

Policy pointers

Improved mobility and connectivity are driving rural livelihood transformations and local development in some countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Governments should recognise this as essential for development processes in rural areas.

Better infrastructure in rural areas is key. It would improve connections for rural people to small towns, enhance their access to social and financial services, and increase opportunities for livelihood diversification.

Governments could play a vital role with policies for investing in schools, clinics, markets, financial services, electricity supply, roads, but also by giving more attention to information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as mobile phones.

Remittances from migrants also offer huge development opportunities, both at the individual level and for society at large. Local governments should encourage local development projects initiated by civil society organisations by creating supportive institutional environments.

Mobility and connectivity: driving rural livelihood transformations in Africa

Recent research in Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania has revealed major drivers of rural livelihood transformations and local development.¹ Thanks to improved connectivity, greater mobility and better rural-city connections, rural people are diversifying their livelihoods and transforming agricultural production systems. This has created rural non-farm labour opportunities, which in turn stimulates positive socioeconomic dynamics in the regions. But it has also triggered challenges. Without government support for large-scale investment in infrastructure and regional planning, not everyone benefits to the same extent. Positive government-led measures could foster local and regional development in sub-Saharan Africa — recognising that livelihood transformation and mobility dynamics are essential not only to individual households but to society at large.

This briefing paper identifies key policy areas for rural development. Livelihood transformation processes in dynamic rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa are guiding everyday life for rural households. Livelihood diversification and better rural-urban connections — the multifaceted flows of people, goods, labour and capital — have already made a significant contribution to local development. Better rural connectivity due to technological infrastructure has increased mobility dynamics from, to and within the regions. In practice, governments could play a vital role by stimulating the construction and upgrading of regional roads and by investing in information and communication technologies (ICTs).

Why explore mobility?

In sub-Saharan Africa, rural-urban linkages and interactions play an increasingly significant role in local economies and livelihood transformation.²

But we need a better understanding of the impact on changing livelihoods both in rural and urban areas.^{3,4} Rural-urban connections in sub-Saharan Africa are becoming increasingly complex: migration cannot be considered a unidirectional movement from rural areas to cities. It has instead been shaped by a chain of connections in which rural and urban livelihoods interact on a movement continuum. Temporary movement — whether daily, weekly or seasonal — characterises the main mobility pattern of rural households crisscrossing the region for social reasons as well as to search for employment, services, commercial goods and education. These temporary flows of people are complemented and linked with more permanent flows of mobility, which makes the areas under study highly dynamic in terms of mobility inflows and outflows.

Governments have a vital role to play in stimulating the construction and upgrading of regional roads and by investing in information and communication technology

What are the implications for local development?

These rural dynamics have influenced development processes in the region in significant ways. The research found that the introduction of cash crops has for instance drawn a variety of traders and external actors who have turned the sites into attractive locations for investment. Several sites attract traders, businessmen and women from cities and surrounding areas who want to invest in land and create additional labour opportunities. This often results in better incomes for rural people through which they can afford to travel to town, to cities or other rural areas to look for additional livelihood opportunities. Others start a business in the community; they open a small shop or a phone booth or buy a Chinese motorbike and become a taxi driver. People also invest in improved housing. These investments in real estate also create a vibrant market for building materials and informal jobs in the construction sector.

Remittances: a key development opportunity?

Remittances in money and in kind are also an important factor in contributing to local development and poverty reduction. As the research shows, a large portion of migrants send remittances back to their places of origin

(eg Box 1). Especially in Ghana and Cameroon, remittances form a significant part of household income. Most households engage in mobility as part of livelihood, survival or consolidation strategies. They use remittances to buy various goods including farming inputs such as fertiliser, as well as cooking utensils, food supplies, cloth, bicycles or small solar panels to power lights at night and to charge mobile phones. Only a minor few succeed in accumulating wealth as a result of international remittances.

Yet the research shows that when migrants organise themselves through hometown or migrant associations, remittances have the potential to be used for local development projects in infrastructure and services, especially when lobbied for at the national government level as in the case of Cameroon.

What are the challenges?

Positive economic dynamics also trigger challenges in terms of local rural development. At the household level, increased mobility of household members places an extra burden on family labour. Sometimes, households must reduce or even stop farming activities — making them more dependent on external money flows. Financial investments in household mobility can also reduce the availability of cash for daily needs.

At the community level, not everyone benefits to the same extent from dynamic rural transformations in the area. Certain population groups are very vulnerable because fertile land has become scarce in these regions. In addition, the lack of government support for large-scale investment in infrastructure and regional planning leaves villages highly dependent on private investments and the 'goodwill' of local elites and chiefs to initiate development projects. These are often driven by local power games. The availability of funds and resources can be unpredictable and unreliable.

What are the main policy recommendations?

Based on the findings of the research, the following are specific recommendations for local governments that seek to foster development in rural regions.

Mobility and livelihoods diversification:

- Positive government-led measures could foster local and regional development in sub-Saharan Africa — recognising that current processes of livelihood transformation and mobility dynamics are essential not only for individual households' livelihoods, but also for societal development at large.

Box 1. Bamileke migrants' homeland investments

For many years, the Bamileke people from Western Cameroon have been successful economically and politically. Apart from farming, many have also migrated to the cities of Cameroon and been highly effective business owners, influential traders and transport operators. Much of the urban food supply chains is in their hands. The Bamileke are also active traders elsewhere in the Central African region.

Many Bamileke live in Yaoundé and Douala and participate in a variety of ethnic associations and networks that span urban and rural spaces. Some are influential politically and contribute to the development of their communities of origin. Others are small business owners or successful entrepreneurs owning supermarkets, hotels or transport companies. Some are wealthy landowners running profitable plantations, cattle-breeding, fish-farming or food-processing businesses.

It is not surprising that those with sufficient means invest in their region of origin. They build opulent family houses, community infrastructure and farming. One successful entrepreneur, a member of the national parliament who lives most of the time in Douala, has even built a colossal conference centre in rural Bamboutos.

- National, regional and local governments should devise and implement development policies that take into account — and even target — rural people for whom mobility is a vital asset of their livelihoods that span the rural and urban and include farm and non-farm economic activities.
- This includes taking the lead in improving social, economic and spatial infrastructure (eg schools, clinics, markets, financial services, electricity supply and roads). This would improve connections with small towns, enhance access to social and financial services, and increase opportunities for livelihood diversification. Such measures would — at least in part — also prevent the outflow of human capital, in particular of the young and enterprising parts of the rural population.
- Governments have a vital role to play in stimulating the construction and upgrading of regional roads and by investing in ICTs. This might allow a broader range of actors to participate in the market exchange and to facilitate the flow of market information from towns and cities to villages.
- In addition, local governments could create off-season labour opportunities by employing people in road maintenance, construction work or service provision. Such institutionalised, off-season employment opportunities keep labour and economic activities in the region — and as such can foster economic vitality the whole year round.

Remittances and local development.

Remittances offer real opportunities for local governments to facilitate and stimulate projects for the public good, such as the construction and renovation of roads, schools, health clinics and markets:

- Migrant associations play a significant role in development, by diminishing deficiencies in public infrastructure investment. But migrant associations need the support of local authorities. While efficient at mobilising money, they can be weak in the practical implementation and operation of local development projects.
- Local governments should encourage projects initiated by civil society organisations, creating supportive institutional environments, and allocating funds for operational costs and salaries of teaching and health workers.
- Local governments should establish the proper conditions for co-development with migrant associations, local (farm and non-farm) entrepreneurs and other local stakeholders. Governments can do so by facilitating local

multistakeholder platforms, guaranteeing participatory decision making about collaborative investments in local and regional infrastructure and services, and coordinating the implementation of the projects.

- Government-led community contracting arrangements for such public works may also be a strong tool in providing off-season employment.

Transport infrastructure. Developing transport infrastructure is a much-needed condition for rural economic development. Good transport networks physically connect rural food-producing areas with urban consumer markets — and help people to move and engage in non-agricultural economic activities. But more often than not, transport infrastructure is still too narrowly focused on connecting district towns with capital cities:

- The role of the government is vital. The development of rural roads in strategically selected areas needs priority in terms of planning, budget allocation and actual implementation.
- Regional and local governments should also develop networks of strategically placed collection points that are well connected to the arterial roads of the region. This would greatly improve accessibility to dynamic rural areas, decrease transportation costs significantly and potentially generate non-farm income opportunities for people transporting commodities by wagons, bikes or motorbikes.

Information and communication

technologies. The rapidly developing infrastructure for ICTs has significantly altered livelihood patterns and rural-city connections. Access to communication and information has improved substantially, helping to develop and maintain networks (for economic and social interests) and allowing people to save and transfer money through the use of mobile money. Mobile phones are used to disseminate market information such as crop prices and help reduce transaction costs of sellers, buyers and transporters. But despite these opportunities, there are still huge disparities between those who have access to mobile phones and mobile money and those who have not:

- Improving telecommunication infrastructures should be a key part of development policy agendas at all levels of government
- Central government may play an important — although indirect — role by stimulating user cost reductions, which would lead to an expansion of internet use, such as encouraging

market competition among mobile phone and internet companies

- Creating appropriate regulatory frameworks to reduce the costs of handsets and airtime will also lead to user expansion
- Incentives for the use of solar-powered phones might be considered, as many rural households do not have access to electricity and cannot recharge the batteries of their phones at home
- In addition, local governments could improve access to the internet by establishing

municipal computer centres for people to use for free. Local governments could also offer basic ICT courses.

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Investing in rural people

Urbanisation, rural-urban transformations and food systems

This policy brief is part of the IFAD-funded project Rural-Urban Transformations and Food Systems: Re-Framing Food Security Narratives and Identifying Policy Options That Foster Sustainable Transitions and of the RurbanAfrica research project funded by the European Union under the 7th Research Framework Programme. Global food security and rural development are often framed in terms of inadequate agricultural production. But urbanisation is driving profound transformations in food systems in rural, peri-urban and urban areas – from food consumption to food processing, transport, markets and all related activities. Local, national, regional and global policies are critical to shaping rural-urban linkages and the political economy of food systems. Policies must support food security and livelihoods of low-income groups in all locations – while fostering sustainable rural-urban transitions.

IIED is convening and supporting a global network of researchers and practitioners in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and China. These include local government officials, civil society organisations and regional research institutions, both urban and rural. Network members are also engaging with international agencies such as the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Habitat, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). For a full list of project policy briefs and working papers, see: www.iied.org/urbanisation-rural-urban-transformations-food-systems.

Notes

¹ Steel, G and van Lindert, P (2017) Rural livelihood transformations and local development in Cameroon, Ghana and Tanzania. IIED, London. <http://pubs.iied.org/10811IIED> / ² Tacoli, C (2002) Changing rural-urban interactions in sub-Saharan Africa and their impact on livelihoods: a summary. IIED, London. <http://pubs.iied.org/9153IIED> / ³ Bah, M et al. (2003) Changing rural-urban linkages in Mali, Nigeria and Tanzania. *Environment and Urbanization* 15 (1). <http://journals.sagepub.com/toc/eau/15/1> / ⁴ Agergaard, J et al. (2010) Rural-urban dynamics: livelihoods, mobility and markets in African and Asian frontiers. Routledge, New York.