) as in Italy, Senegal, Nigeria etc. Yet other governments agreed on a combination of criteria such as population density, political functions, infrastructural provisions, industrial and administrative establishments, high level of social services, and the transformation of rural consciousness and behaviour. However, some rural villages in South-South zone of Nigeria have possessed two or more of these urban

characteristics that can help in the process of rural urbanization.

**Antecedents:** This is seen as a developmental milestone of a particular settlement. Such as peculiarities, achievements, challenges, and events around its survival and existence.

**Requirements:** This entails the guidelines, administrative framework, urban planning and development laws, and the supervisory authorities to regulate activities and sustain aesthetic values of the centre (zoning).

**Prospects:** Prospect in this regard would suggest the ability and capacity of a settlement to grow and expand until it attend a metropolitan status.

**Itu Local Government Area:** This is one of the 31 Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State with an old town, Oku Iboku in which Mary Slessor's influence was felt, and a prominent village (Mbak Atai) hosting the headquarters of Itu Local Government Area.

## **Material and Methods**

The paper adopted literature review methodology where books, archival materials, journals, unpublished monographs etc. provided the secondary data sources used to address concepts, theories or models, and the research questions. However, the findings, conclusion and the recommendations were drawn from the reviewed works of many scholars duly acknowledged.

## **Literature Review**

### Antecedents of rural urbanization

Rural urbanization is one of the most interesting processes which has revealed itself in Africa and indeed Nigeria in recent times. Several authors claim that the origin of rural urbanization in Africa and Nigeria in particular was pronounced during colonialism (Lloyd and Mabogunje, 1982 in Ekpenyong, 2000). However, it must be acknowledged that no complete historical background of modern urban centres in Africa can be given without a consideration of their pre-colonial, colonial, and the post-colonial antecedents.

In the pre-colonial period, scholars (such as Gugler and Flanagan, 1978; Ayeni 1981 in Ekpenyong, 2000) observed that the ancient urban centres of the North, East and West Africa (Rabat, Tangier, Algiers, Tropoli, Brawa, Mogadishu, Mombasa, Morlindi, Timbuktu, Agades, Katsina, Sokoto, Oyo, Ilesha, Kumasi, Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Benin City, Oghomoso, Duke, Creek and Henshaw towns in the coastal region of the Cross-River estuary) had existed due to human activities such as the interactions between the lucrative trans-Saharan, transatlantic trades and the fortune of kingdoms and empire States which were organizational units of political interactions and activities in various rural settlements. In other words, the evolutionary process of these towns was associated with the development of commerce and a centralized political system in the areas which were for a long time characterized by village settlements, isolated politically, economically, socially and geographically from another. Yet, with the invasion and colonization of Africa and Nigeria in particular by Europeans from the sixteenth century onwards, the development of these hitherto rural settlements took an entirely different turn because of such world events as the industrial revolution, voyages to discover new lands, and colonization (Noah, 1980).

Indeed, the industrial revolution of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries transformed technology thereby creating new goods and the need for market expansion. In Europe where it first began, the revolution brought mechanization which created increases in per capita output, food production and concentration or localization of people and activities in several rural villages which eventually transformed them. This transition from an agrarian to an industrial economy was the key to the emergence

and spread of urbanization in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ekpenyong (2000) argues that at the center of this industrial revolution was urban and metropolitan centers, the center par excellence where men, machines, and capital interacted and coordinated to produce goods and services for world markets. These settlements also combined a number of functions including governmental, commercial, industrial, educational and recreational, among others (Ekong, 2010).

The crises of overproduction in Europe surely created need for the search for new markets. Amin (1989) argues that both the quest for raw materials and markets for the finished European goods created need for rapid expansion of centers of production, coordination and activity. It was these quests that resulted in colonization, which affected the landscape of most rural settlements in what later became Nigeria in 1914. In the colonial era, expansion of the frontier of trade became the key issue. Consequently, the colonial masters considered political stability and the creation of a number of towns from the hitherto rural settlements to serve the colonial administrative structure and the new socio-economic order (Ekpenyong, 2000). These periods demanded the concentration of administrative, economic, social, and political sub-units at a more centralized village settlement. The development resulted (especially in the Eastern part of Nigeria where the village form of settlement was predominant) in the selection of centrally located villages to serve as the local administrative headquarters as well as district, divisional, or provincial capitals of which Itu town was a part. Taylor and Jones (1964) observed that the location of such capitals in the more centralized villages led to the fact that urban centers in the colonial period were small, pre-industrial, invaded by rural characteristics of which old Itu town provided a functional example.

In the light of the aforementioned, the rapid transformation of erstwhile villages into administrative centers was not only an innovation but also an advancement of hitherto rural villages. This new order attracted the establishment of functional agencies such as district offices, police stations, prisons, customary and magistrate courts, post office, schools and residential quarters for the civil servants. Thus, the number of non-farm population which included an increasing number of wage earning labourers as well as those providing basic services to wage earners, craft industry, traditional health delivery methods etc, created an adequate population threshold to support daily markets in such areas as Onitsha, Umuahia, Ikot Ekpene, Afikpo, Oron beach market, and old Itu town (Offong, 2007).

The post-colonial period witnessed massive urban development after independence in 1960 in Nigeria. This was memorable in the sense that there was massive creation of new towns, upgrading in status of many small rural settlements having relatively high population density with an inbuilt tendency to experience rapid growth. These post-independence urban developments have taken place largely in response to political decisions aimed at decentralization in order to further the process of national development and integration, and to allay the fear of the minority groups. Again, these processes were facilitated in Nigeria, due to the creation of: 12 States in 1967; 19 States in 1976; 21 States in 1987; 30 States in 1992; and the 36 States in 1996 (Ikpe, 2005). In order to support the 36 States structure, the local councils were increased to 774 in the country. These arrangements resulted in the upgrading of many small urban centers of the colonial era that served as district, divisional or provisional capitals into the status of State capitals and local government headquarters (as applicable), where economic, political, social and governmental activities take place. In addition, these upgraded villages became centers where industrial and commercial activities were promoted and translated into concrete hubs or nodes of socio-economic development. Itu Local Government Area provides a good example of such upgraded village as Mbak Atai is currently serving as the local government headquarter, where socio-economic and urban activities can progress.

### **Factors opposing rural urbanization and their implication**

Urbanization is transformational because any community caught up in the process must be able to give up if not holistically in part their rural or traditional characteristics. This notion explains why several authors listed below present urban centres conceptually:

- i. Sani (1992) noted that an urbanized area has a large conglomerate of people brought together in a defined geographical unit of government (local, state and national governments) for the primary purpose of socio-economic interactions, while providing them with some essential common services based on their felt needs.
- ii. Ukwu (2000) explains that an urban centre is distinguished most fundamentally by its functions. It is essentially a central place for the mobilization and organization of services for an area. The basic urban functions which generally have to do with administration, commerce industry, transportation etc. are facilitated by aggregation.
- iii. Anugwom (2000) in Offong (2007) noted that an urban area is a geographical area with a conglomerate of different people from diverse background with different and often conflicting cultures provided the economy is open to everyone due to the relaxation of the customary practices such as land tenure system.
- iv. Ekpenyong (2000) argued that urbanization is a process in which the diffusion of a system of values, attitude and behaviour called urban culture or urbanism is made possible. This process involves industrialization, migration, westernization and the growth of settler communities.
- v. Wilken (2001) in Offong and Udonwa (2019) explain that urbanization entails the transformation of rural consciousness as a result of the influence of mass media, effective transportation system, giving up of most of the primordial practices, modification of technology and production methods.
- vi. Breckenfeld (1977) in Giddens (2005) argued that the term urbanization is a synonym of a city, but the two are not the same because all cities may be considered as urban centres, but not all urban centres are cities due to size, population, activities, and socio-infrastructure facilities and the presence of rural features.

In this regards rural urbanization itself is opposition to the features of rural settlement in the same manner that rural features are opposing rural urbanization. For instance, in most rural communities, urbanization would mean a declining agricultural economy, gradual removal of land tenure systems, agricultural land from aesthetic areas, a reduction of indiscriminate family compounds, gradual loss of rural characteristics such as traditions, infrastructure, craftworks, utensil, beliefs and other artefacts (Offong, 2007). The process of adjustment from such measures had always met with resistance.

Earlier on, Kanji (1995) in Offong (2016) noted that the spread of city and the rapid urbanization of rural communities have consumed enormous tracts of farmland in much of the world. According to him, between 1987 and 1992, China lost close to one million hectares of farmland each year to urbanization for expansion of roads and industries and industrial infrastructures. In the US, Kanji (1995) still noted that the country lost 400,000 hectares of farmland each year, formally used for fruit crops, root crops, vegetable plantations and other plantations, livestock grazing etc to create urban infrastructure, housing, industrial establishments, establishment of corporate headquarters, government agencies etc. Scholars (Ekpenyong, 2000; Ekong, 2010) estimated that from 1990 to the year 2020 a total of approximately 14 million hectares (475,000 ha/yr) in developing countries (Nigeria in particular) will be converted to urban development.

This in effect will cause food insecurity as both subsistence and commercial rural food producers shall be laid off and cut off from age-long livelihood source.

Arising from the aforementioned, the forces against rural urbanization are associated with primordial interests and practices in such areas as economy, politics, socio-cultural, infrastructural, traditional health related practices and behaviour. Offong (2007) listed such forces as: persistence of agricultural economy, land tenure system, customary land practices, the persistence of crude and traditional technologies, beliefs and cultural sustainability, entrenchment of traditional institution for local governance, persistence of unscientific business argument by the aborigines, fear of the loss of indigenous technical know-how, the fear of losing agricultural land and occupation etc. These forces have the potency to indoctrinate the people or the rural dwellers so as to resist rapid urbanization of rural communities.

### **Requirements for rural urbanization**

Scholars (Jibowo, 1983, Ekpenyong, 2000; Ekong, 2003, Offong, 2007) have argued that, while rural settlements are natural, towns and cities are human creations. Other research findings have expressed similar view that humans evolve as dispersed groups running over wide territories. In their advancement, humans tend to improve on their natural habitats, (rural villages) by creating urban centers as new forms of settlements. Consequently, urban or city is the creation of man through the instrumentality of political will or decisions. For example, the adoption of the work of Ebenezer Howard “The Garden Cities of Tomorrow” published in 1898 by the British Governments led to the passing of the then, New Towns Act of 1946 (Gugler and Flanagan, 1978). This Act which established the British Town Planning Authorities had aided in the creation of a town called Tapiola outside Helsinki in Finland described as having: “varied charming houses; industrial base; high population density, with high standard of planning, livability, appearance and amenity that have greatly strengthened its appeal.” The success story of Tapiola was attributed in part to its strong statutory backing associated with a strong political will of the indigenous government. This lesson of European new town development had influenced the Americans in the physical planning of the then similar new towns as Reston, Virginia, Columbia, Maryland etc, with semblance in characteristics and physical features as Tapiola (Offong, 2007). However, the British and American success stories about the creation of new towns sparked off interest in other countries. For instance, Ciudad Guayana in Venezuela is an independent, free standing growth new town located in an area considered as backwater. The development of the town was handled by Corporation Venezolana de Guayana (CVG), being an indigenous autonomous authority, accountable only and directly to the president for close monitoring.

If there are lessons to be drawn from Tapiola, rural urbanization can be facilitated by creating an autonomous urban development authority. Offong (2007) noted that such agency can only function with legal backing and budgetary accommodation to handle specific projects aimed at rural landscape transformation. Offong further stressed that the autonomous development authority, whether at the local, or state level must reflect the realities of understanding the historical circumstances of such towns to be created or replanned (culture, socio-economic, political, and value system). This is hoped to persuade the indigenes to give up in part their primordial interests and sentiments and embrace change. Beyond this, town planning laws are meant to accompany the master plan design to guide the execution of the various phases of the town to be created or replanned (Onokerharaye, 1994).

It is important to draw lessons from the work of Onokerhoraye (1994) who listed a number of those who contributed to the modern town planning thought and practice as discussed below:

- i. Robert Owen in 1858 brought out the design of a city in the form of a parallelogram which provided for all buildings in the neighbourhood to be grouped around a great square;
- ii. Charles Fourier in 1837 saw the city as consisting of three enclosures. The main town; the suburbs; and the avenues and the extreme outskirts. In Fourier's approach, each of these zones adopts its standards for buildings but subject to the approval and supervision of the urban development authority;
- iii. Camillo Sitte in 1889 published a book titled: "Notes and Reflections upon Artistic City Planning." Camillo, in this work emphasised the need for romantic design and open space where beauty, geometry, continuity, symmetry and rhythm were of essence than functionality. These open spaces whether as plazas, squares, parks, etc must be arranged such that they give to the town the punctuated mass of buildings, and provide service to the people;
- iv. Le Corbusier, an architect, argued that a city should be made to have three districts:
  - The commercial core;
  - The central business district; and
  - The intermediate residential zone (high rise block of flats, outlying zone of single family and multiple family low rise houses).
- v. Lord Lugard Township Ordinance of 1817 and the Nigeria Town and Country Planning Ordinance (NTCPO) of 1946 presented the blue-print listed below:
  - a. The Township Ordinance of 1917 provided for the creation, constitution, and administration of all towns and municipalities in Nigeria. This ordinance made provision for district segregation between European public officers and the subordinated Africans. Beyond this, matters concerning health and sanitation were separated from those relating to development control and the construction of buildings and streets. However, health and sanitation were placed under the control of Medical and Sanitary Departments (under the Public Health Ordinance), while Township Ordinance (kick-up Administrative and Public Work Department). In this regard, such urban center, as Lagos was declared a first-class township, while Kaduna along with seventeen other towns, were second-class township, provincial headquarters were third-class township (such as Local Government Headquarters today). Most of the classified townships were either rail towns or river or seaports towns with powers vested in the local authority (Onokerhoraye, 1994).
  - b. The Nigeria Town and Country Planning Ordinance of 1946 was enacted to take care of the Town Planning and Village Reconstruction Programme of a ten-year plan of development and welfare. This was sequel to the need that every town in Nigeria then, had cause for replanning, with proper laying out of their aesthetic appearance and structure. This Act was an adaptation of the British Town and Planning Act of 1932 in which section 3 states that:

*The principal objects of the planning schemes are generally to control the development and use of the land involved to secure proper natural beauty or interest to protect existing urban and rural communities.*

In furtherance to the above provisions, section 13(1) and part (v) of its first schedule added objects of coordinating and facilitating township development activities as:



- the reservation of land for roads construction, maintenance, and improvement of roads, the establishment of public rights of way;
- the regulation and control of buildings, slum clearance, the reservation of land for various purposes including open spaces, industrial, trade, education and religion purposes;
- the construction and establishment of all kinds of public utility, services, transport and communication; and
- the preservation of views and specified forms of natural beauty.

Subsequent Acts were adoptive Bye-laws Order, adopted in the Western Region of Nigeria in 1960, which was meant to regulate the land use of individual plots in the urban areas. These bye-laws stated:

*“For every building to be erected, there has to be working drawing, site plan, with detailed instructions about materials to be used, site coverage, setbacks of buildings, water and sanitary systems.”*

Referring to the above statutes, it is evident that urban creation is deliberate, using strong political will more than coincidence.

**Urban Land Development Control:** This was designed to regulate the growth of a town in a planned or orderly manner. This was meant to stipulate adequate standards for all aspects of planning. In other words, private, and public buildings, whether in residential, commercial, industrial or administrative areas must have sufficient light, ventilation, and ways of easy access to them. In addition, the plan must reflect such realities as:

- Must be safe and convenient;
- There must be sufficient setback from the center line of the road;
- The height, bulk, area, use, character, and appearance of buildings need to be regulated;
- One building or site should not interfere with the safety, convenience, privacy, and efficiency of another building or site.

**The Master Plan:** Kent (1964) and Black (1967) in Onokerhoraye (1994) define the 'Master Plan' (MP) as the official document of a municipal government which sets forth its major policies concerning desirable future. This physical development of a settlement suggests that the master planning approach is a positive one, long term land-use and development of a given town. The authors noted that 'MP' assigns the various areas to types of use and forms of use as in housing, circulation, utilities, service, facilities, open spaces and general design. Thus, the Master Plan (MP) provides a general guide or direction for the development of a town at private and public capacities. Most towns in Nigeria have a master plan, but often time are not implemented, either it is not enforced or the residents ignore the provisions. Consequently, structures are erected haphazardly.

**Zoning:** This is defined as the demarcation of an urban community into districts for the purpose of regulating its structures and development. This demarcation takes the form of:

- The height and built of structures;
- The area of plot that may be occupied and left open;
- The population density; and
- The use of structure and land for commerce, industry, residences etc. (Onokerhoraye, 1994).

In the light of the above, there are 4 major districts into which a city is zoned. These are, residential, commercial, manufacturing, and agricultural (Giddens, 2006). These can be broken down as:

- Residential District: This is where rising and non-rising residential structures are hosted.
- Manufacturing District: This is a light, and heavy industrial or manufacturing sub-district;
- Agricultural District: It helps plantations, livestock, and slaughter;
- Commercial District: It features heavy commercial and light commercial sub-districts.

Andrew (1962) in Onokerhoraye (1994) noted that the main purpose of zoning is to channel urban growth in the proper directions and proper uses in order that safe, efficient and stimulating urban centers will result.

**Urban Renewal:** According to Gibson and Langstaft (1982) in Offong (2007) urban renewal refers to the redevelopment and or rehabilitation of the older parts of town and cities, including their central business districts. The concept of urban renewal or redevelopment has an American origin in the Housing Act of 1949 designed to clear, restructure land use in the older towns which had developed into slums. Then establish in their place, a comprehensive programme of new residential and non-residential development. In Britain, urban renewal is associated with the desire for housing upgrading and reform, especially in the interest of the urban poor to avoid exclusion and deprivation (Giddens, 2006).

The aforementioned requirements are believed to create distinctive characteristics which set this created environment (urban) apart from its previous rural backgrounds. Harvey (1983) had noted that an urbanized area is a form of created environment in a social and cultural space in which modes of social life in this rural area becomes progressively undermined and turned into a new cultural mosaic of city life. In the light of this, rural – urbanization is expected to undermine and displace other pre-urban cultural features (such as foot paths, farm lands, thatched roof mud houses, latrine etc.) as it transforms not only the ecology but also the range of productive activities (agriculture, craft work, technology etc.) and operations in any rural settlement caught up in the process.

Against this background, several scholars (Harvey, 1973, Ekpenyong, 2000; Kuffor, 2003) in Offong (2007) viewed “urban” and “rural” as two distinct sociological categories which depict two sets of settlements with different if not irreconcilable physical, social and cultural features. In the word of Deter and Satterwaite (2002) urban and rural areas are part of the global heritage of mankind. The former (urban) shows us what the later (rural) will be, while the later (rural) shows what the former was. In other words, rural area shows us the state of the urban area before its transformation, while urban area shows us what the future of the rural area would be, depending on the pace with which – land tenure system, persistence of subsistence agricultural practices, low investment status, beliefs and traditional practices, crude and obsolete technologies, low infrastructure, low and or social amenities etc. are removed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

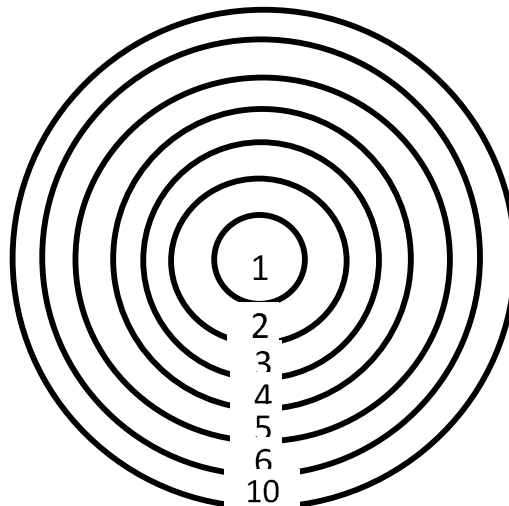
The paper adopted the concentric zones, sector, and multi-nuclei models of urban ecology in addition to the conflict dimension known as “New Urban Sociology” as theoretical frame of reference.

#### **The Concentric Zones Model**

This model was propounded by Robert Park, Ernest Burgess and Roderick McKenzie in 1925 (Kalhoun, Light and Keller, 1989). These proponents argued that as the size of an urban population increases, people begin to compete for space. This competition tends to produce many (1-10) concentric zones of development, each serving a different function. (See figure below)

### Concentric Zones

A.

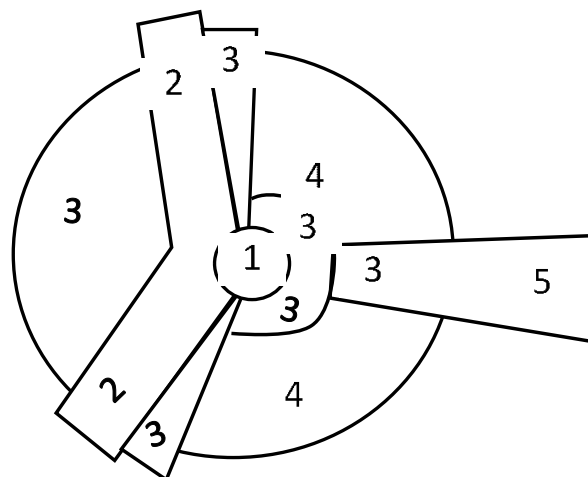


**Source:** Adapted from Calhoun, Light and Keller; *Sociology* (1989)

The first zone at the center of the city is the central business district, made up of stores and offices. The second zone which surrounds the first is in a state of transition and characterized by residential instability, low rents, high crime rates, and various forms of vice. However, businesses and light manufacturing are beginning to move into it. Beyond the zone in transition lie four residential zones – (i) this is inhabited by the working class; (ii) middle classes (iii) upper classes; (iv) a zone of wealthy commuter outside the city limits. A concentric-zone best describes a city like Chicago which was the product of industrial revolution. Nevertheless, the model can be used as a possible guide for rural urbanization processes.

### Sector Model

B



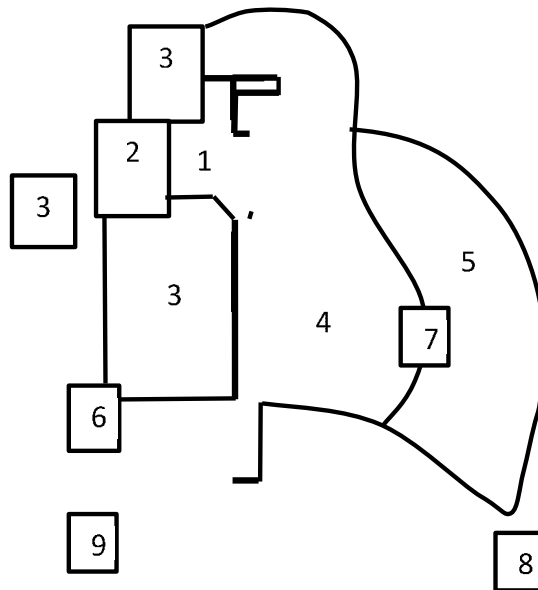
**Source:** Adapted from Calhoun, Light and Keller; *Sociology* (1989)

This model of urban development which was propounded by Homer Hoyt in 1943 emphasized the importance of transportation routes – railroad lines, highways, rivers and canals – as structural basis for the growth of cities. The sector model also featured an outward movement of population, but in the form of pie-shaped sectors surrounding a central business district. According to Hoyt, the various zones of urban land use tend to be distributed along major transportation routes radiating out from the downtown area. Beyond this, Hoyt noted still, that as the activity of a certain type expands, it tends to do so within its particular sector, extending outward toward the edge of the metropolis. For instance, the development of the (i)

Boston suburbs along trolley lines; (ii) California's Silicon Valley, where computer firms have settled along freeways running south out of Oakland and San Francisco; (iii) Yaba and Oshodi town along railway routes in Lagos, Nigeria provide the local example. The figure above could guide the Itu Local Government authority in the rural urbanization process.

The development of towns and cities from a single business district in city center does not hold in every circumstance. In this regard, Chauncy Harris and Edward Ullman in 1945 proposed and developed the multi-nuclei model (Schaefer, 2005).

**Multi-nuclei Model**



**A – C Models**

- 1. Central business district
- 2. Wholesale light manufacturing
- 3. Low class residential
- 4. Medium class residential
- 5. High class residential
- 6. Heavy manufacturing
- 7. Outlying business district
- 8. Residential suburb
- 9. Industrial suburb
- 10. Commuters' zone.

Source: Adopted from Schaefer – Sociology (1988)

In the views of Chauncy Harris and Edward Ullman cited in Schaefer (2005), all urban growth does not radiate outward from a central business district. Instead, a metropolitan area may have many centres of development, each of which reflects a particular urban need or activity. Thus, a city may have a financial district, a manufacturing zone, a water front area, an entertainment center etc. Certain types of business firms and certain types of housing will naturally cluster around each distinctive nucleus. Scholars (Squires, 2002; Schaefer, 2005) noted that the rise of sub-urban shopping malls is a vivid example of the phenomenon of multi-nuclei within metropolitan areas. The model explain that, initially, all major retailing shops in urban center were located at the central business district. Though each residential neighbourhood had its own grocers, bakers, and butchers, yet people travelled to make purchases in the departmental stores at the center of the city. However, as major metropolitan areas expanded and the suburbs became more populous, increasing numbers of people began to shop nearer their homes. Currently, the suburban mall is a significant retailing and social centre in communities across various countries of the world (Schaefer, 1988).

In applying these models to the study (concentric zone, sector, multi-nuclei, it is clear that rural urbanization could be considered as a process, influence, and activities that may produce zones, sector, multi-nuclei, urban settlements. This suggest that rural urbanization, like evolutionary models of explanation is transitional from the rural life which could take any of the models in the development process based on deliberate interventions, relevant statutes and other human actions. In this regard, Itu rural villages (old Itu town, Oku Iboku and Mbak Atai – the Local Government Headquarter) can be made

to follow any pattern in the aforementioned models in their bid to be urbanized. This is because human interaction processes can produce outcomes of varied degree such as the shape and the characteristics of these models.

Another theory adopted in this paper was the conflict view of urban growth and development, otherwise known as new urban sociology. The major proponents of this model (Wallerstein, 1974, Gottdiener and Feagin, 1988) were of the opinion that urban communities are human creations that reflect peoples' needs, choices, and decisions. According to them, some people have more influence over those decisions than others. In this regard, Gottdiener and Feagin (1988) argued that interplay of local, state, regional, national, and global forces have exerted tremendous influence on local space or landscape. Reflecting on this trend, Wallerstein (1974) in Schaefer (2005) argues that:

*Certain industrialized nations – US, Japan, Germany etc. hold dominant position at the core of the global economic system. At the same time, the poor developing countries of Asia Africa, and Latin America lie on the periphery of the global economy, controlled and explicated by core industrialized nations.*

Adopting the world systems model, new urban sociologists (Conflict perspective) consider urbanization from a global dimension. Consequently, this radical school of thought views urban development not as independent and autonomous entities, but as the outcome of decision making processes directed or influenced by a society's dominant classes and by core industrialized nations. These radical thinkers insisted that rapidly growing urban communities of the world's developing countries were shaped first by colonialism, neo-colonialism and eventual global mentality controlled by core nations and multinational corporations. The outcome of this interface between the developing and developed economies has not been beneficial or profitable to the rural urbanization processes or cities landscape of the developing economies because of different economic ideologies, alignment, investment and market potentials.

In applying the theory to the subject matter, more urbanization or cities' development are not the matter of local policies only, but has so much to do with the state, regional, national, and global socio-economic and political influences. Thus, many modern towns and cities are polarized by the existence of large squatter settlements and the presence of affluent people who are interested in the city growth because they can build new shopping centers, office towers, ball parks, shopping mall, choice residential quarters, corporate headquarters, private transport corporation etc. In the light of this, if all these or parts of these forces could find their ways into Itu rural villages, there is a likelihood that, the pace of urban growth and development may be impactful. Though the absorption capacity of the emerging urban area may be slow to accommodate different city residents, such as the cosmopolites, unmarried and childless people, the unemployed, ethnic villagers, the deprived and the trapped, the process is gradual with the need for adequate interventions (Gans, 1991).

### **Brief Ethnographic Description of the Study Area**

The locational focus of this paper was Itu Local Government Area. These rural villages (Old town, Oku Iboku, Mbak Atai) are hosted by Itu Local Government Area being one of the 31 Local Government Areas in Akwa Ibom State. Itu villages (old Itu, Oku Iboku, Mbak Atai towns) had early exposure and contacts with the colonialists and the Missionaries. This is because it was the home of late Mary Slessor, the Scottish Missionary who established the first leper colony, built a General Hospital in the area, fought relentlessly against the killing of twins and ostracism of the mothers and promoted healthcare delivery before her demise in 1915 (Noah, 1980 in Offong, 2007). From 1952 to 1967 (the eve of the Nigerian civil war), Itu rural towns witnessed a boom in their socio-economic activities. This experience was predicated upon the

presence of such firms as the United African Company (UAC), Patterson Zochonis (PZ), John Holt (JH) and G. B. Olivant (G.B.O), among others. However, the presence of these firms fell short of expectation because in the early 1960s, politicians of the first republic relocated these companies to other Nigerian towns and cities, leaving Itu as an agrarian settlement with agriculture at subsistence level as the mainstay of economic lifeline (Ekong, 2001).

At Nigeria's independence, Itu continued to be in the division of the former Eastern region with Resident Divisional Officer (RDO). This status, Noah (1980) noted, had remained until the 1976, government political reforms where the pre-existing divisional status and provinces were split into states and local government areas. In the light of this, Itu emerged as a local government area with 5 clans, 10 wards, and more than 150 villages when Akwa Ibom State was created in September 23, 1987. Yet agrarian subsistence production dominated the area which threw up more rural villages than towns (Ekong, 2001). Urbanization, industrialization and globalization are currently the forces of development, Itu old town and the current Local Government headquarter (Mbak Atai) are yearning for transitional experience where improvement in the socio-economic activities and the geographical landscape can rightly suggest an attempt for improvement in the quality of life and sustenance. The pilot effort of this expectation and social processes in rural urbanization and by extension industrialization can be experimented in Itu towns.

### **Findings and Discussions**

Arising from the literature and archival materials reviewed, the following findings were achieved:

- Currently Itu old rural town, Oku Iboku and Mbak Atai (the Local Government Headquarter) exist with predominant rural features, but having great potentials for urbanization as the boundary communities to Cross River State; and the host of hitherto foreign companies and the national company (Oku Iboku Paper Mill).
- These rural communities were at the commanding height of exposure to foreign and national influence when they played host to early Missionaries, colonialists, provincial or and divisional administrative structure of the colonial administrators, notes of development as center for health care delivery and early western civilizations.
- These levels of exposure pointed out above, arguably had long prepared these centres in Itu for urban development despite an avalanche of primordial or ancient influences.
- The paper further revealed that those structures that served the Missionaries, colonial masters, the national governmental agencies can be resuscitated as pilot effort for rural-transitional process to modern urban centres, the demands of global socio-economic transactions and development.
- The paper show clear direction for collaboration. That is the “home boys (aborigines) and girls” who are investing outside or in the diaspora could come home and invest their fortune, build similar structures as they did elsewhere. This effort may complement internal effort (local, state and national governments) in transforming these rural communities to viable urban centres of socio-economic development.
- The paper reveals that the application of the relevant urban laws, zoning principles (a consideration of orderliness and aesthetic values), establishment of local urban renewal, planning and development authority could be major steps for effective rural – urbanization in Itu communities. Though other urban realities may emerge, the use of planned change and other incidentals could facilitate the transitional process to full urban status with self-sustained capacity.

- The paper reveals the thought of urban scholars who argued that urban settlements are human creation. This suggest that urban planning and development are the consequences of human interventions on a natural environment. Therefore, the human factor in the form of creative ability is a major one in rural urbanization without which nothing impactful can be achieved. There is also the possibility for those former absentee villagers who are affected by the phenomenon of “population turn around” to reset their priorities, using the Nehemiah thought and filial piety in favour of Jerusalem to transform Itu rural villages into urban centres. The knowledge of concentric, sector, multi-nuclei models (which are functionalists prescriptions for urban growth), and the new urban sociological approach can be combined to produce modern city structure in Itu Local Government Area.
- The investigation also revealed that Itu communities possess tourism and economic potentials such as the Mary Slessor's site, coastal communities, with vast water front for both tourists' site and economic opportunities of international standard. These are the drivers of urbanization, and negotiated pills to lure national and global interests.

### **Conclusion**

Rural urbanization in the contemporary world is primarily human driven. Consequently, interest groups (indigenes in the diaspora, local authority, the political class, investors, the religious investors etc) could present a common front in order to transform those villages with potentials to turn to attractive urban centres. Though one cannot undermine such challenges as crime, air pollution, noise, unemployment, overcrowded schools, inadequate public transportation, lack of housing, lack of recreational activities which are unpleasant realities for urban life, urban economic power and the attraction of various skills and talents, financial capital, technological knowledge, hardwares, employment opportunities, improved income and quality living far outweigh these shortcomings. Therefore, urbanization is a better option than ruralization seen as perpetually of lowly rated socioeconomic and political characteristics.

### **Recommendations**

Findings of the paper have attracted the following recommendations:

- i. Rural urbanization is the process of changing from the primordial and traditional bound mentality to a modern one (modernization), changing from a close economy to a more open one (national and global economy), changing from the crude technology to advanced one (technological change) etc. Therefore, effort to change the current state of rural towns in Itu communities should be collective. Those in the diaspora, local authorities, private investors, entrepreneurs, Faith-based Organizations (FBOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs); the academia etc. are to consciously or unconsciously collaborate for a better deal. (The changing face of Itu rural towns).
- ii. The work plan for the new phase of Itu towns must be in tandem with the relevant town planning or urban laws and the universal best practices, leaving allowance or gap for local contents and peculiarities. Beyond this, the relevant agencies for the enforcement of these laws must be established.
- iii. The aborigines or indigenes should be ready to gradually remove primordial or traditional sentiments as – land tenure system; subsistence agricultural economy; attachment to beliefs that resist change; the persistence of crude and traditional technology; a gradual disengagement of town crier technique in communication; lack of attitude for deferred gratification; low aspiration, and mentality of banking concept (no self-help projects except from government of the larger society).

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