

Chapter 9

Social Costs and Benefits of the Transformation of the Traditional Families in an African Urban Society

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ABSTRACT

This chapter analysed the social costs and benefits of changing lifestyles and livelihoods adopted by the families in Africa to fit in the obtaining urban environments. The transformation is in a way to minimise the cost and maximise the benefits of urbanism. The net overall effect of the transformation has been increasing household poverty signified by poor incomes, family instability, increased nucleation of families and disbanding of family rural ties for the city. In most cases, this means increased vulnerability and insecurity of the traditional family. How then do the urbanised traditional families cope with city pressures? The study draws cases from South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Ethiopia and Egypt these being countries where urbanisation levels are in critical variation due to varying circumstances including the removal of apartheid restrictions, armed conflict, economic instability, population explosion, existence of pristine conditions, possibility of overurbanisation and proclivity to maintaining tradition, respectively.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The family is the basic building block of any personal or national development. The rapid urbanisation has affected all aspects of the African society especially the traditional family. In Africa, the traditional society greatly respected the extended family which bonded members of the same tribe. A traditional family is that one which was extended to include all the relatives in same lineage. However, through urbanisation, the composition and lifestyle of the family as an institution has changed significantly towards urbanism. Noting that Africa is rapidly urbanising, it is sad that the same has not been matched with attendant services and amenities. The major characteristics of such urban centres include high informality, slum settlements, high unemployment, deteriorating and inadequate infrastructure and utilities; this situation is ongoing. These characteristics pose many hardships, socio-economic, environmental and political. The hardships, however, had undermined the traditional social protection mechanisms, antecedent the extended family ties, that had previously assisted families to cope with life pressures (OECD, 2011; Ojua et al, 2014). Due to this obtaining, the family unity transformed to cope with emerging life pressures; the most identifiable change in the family include the like for nuclear families than extended families. However, cognisant of the challenges and lack of social cushion, there are emerging social protection mechanisms like crowd-sourcing, crowd-funding, sharing economy, social entrepreneurship and social collaboration meant to help bail out people from the jaws of the obtaining teething troubles.

The present chapter has the aim to examine the social costs and benefits of a transformation of the traditional African family and suggest ways through which the costs can be minimised and benefits maximised. The chapter is organized under the following key subheadings: conceptual framework, literature review, results and analysis of case, discussion and synthesis, policy options and practical recommendations and conclusion. These are packaged to build a strong conclusion that urbanism has driven people into poverty with limited options of social protection; the social security burden is divorced to the state governments which are poorly resourced to carry out such mandate hence increased urban poverty.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Urbanisation is invoking continuous transformation to the geographical landscape in many regions, Africa included (Agbaje, 2013; Dociund Dunarintu, 2012). Urbanisation, either due to rapid rural-urban migration or the extension of urban boundaries into peri-urban areas, has exposed the people to new urban lifestyles with benefits and problems therefrom. This led to a change in the change in the traditional family; the changes in the family are a response to the new pressures, needs and trends in both personal and national development for example the reduction of a family unit from being an extended and blotted to a small nuclear family can be a result of high cost of urban living, education, and access to health facilities. Not to escape mention is that the transformation of the traditional family has cost and benefits with which urban authorities must strive to minimise and maximise, respectively (Dociund Dunarintu, 2012). Given that the world is dynamic, the family transformation is an ongoing process in response to such changes in the family surroundings (ibid). This rapid transformation of lifestyles has to be planned for and put in place measures to contain the negative impacts therefrom since it comes with new demands and pressure on the urban system as a whole. The increased love for urban areas will lead to intensified shortages, more than it is today, of accommodation, water, sanitation facilities, schools and

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