

NEW TOWNS AS GROWTH CENTRES A Case Study in Nigeria

by
E. Sokari-George*

ABSTRACT

This paper criticizes the selection of seven new towns as growth centres in Rivers State. However, based upon financial constraint and other variables, it suggested only two locations suitable for growth centres. These centres are integrated with rural development policies to function as alternative destinations for rural migrants to the state's capital city and to strengthen the service hierarchies in the rural region. The general arguments are illustrated with a case study of Rivers State of Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Rivers State is the only State in the Federal Republic of Nigeria which has a single major city - Port Harcourt. Port Harcourt, the State's capital is used for administrative and both for public and private sectors of the economy. Also, Port Harcourt is the centre of Nigeria's petroleum production. Because of the petroleum industry, multinational oil companies such as Agip, Elf, Mobil, Philips, Shell-BP as well as the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the Nigerian Petroleum-chemical Industry (NPI-head office) are located in Port Harcourt while others like the Nigerian Petroleum Refining Company (NPRC) and the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria (NAFCON) are located at the periphery of the city. Apart from the companies mentioned above, there are other major manufacturing establishments in Port Harcourt (Table 1).

* Dr. E. Sokari-George is a lecturer at the Department of Architecture and Town Planning, Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.

TABLE 1. MANUFACTURING ESTABLISHMENTS IN PORT HARCOURT: 1970—1983

Industry Type	1970—73	1974—75	1976—77	1978—80	Total
Fishing	2	1	1	2	6
Mining and quarrying	1	1			2
Food beverages and tobacco	33	4	5	4	46
Textiles, clothes and leather	54	6	5	13	78
Wood and wood products	22	1		1	24
Paper and paper products	15	4			19
Chemical and plastic products	23	6		3	32
Non-metallic mineral products	4			1	5
Basic metal industries	1				1
Fabricated metal products	23	2	7	14	46
Electricity, gas and water	1		1	1	3
Repair services	25	2		8	35
Total	204	27	19	47	297

Source: Rivers State, 1983.

Due to these activities and others, Port Harcourt therefore pulls massive migrants to itself for better employment and/or a response to spatial earnings differential in the capital city (Sokari-George, 1985). For instance, in 1973, migrants into Port Harcourt from within the Rivers State were 107,720, while those from other states were 61,739 (Salau, 1984). On the whole, the total migrant population in 1973 was 169,459 and represented 73 percent of the population of the city in that year.

As a result of the massive migration into Port Harcourt and with an "annual growth rate of 9.5 percent, the dangerous phenomena of over-crowding, sub-urban sprawl, traffic congestion, squalor and shortage of housing, crime, and other urban facilities have begun to manifest themselves ..." (Ndiomu 1981: 1).

To ameliorate the above urban problems in Port Harcourt, during the Third National Development Plan 1975—80 period, with a civilian administration at the helm of affairs in 1979, seven new towns (Ekeremor, Bori, Woji, Boro, Ogbia, Abua, and Obigbo¹; see Figure 1) "conceived as growth centres with ... a target population of about 50,000 of each new town when completed" (Ndiomu, 1981: 2) were selected from seven local government areas by the Rivers State Government in 1980. Four of the designated centres were found in four local

1. Actually, all of them are existing villages of different sizes in population. The Government felt the expansion of these centres is a less costly alternative than the creation of new towns and as they are conceived as growth centres, we have also tagged them the term "growth centres/growth poles."

government areas on the main land of the state, three were located in the smallest (by population) local government areas in the Riverine area, and none was designated in the two largest (by population) local government areas.

If indeed the State Government was in for growth pole or growth centre strategy, little did the government know that there has been a controversial debate on the issue for almost two decades. During the period opposition to growth centre strategy became stronger especially in developing countries. From a golden national or regional development catchphrase, growth pole or growth centre has become almost a dirty word. The debate, however, is more of a semantic one than of substantive one. Similarly, the more relatively recent disenchantment is more a product of new fashions and pet phrases ("new international economic order," "basic minimum needs," and "integrated rural development") than of long experience with attempts to implement growth pole strategies. The purpose of this paper is not to review the debate on the growth centre controversy but to determine if the seven designated centres are feasible for growth pole strategies and if they are not, to suggest and/or to indicate how the strategies might play a significant part in the development process of Rivers State.

GROWTH CENTRE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In some developing countries, as indicated earlier, the growth pole strategy to national or regional development has received a very strong opposition (Friedmann, 1975, Faber and Seers, 1972; and Mesarovic and Pestel, 1974). This opposition arises from (1) the application of the concept copied and used from the Western strategies in an indiscriminate without modification to suit the socio-economic development pattern of the countries, and (2) the use of the strategies as location for planned development instead of integrated national or regional urban development (Richardson and Richardson, 1975; and Conroy, 1973). In other developing countries, the strategies of growth pole are accepted and integrated into national developing policies in national planning documents and planning legislations (Barkin, 1978; and Sawers, 1978). In these countries the strategies have either been applied as decentralisation policy in both medium size city levels and in small cities in rural areas to provide a driving force for regional development, in particular the reduction of regional disparities, to cope with polarisation phenomenon of primate cities, or as strategic public investment policy

1. The author does not engage in any semantic discourse on the distinctions between the two terms here but will throughout the paper use them interchangeably.

in the establishment of industries in potential core regions or rural areas to cope with rural-urban migration and regional disparities.

In either case, emphasis is placed on the creation of industrial employment either in agricultural processing industries producing food for export or for the home market or a considerable number of small-scale industries, smaller workshops and factories that can act as feeder industries for a number of activities in the large urban centres.

Case histories of many cities in some developing countries with population ranging between 100,000 and 500,000 show that they are highly dependable on their hinterlands for agriculture small-scale industry (Ho, 1979; Sundaram, 1970; and Gulick, 1967).

In centres for small-scale industry, for example, Taiwan presents some cases where medium size or small cities set up as growth-centres support a substantial number and variety of manufacturing establishments. Ho (1979) points out that between 1930 and 1956 industrial employment increased by nearly four percent a year in Taiwan's seven largest cities, and between 1956 and 1966 it increased by about 5.6 percent a year in small cities outside Taipei metropolitan area. In 1966, Tainan, Kaohsiung, Taichung, and 23 urban townships adjacent to these medium size cities had 23 percent of Tainan's employment in manufacturing and eight smaller cities had an additional ten percent. Ho argues from his review of experience in Tainan that a decentralised pattern of industrialisation based on medium size and small cities in rural areas improved non agricultural employment opportunities for rural households by allowing them commute to manufacturing jobs in near cities and still engage in farm activities on weekends and created other linkages with small commercial, service, and repair establishments in rural towns, making it possible for small business to develop in the farming communities. Decentralised industrialisation created employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for rural people, giving them more income to spend on manufactured goods produced in growth centres outside the large urban areas, and making the ruralities to remain in the rural regions (Ho, 1979: 90—92). This suggests that growth centre offers alternative destinations for migrants, strengthens regional settlement hierarchies, gives regions more demographic stability, and stimulates development of rural regions.

Another interesting concept to develop the rural regions of developing countries is that of the "agropolitan district" (Friedmann and Douglas, 1975). This approach is quite in contrast with the growth pole concept. Friedmann and Douglas argue that growth centre simply means an urban industrial strategy, and

instead suggest that elements of urbanism should be introduced into rural areas via agropolis or "cities-in-the-fields" approach. This approach involves the creation of a spatial unit larger than the village, named the "agropolitan district." The district will supply services, will provide off-farm jobs, and will be self governing. In normal circumstances, the agropolitan district would have an average population density in excess of 200 persons per square kilometre would contain a major town of 10,000—25,000 with a commuting radius of 5—10 kilometres (walking or cycling distance). Most of the labour force would be agricultural but there would be some small-scale light industry, agro-processing and agro-supplying industries, and a variety of service activities. The functions of the district would be financed by retaining local savings, the substitution of volunteer work for taxes, the transfer of capital from a regional capital city to rural areas, and changing the internal terms of trade in favour of agriculture.

The two major differences between the growth pole and the agropolitan district are: (1) the former is ideally set up in a national or regional urban strategy, whereas the latter aims to resist urbanisation, and (2) the growth centre strategy is very selective spatially with the chances of success declining as the number of designations increase, the agropolitan district approach calls for an even scatter of a large number of districts. It is unclear how the districts would be created—whether by selection of certain villages for expansion or by establishment of new rural towns. The implementation issues have not been properly taken care of by the proponents of the agropolitan district approach.

GROWTH CENTRE IN RIVERS STATE PLANNING:

In 1980, as indicated earlier, the Rivers State Government embarked upon the development of seven growth centres.¹ The purpose of the centres, "is to provide alternatives to the over growth, congestion and sub-urban sprawl of Port Harcourt by creating new moderate size as growth poles in which people can have good homes in healthy and pleasant surroundings near their places of work with urban services and cultural facilities ... To give them priority in public works, developing them as industrial centres, and developing them as alternative destination for migrants to Port Harcourt. This is a major and necessary element in the State's regional planning policy ..." (Ndiomu, 1981). This is not to say that Port

1. The judgements for this part of the study were formed in 1984 while the author was preparing a course on National and Regional Planning in Nigeria. It should therefore be stressed that the text reflects personal observation of the author and does not in anyway represent the views or the Government of Rivers State. Apart from official government documents, the main information inputs for this study are of an informal nature. This explains the very limited references.

Harcourt is too large. It is a relatively medium size city of less than one million in population (Table 2). It accounts for only about 12.5 percent of the State's population but its income distribution is very inequitable (Sokari-George, 1985).

TABLE 2. PORT HARCOURT: POPULATION GROWTH 1915—1983.

Year	Population
1915	5,000
1921	7,185
1931	27,000
1934	20,000
1944	30,200
1948	35,000
1953	73,300
1963	179,653
1967	183,000
1973	231,000
1982/83	911,731

Source: Ogionwo (1979: 73); Salau (1984).

It appears, however, the Rivers State Government has professed to have a growth pole strategy, it has been more nominal than real. The discussion here will deal with what type of growth centres might be implementable in Rivers State rather than with evaluation of extant policy. An attempt will be made to suggest a strategy that helps to achieve regional spatial objectives and that is complementary with emphasis on rural development.

In the first instance, the seven centres designated, none of them had municipal status because their sizes are far less than 70,000 in population and even if they are fully developed to the targeted population figure of 50,000 each they would not acquire the municipal status. Irrespective of none municipal status, they could either be chosen on their individual economic merits (i.e. potential for industrial development) or they could be chosen for purely political reasons.

If either of them is correct, it made little or no sense in terms of a regional spatial strategy. For example, two of the designations (Woji and Obigbo are within three and seven kilometre distance and 3,000 and 5,000 in population respectively) are too close to Port Harcourt to maximise returns on scarce resources and have no potentialities for future growth. Second, because of their population sizes and the proximities to Port Harcourt, Woji and Obigbo must not be given the status of growth centres. After all, Port Harcourt is still growing rapidly and this means Woji and Obigbo will soon be swallowed up to reinforce metropolitan

polarisation rather than to undermine it. Third, different levels of growth centre is needed for different purposes. A regional growth centre is to stimulate decentralisation from the largest city or to stabilise a region's population. These indicate varying urban sizes and different selection criteria, but most important, they place growth pole selection with the consideration of urban hierarchy.

Other centres such as Abua, Bori, Boro, Ekeremor and Ogbia have population of 10,000, 7,000, 2,000, 3,000 and 8,000 respectively; are all within 60—80 kilometres and have no municipal status. They are neither of medium size (even if they have acquired the targeted population figure of 50,000 each) nor far enough from Port Harcourt to be its competitive pull or as counterweights but are close enough to benefit the agglomeration of Port Harcourt's economics.

Boro, Ekeremor, and Ogbia are located along Rivers Nun, Farcados, and Kolo respectively. During high tides the rivers overflow their banks and the towns are always completely flooded. Again, the three towns (Boro, Ekeremor, and Ogbia) are all located on marshy or swampy grounds unsuitable for further development.

The designation of growth centres is a good idea in the right direction but as indicated, the selection of the seven centres were wrong and for a State Government alone to embark on such number of projects is too much for effective implementation and in view of resource constraints and scarcity of infrastructure capital. A developing nation with these constraints cannot singularly carry on a project of seven growth centres at a time much less a State Government in developing country in Africa.

Spatial considerations suggests that if a major centre were to be established it should be in a medium size city. Apart from Port Harcourt there is no other metropolitan centre in Rivers State. This means that the state is still predominantly rural. However, there are cities of different sizes from different local government areas that can be considered as growth poles or catchment centres. For example, Buguma City the second largest community in Rivers State has a population of (about 120,000), Abonnema (about 90,000), Bakana (about 70,000), and Tombia (about 65,000); all are in Degema Local Government Area (DELGA). In Bonny Local Government Area (OLGA), Bonny has a population of (about 85,000), Opobo Town (about 70,000), and Ngo (about 60,000). These cities or towns are all in the Riverine area of the State, and except Bakana are all 120—240 kilometre range from Port Harcourt. Furthermore, these cities or towns are all unconnected by road network because of difficult terrain of the areas.

If the Government of Rivers State actually wants to develop some growth centres to stimulate decentralisation in its rural areas and to minimize the migration to Port Harcourt, consideration should be given to urban hierarchy in the selection of the growth centres, and the number of centres must also be reduced

to two small cities in two local government areas at a time for effective implementation. Bonny and Degema Local Government Areas can qualify for the two centres because they have some medium size and small cities to merit the growth pole status.

BONNY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (OLGA)

Although OLGA has a difficult terrain, a major growth centre in the area can easily be established. The local government is endowed with untapped natural resources, it has substantial agricultural potential, it contains about 30 per cent of the state's population, and it has a rapid population growth rate of 5.2 per cent, yet there is no major or small-scale industrial activity and lacks a major urban centre. This lack of activity has contributed to massive migration northwards to Port Harcourt (See Figure 1). The massive migration, however, can be alleviated if an urban centre nearer home is set up to accommodate the northward bound migrants. An expansion of one of the towns (Bonny, Opobo Town, and Ngo) preferably Bonny, because it is the headquarters of the local government area and it has a population of about 85,000, is necessary to attain urban-rural balance, since local migrants to this centre will easily be able to contact their rural origins as compared with migrants to Port Harcourt. The rural-urban contacts in OLGA can be an important vehicle of development diffusion, mainly as an instrument for raising agricultural productivity.

On grounds of interregional equity, priority should be given to OLGA since the area lags in infrastructure and services but has unexploited natural resource. The area, because of the difficult terrain, has no road network to the mainland except by speedboats, health services are very poor, and there is no electricity connecting the national grid. But Bonny has oil fields and oil terminal, glass sands, and fibre processing while Ngo has copra. Glass sands, fibre processing, and copra have not been fully exploited because of none availability of infrastructure and several hectares of coconut farm is neglected or abandoned since the end of the country's civil war in 1970. This, if proper care is taken, can bring about foreign exchange earnings. It is also said that infrastructure and services are functionally related to the degree of development of regional urban hierarchy. In other words, if infrastructure and services are developed in OLGA, they will strengthen the area's larger towns and will improve the general welfare level of the population in both the rural and urban areas.

A further advantage of Bonny is that its industrial potential is substantial. Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria has completed arrangements to build a liquified national gas plant at Bonny to process gas for both domestic use and for export. This shows that Bonny has economic potential and to promote

Bonny, would automatically increase economic and social flows between the southeast of the state and Port Harcourt, and would benefit the neighbouring communities such as Ogoni, Kono, and Bori. The designation of Bonny as a growth centre and subsequent priority to the city in the allocation of infrastructure and industrial decentralization efforts would strengthen a linear development axis from Port Harcourt through Onne (where the petro-chemical complex is billed to be sited and where the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria will start production in 1987) to Bonny.

DEGEMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (DELGA)

Just as OLGA, the cities and towns in DELGA are all unconnected with the mainland because of the difficult terrain of the Riverine area. However, if OLGA is a suitable area for a growth centre, there is a stronger case for giving priority to DELGA. It is larger in area than OLGA (see Figure 1), some of its cities or towns are twice larger than the towns in OLGA, and it contains about 45 per cent of the State's population.

Buguma City, one of the cities, has a population of about 120,000. It is the capital of Kalbari tribe in DELGA and has an agglomeration of about 500,000 population. Although Buguma City is not the administrative headquarters of the local government area, it is an ancient city with a unique location and offers several advantages, such as a potential trading centre and diversification of small-scale industrial structures like textiles, fish-based industries, boat building (speed-boats), government craft centre, and has some prospects as a tourist centre. Buguma City has oil wells and its hinterland has substantial potential for rice cultivation which is undeveloped. This and others could be developed as rural industrial base which would strengthen Buguma City to act as a counterweight to Port Harcourt and bolster the regional urban hierarchy of the state. There is a good supply of skilled labour and low income housing by provincial city standard. It has a giant electric generator to serve the citizens' activities and because of its size and the small-scale industries in the community, plans are in advance stage by the Federal Government of Nigeria to connect the national electric grid.

Another advantage to Buguma City is its neighbouring town - Abonnema. Abonnema has about 90,000 in population, used to be a commercial and seaport town. With the closure of the port during the 1960's (in the middle of the Nigerian Civil War) the commercial activities had ceased to function. In order to limit the growth of Port Harcourt, the sea port at Abonnema should be reopened. As it is well known, ports are indispensable for export oriented industries and industries with a high import content. Compared to ports, internal transportation costs are

less significant as locational factors, since Rivers State is a small state within a country with a somehow well-developed transportation network. Second, Buguma City, with an agglomeration of nearly 500,000 population, is a potential counterpole to Port Harcourt, serving as a partial central place for Brass Local Government Area (BALGA). Third, with a seaport, Abonnema will enjoy locational advantage of high accessibility to the neighbouring countries of Cameroun, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon, a big market as well as a source of capital. Similarly, a road connecting Degema (the administrative centre of DELGA) and the mainland would strengthen the prospects of Buguma City for trade and for the tourist industry.

CONCLUSION

The growth pole strategies adopted in Rivers State of Nigeria did not merit the name because the designations were insufficiently selective, the centres were too small to be integrated into an overall strategy for the state as a whole, and the implementation was very ineffective. This paper has therefore suggested an internally consistent strategy for correcting the imbalances between the mainland and the Riverine areas of the State, for promoting a viable regional urban development policy, and for increasing the interaction between the urban and rural areas. It is believed that the recommended strategy is compatible with the accepted policy goals of showing down the growth of Port Harcourt and continuing the attention given to agriculture and rural development.

REFERENCES

- Barkin, D. 1978. Confronting the Separation of Town and Country in Cuba. 317-37. In: W.K. Tabb and L. Sawers (Eds.). *Marxism and the Metropolis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Conroy, M. W. 1973. On the Rejection of 'Growth Center' Strategy in Latin American Region Development Planning. *Land Economics*. 49: 371-80.
- Faber, Mike and Seers, Dudley (Eds.). 1972. *The Crisis in Planning*. 2 Vols. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Friedmann, John. 1875. Specific Recommendations on Regional Planning in the Rural-Urban Context in Thailand. Mimeographed (Memo No. 6 to the NESDP, Bangkok, March).

- Friedmann, John and Douglas, Mike. 1975. Regional Planning and Development: The Agropolitan Approach. In: UNCRD. *Growth Pole Strategy and Regional Development Planning in Asia*. Nagoya, Japan: United Nations Center for Regional Development.
- Gulick, John. 1967. *Tripoli: A Modern Arab City*. Cambridge: MA. Harvard University Press.
- Ho, Samuel, P.S. 1979. Decentralised Industrialization and Rural Development: Evidence from Taiwan. *Economic Development and Culture Change*. 28: 77—96.
- Mesarovic, Mihajlo and Pestel, Eduard. 1974. *Mankind at the Turning Point: The Second Report to the Club of Rome*. New York: E.P. Dutton.
- Ndiomu, B.B.A. 1981. The New Towns Development Programme in the Rivers State: Its Rationale, Economic Significance, and Achievements. In: *Rivers State Development Programmes*. Government of Rivers State, Port Harcourt, Nigeria.
- Ogionwo, W. (Ed.). 1979. *The City of Port Harcourt*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Richardson, H.W. and Richardson, M. 1975. The Relevance of Growth Center Strategies to Latin America. *Economic Geography*. 51: 163—78.
- Rivers State. 1983. *Industry Directory of Rivers State*. No. 3.
- Salau, A.T. 1984. *Nigerian Cities*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Sawers, L. 1978. Cities and Countryside in the Soviet Union and China, 338—64. In: W.K. Tabb and L. Sawers (eds.). *Marxism and the Metropolis*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Sokari-George, E. 1985. The Migration Effects of Over-Urbanisation and their Planning Implications in Nigeria. *A Working Paper*, Rivers State State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt.
- Sundaram, K.V. 1977. *Urban and Regional Planning in India*. New Delhi: Vikas.