



UNIVERSITY OF NATAL DURBAN

**THE DYNAMICS OF
URBANISATION
IN SOUTH AFRICA**

JILL NATTRASS

DEVELOPMENT STUDIES UNIT

Centre for Applied Social Sciences

WORKING PAPER NO. **2**

THE DYNAMICS OF URBANISATION

IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

Jill Nattrass

Working Paper No. 2

Development Studies Unit
University of Natal
Durban 1983

THE DYNAMICS OF URBANISATION

IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

Jill Nattrass

Working Paper No. 2

Development Studies Unit
University of Natal
Durban 1983

JILL NATTRASS is an economist at the University of Natal. She is Professor of Development Studies and head of the Development Studies Unit. Her particular research interests lie mainly in the field of development - particularly in the areas that relate economic growth, social and political change and development in South Africa. She has published a book and numerous articles and research papers in this general field.

ISBN 0 - 86980 - 333 - 6

CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	1
1.0 Introduction	1
2.0 Why Urbanisation accompanies Economic Growth	2
3.0 A Framework for Analysis	5
4.0 Urbanisation in South Africa	7
5.0 The Dynamics of Urbanisation	12
5.1 The Legal Framework	12
5.2 The Social and Political Framework	14
5.3 The Economic Structure	15
6.0 Conclusion	19
Bibliography	22
<u>List of Figures</u>	
Figure 1.	6
<u>List of Tables</u>	
Table 1. Percentage of Group Living in Urban Areas	8

ABSTRACT: The paper discusses the relationship between economic growth and urbanisation and asks how these links will affect South African urbanisation patterns. In view of the conclusion that virtually all future rural urban migrants will be African, the impact of both the present legal constraints on urbanisation by the African group and the economic forces acting upon them are discussed, as are the various forms in which urbanisation takes place. The paper concludes with a brief look towards the future.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Probably the three most outstanding characteristics of the social evolution that has taken place over the past three hundred years have been the growth of industrial production through the medium of the factory, the massive movement of people from the countryside to the towns and cities and the break up of the extended family system and its replacement by the growing importance of the nuclear family. These three changes in the social fabric are not independent of one another but the relationship between them is not a simple one. This paper is largely concerned with the dynamics that drive the process of urbanisation as well as with the particular characteristics of the process in the South African context.

2.0 WHY URBANISATION ACCOMPANIES ECONOMIC GROWTH

Relatively primitive economies are characterised by a heavy dependence upon agriculture and a reasonably widely dispersed population. However, once incomes start to rise and a point is reached at which the immediate food needs of the population are satisfied, history has shown that both the structure of the economy and the spatial distribution of the population start to change. It is largely economic phenomena and people's reactions to them that determine the exact nature of the change that takes place. Although the actual changes that happen are specific to the circumstances surrounding them, there are a number of the characteristics of the economic growth process discussed below that occur generally and it is these which tend to generate increasing levels of urbanisation.

Firstly, because the income elasticity of non food items is very much greater than that of food, as incomes rise in an economy so the demand for non food items, such as manufactures and personal services, grows faster than that for food (Johnston and Mellor (1961)). As a result of this rapidly growing and uneven demand, employment opportunities in the non food producing sectors usually offer better prospects than do those in the food sector (particularly as regards jobs in agriculture). Consequently, people start to move off the land in search of the better opportunities in industry (Lewis (1954)).

Secondly, the nature of non food industry itself also often encourages increased urbanisation. Although some industries locate at

the source of a major raw material input, most choose their location in terms of either the ease of access to the market for their final product or the availability of processed factor inputs, such as electricity and repair facilities or their access to a pool of adequately trained labour. All these latter factors lead to industries grouping together and forming a nucleus for urban growth. The prospects for such growth are then further enhanced by the commercial opportunities that flow from the growing concentration of population, that accompanies the agglomeration of industry.

Thirdly, industrialisation and the general rise in the living standards of those that are associated with it, affects the balance of men and land in the rural areas. The assumption usually made here is that the relationships referred to above lead to a gradual depopulation of the land and in many countries this has indeed been the case. Thus, in these cases, one sees a fall in the proportion of both the population living in rural areas and that engaged in agriculture (Kuznets (1965)). However, it seems that in a number of developing countries and indeed in South Africa herself, there has been a reverse relationship. Industrialisation has been accompanied by an increase in the number of people living in the rural areas. Land/man ratios have been reduced and standards of living in the rural areas have fallen rather than risen as industrialisation and modernisation has taken place elsewhere in the economy (Lipton (1974), Natrass (1981)). In circumstances like these, the gap between economic opportunities in the expanding urban areas and the rural areas widens even more rapidly and people are not only attracted to the towns by

the higher living standards apparent there, but are also pushed out of the rural areas by the fact that the land becomes increasingly unable to support them. Their rural standards of living are not only lower than the average in the towns, but are declining to socially, and in some instances physically, unacceptable levels.

Fourthly, changing economic circumstances in the rural areas can in some instances generate economic push forces that spring from very different sources. Both the enclosure movement in Britain in the late eighteenth century and the ejection of the bywoners from the boer farms in the Trekker Republics in the late nineteenth centuries are examples of this second type of push factor. Here the economic opportunities for the rural areas created by the growth of the domestic market for agricultural products, led farmers to switch their techniques of production from farming practices that were based upon an allotment system, to large scale production on the basis of 'open field' cultivation. This was a move away from labour intensive production techniques to more capital intensive methods of production and the switch in techniques led to large numbers of people being forced from the land - people who, having no alternative, found their way to the towns.

Rural push forces of both types can, and indeed often do, lead to people being forced from the land faster and in greater numbers than alternative economic opportunities can be created in the towns. Hence, one often finds that economic growth in a developing country is accompanied by rising urban unemployment levels and considerable social

and economic hardship (Jolly, de Kadt, Singer and Wilson (1973)).

Economic factors are of course not the only forces influencing the distribution of population. Both the social and the legal framework also play their part. However, in view of the above arguments, one can safely conclude that in circumstances in which the social and legal institutions exert either a favourable or neutral effect upon the movement of people away from the rural areas, economic growth will always be accompanied by urbanisation.

3.0 A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

For analytical purposes one can, somewhat simplistically, divide all the forces that affect rural-urban migration into one of four categories, no matter whether they originate from the social, the political, or the economic systems. The four categories are urban pull forces, urban push forces, rural pull forces and rural push forces (Clyde Mitchell (1959); Wilson (1972)). The relationship of the four categories to the rural-urban migration process is shown schematically below in Figure 1.

Two distinct sets of forces encourage urbanisation. Firstly, the urban pull forces such as the better urban economic opportunities, the attraction of the urban lifestyle and the better access to amenities particularly education, transport and recreational facilities (Schapera (1947), Sjaarstad (1962), Sahota (1968)). The second set of forces encouraging the movement to the towns are the rural push

greater than that of the urban push and rural pull factors, urbanisation takes place as people from the rural areas relocate in the towns and vice versa.

In some African countries, including to some extent South Africa, one finds situations in which for various reasons the direction of dominance reverses intermittently. In these cases one finds a class of 'oscillating' or 'circulating' migrants developing - people who have been called "men of two worlds" (Hobart Houghton (1964)). Such people go to town for a period determined by the length of time that the forces encouraging urbanisation are dominant. Once the forces pulling them back to the rural areas become greater, they return to their rural homes, remaining there until the direction of dominance reverses once again.

4.0 URBANISATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

With the exception of Cape Town and Bloemfontein, the location of South Africa's major urban centres largely reflects the spatial distribution of economic opportunities that was created by the development of the mining industry. The major towns and cities are situated either within the mining country itself or at the harbours that handle the trade that has grown up as a result of the growth of the mining sector.

It is often said that in South Africa the different race groups have

responded to the forces of economic growth differently and that this difference is the cause of the variations in the degree of urbanisation amongst the races. A more careful observation, however, would probably reveal that the true position does not relate so much to the response of the race groups, as it does to the institutional and social frameworks within which those responses are made. The actual variations between the race groups both with respect to the degree of urbanisation and the time period over which it has taken place are indeed quite significant as the data in Table 1 show. Hence one finds that after nearly a century of economic growth and the development of a significant industrial sector, whilst only 10 percent of the White and Indian groups live on the land, nearly two thirds of the African group remain rural dwellers.

Table 1. Percentage of Group Living in Urban Areas

		Percentage living in Urban Areas in the Year				
		1936	1946	1960	1970	1980
African	13	17	22	32	33	38
Asian	5	66	70	83	87	91
Coloured	4	54	58	68	74	77
White	2	65	72	84	87	89
		31	36	47	48	53

Source: 1936 - 1970 Government Population Census for the relevant years. 1980 kindly supplied by the Central Statistical Services, Pretoria.

It is very clear from the data in Table 1 that, if the process of increased urbanisation continues, by far the majority of people who will move from the country into the towns over the remainder of this century will be African. Not only is this group the least urbanised at present, but also it was the group that was urbanising most rapidly over the decade from 1970 to 1980 - showing a 13 percent increase in the number of urban dwellers as against a 5 percent increase for Asians, a 4 percent increase for Coloureds and a 2 percent increase for Whites.

The difference in the urbanisation process amongst the race groups goes beyond that of degree. Amongst the White, Indian and Coloured people who move into the towns most generally do so on a permanent basis. However, in the African urban communities, one finds both permanent urban dwellers and a significant groups of 'oscillating migrants'. It is difficult to say definitely what proportion of urban Africans fall into this latter class because the official statistics exclude people who enter the towns illegally and it is difficult to find an acceptable basis for estimating the size of the migrant labour force (Nattrass (1976); Simkins (1981)). However one such estimate placed it at over 1.5 million people in 1970 (Nattrass (1976)).

If the system of migrant labour had not persisted amongst the African group, the degree of urbanisation would have been considerably greater. Indeed, using the above estimate of the number of oscillating migrants, it appears that had the families of the present migrants lived with them in the urban areas, the percentage of the African group that would have been urbanized by 1980 would have been well over 50 percent.

Even amongst those who are permanent urban residents one often finds that the members of the African group are in a different position. To urbanise legally, a would-be African in-migrant has to go through a legal process that was essentially designed specifically both to retard permanent urbanisation and to limit the number of Africans living in the towns and, as a result, is both tedious and difficult. The consequences are obvious, people both bypass the law and ignore it and growing numbers of Africans now live in the urban areas illegally.

The form of illegality, however, varies: in some instances the entry itself is illegal; in others it is the form of residence that is illegal whilst the entry is legal. Examples of the latter case are the migrant workers who move out of the hostel accommodation in favour of living in illegal lodgings in the townships or who become shack dwellers. In still other instances, as was the case with the families of the migrant workers who settled in Crossroads, both the entry and the life style are illegal.

Largely as a result of the complex legal framework, one finds four distinct classes of urban Africans :

1. Those living permanently and legally within the urban areas. This class would include Africans in white areas who have Section 10 (1)a, b, or c rights in terms of The Black Urban Areas Act, and Africans living in towns in the Black States.

2. Those living permanently but illegally in urban areas. These people by definition are found only in the designated white areas and may be living in either the Black townships, in squatter areas or in the backyards of their employers.
3. Oscillating legal rural-urban migrants. Those people who have been allowed into the white urban areas in terms of Section 1(d) of The Black Urban Areas Act.
4. Oscillating illegal rural-urban migrants - people who have for one reason or another failed to obtain Section 1(d) rights but who have nevertheless entered and remained in the urban areas.

The differences in both the present extent of urbanisation amongst the African group and in the conditions under which the urbanisation process itself takes place, make it clearly worthwhile analysing in more detail both the framework within which the urbanisation forces will operate upon this group and the likely behaviour of the forces themselves - particularly as the majority of all the new urban dwellers in South Africa for the foreseeable future will come from this group.

5.0 THE DYNAMICS OF AFRICAN URBANISATION

The dynamics of the urbanisation process amongst the African group in South Africa too are very different from those that normally lie behind the growth of towns. The roots of these differences are to be found in the racial nature of South Africa's legal framework, in the social and political framework and in the structure of the economy itself.

5.1 The Legal Framework

From the early days of the white settlement at the Cape there have been legal restrictions on the rights of the African group to enter and to settle in the towns. A great deal of emphasis right from these early times was laid upon 'vagrancy' and 'redundancy'. (Van der Horst (1942)).

With the advent of the Union, a capacity for legislating on a common basis was created amongst the States now comprising South Africa and in 1923 The Urban Areas Act was passed and the principle of racial separation was applied in the urban areas, in a similar manner to the way the 1913 Land Act restricted African access to land in the rural areas. The Urban Areas Act was amended in 1937 to give additional powers to municipalities to "deal with the redundancy problem" and the system of control was further rationalised in 1945. A number of Commissions and Committees investigated the situation over the

period 1939 - 1947, the best known of which was the Native Laws Commission (The Fagan Commission) and all concluded that the movement of Africans to the towns on a permanent basis was inevitable. These findings were accepted by the government of the day, the United Party, who then lost the 1948 election to the Nationalists - largely on the issue of 'Native policy'.

The new Nationalist government that came to power rejected the findings of the Commissions and the belief that African urbanisation was inevitable and reaffirmed their faith in the findings of an earlier, Nationalist inspired, Commission, the 1922 Stallard Commission, which had concluded that only the white group had the right of permanent residence in the towns. This new state policy direction formed the foundation for the legal structure of influx control and township administration within which African urbanisation has taken place from 1948 to date. Entry and residence rights were determined by the well-known conditions that are set out in Section 10 (1) of the (now retitled) 'Black Urban Areas Act', and they had the effect of permanently institutionalising the migrant labour system. This Act also prevented members of the African group from obtaining land in the urban areas on a freehold title basis.

These restrictions increased the cost of urbanisation to would be rural-urban migrants, in terms of both the amount of personal effort that had to be expended in fulfilling the legal requirements and the personal costs involved in the increased chance of being caught and

fined in the case of the illegal entrants. Further, the restrictions on freehold title and on the development of Black business, also severely limited the potential benefits accruing to the rural-urban migrant, further retarding the urbanisation process.

The legal framework also affected African urbanisation patterns in another way. The laws forming the basis for racial separation led to large numbers of Africans being removed from so-called 'Black Spots' in white rural areas and resettled in rural, high density villages which in general had little or no economic vitality of their own. With no land to farm and no alternative economic opportunities close by, the breadwinners from these resettled families had little choice but to seek work in the urban areas - usually as migrants without their families, due to the restrictions placed upon access to the towns by The Black Urban Areas Act.

5.2 The Social and Political Framework

As a separate paper is being presented on these aspects (Schlemmer (1982)), it is not proposed to go into detail here on the impact that the social and political framework has on African urbanisation patterns. However, two general points do need to be made. The first relates to the social framework and it is this: Whilst it is true that differences in culture and general lifestyles will have influenced urbanisation patterns in the early stages of the process, this influence can be expected to lessen over time as the extent of

the African contract with the Western economy and cultures increased. The migrant labour system itself too can be expected to act as a force that will help to bridge the cultural gap, as increasing numbers of rural-urban migrants will obtain first hand knowledge of the other of their 'two worlds' and will return to their original homes to tell of their experiences.

The second point relates to the political framework. Africans have lacked the vote throughout the development of modern South Africa. This, coupled with the geographical distribution of the economic centres in the country, has led to the growing impoverishment of the African rural areas (Nattrass (1982)). The policy of separate development has until recently, laid far greater emphasis on 'separation' than it has upon 'development'. Restrictions on African access to the modern sector have increased population pressures on the available land in the Black rural areas and the lack of overt African political power has meant that the extent of the economic resources that have been transferred into the Black States has been limited (Nattrass (1981)).

5.3 The Economic Structure

The impact of the changing economic structure on the forces influencing urbanisation has been to increase the strength of both the urban pull and rural push forces.

South African economic development is spatially uneven and highly

concentrated. In 1975, 57 percent of the Gross Domestic Product was produced in three major metropolitan regions (Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area, Durban-Pinetown and the Cape-Metropolitan region). If one includes the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage complex and East London, this percentage rises to 62 percent. Indeed, such is the extent of the concentration that the Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging area alone contributed 42 percent of South Africa's total output in 1975.

The distribution of economic activity through the South African space does not match the spatial distribution of the African population, 41 percent of whom lived in the non-independent Black States in 1980 - areas that in 1975 together produced less than 3 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. The extent of this spatial dislocation between the distribution of population and economic activity is the major source of pressure for African migration to the main urban areas - pressure that has until recently been largely contained by the legislative framework.

Another economic source of pressure for increased African rural-urban migration is being generated in the white rural areas through the mechanisation that is taking place in the commercial farming sector. Between 1971 and 1978 the number of Africans employed on white farms dropped from 1 391 300 to 1 064 500, a reduction of 326 800 workers, which was 23,5 percent of the total (Department of Agriculture (1983)). If one assumes that half of these workers were married men with families, then on an average family size of 6, this would mean that just under one million Africans left the white rural areas over that

seven year period alone. Prevented by the population influx control laws from entering the white urban areas, Africans leaving white farms have no alternative other than to move into the Black States, and re-establish themselves either in the new resettlement towns or in the already overcrowded rural areas. Neither course offers the incoming family an adequate economic base and once the family is resettled, lacking any alternative, the breadwinner is virtually forced to try to enter the migrant workforce and seek work in the urban areas.

On the economic front, the migrant labour system is also self-perpetuating, as participation in the system generates forces that further undermine the economic capacity of the Black rural economy.

The major influence on the rural economy comes from the absence of a large proportion of the adult male labour force. On average over 60 percent of the men in a rural community aged between 20 - 45 are away working as migrant labourers in the urban areas and in many communities this percentage rises as high as 80 percent (Nattrass (1976)).

The influence is not, however, solely limited to the quantitative aspects of the migrant labour system. The migration process in South Africa, like it is throughout the world, is age and education selective in nature, with the migration propensities being higher than average amongst the young and the better educated. As youth is the innovator of most change, a high rate of absence amongst those aged

under forty years means that it becomes increasingly difficult to introduce new techniques in an area so denuded of men in those age groups. In an African context where the man is traditionally the decision maker, this effect is reinforced and the decision making process becomes increasingly cumbersome as the proportion of males absent from the area rises (Nattrass (1977)).

Further innovation in agriculture requires investment. The low level of remittances by migrants to the rural areas (typically about 20 percent of the migrant's earnings), coupled with the low levels of productivity in those areas which are intensified by the drain imposed by the continued residence of the migrant's dependents, means that rural family incomes are too small to permit any substantial savings to be made (Nattrass (1981)).

Finally, the massive transfer of labour from the homeland rural areas to the urban areas alters both the economic and social relationships in these communities. Development in South Africa as a whole has not been accompanied by development in these rural areas; the changing rewards to be gained from peasant agriculture and migrant labour has led to a growth in the demand for the latter by work seekers. Changing demand patterns in the job market have encouraged innovations and changes in techniques that facilitate the acquisition of jobs in the modern sector. Hence one finds a substantial growth in investment by the rural family in education and in labour saving equipment on the farm such as cultivators and ploughs in order, firstly, to fit the emergent worker for a job in the modern sector

and, secondly, to free him from his traditional tasks in order that he can take up the desired occupation (Natrass (1976)).

Although the major influence of South African economic growth on urbanisation patterns has been to encourage a flow of people of all races to the major urban areas, there are some factors that may act in the reverse direction.

The first of these is the growing level of urban unemployment which is exacerbated by the inflow of rural-urban migrants and by the growing application of modern labour replacing technology. Secondly, the deterioration in the quality of life in the urban areas which often accompanies high urbanisation rates also acts as a deterrent to in-migration, as it lowers the benefits to the migrant from moving to the town. Finally, the development efforts that have been made within the Black States as well as the 'border areas' industrialisation policy have created some job opportunities that are closer to the Black rural areas, albeit relatively few, which slightly reduce the need for out-migration (Benso (1980)).

6.0 CONCLUSION

Economic growth has been, and will for the foreseeable future at least, continue to be a factor generating a strong flow of Africans to the major urban areas. It is possible that the new industrial decentralisation package announced at the Good Hope Conference will

succeed in redirecting more industrial development away from the present economic cores to the outlying towns than did the previous policy and, if this happens, it may well also similarly divert part of the stream of rural-urban migrants. Decentralisation efforts do not, however, have a happy history of success and whilst the new package looks hopeful, it too could follow the road of its predecessors. Even if the new policy is moderately successful, the numbers of Africans still in the rural areas and the lifestyles there are such, that one has to accept that the majority of them are still likely to move to the major centres.

Another recent feature that suggests that South Africa's major urban centres will continue to be the recipients of large numbers of African rural-urban migrants is the growth of their surrounding squatter areas. There is evidence that some migrant workers are beginning to opt out of the migrant labour system, choosing instead to bring their families to live with them in town - either illegally, as is the case with those in the Crossroads settlement in Cape Town, or legally in Black areas close to white towns, such as in the areas of KwaZulu that abut on Durban. When one considers that a conservative estimate of the size of the migrant labour force is over 1 million people, should only half opt out of the system, it would involve an increase in the number of Africans who are permanent dwellers in the major centres of up to 2 500 000 people. What is more, such an increase could very well take place over a fairly short time period, as is evidenced by the rate at which shack settlements spring up at present.

21.

From all the arguments, it is apparent that African urbanisation levels will certainly increase markedly over the next decade, and it is important that all decision makers involved in forward planning take account of this phenomenon.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. B.E.N.S.O., 1980: *Statistical Survey of Black Development*, Buro vir Ekonomiese Navorsing en Ontwikkeling, Pretoria.
2. Department of Agriculture, 1983: *Annual Abstract of Agricultural Statistics*, Pretoria.
3. Hobart Houghton, D., 1964: *The South African Economy*, Oxford.
4. Johnston, B.F. and Mellor, J.W., 1961: 'The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development', *American Economic Review*, Vol. LX No. 1, pp- 126 - 142.
5. Jolly, R., E. de Kadt, H. Singer and F. Wilson (Eds.), 1973: *Third World Employment*, Penguin.
6. Kuznets, Simon, 1965: *Economic Growth and Structure*, Heinemann, London.
7. Lewis, W.A., 1954: 'Economic Development with Unlimited Supplies of Labour', *Manchester School of Social and Economic Studies*, Vol. 20 No. 2, pp. 139 - 192.
8. Lipton, M., 1974: *Why Poor People Stay Poor*, Temple Press, London.
9. Mayer, P. (Ed.), 1980: *Black Villagers in an Industrial Society*, Oxford Press.
10. Mitchell, J. Clyde, 1959: 'The Causes of Labour Migration', *The Bulletin of the Inter-African Labour Institute*, 1959.
11. Nattrass, Jill, 1976: 'Migrant Labour and South African Economic Development', *South African Journal of Economics*, Vol. 44 No. 1, pp. 65 - 83.
12. Nattrass, Jill, 1977: 'Migrant Labour and Underdevelopment: The Case of KwaZulu', *Black/White Income Gap Project Interim Report No. 3*, Department of Economics, University of Natal, Durban.
13. Nattrass, Jill, 1981: *The South African Economy : its Growth and Change*, Oxford University Press, Cape Town.
14. Nattrass, Jill, 1983: 'The Dynamics of Black Rural Poverty in South Africa', *Development Studies Unit Working Paper No. 1* University of Natal, Durban.

15. Sahota, G., 1968: 'An Economic Analysis of Internal Migration in Brazil', *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 75 No. 3.
16. Schapera, I., 1947: *Migrant Labour and Tribal Life*, Oxford University Press.
17. Schlemmer, L., 1982: *Black Urbanisation: Some Preliminary Considerations for Policy*, Sales House Workshop on the Process of Urbanisation, Johannesburg.
18. Sjaarstad, L., 1962: 'The Costs and Returns of Human Migration', *The Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 70, No. 5, pp. 80-93.
19. Simkins, C., 1981: *The Economic Implications of African Resettlement*, South African Labour and Development Research Unit Working Paper No. 43, University of Cape Town.
20. Van der Horst, S.T., 1942: *Native Labour in South Africa*, Frank Cass, London.
21. Wilson, F., 1972: *Migrant Labour in South Africa*, South African Council of Churches and Spro-Cas, Johannesburg.

This work is licensed under a
Creative Commons
Attribution – NonCommercial - NoDerivs 3.0 Licence.

To view a copy of the licence please see:
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>