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Small Towns in Ghana: Justifications for their Promotion under Ghana's Decentralisation Programme

GEORGE OWUSU

Abstract: A key objective of Ghana's decentralization programme is the promotion of small towns, particularly district capitals, as a means of reducing rural-urban migration and the rapid growth of large towns and cities. While small towns have grown significantly in both number and population over the last three decades, the proportion of the total urban population living in these urban centres has changed very little or has even declined slightly. This contradicts the view that the growth and proliferation of small towns is leading to declining growth rates of the larger urban centres. This conclusion leads to the question of whether there is a justification for the promotion of small towns under Ghana's decentralization programme. This article examines the reasons accounting for the growth of small towns and concludes that promoting small towns, especially the district capitals under the current decentralization programme, is a positive response to rural development and the development of dispersed urbanization in the long term.

INTRODUCTION

The process of urbanization in Ghana, like much of Africa is not a recent phenomenon. Its origin predates the arrival of Europeans and colonization.¹ However, while the scale of urbanization during this period was quite small, the process assumed a new impetus and dynamism during the European colonisation and the introduction of Western economic enterprise with its market economy which favoured urban concentration.² The colonial and post-colonial investment strategies informed by the basic criteria of investing in regions with exploitable and exportable resources, and subsequent provision of basic infrastructure in such areas attracted the population and development relative to other parts of the country.³ Areas of southern Ghana with climates suited to the introduced cash crops, timber exploitation and mining sites closer to the coast or ports have benefited from these investments.⁴ More significantly, these activities to a large extent enhanced urban concentration as existing and new centres developed as collecting points for exportable locally produced commodities, administrative and communication centres. Northern Ghana, by virtue of its location received less of these investments. Furthermore, the presence of the Europeans on the coast also led to the reorientation of trade routes,

George Owusu is a Doctoral Fellow at the University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim, Norway. His research interests include rural and urban development, decentralization, and participatory approaches to development.

affecting towns in northern Ghana, which had developed as a result of the trans-Saharan trade between West Africa and the Islamised states in the Northern Africa.

While these are the broad forces that intensified the process of urbanization in Ghana, the process itself, as in much of Africa, has been characterised by the predominance of very few urban centres. It is this trend that has drawn the attention of development planners because of its perceived detrimental impact on the spatial economy of the country. As a result, various planning strategies have been implemented with the aim of reducing this polarisation and producing a more balanced hierarchical settlement pattern. The most notable of these strategies have included the growth pole concept and the integrated rural development programmes (IRDP) designed to stimulate rural development to curtail rural-urban migration.⁵ However, these strategies have failed to significantly alter the urbanization and settlement pattern.

In recent years, attempts at transforming the settlement hierarchy or at least reducing the growth rate of the large towns and cities have centred on decentralization and the promotion of small towns and rural development.⁶ Though the small town development strategy is not new, what is new here is the link with decentralization. The increasing transfer of resources and authority to the district level under Ghana's decentralization programme is expected to enhance district development and, in particular, promote district capitals as attractive centres to potential rural-urban migrants.⁷ Despite the implementation of its programme over a decade, the pattern and trend of the urbanization process have changed very little or at least remained the same.

Ghana's population has increased significantly since the 1920s when formal censuses were introduced. Along with the increased population has come the increasing concentration of the population in settlements of 5000 or more people.⁸ In 1921, 7.8% of the population lived in urban centres. This had risen to 23.1% by 1960, to 32% in 1984, and to 43.8% in 2000.⁹ However, a few centres dominate this concentration, mainly Accra and Kumasi. As of 2000, the two cities accounted for about 34% of the total urban population though there were about 350 urban centres in the country. More importantly, there has been continuous increase in the number of urban centres (defined in this article as small towns), especially in the last three decades. However, the proportion of the total urban population residing in these centres has changed very little or has even declined slightly.

OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

This article examines the reasons accounting for the growth of small urban centres (including district capitals), and the justification for the promotion of these urban centres under the present decentralization programme, given the fact that their growth and proliferation have not slowed the growth of the large urban centres. This examination is based on data derived largely from the Ghana Statistics Service (GSS) reports on the 2000 Population and Housing Census and other studies on population and settlements in Ghana as well as fieldwork carried out in two district capitals in Ghana. Based on the official definition of an urban centre and Ghana's urban classification identified in this article, the various urban centres in the GSS 2000 Population and Housing Census reports are counted and categorized accordingly.

This article acknowledges the limitations of the official survey data, especially the lack of clarity regarding the boundaries of urban centres resulting in either splitting or merging of some settlements. A typical case in point is the peri-urban areas surrounding major urban centres such as Accra and Kumasi. In some instances, identified 'suburbs' of these centres are treated in the official report as independent urban units. In this case, some discrepancies could occur both with the counting and classification of the identified urban centres. Notwithstanding these limitations, the 2000 Population and Housing Census

reports provide relatively good quality and detail data for analyzing urban centres in Ghana since they contain names and populations figures of identified settlements.

The article starts with a presentation of Ghana's current urban hierarchy and definition of small towns. After this, factors accounting for the growth of small towns are explored. Finally, the case for the development of small towns within the context of the decentralization programme is presented.

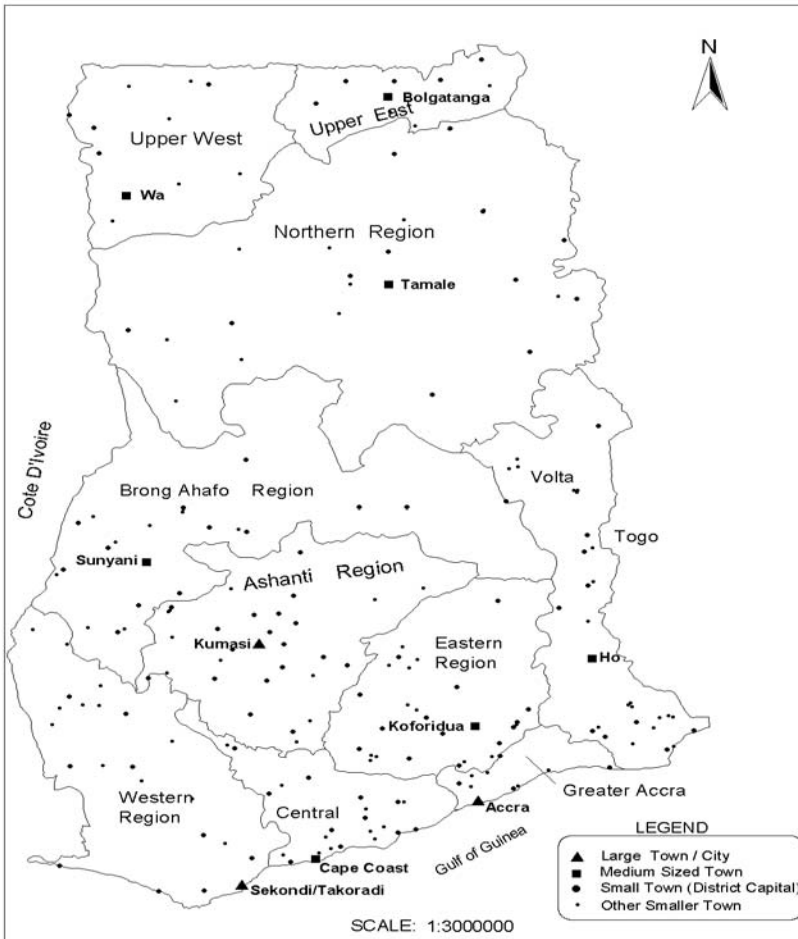
GHANA'S URBAN HIERARCHY AND SMALL TOWNS

As earlier noted, urban centres in Ghana are officially defined as settlements with populations of 5000 or more.¹⁰ Besides other limitations, definitions of this sort significantly failed to delimit the various urban hierarchies found within each country or region. Some have therefore suggested that the best approach is the adoption of national or official definition of urban centres, and to delimit each country's urban systems based on this.¹¹ This approach does not remove the problem of the lack of a universally acceptable definition of urban centres but proponents have argued that it has the advantage of removing the problem of over-generalisation, and allows urban centres and systems to be analysed within a specific national or regional context. This approach that is adopted here.

Using Ghana's official urban definition, three main classifications can be made: small towns, medium-sized/intermediate towns, and large towns/cities. Adding rural settlements, Ghana's settlement hierarchy can be placed within a four-tier system. At the top of Ghana's urban hierarchy are the large towns/cities of Accra, Kumasi, Tema and Sekondi-Takoradi, with populations of 250,000 or more. This is followed by the intermediate (medium-sized) towns with populations of 50,000 to 250,000, typified by the regional capitals. After this are the small towns, exemplified by district capitals/administrative centres with populations between 5000 and 50,000.¹² Lastly, there are rural settlements. It should be noted that this classification and the definitions are for the purpose of analyses and discussions in this article since no official definitions exist in Ghana other than the official definition of an urban centre.

This classification and definition of the urban hierarchy is, however, an oversimplification of Ghana's urban system. This is because with the exception of the administrative status criterion, many centres exhibit a variety of functional and population complexities which make the process of putting them into categories or 'boxes' problematic. A typical example is the gold-mining town of Obuasi which is also the district capital of Adansi West District of the Ashanti Region, with a population of 115,564 in 2000. The presence of gold-mining activities has attracted many industrial and services establishments to the town, which may even be comparable to or exceed those of the medium-size town. According to the above definitions, Obuasi by virtue of its population, administrative status and industrial establishments could be classified as both a small and medium-sized town. Fig. 1 shows the distribution of urban centres in Ghana. It indicates a higher concentration of urban centres in the south reflecting the effects of colonial and post-colonial development policies, and the availability of economic opportunities due to limited or abundant mineral and agricultural resources in some regions.¹³

Fig. 1: Map of Ghana Showing Distribution of Urban Centres



Tables 1 and 2 indicate that Ghana's urban population has undergone a number of changes in the last 30 years. This observation also reveals regional disparities in the level of urbanization and proportion of small towns, as shown in Table 1. The Tables reveal the overwhelming dominance of urban centres defined as small towns (centres with populations between 5000 and 50,000). The number of these centres increased from 114 in 1970 to 336 in 2000 (see Table 2). Despite the massive increase in the number of small towns, the proportion of the total urban population residing in these centres has changed very little or has declined slightly from about 49% in 1970 to about 46% in 2000.¹⁴ What are the factors accounting for the growth and proliferation of small towns? What are the planning and policy justifications for the promotion of small towns, especially district capitals? These are very important questions, which need to be explored. In particular, they have relevance for the present decentralized development process, which aims at improving rural areas and the development of a more balanced settlement pattern.¹⁵

Table 1. Regional Distribution of Urban Centres: Proportion of Small Towns*

Region	1970		1984		2000	
	No.	Urban Pop.	No.	Urban Pop.	No.	Urban Pop.
Western <i>% of small towns</i>	13 92.3	295,129 (28) 52.2	10 90	289,247 (23) 34.9	33 97	691,404 (36) 46.6
Central <i>% of small towns</i>	21 95.2	248,149 (29) 77.6	25 96	339,949 (29) 80.7	39 97.4	598,405 (38) 86.2
Greater Accra <i>% of small towns</i>	4 75	673,663 (85) 7.4	6 66.7	1,108,695 (83) 4.3	35 91.4	2,564,864 (88) 14.4
Volta <i>% of small towns</i>	12 100	124,451 (16) 100	21 100	224,809 (21) 100	35 97.1	441,084 (27) 86
Eastern <i>% of small towns</i>	25 100	282,455 (25) 100	40 97.5	437,923 (28) 86.6	56 98.2	728,718 (35) 88
Ashanti <i>% of small towns</i>	14 92.9	476,621 (30) 27.3	26 92.3	752,740 (33) 29.6	58 96.6	1,875,882 (51) 31.5
Brong Ahafo <i>% of small towns</i>	18 100	162,442 (22) 100	30 100	318,302 (27) 100	54 96.2	687,706 (37) 82.8
Northern <i>% of small towns</i>	8 87.5	141,594 (21) 40.9	16 93.8	288,736 (25) 52.9	27 96.3	496,803 (27) 59.3
Upper East <i>% of small towns</i>	3 100	50,494 (6) 100	5 100	99,928 (13) 100	7 85.7	144,282 (16) 64.4
Upper West <i>% of small towns</i>	1 100	13,740 (7) 100	3 100	47,547 (11) 100	6 83.3	101,096 (18) 34.1
Total <i>% of small towns</i>	119 95.8	2,468,738 (29) 49.2	182 95.6	3,907,876 (32) 47.8	350 96	8,330,244 (44) 45.7

*Figures in bracket show percentage of urbanized population (to the nearest whole number).

Source: Derived from GSS reports on the 2000 Population and Housing Census.¹⁶

Table 2. Distribution of Urban-Sizes in Ghana (1970-2000)

Category ('000)	1970		1984		2000	
	No.	Population	No.	Population	No.	Population
1000+	0	0	0	0	2	2,829,207
500-1000	1	624,091	1	969,195	0	0
100-500	2	490,318	3	793,783	4	1,147,963
50-100	2	140,254	4	276,981	8	544,163
20-50	13	369,848	19	529,266	38	1,127,988
5-20	101	844,227	155	1,338,651	298	2,680,923
Total Urban	119	2,468,738	182	3,907,876	350	8,330,244

Source: Derived from GSS reports on the 2000 Population and Housing Census.¹⁷

Growth of Small Towns: Recent Trends

Whilst various studies have been done on Ghana's urbanization, they have mainly focused on the large towns, particularly regarding migration to these centres and its consequences.¹⁸ Not much has been done on the process of urbanization and urban growth regarding small towns. This situation, however, is not limited only to Ghana. Among the reasons given for this state of affairs is the view that small towns are not a clearly delimited independent entity about which one can easily generalize and develop concepts and models. There is also a perception that they are indifferent to the development process.¹⁹

Even though the processes and policies shaping small and large towns may be the same, their dynamism within the urban hierarchy may differ. This point becomes more important in the case of Ghana where available data indicates that there is a proliferation of settlements defined as small towns yet the proportion of the urban population in these centres has changed very little or declined slightly. From this perspective, it is imperative for the factors accounting for the growth of these towns to be explored and analyzed.

While the historical dimensions have been well-noted by many writers on urban growth and regional development in Ghana, more contemporary factors acting on these historical conditions and shaping the current urbanization process involve the impact of the economic and political reforms of the last two decades.²⁰ These are the World Bank/International Monetary Fund (IMF) inspired Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) as well as the decentralization and local government reforms introduced at the end of the 1980s. To these broader socio-economic factors can be added the effects of the continuing high population growth rate. Besides these broader factors, in the context of small towns there are also regional or local factors, such as peasant agricultural expansion and commercialization combined with favourable location factors, including location on main trunk roads, location closer to mining activities, and spillover effects from large urban centres. It must, however, be stressed that these factors have not been the cause of the present urban form but they have acted upon and shaped the existing historical and socio-economic situation. Again, it must be emphasized that the influence of these factors are not uniform. In other words, while the broader factors may be very important for some small towns, for other centers the influence of local or regional factors may be the key to their growth or decline. Determining which factors are more or less important would require the study of specific small towns in the country.

Economic Reforms: Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs)

In the early 1980s Ghana adopted the World Bank/IMF-inspired SAPs in response to persistently dismal socio-economic performance which began in the 1970s.²¹ These reforms involved economic liberalization and privatization, and a general restructuring of the state's role in the economy. The implementation of these measures has restored some level of economic growth and sanity at the macroeconomic level. However, this has come at a high social cost due to the fact that most vulnerable groups have been adversely affected both directly and indirectly by measures such as the withdrawal of subsidies on social services, retrenchment of labour, and the general increases in prices of goods or services.²² Also, SAPs in Ghana have been criticized as only stimulating economic activities in the traditional resource-rich regions and relatively developed south, especially the cocoa and coffee, mining, and timber regions. This, it is argued, has further widened the gap between the north and south.²³ However, Konadu-Agyemang and Adanu argue that the promotion of non-traditional export commodities under SAPs has enabled regions (especially northern Ghana) to participate in the export

trade – a process, if adequately supported in the long-run with better infrastructure would likely have a positive impact on previous disadvantaged regions.²⁴

Notwithstanding the criticisms of SAPs, the argument has been made that the removal of subsidies (which for a long time largely benefited the urban population), the shrinking of the formal sector (which was largely concentrated in the larger urban centres), and the high cost of living in these centres have reduced the attractions of the leading cities in the country.²⁵ Also it is noted that SAPs have resulted in some amount of urban to rural migration, mainly from the large towns towards settlements on the lower scale of the settlement hierarchy.²⁶

In a related argument, Gilbert notes that SAPs lead to reduction in rural-urban migration rates and hence reduction in the growth of major cities, whilst at the same time allowing the growth of both secondary cities and other locations in the national urban system.²⁷ To explain this, he provides three possible explanations: (1) diseconomies of scale associated with major cities alongside general improvements in transportation and other infrastructure, resulting in deconcentration of manufacturing and other economic activities; (2) shifting terms of trade from industry to agriculture, hence allowing rural areas to be more economically attractive; and (3) SAP-inspired export-oriented trade favouring agriculture over industry, hence investors are more prepared to take decisions to locate outside the core of the Third World metropolis.²⁸

While the explanations suggested by Gilbert may hold for other Third World countries, especially in Latin America, they fall short in the case of Ghana.²⁹ Available evidence indicates that in Ghana, SAPs have not resulted either in deconcentration of industries and employment or a significant shift in the terms of trade in favour of agriculture. Rather, investments have continued to be concentrated in the core metropolitan areas, especially Accra-Tema. According to Grant and Yankson, one of the visible impacts of SAPs in Ghana is the dramatic rise in the number of new firms, particularly foreign companies, that have established operations in Accra (currently headquarters for 655 foreign companies).³⁰ In total, the Accra-Tema metropolis accounts for about 70% of Ghana's manufacturing output, (about the same proportion according to Andr e's pre-SAPs study of manufacturing industries in Ghana)³¹ In fact, evidence from the 2000 Population and Housing Census Reports indicate that the four urban centres of Accra, Tema, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi account for about 44% of the total urban population. Accordingly, a GSS report on the Census noted that a balanced spatial distribution of the population is not likely to be achieved unless the opportunities for improvement in the lives of the people are more evenly distributed.³²

Alternatively, the fortunes of the various urban systems in the country could be analysed by looking at studies on poverty. A well-recognized study by the Ghana Statistical Service (GSS), "Poverty Trends in Ghana in the 1990s," noted that even though there was a general decline in the incidence and level of poverty in the country in the 1990s (except in the urban savannah), the reduction was particularly sharp in Accra.³³ Apart from Accra, which was singled out in the Report, all other urban centres were treated as one category. However, there is every reason to believe that just like Accra, the large towns and cities in this category benefited more than the other urban centres.

Notwithstanding the limitations of the impact of SAPs on the growth of small towns, it can be argued that the improvement in the infrastructural base of rural areas and lower urban centres, such as electrification exercises and road rehabilitation under SAPs, seems to have opened up these areas and allowed the population to enjoy amenities long considered the privilege of those living in the medium-sized and large towns. According to Ofori, these general improvements illustrate the national and regional development policy aim of increasing rural accessibility, improving rural-urban linkages, and facilitating the transport of regional products from producing to consuming areas.³⁴ Inflation, the removal of subsidies, and unemployment resulting from the contraction of the public sector have

diminished the attractions of the big towns and cities since they were more affected by these than small towns with their relatively small public sector services and economies often dominated by agriculture.³⁵

SAP-induced improvement in the transport system in recent years has contributed significantly to the growth of both large and small towns. The past two decades of SAPs and market liberalization have tended to reduce the barriers of physical distance. The resumption of aid flows and removal of many foreign exchange barriers have facilitated the importation of motor vehicles and spare parts in many African countries.³⁶ In Ghana, the road sector has been a major recipient of donor funding programmes. In addition, economic liberalization and privatization (deregulation of public transport) have led to an increase in both the number of vehicles and private commercial transport operators, the most prominent being the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU). While some analysts such as Briggs and Yeboah have attributed the expansion of the major urban centres such as Accra to this, it can also be argued that economic liberalization and privatization have improved linkages between settlements, allowing small towns to have access to both higher-order centres (large and medium-sized towns) and lower-order settlements (rural areas).³⁷ This, coupled with improved infrastructure, has enabled some economic activities, especially commerce and services to be introduced in small towns, though not on the same scale as the large towns and cities.

Decentralization and Local Government

In 1988 Ghana embarked on its decentralization of administration and development programme to encourage a greater degree of local autonomy and make district administration and development more efficient. To a greater degree, the decentralization programme is a logical continuation of the broader structural adjustment effort, a reaction to the changes in the broader economic and ideological environment. Under the programme, District Assemblies (local governments) have been established and given more responsibilities and power as the highest political, administrative and development authorities in their respective areas of jurisdiction. In all, 87 functions were delegated to the District Assemblies, ranging from environmental conservation to provision of social services. Even though Ghana's decentralization programme has several objectives, a basic goal is rural development as a means of reducing migration to the large towns and cities, generally redirecting population movement from areas of over-concentration to other areas previously regarded as deprived.³⁸

The implementation of the decentralization programme in 1988 led to the promulgation of Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) Law 207, giving legal backing to the creation of District Assemblies and the establishment of 110 districts in the country. This directly replaced the previous 65 district councils which had been in existence since the mid-1970s.³⁹ The establishment of additional districts meant that new district capitals had to be found and assigned. This in itself provided the basis for the growth of hitherto rural settlements into urban centres and increased in the number of small towns. Administrative status tended to attract public infrastructure and influx of population allowing centres to rapidly developed into towns.

In addition, the decentralization programme has resulted in several initiatives from government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and donor agencies as a way of enhancing participatory democratic development and the capacity of local institutions. It has also meant strengthening small towns, particularly district capitals or administrative centres to enable them cope with their increased functions and perform their new role more efficiently. Some of these programmes and projects specifically targeting district capitals include the following: introduction of the District Assemblies' Common Fund (DACF), a constitutional provision which allocates 5% of the total national revenue to District Assemblies; the World Bank and United Nations Development Programme's Urban V projects,

targeting roads and sanitation problems; European Union (EU) micro-project schemes; and the German Agency for Technical Assistance (GTZ)/Ghana Government (Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development) project titled ‘Promotion of District Capitals’ (PRODICAP). Since the 1980s, it has also been the policy of central government and the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development to provide each district capital with a specific range of amenities – electricity, telephone, district referral hospital, potable water, a model secondary/technical school, and accessible road links.⁴⁰ In fact, this policy has also informed much of the drive to extend electricity and other amenities to many parts of the country.

These improvements or increased transfer of resources to the districts have contributed to the growth of district capitals and other settlements within the districts.⁴¹ Key informant interviews carried out in October 2002 with district planners in two districts in the Central Region (Upper Denkyira and Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira Districts) confirmed this assertion. Both planners noted the improvement in the flow of resources to the districts. The District Planning Officer of Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira District, established in 1988, stated:

The district capital, Twifo Praso has changed quite significantly. When I came here, the capital was basically a rural settlement. However, the declaration of Twifo Praso as a district capital, the extension of electricity to the town, the rehabilitation of the road to Cape Coast and; improvement and accelerated increase in infrastructure from the district’s share of the Common Fund and other resources of the District Assembly have greatly opened the whole district and Twifo Praso in particular ... In the case of Twifo Praso, the programme has rapidly turned a rural settlement into a fast expanding and growing urban settlement.

There is a general consensus among analysts of Ghana’s decentralization, both from interviews in the field and from the literature that the programme has led to improvement in the flow of resources and increased access of people living in previously neglected areas to central government resources and institutions.⁴² However, these positive results have also been described as generally marginal when related to the needs of the districts and functions delegated to the District Assemblies. Nonetheless, it is accepted that the programme has to some extent enhanced the infrastructure bases of rural areas and lower-order urban centres, especially the district capitals, hence their population growth (see Table 3). The large towns and cities of Accra, Tema, Kumasi, and Sekondi-Takoradi simultaneously continue to register impressive growth (Table 4). Again the tables show that the growth rate is not uniform but varies from region to region both for the district capitals and regional capitals.

Table 3. Regional Distribution of District Capitals: Population and Growth Rate

Region	No. of District Capital	Population				
		1970	Growth Rate (1970-1984)	1984	Growth Rate (1984-2000)	2000
Western	10	68,841	1.1	80,101	3.2	135,640
Central	11	122,907	1.4	148,524	2.5	221,568
G/Accra	3	9,595	1.3	11,511	2.4	16,906
Volta	11	68,768	1.6	86,182	2.9	137,604
Eastern	14	129,121	1.8	165,042	2.3	239,374

Ashanti	17	122,559	2.9	185,009	3.8	341,576
B/Ahafo	12	89,566	3.4	144,754	3.7	263,353
Northern	12	70,993	4.0	123,738	2.3	179,899
U/East	5	37,973	3.8	64,432	1.7	84,667
U/West	4	11,757	2.6	16,814	2.6	25,494
Total	99	732,080	2.4	1,026,107	3.0	1,646,081

Source: Derived from GSS reports on the 2000 Population and Housing Census.⁴³

Table 4: Metropolitan/Regional Capitals (Large/Medium-Sized Towns): Population and Growth Rate

Region	Regional/ Metropolitan Capital	Population				
		1970	Growth Rate (1970- 1984)	1984	Growth Rate (1984- 2000)	2000
Western	Sekondi-Takoradi	143,982	1.9	188,203	4.2	369,166
Central	Cape Coast	56,601	1.1	65,763	1.4	82,291
G/Accra	Accra	624,091	3.1	969,195	3.4	1,658,937
Volta	Ho	24,199	3.2	37,777	3.1	61,658
Eastern	Koforidua	46,235	1.7	58,731	2.5	87,315
Ashanti	Kumasi	346,336	2.6	496,628	5.6	1,170,270
B/Ahafo	Sunyani	23,780	3.5	38,834	2.9	61,992
Northern	Tamale	83,653	3.5	135,952	2.5	202,317
U/East	Bolgatanga	18,896	3.9	32,495	2.6	49,162
U/West	Wa	13,740	6.9	36,067	3.8	66,644
G/Accra	Tema*	36,928	6.5	91,870	10.1	460,916
Total	11	1,418,441	3.0	2,151,515	4.3	4,270,668

*Municipal centre without regional administrative capital status but major industrial/seaport centre.

Source: Derived from GSS reports on the 2000 Population and Housing Census.⁴⁴

The marginal impact of the decentralization programme is generally attributed to the limited resources of the District Assemblies and numerous bottlenecks facing the programme. This situation may therefore account for the continuous concentration of the population in very few centers.⁴⁵ This is an indication that the programme's policy objective of improving living standards in the districts and facilitating the geographical spreading of development as a means of reducing migration to the large metropolis is yet to be achieved.

Again, in terms of redistribution of national resources and development, studies indicate that local governments in small towns and rural districts have not fared any better. In their detailed study, Razin and Obirih-Yeboah conclude that local governments in the capital city region (Accra-Tema) and in the second largest metropolitan area (Kumasi) as well as those in the other large urban centres, were the most financially sound compared to those in remote regions and predominant rural areas.⁴⁶ Even financial allocations from central government, such as the District Assemblies' Common Fund (DA CF) were found to favour the large urban centres. Besides, the fiscally-sound large urban centres enjoyed relatively high self-generated revenue as they have a large tax base. This allows these Assemblies to implement more development programmes and enjoy a relative level of autonomy rather than relying

solely on central government transfers, which come with strict guidelines with little or no reference to peculiar local circumstances. While the problems associated with the inability of District Assemblies to generate revenue on their own and over-dependence on central government transfers are not elaborated on further here, the point made here is that Razin and Obirih-Yeboah's study and other similar studies indicate that even though decentralization has improved the level of flow of resources from central government to all districts, so far it has failed to redistribute resources and growth from the large towns and cities.⁴⁷

Lastly, the marginal impact of decentralization on rural areas and small towns can be gauged by the limited employment opportunities in these areas and the continuous movement to the large towns/cities. This situation exists because these areas are also affected by the very forces which hinder job creation in large towns/cities. Rural household interviews carried out in eight communities within the hinterlands of two Central Region district capitals (Dunkwa-on-Offin and Twifo Praso), aimed at exploring the impact of decentralization on rural-urban linkages revealed that although a substantial proportion of the respondents (61.2%) have no intention of moving, 54.8% of respondents who intend to move indicated Accra-Tema, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi as the urban centres where they would prefer to relocate to. Respondents cited the lack of jobs and employment opportunities as the main reason which makes the district capitals (small towns) unattractive. This view was backed by an unpublished report obtained from the Dunkwa District Branch of the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In this report, the District Office responsible for income tax collection in the two districts (Upper Denkyira and Twifo Hemang Lower Denkyira Districts) noted the impact of broad macroeconomic processes such as falling world commodity prices on key firms such as gold mining companies and Twifo Oil Palm Plantation (TOPP). The Report concluded that these have impacted severely on employment opportunities and consequently on tax contributions in the districts.

High Population Growth

According to a GSS report, Ghana's population in 2000 of about 18.9 million represented an increase of 53% over the 1984 population of about 12.3 million, and an intercensal growth rate of 2.7%. While this rate is lower than the rate for West Africa as a whole (2.9%), it is higher in comparison to the rate for the world (1.5%) and the average for less developed countries (2%).⁴⁸ This high population growth rate, coupled with a general imbalance in the distribution of economic opportunities between rural and urban areas provides fertile conditions for the continuous concentration of the population in urban locations, including small towns. It is important to note that this concentration of the general population is not only due to migration but also to natural increases. In Ghana there is not a significant difference between urban and rural fertility rates. In addition, although fertility rates may be somewhat higher in rural areas than in urban areas, lower death rates in the latter enable the normal rate of natural increase in both areas to remain fairly similar.⁴⁹

The growth and increase in the number of small urban centres has also been interpreted as the logical outcome of increasing rural population densities.⁵⁰ Available data from the census reports indicate that there have been increased population densities in all the regions, the highest occurring in the Greater Accra Region. From a national average of 36 persons per km² in 1970, the figure rose to 51 in 1984 and then to 79 in 2000.⁵¹ The increasing population densities and the continuing population growth give momentum for the growth of rural centres into small towns. This may actually account for the growth and increase in the number of small and intermediate towns in northern Ghana rather than the impact of SAPs as suggested by Burrows and Acheampong.⁵² This is a result of the unfavourable position of northern Ghana with respect to the implementation of SAPs, as already noted, and reflected in the

relatively slower urban growth rates between 1984 and 2000 in all the three northern regions compared to the period 1970-1984 as shown in Tables 3 and 4.

Influence of Regional/Local Factors

Regional or local geographical factors, which can be described as “favourable location factors”, may not account significantly for the growth or emergence of large urban centres but are very significant in the case of small centres. The last few decades have witnessed the exploitation of mineral deposits, emergence of large metropolis, and generation of road traffic. All of these are geographic elements, which offer opportunities for the growth of some human settlements according to their new relative location. While these favourable location factors may provide the basis for the initial growth, further growth may require a second series of factors, which are not dependent upon only local economic factors.⁵³ It is this situation which may account for the large number of towns within the lower limit of the urban hierarchy. It must also be emphasized that these regional or local factors are not isolated from the influence of the broader factors. However, unlike the broader factors they do not affect the process of growth of all urban centres.

Peasant commercial agriculture, especially expansion of cash crop farming, has been a major influence on the evolution of settlements in the past, and it continues to be the case today. The growth and increase in the number of small towns is a probable outcome of the increased effort to commercialize peasant agriculture, linking peasant farmers to market centres. Rural centres located in rich agricultural regions that are also accessible (such as located on a major highway or at the convergence of transport routes) provide excellent opportunities for the development of markets, and consequently the emergence of towns. In such situations, while the dynamism of the surrounding areas and the development of the market is very important, what is crucially important is the centre's accessibility. These factors account for the phenomenal growth of many rural centres along the busy highways such as the Accra-Kumasi, Cape Coast-Kumasi and Kumasi-Tamale highways.

As already noted, the introduction of modern mining technology in the past had been responsible for the rapid development of many settlements into towns in southern Ghana especially in the Ashanti and Western Regions, and this continues to be the case today. The presence of exploitable mineral deposits closer to a settlement provides strong influence for the settlement's growth. The rate at which these towns grow depended on the scale of the mining operations. Dickson has noted situations where some towns such as Nsuta in the Western Region may not even have existed as recognizable villages, but were essentially the sole creation of mining activities.⁵⁴ Notable mining centres include Obuasi, Tarkwa, Prestea, Nsuta, Bibiani, and Dunkwa. While mining operations have ceased in such places as Dunkwa due to either exhaustion of mineral deposits or operational difficulties, new centres have emerged as a result of government liberalization of the sector under SAPs. Even in places where major mining operations have ceased, there has been proliferation of small-scale mining and ‘galamsey’ (illegal mining) operations, which attract many people and serve to sustain local economies. In fact, besides the national capital city region (Accra-Tema) and Kumasi, all the urban centres specifically identified by the GSS report on the 2000 Population and Housing Census as net receivers of migrants are mining centres (Obuasi, Bibiani, Tarkwa and Prestea).⁵⁵ With the exception of Obuasi, whose population has grown quite significantly for the last two decades from 60,617 in 1984 to 115,564 in 2000, all the other mining centres can be classified as small towns. Therefore the location of settlements closer to mineral deposits provides opportunities for the growth of rural settlements as towns.

A significant factor in the increase of small towns is what can be described as the spillover effects of the large urban centres. The massive growth of the large urban centres and the problems of housing and

congestion have created a situation facilitated by improvement in transport whereby a substantial proportion of the urban population who work in the cities are prepared to take up residence in the peri-urban areas and other nearby settlements. This has resulted in several rural settlements closer to the large urban centres developing into small towns. A 2002 GSS report notes that several localities adjoining the Accra Metropolitan Area which were rural in 1984 have now attained urban status, mainly as a result of the spillover of the growth of the Accra Metropolitan Area into localities in the surrounding districts.⁵⁶ The spillover has also induced massive growth of small towns in districts in the Central Region closer to the national capital, Accra. Special mention can be made of Kasoa in the Awutu-Efutu Senya District, where the population grew from just 2597 in 1984 to 34,719 in 2000. This is also true of the Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi Metropolitan Areas, and to some extent Tamale, the largest urban centre in northern Ghana. Not surprisingly, therefore, data derived from the Ghana Statistical Service published reports on the 2000 Population and Housing Census indicate dramatic increase in the number of urban centres in these regions between 1984 and 2000, as shown in Table 1.

While small and medium-sized towns have grown and proliferated over the last three decades, they have not slowed the growth rate of the few large metropolitan areas. Finding solutions to this situation remain at the core of the attempt over the last decade and half to address the spatial imbalance of the population through the decentralization programme. In particular, this is very relevant to the continued pursuance of the decentralization programme and continuous donor or government assistance in the growth of small towns, especially the district capitals. It is the implications for regional planning in terms of small towns' promotion and rural development that the concluding section considers.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING: THE CASE FOR SMALL TOWNS PROMOTION

Ghana is experiencing rapid urbanization. However, what is worrying and is highlighted in numerous official and research documents is the uneven spatial concentration of the urban population.⁵⁷ According to the 2002 GSS report (2002a), the level of urbanization was 43.8% in 2000.⁵⁸ However, it was 87.7% for the Greater Accra region and 51.3% for the Ashanti Region, mainly due to the metropolis of Accra and Kumasi respectively. Indeed, none of the other regions has a level of urbanization that is above the national average. Overall, these largest metro areas dominate the urban system. This urban system has largely been shaped by colonial and post-colonial development policies of investing more in regions with exploitable and exportable resources. This development strategy has favoured large urban concentration to the detriment of rural areas and small towns.

In recent years, the policy of decentralization has been pursued with the basic aim of rural development and facilitating a balanced spatial distribution of the population. The programme seeks to improve rural livelihoods as a means of reducing the rural-urban drift and the growth of the few large centers.⁵⁹ The impact of the decentralization programme, SAPs, continuing high population growth, and the influence of some regional/local factors have all combined to register some level of growth at the lower levels of the settlement hierarchy. Small towns have not only increased in population but their numbers have increased as well. This has, however, not slowed the relatively rapid growth rates of the large metropoli despite the large proportion of urban centres (96%) being small towns. This leads to two conclusions with implications for planning.

First, the increase in the number of small towns and a decline of the urban population residing in these urban centres would suggest that besides direct movement from rural areas to large urban centres, the population may also be engaged in a step-wise migration process. According to Burrows, this type of migration is very common, that is, migration from a village to a small town which finally ends in a

major urban center.⁶⁰ A 1995 GSS report on internal migration also adds that migration from small towns to large urban centres, particularly to Accra-Tema metropolitan region, has become very significant in recent years.⁶¹ Studies on rural-urban migration in Ghana show that by far the most common reason for this type of migration is economic, especially for employment. The continuous movement to the large urban centres indicates that economic opportunities in the small and medium-sized towns are limited or simply do not exist.

The second conclusion which can be drawn is that population growth of small towns may be more due to natural increases than migration to these centres. The 2002 GSS report notes that the population increase at national level is largely the result of lowering growth rates but still high fertility and fairly low mortality rates.⁶² However, the same report attributed the massive growth of Accra, Tema and Kumasi as well as the mining centres of Obuasi (in the Ashanti Region) and Bibiani, Tarkwa and Prestea (all in the Western Region) to the high influx of migrants to these centres. Again, given that it is the capital city and the large urban centres which have experienced the highest growth rates and continue to dominate the national urban system, it is not surprising that they continue to be major destinations for migrants.⁶³ The implication here is that attempts to reduce the growth of the large towns may not hold bright prospects at least in the short and medium terms. This is because the anticipated outcome of decentralization of enhancing the attractiveness of small towns, especially district capitals, as potential recipients of rural migrants and also as attractive centres for the small towns population is yet to be achieved.

Both conclusions strengthen the argument that unless efforts are made to improve the lot of the small towns and rural areas, there is a large pool of potential migrants in these areas ready to swell the population of the large metropoli. Conversely, it can also be argued that the large number of small towns spread throughout the country presents an opportunity to facilitate the process of a balanced spatial distribution of the population. Both prospects strengthen the case for decentralization and the promotion of small and medium-sized towns. In particular, it would require in the short and medium terms the active involvement of the state in putting in place favourable decentralized policies such as adequate provision of infrastructure, supportive district socio-economic initiatives and mobilization, and transparent and accountable governance structures. These are required due to the country's weak political and economic structures, especially at the district and regional levels.⁶⁴ This supports Crook's assertion that even though decentralization may be a popular and conceptually efficient development strategy, it is unlikely to lead to poverty reduction without serious and strong commitment by central governments eager to pursue and support such policies. In other words, the extent to which decentralization results in improvements in human development outputs is largely a function of the resources and systems for allocating funding, primarily by central governments.⁶⁵

Compared to most countries in Southern and North Africa as well as some countries in West Africa such as Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire and Nigeria, Ghana is still relatively less urbanized.⁶⁶ With an urban population of 43.8% in 2000, and this national average exceeded only by the Ashanti and Greater Accra Regions, there is still a large pool of potential rural-urban migrants that have the potential to swell the proportion of the total urban population of the big cities and towns. Also, there is the likelihood of more settlements becoming urban through the process of reconversion due to natural population increase, thus altering the proportion of rural and urban. It is significant that, even though the four largest urban centres account for about 44% of the total urban population, a large proportion of the urban population still lives in small and medium-sized towns, and the greater number of the rural people (representing about 56% of the total population) has closer contact with these towns than with the large towns and cities. This makes small towns important nodes for development. Therefore, the view taken here is small towns that serve the rural hinterland and its population have a great potential role to play in promoting a

sound and balanced national settlement pattern and a broad-based rural development benefiting the majority of the people.

Further underpinning this argument is the current increasing prevalence of market-based development strategies under SAPs and their emphasis on export-oriented agricultural production, which calls for efficient economic linkages connecting producers to external markets. From this perspective, small towns are increasingly seen as playing a key role in providing and linking their rural hinterlands with both domestic and international markets.⁶⁷ Hence, the interest in small towns as nodes for linking rural agricultural areas to marketing centres. In this respect, small towns in Ghana, especially the district capitals, could be important links in the process of commercialization of peasant agriculture and efforts to reduce poverty. Owusu and Lund's study of markets in two district capitals in the Central Region (Dunkwa and Twifo Praso) demonstrates the potential role the district capitals could play in the development of districts within the context of the decentralization programme.⁶⁸

It should be noted that programmes for small towns do not explicitly aim at small town development but rather the strengthening of rural-urban linkages, the promotion of agricultural development in small towns' hinterlands, and the stimulation of non-farm employment opportunities in small towns.⁶⁹ Arguing from this position, it can therefore be said that Ghana's decentralization programme shares similar goals and objectives with small towns programmes, with both reinforcing each other – improving living standards in rural areas through improvements in agriculture. Small towns are in a unique position – they are places still rooted in rurality but have adequate contact with the urban networks and their influences. They are therefore potential host centres for development initiatives targeting the rural areas where greater proportion of the population resides.

From the perspective of rural-urban linkages, strengthening small towns does not only enhance farmers' access to market and services but the resultant improvement in income should lead to demand for higher order goods and services, resulting in the growth of district capitals and other small towns. Theoretically, this should have positive impact on labour and employment, and consequently on poverty reduction. It is argued that agriculture may be able to absorb a significant but not sufficient percentage of additional labourers as it nears labour capacity. Many of the unemployed labourers can be expected to migrate to the major cities and larger towns already suffering from diseconomies of scale due to their rapidly growing populations.⁷⁰ Hence, the policy of decentralization and small town development programmes when pursued in a developing country should lead to absorption of surplus agricultural labour in the small town and also reduce migration to the cities and large towns. This, however, requires from the state conducive, genuine political and economic policies favourable to the provision of adequate infrastructure to support decentralization, thereby enhancing and facilitating local participation and resource mobilization. These must be fulfilled by the state, notwithstanding the policy of decentralization and autonomous development, if a process of enhancing rural-urban linkages necessary for the overall development of districts is to be achieved.

Finally, promoting small towns, especially the district capitals, under decentralization involves a strategy of urban renewal from below by enabling these urban centres to grow to absorb new centres, or simply the development of a process of dispersed urbanization. This also involves the transformation of the rural economy. The strategy then accepts the inevitability of rural emigration but seeks to redirect flows away from the large urban centres of Kumasi and Accra. It also recognises that any solution to the urban problem associated with rural-urban migration must take account of the condition of the rural people.⁷¹ Since most rural-urban migrations are undertaken for economic reasons, any policy that transforms the rural economy will affect the scale and pace of urban development.

NOTES

1. Dickson 1971; Anderson and Rathbone 2000.
2. Little 1974; Owusu 2005a forthcoming.
3. Konadu-Agyemang and Adanu 2003.
4. Dickson 1971, 1975.
5. Thomi and Yankson 1985.
6. Owusu 2004; Owusu 2005b forthcoming.
7. GSS 1995; Owusu 2004; Owusu and Lund 2004; Owusu 2005b forthcoming.
8. In Ghana, urban centres are officially defined as settlements with populations of 5000 or more. However, no official definitions exist for the various urban categories such as 'small', 'medium' and 'large' towns. Existing definitions such as Andr e (1981); Thomi and Yankson (1985); GSS (1995) and; Yeboah and Waters (1997) though identify these urban (small, medium-size and large) categories achieved this through different definitions. The crudeness of the definitions can be justified by the requirements for which the classification was designed for, and the available data used.
9. GSS 2002a.
10. The use of this criterion has been well criticized for both conceptual and practical purposes. This is, however, not the subject of particular interest here.
11. Hardoy and Satterthwaite 1988; Simon 1992; Czerny et al. 1997.
12. Owusu 2005a forthcoming; Owusu 2005b forthcoming.
13. Yeboah and Waters 1997; Yeboah 1998; Konadu-Agyemang and Adanu 2003.
14. However, regionally there has been some increase in the proportion of the urban population living in small towns: higher in the Northern Region, and lower in the Central, Ashanti and Greater Accra Regions.
15. GSS 1995; Owusu 2004; Owusu 2005b forthcoming.
16. GSS 2002a, 2002b, 2002c.
17. GSS 2002b, 2002c.
18. Caldwell 1969; Briggs and Yeboah 2001; Konadu-Agyemang 2001.
19. Clark 1995; Pedersen 1997.
20. Dickson 1971, 1975; Songsore and Denkabe 1995; Bening 1999.
21. Konadu-Agyemang 2000; Yeboah 2000; Owusu 2001; Konadu-Agyemang and Adanu 2003.
22. Adepoju 1993; Sowa 1993; Donkor 1997; Konadu-Agyemang 2000.
23. Songsore and Denkabe 1995.
24. Konadu-Agyemang and Adanu 2003.
25. Acheampong 1996: p. 56; see also Aeroe 1992; Burrows 1992; Owusu 2002; Owusu 2005a forthcoming.
26. Canagarajah and Mazumdar 1997: p. 48-49; Sowa 1993; GSS 1995.
27. Briggs and Yeboah 2001, p. 19.
28. Gilbert 1993.
29. Yeboah 2000.
30. Grant and Yankson 2003.
31. Andr e 1981.
32. GSS 2002a, p. 3.
33. GSS 2000; see also Konadu-Agyemang 2000.
34. Ofori 2002, p. 164.
35. Acheampong 1996, p. 56.

36. Bryceson 2001.
37. Briggs and Yeboah 2001.
38. GSS 1995, p. 12-14; Ayee 1997, p. 38.
39. Crook and Manor 1998.
40. GSS 1995; Owusu 2004, 2005b forthcoming.
41. GSS 1995; Acheampong 1996.
42. Ayee 1997, p. 39; Crook and Manor 1998; Thomi 2000; Yankson 2000.
43. GSS 2002b, 2002c.
44. GSS 2002b, 2002c.
45. GSS 2002a, p. 2-3; Ghana Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) 2002, p. 16.
46. Razin and Obirih-Opareh 2000.
47. see Ayee 1995; Asibuo 2000 for thorough discussion of the problems of revenue mobilization.
48. GSS 2002a, p. 1.
49. Konadu-Agyemang 2001, p. 54.
50. Giraut 1997.
51. GSS 2002a.
52. Burrows 1992; Acheampong 1996.
53. Giraut 1997.
54. Dickson 1971, p. 249-250.
55. GSS 2002a, p. 1.
56. GSS 2002c, p. iv.
57. GSS 1995, p. 2-3; Konadu-Agyemang 2001; GPRS 2002, p. 16-17 for discussion of the problems associated with the high concentration of Ghana's urban population in few large towns and cities.
58. GSS 2002a.
59. Ayee 1997, p. 38; Owusu 2004, 2005b forthcoming.
60. Burrows 1992, p. 190.
61. GSS 1995, p. 235.
62. GSS 2002a, p. 1.
63. Briggs and Yeboah 2001; Grant and Yankson 2003.
64. Owusu 2004, 2005b forthcoming.
65. Crook 2003, p. 83.
66. The World Bank 2000, World Development Report 1999/2000.
67. Tacoli 1998.
68. Owusu and Lund 2004.
69. Rondinelli 1984; Gaile 1992, p. 131; Baker 1997; Giraut 1997; Pedersen 1997.
70. Gaile 1992; Owusu 2004, 2005b forthcoming.
71. Pacione 2001.

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