



Linking Urbanization to Urban Poverty: A Marxist Interpretation

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Abstract

This study theoretically simplified how urbanization can fuel urban poverty using Marxist's interpretation as a baseline for the study. It was based on the review of over thirty related works on urbanization, urban poverty and Marxist theory. Marxism stipulated that capitalist elites controlling the political and economic structure of society were able to manipulate policies that concentrate development and amenities in cities thereby impoverishing rural regions which push migration thereby increasing urbanization. For a clearer view of the situation, the migration characteristics of 79 young migrant men between ages of 25 - 30 years from rural areas coming into Owerri, a city in Southeast Nigeria were sampled. The results showed that 91.14% of migrants come into the city seeking for jobs of which only 12.66% of them have any form of higher education required to secure jobs while only one had any formal working experience. In the long run this new set of people will add to the poverty situation in the city. As more people enter into cities with little economic expansion to accommodate new comers, there is increased competition for the available employment opportunities and a corresponding lowering of income for many struggling families reducing income to many families thereby increasing the poverty rate in the city. This study recommended a political and economic structure for cities that de-emphasizes excessive capital accumulation which influences public policy. Also the Chinese model of urban villages should be integrated into development plans of developing countries to act as a means of reducing rural migrants from coming into cities directly where they are likely to add to the poverty situation of cities.

Keywords: Urbanization; Urban Poverty; Elitist Theory; Marxist theory

Introduction

Urban poverty in Nigeria has been considered as an increasingly visible phenomenon due to impacts of society's transformation especially urbanization. The pattern, trend and characteristics of urbanization in Nigeria have also been described as alarming by

some urban planners. Concentration of economic, social, political and administrative organs of a nation or region in cities has made them a magnet for many rural people especially poor households [1] who seek to acquire better standard of living from their present state. Cities therefore will continue to remain attractive to more

people for a long time as long as rural areas do not provide opportunities for inhabitants and develop at the same pace with urban centres.

Urbanization involves major shifts in the way people work and live thereby offering unprecedented opportunities for improved standards of living, higher expectancy and higher literacy rates as well as better environmental sustainability with efficient use of increasingly scarce natural resources [2] which is a major cause of urbanization is rural - urban migration. This leaves many rural migrants not having the required ability to fit into the mainstream economic activities for their own development. This trend manifest as poor housing, environmental degradation, pollution, poor sanitation, health issues, crimes, slum generation, social exclusion and negative alternative lifestyles by those affected. However, this study viewed urbanization as urban concentration occasioned by rural urban migration.

For some social theorists, a keen Marxist proponent sees the city as exhibiting Marxist capitalist's tendencies. For as capital and profit accumulation continue take precedence those who have political and economic power tend to shape how the city structures relate with city dwellers. They believe that the many social and environmental problems facing urban dwellers today reflect this heritage of polarized political development, the competitive and impersonal nature occasioned by the pursuit of capital prevalent in cities of most developing countries. This creates a class of citizens that are continuously at the mercy of the capitalist's structure of cities and who face continuous manipulation from capitalists. As for these classes of people who are unable to compete favourably due to individual and structural inadequacies, evidence suggests that their lives are poverty stricken and miserable due to the condition they have to contend with in most cities.

Cities are entities of massive socio - economic opportunities that tend to act as engines of economic growth and development. Unfortunately many cities harbour many of the world's poorest and deprived population especially in developing countries. It is therefore this perceived contradiction that this study viewed. Poverty is increasing especially in many urban centres of developing countries and in some cases driven largely by the phenomenon of rural - urban migration and the fast pace of urbanization without commensurate provision for their economic opportunities for residents.

Poverty is a result of different factors that are at play, such interactions include the structural environments and cultural models that create certain behavioural outcomes in most societies. As researchers in a postmodern age where critical social theory continues to open up new vista for research efforts, it is incumbent that every aspect of the origin of poverty should also be given due attention in furtherance of knowledge so as to expand the knowledge base to this phenomenon that has continued to affect large numbers of people in rural and urban areas. Also, as the world continues to urbanize and the character and habits tend to gravitate towards urban living, it is expedient to study the nexus between the growing trend of urbanization and its effect on the increasing rate of poverty using all philosophical and epistemological approaches available.

The fact that a class of people in our cities continue to be segregated and exploited against in the pursuit of profit by those who monopolize capital strikes at the heart of Marxists theory is indicative of trend that the changing face of cities as well as the process of urbanization can create such imbalances. This work confirmed the link between urbanization and urban poverty using the Marxist's interpretation as opposed to cities being engines of growth for the development of every resident.

Conceptual definitions

This section of the study looked at the various concepts and definitions associated with urbanization and poverty.

Urbanization

Urbanization is often perceived as a complex phenomenon that its definition is often contested [3]. It is known to proceed in two ways, the multiplication of points of concentration and the increase in size of individual concentrations. It may occasionally or in some areas stop or actually recede, but the tendency is inherent in society for it to proceed until it is inhibited by adverse conditions".

On his part [3] see urbanization as a term used to describe the process involving movement of people from rural areas to cities and is often driven by economic factors out of which emerges the development of government infrastructure, businesses, civil society organizations and cultural norms. Thus, the evolution of urban systems has wide-reaching consequences on the urban and rural environment, the economy, political formations and society at large.

Kaplan D., *et al.* [4] described urbanization as the percentage of people who live in cities generally resulting from a shift in population from countryside to the city. From demographers' point of view, urbanization is defined as "the increasing share of population living in urban areas" [5]. This share of increasing population on the long run tends to alter both the demographics and size of the inhabitants in cities. However, urbanization is not just the result of rural-urban migration, particularly if rural-urban migration is taken to mean long-term rural dwellers moving permanently to urban centres. These demographers have argued that the added urban population that results from urbanization is sometimes estimated as the sum of net rural-urban migration and the increase in urban population resulting from the expansion of urban boundaries.

Tacoli C [6] gave a clarification that cannot be ignored. This author further said that urbanization is distinct from urban population growth, although the two concepts are often conflated, creating considerable mischief. Urbanization is defined as a rise in urban share, if urban and rural populations are all growing at the same rate, there cannot be said to be urbanization. Alternatively, if the total population is not changing but the urban share is increasing, all urban population growth is the result of urbanization and the rate of urbanization [the rate of increase in the share of the population living in urban areas] is equal to the rate of urban population growth.

The urban population in most cities of Nigeria has been on the increase due to the failure of cities to generate centrifugal force of dispersal and spread effects to reduce the impact of a large population within the cities without a corresponding increase in economic growth and facilities [7]. The population residing in urban areas have been on the increase from 1950 (10.2%); 1970 (22.7%); 1990 (35.3%); 2000 (42.4%); 2010 (49.0%); 2011 (49.6%); 2015 (52.1%); 2030 (60.8%) according to data extrapolation from the UN office in 2011. With the increasing rates of urban population come more complex problems associated with urbanization which is urban poverty [3].

Urban poverty

Poverty is a term as has continued to crop up in various literatures all through the history of mankind. Even with its far reaching effects on the human race, there seems to be no consensus on a standard definition of poverty despite its universality and the enormous literature available on it [8,9]. Poverty is termed a com-

plicated concept, as it cannot be explain in a single term because it affects different aspects of human existence and for better understanding a multi-dimensional approach is often adopted in its explanation [10].

Onibokun AG and Faniran K [11] perceived urban poverty as living in sub-standard and sub-human environments characterized by slums, squalor and grossly inadequate social amenities like health facilities, schools and recreational opportunities. [12] pointed out that poverty is characterized by lack of or inadequate access to urban infrastructures among others, while the urban poor can easily be identified from the types of food they eat and the environment in which they live.

Others researchers such as [13] argued that poverty goes beyond material deprivation and includes insecurity, vulnerability and exposure to risks, shocks and stress. Many urban residents especially the unemployed and under-employed are left at the mercy of this situation. This situation can also be manifested in not having enough food to eat, poor quality drinking water, poor nutrition, unfit housing, low educational opportunities, low employment opportunities, low quality or lack of quality healthcare, lack of active participation in the decision making process, a high rate of infant mortality, low life expectancy and low level of energy consumption.

Poverty needs to also be understood as being strongly influenced by the resources that people can claim, under what conditions and with what level of choices [14]. Such analysis seems to agree with Marxist's theorists that differentiation, distributional concerns and issues of power are central when analyzing poverty and that poverty is not really a choice. The fact that people can claim some form of resources needs to be understood from not just the fact that they claim these resources but being in a position to control these resources and controlling them in a way that can be used to enhance their standard of living. Unfortunately many in cities due to the power dynamics in most cities are not able control any form of resources to their betterment.

It is observed that certain government policies and structures, formal and informal processes and institutions govern social relations and power structures which often extend over various spatial, temporal and social scales are often detriment of some class of residents who lack the wherewithal to compete favourably in the urban space. These in turn affect people's opportunities, their

ability to make choices, their access to resources and the distribution of benefits, costs and risks within and between individuals and groups [14], this is very important in the analysis of urban poverty.

Emphasizing on the multi-dimensionality of urban poverty [2] talks about income poverty and observes that unlike rural settings cities due to their structure force residents to depend on cash to meet most essential needs in life. Therefore the city as constituted is a capitalist's enclave that those without the economic and political strength cannot compete are therefore left in poverty. Income poverty of residents is generally compounded by inadequate accommodation, limited access to basic infrastructure and services as well as exposure to environmental hazards and exposure to crime and violence.

In spite of the controversies surrounding its conceptualization, it is generally agreed that poverty has adverse effects on individuals and communities, breeding social exclusion, isolation, fear, distress and deprivations [15]. Poverty can lead to loss of self-confidence, self-actualization, self-fulfillment, lack of good orientation and abandonment of cultural values and heritage such that people are ashamed of their cultural and racial identity [16,17].

Literature Review

Findings from various literatures about urbanization agreed that it induces poverty on one hand but some theoretical analyses as well as empirical evidences suggest there can also be a positive relationship between urbanization and economic growth [18]. Using economic geography as a baseline a World Bank report in 2009 praised urbanization for enhancing countries income in the long run and this theoretical foundation stem from the benefits of information spillovers, labour market pooling, access to intermediate inputs and proximity to large markets [19]. These factors led to higher productivity of firms and workers which resulted in higher overall economic growth, increased income and a reduction in urban poverty.

Research on the effect of urbanization on economic growth and poverty seems to be intertwined with its effects of rural poverty as has been observed in numerous literatures. The effects of urbanization on rural areas can be positive as well as negative. Urbanization and urban development can have a positive impact on rural revenues by raising the demand for rural areas products as revealed by various works [6,20-22].

There are indeed positive links between urbanization and economic growth as [23] suggested, but state that the fragility of the link between growth and poverty weakens the presumption of a positive relationship between urbanization and poverty. This is so because concentration of population in urban areas can become highly problematic for urban decision makers and administrators with the preponderance of the formation of slums, as large number of people compete for ever decreasing urban resources which increases crime and unrest.

Using theoretical background knowledge however of the relationship between urbanization, income growth and poverty [24], tried to draw on the impact associated with these phenomena. Their work reveals was a U-shaped relationship between level of urbanization, inequality and income growth. The work also provided clear empirical evidence for the model through econometric data analysis. The study further suggested that urbanization also contributes to poverty reduction but at much higher levels by growing income of urban residents.

Evidentiary analysis shows that urbanization contributes to reducing poverty although there are some factors that have been known to inhibit the benefits accruable from the process of this urbanization. Reports show that in the short run urbanization has been observed to increase urban poverty due to induced population concentration on marginal urban lands leading to environmental degradation with long term effects of reducing productivity [25], with the negative externalities and outcomes that is associated with the lowering of income of urban residents and aggravating the already precarious poverty status.

Akinola SR [7] stressed that urban governance was able to draw conclusions on the relationships between urbanization and poverty. He further argued that with rapid rate of urbanization and population growth and the facilities meant as incentives for entrepreneurial development as well as those supposed to be nerves of urban economy deteriorating rapidly in Nigeria, the quality of urban services such as roads, water, sanitation, health and electricity which are meant for a meaningful standard of living means that many in a growing population will not be absorbed into productive employments leading to increased rate of urban poverty.

Ravallion M [26] study on thirty nine (39) countries was able to develop a simple model of urbanization of the poor in a developing

country. Under his model various conditions were identified under which the urban poor urbanize faster than the non-poor. This implies that the urban share of the poor is an increasing convex function of the urban share of the population. The estimated empirical model from the study still assumed that the urban poverty rate rise slowly relative to rural rate making the link between both phenomena glaring [27].

Many studies abound on the relationship between urbanization and poverty however this study intended to expand the debate by analyzing the contributions of Marxist's capitalist explanations.

Linking urbanization and poverty through a Marxist's interpretation

This study however showed how the imbalances associated with capital accumulation and pursuit of profit can in the long term contribute to poverty through its encouraging of excessively concentration of economic activities in cities, depriving rural areas of much needed employment opportunities which ultimately leads population migration from these rural areas of people who lack wherewithal to adequately contribute to the cities for the betterment of themselves. This exacerbates the already worsening situation of the poor working class in cities developing countries due to the lowering of wages of established residents through constant competition that continues to drive wages down.

Urban poverty has roots in the inequalities that characterize most societies in a social structure that displays a disdain for things rural while in the exercise of economic and political power tends to appropriate people's goods and even their rights for private enrichment [28]. This disdain is real for those the society perceives as lacking in capacity to adjust into the economic life of cities. Profit is usually driven by lowering cost of production, and the reduction of labour costs is always an easy target for capitalists.

Harvey D [29] insisted that capitalist influence on city dynamics avers that Marxist's urban theory deals with spatial-geographical dimensions and manifestations of the twin theme "capital accumulation and class struggles". Kugkhapan NT [30] writing in support of [29] explained Marx's theory by advancing spatial processes and consequences of capital accumulation, such as geographical expansion, uneven development and the obsolete built environment; that can lead to marginalized classes and economic deprivation.

Haggblade S., *et al.* [31] analysis suggested that time-space relationship is an important field of social theory and explains that controlling space is as important as controlling capital because both have been known to construct social and economic relationships in society. Therefore, urban spaces and rural regions fall within the scope of which capitalist have been known to exercise control. Elitist conspiracy" or "elitist theories" have been coined by various scholars with leanings towards Marxism. The theory proposed some insight into the question of social equity within human social and economic interactions. Societies are, the theory holds, ruled by a relatively small number of people with like-minded, usually business interests [32]. The elite theory posits that the structure of society resembles pyramids, with a relatively small number of very powerful people at the top gradually giving way to a large mass of lesser individuals at the bottom [33].

Elitist's theory believes that those who control capital maintain their position of authority and influence by continuing to keep those outside their group from benefitting from the resources of the city often times using the instrumentalities of the law. This implies that many people, residents or migrants coming into cities will have to suffer the policies of a skewed system. Therefore the poor rural migrants flocking in and expanding cities' borders looking for better means of livelihood would be at a disadvantage because they are shut out as the policies of the economic and political elite is only intended to exploit class of people like them. This theory is vastly relevant in many undeveloped economics where the rate corruption and poverty is high and government institutions are weak in both urban and rural areas as is the case in Nigeria.

Brock T [34] in his analysis of Marxism, explains it as a social, political and economic philosophy put forward by Karl Marx which examines the effects of capitalism on labour, productivity and economic development. The theory's emphasis is on everyday struggles between those who control resources in the society and those who turn those resources to capital and profit.

Using Marxist's approach in explaining urban poverty states that every society is built upon a mode of production-that is, a set of institutional practices by which society organizes its productive activities, providing material needs and the reproduction of socio-economic structure [35,36]. For the society to survive it must continue to evolve ways of remaining viable by creating more avenues

for capital acquisition and profit margins which are used for capital investments for the city to grow physically and economically, this is however the main goals of capitalists who control the means of production in the society.

Inequality is inevitably produced during the normal operation of capitalist economies and cannot be eradicated without fundamentally altering the mechanisms of capitalism. In addition it is functional to the system, which means that power holders have a vested interest in preserving existing social and economic inequality, even if people are left impoverished.

To understand further the pull that cities in Nigeria have on rural dwellers and its perpetuation of urban poverty that drive rural urban migration, the level of poverty is indeed the biggest motivating factor. Using poverty headcount, poverty gap and Gini coefficient it is found that rural areas are trending worse than urban areas. This in itself buttresses the fact that more and more people will continue to move to cities from rural areas in search of better living standards even without requisite skills and qualifications invariably ending being poor.

	Poverty headcount rate in % of population strata	Poverty gap index in % of poverty line	Gini coefficient
Nigeria	40.1	12.9	35.1
Urban	18	4.5	31.9
Rural	52.1	17.4	32.8

Table 1: Poverty and inequality indicators in Nigeria in 2019.

Source: Nigeria Living Standards Survey, 2018-2019. The estimate excludes Borno – state, Nigeria [37].

On a related note, a survey conducted on characteristics of rural migrants in January 2021 by this researcher, into the city of Owerri, capital of Imo state, Southeast, Nigeria of seventy nine (79) young men between ages of 25 - 35 years is instructive in this study and the result is analyzed below.

The result showed that migration to the city of Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria is mostly the result of economic situation in rural areas of the state. A total of 72 respondents (91.14%) say the major reason for coming to the city is for employment opportunities.

Reason for migrating to the city of Owerri	Total	Percentage
Seeking employment opportunities	72	91.14
Enjoy better social amenities	5	6.33
To be closer to relatives	2	2.53
Schooling	0	0
Total	79	100

Table 2: Principal reason for leaving your village and coming to Owerri city.

Source: Fieldwork by researcher (January, 2021).

Occupation of respondents in their villages	Total	Percentage
One form of agriculture	46	58.23
Trading	7	8.86
Hunting	1	1.27
Carpentry work	4	5.06
Bicycle repairer	2	2.53
Palm wine tapping	5	6.33
Hired labourers	11	13.92
No occupation	3	3.80
Total	79	100

Table 3: What was your occupation in the village before leaving for Owerri City?.

Majority said they were engaged in agricultural activities that is 46 (58.23%), while only 10 (12.66%) had education up to higher institutions and only one had had any formal job experience. With this statistics it is likely that respondents will not be well integrated into a city’s economic system and are likely to struggle even end up adding to the poverty situation of the city. This scenario is replicated in many developing countries facing similar situation such as Nigeria.

Brueckner J [38] pointed out that migration is simply the result of differences in income and market opportunities between urban and rural areas. Most policies in developing countries like Nigeria encourage migrations, urbanization and over concentration of

cheap labour in cities, with little or no investment in infrastructure, employment opportunities and urban services to accommodate new arrivals [43]. The increased population induces competition for the few available jobs which further reduces labour wages as well as a lack of opportunities for the urban poor both as older residents and new migrants. This plays well for the capitalist system in cities for continued capital accumulation through this situation, thereby establishing a link between Marxist’s explanation, the city, urbanization and poverty.

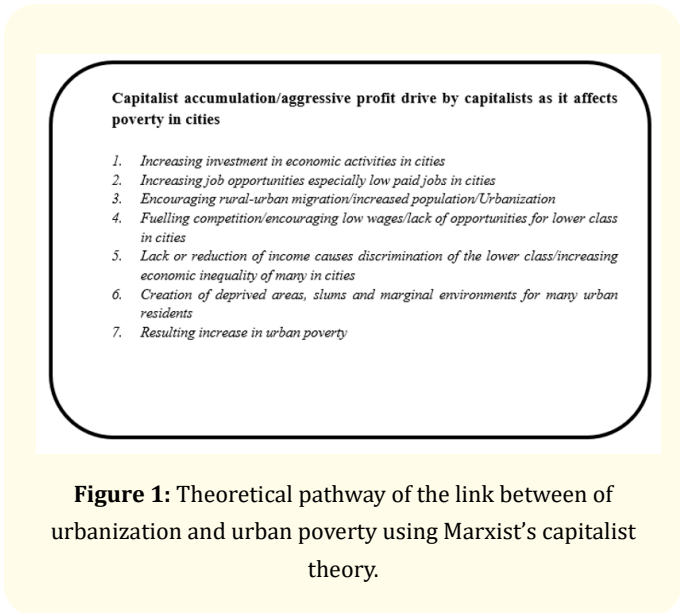


Figure 1: Theoretical pathway of the link between of urbanization and urban poverty using Marxist’s capitalist theory.

Recommendations

Agricultural existential role should not be that of furthering the process of urbanization and industrializing the economy of cities. Rapid rural agricultural growth and improved value chains to feed the growing population and improve manufacturing sector is important. Increasing diverse consumption demands showed that the trickle down phenomenon expected is not working or may not be sufficient to eradicate poverty in rural areas; other barriers such as opportunity and income inequalities continues to impede the virtuous growth-poverty inverse relationship [39,41]. Therefore a deliberate policy of rural industrialization and development should be pursued if rural urban migration that fuels urban poverty is to be eradicated.

Governments should address the problems of ineffective and corrupt institutions that are prone towards the protection of in-

terests of the rich and powerful in cities. Government institutions should be for the benefits of generality of urban population. Elected officials, government institutions and agencies are supposed to create an equitable and egalitarian society responsive to every urban citizen, for the main function of any government is the protection and welfare of all her citizens. This will go a long way in de-emphasizing inordinate capital accumulation in cities that ultimately seeks cheap labour that continues to drive migration which fuels urbanization of most cities in developing countries.

Having observed poverty eradication strategies in Nigeria which is often geared towards the individual and family components of society, more attention should be paid towards the social and economic structure of the cities and its push for capitalist’s orientation as observed earlier. Marxists have always called for eradicating any system that encourages the exploitation of workers and vulnerable citizens. Therefore an in-depth analysis of the social and economic systems of cities should be reviewed from time to time in order to remove policies and programmes that tend to breed social and economic inequalities for vulnerable class of citizens in cities.

An approach that should be thoroughly looked into by developing countries is the urban village phenomenon. Urban villages according to [2] are unique products of Chinese urbanization. The fact that little attention is generally paid to the welfare of rural population and migrants in most Chinese cities does not result in wholesale poverty, slums or squatter settlements as [40] found out in their study. Urban villages have evolved to provide affordable and adequate housing for urban poor and rural migrants. Linking urban villages to the overall city development strategies would seem to be a natural and logical response to rural migrants facing rapid economic development and social transition [2,42], for integration of the urban poor and migrant populations in cities. This will in effect reduce the population of rural urban migrants that come to cities with little or no potential economic value in both short and long term. This model of urban villages serves as a transitional zone to people migrating into cities is strongly advocated. This transition zone which has some characteristics of cities will enable migrants to integrate easily for a time while they work in an environment similar to where they are coming from. This is because it serves a dual purpose of building up the capabilities for those who might still wish to migrate further into the city as well reducing the number of people entering the cities who are ill-prepared for live in the city.

Conclusion

Having drawn a connection between urbanization and urban poverty through Marxist's explanation in developing countries, there is however the tendency to assume that with increased rate of urbanization there is the likelihood that urban poverty will also be on the increase if measures are not put in place to mitigate the forms of urbanization and the motivation of urbanization that create avenues for urban poverty.

For the benefits of urbanization to be fully realized in developing countries, capitalists' influences on the city must be reduced. An egalitarian system that promotes the welfare of all must strictly be pursued and implemented. This will create a system of equitable distribution of resources which in the long run will ultimately eradicate exploitation and exclusion often associated with the capitalist's systems in cities.

This study calls for further studies on how to improve the capabilities of rural and urban dwellers so that a significant portion of the population both in urban and rural locations are able to have the ability to control opportunities available in both cities and rural areas. Capability and capitalist nature of cities if well understood can be made to work in limiting the negatives problems associated with urbanization in many developing countries of the world, Nigeria included.

Unlike the early form of Marxist theory, this work does not call for the total overhaul of the capitalist system but rather calls for a system that promotes profit for capital, equitable distribution of resources in cities, improved and accessible infrastructure for vulnerable groups in cities and the complete development of rural areas that makes life meaningful for rural people to mitigate rural urban migration that is associated with urban poverty.

Conclusively, the philosophical and epistemological aspects of various phenomena should continue to be exhaustively studied in order to bring to fore how realities are being shaped in the modern world today. There are numerous interconnected realities that are easily understood if we continue to pursue knowledge through the prism of critical theories as well as through a postmodern outlook.

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