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Urban data and definitions in sub-Saharan Africa: mismatches between the pace of urbanization and employment and livelihood change

*Differing definitions of 'urban' settlements can make comparative analysis of trends in urbanization difficult. Definitions used by many African countries include small settlements which may not exhibit the degree of labour specialisation away from agriculture which economic theories about urbanization presume. This may mean there is a mismatch if urban data are presumed by decision-makers to be proxies for structural economic transformation. After examining these definitional issues this paper provides five illustrative African case studies based on detailed analysis of census and agricultural employment data. It finds that for Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mali in situ urbanization of settlements at the bottom of the urban hierarchy has played a significant part in recent urbanization processes. In Rwanda complex boundary changes have also contributed to a very significant redefinition of previously rural people as 'urban' yet overall the urbanization level did not increase between 2002 and 2012. Significant employment in agriculture is found within small, and some larger, urban centres in all these countries. It is shown that these issues tend to be disregarded in analyses of urban trends for these countries which often present a more positive narrative of urban economic change than the census data support. These examples are contrasted with Botswana where in situ urbanization has also occurred but in this case driven by real occupational change. The paper concludes that the impact of definitions on apparent trends in urbanization in Africa needs to be understood given the significance attached to these trends by policy makers.*

Since the 1960s the sentiments of sub-Saharan African (SSA) governments towards the pace of urbanization have varied. At first the views were often that the pace was too fast. In the 1960s and 1970s most SSA societies were indeed urbanizing very rapidly. However, from the end of the 1970s in many countries net rates of in-migration to urban areas slowed, partly due to the impact of structural adjustment programmes which had very negative impacts on urban economies and livelihoods (Jamal and Weeks 1993; Bryceson and Potts 2006). This slower pace of urbanization was often not recognized due to various data issues. One was the common failure to distinguish between the implications of the rate of population growth in specific cities (which may require significant investment in infrastructure etc even if most of the growth derives from natural increase) and the pace of 'urbanization' (the rate at which the national population

is becoming more urban) (see Potts 2012a). Datasets like the World Urbanization Prospects (WUP) tended to report continued rapid urbanization based on projections from past trends (see Potts 2012a, 2012b; Beauchemin and Bocquier 2004). From around 2003 a global commodity boom led to surging GDP growth in much of SSA often driven by significant rises in the volume and value of mineral and energy exports. This led to new debates about how these economic stimuli would affect SSA urbanization. These new debates contain different strands. Some are careful to acknowledge that economic growth based on natural resources and the export of unprocessed or only semi-processed agricultural and mineral goods may be problematic for urbanization and, in particular, for the much needed growth in formal sector, reasonably paid urban employment (eg see the contributions to Turok (2013)). A second strand is represented by the work of economists who generate regression models of relationships between, for example, natural resource exports or manufacturing employment and urban population growth rates (eg Jedwab 2013; Christiaensen et al 2013; Jedwab et al 2014; Gollin et al 2016). This work has put forward ideas such as ‘consumption cities’ to explain urbanization in countries like Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana where, it is argued, ‘resource windfalls are disproportionately spent on urban goods and services’ (Jedwab 2013: 1). These two strands are largely represented in academic studies.

A third strand is rather different and is often promoted by influential decision makers and representatives of global agencies and business advisers reporting on African economies. It tends to emphasise how economic growth itself can be stimulated by rapid urbanization (rather than vice versa). It relates strongly to the World Development Report of 2009 (World Bank 2009) which stressed the positive economic impacts of urbanization and explicitly stated that there are *not enough* really large cities in Africa. Evidence for the acceptance and promotion of the idea that rapid urbanization in Africa can independently drive economic development by influential actors in institutions such as the World Bank, UN Habitat, the African Development Bank, the McKinsey Global Institute, and the Centre for the Study of African Economies at Oxford University, is found in Potts (2016) and Turok (2013).

Evidently in countries which have long been strongly urbanized such debates are of little significance today. They are mainly relevant to Global South societies which have large rural populations meaning there is still considerable scope for the pace of urbanization to vary. The u-turn in views about urbanization in Africa, and about the direction of causality in the links between urbanization and economic development, has been analysed in detail elsewhere and tested against the economic and urban trajectories of Zimbabwe and Zambia over a fifty year period. It is argued that the evidence suggests that urbanization varies in response to broader economic changes (Potts 2016). The purpose of this paper is to contribute to these debates in a different way. As noted, patterns of urbanization in SSA have often been misrepresented and over-generalised, partly because of long gaps between censuses and the use of outdated projections. The database is now better, as censuses, livelihood and employment surveys are being conducted more frequently. However, my regular scrutiny of new SSA censuses still sometimes finds anomalies between these and urban data compilations such as the WUP. Occasionally there are errors in census reports too. By analysing various types of mismatches between reported trends in urbanization in five African countries where sufficient data from fairly recent censuses are available, this paper seeks to explain how these have come about and their implications for our understanding of current urban processes. It also discusses how misunderstandings or misrepresentations about publicly available data can distort perceptions of what is occurring and hinder realistic assessments by policy makers.

Where possible the analysis triangulates between different types of evidence to strengthen the arguments being made. A particular focus is on the extent to which currently reported rises in urbanization *levels* are paralleled by structural economic changes as measured by employment patterns. This element is significant as it provides a crosscheck on the new view that the pace of urbanization, as currently measured, is an indicator of economic modernization. These issues are exemplified by recent data from Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Rwanda and, as a counter-example of closer links between urban trends and economic change, Botswana.

### *The role of urban definitional issues*

It is well established that huge variations in the way urban settlements are defined in different countries makes comparative analysis of urbanization levels difficult (Satterthwaite 2010; Cohen 2004). There can be good reasons for these differences and a universal definition is probably neither possible nor desirable. However it is important to be aware of the implications of the definitions used when undertaking urban analyses. One source of confusion can be when urban boundaries are over-extended into rural areas. Another can derive from some types of *in situ* urbanization at the lowest end of the urban hierarchy. Many African countries use population thresholds as the main criterion and these are usually rather low (see Potts, forthcoming). This was less important in the past because a threshold of, say, 5,000 (which is frequently used) was sufficient to exclude settlements which were rural in terms of their employment profiles; that is the main economic activities were in agriculture, forestry or fishing. However as populations increased, and sometimes also because of ‘villagizing’ tendencies whereby previously scattered rural households have moved into agglomerated settlements either voluntarily or at the behest of the government, this has changed. A cutoff of 5,000 may thus become less reliable to distinguish between ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ settlements *in an economic functional sense*. In several Asian societies, such as India or Bangladesh, where population densities have generally been much higher than used to be typical in many African countries, and where villages of many thousands of people have long been commonplace, urban definitions cope with such issues by adding other criteria. In particular, the nature of economic activities is used to distinguish between large rural settlements and urban centres with similar or even smaller populations where people work mainly in non-rural sectors. In India, for example, 75% of the male working population must be employed in sectors other than agriculture. Density criteria are sometimes added also.<sup>1</sup> As will be seen later, Botswana also takes this approach and it has several advantages for tracking economic change alongside changes in settlement patterns. Some of the world’s oddest urban definitions are found in northern European

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<sup>1</sup> A separate study including a more detailed analysis of African and Asian urban definitions and the implications of excluding data on economic activities is in preparation.

countries such as Sweden and Denmark where any settlement with more than 200 people is regarded as urban. However these have little policy significance since the share of employment and economic value derived from ‘rural’ activities is so small in such societies. By contrast, in SSA trends in urbanization are keenly watched and analysed as are changes in the shares of employment in different economic sectors.

Beyond comparability between countries, a separate definitional issue requires brief consideration. It can be argued that material, transport and communication links between rural and urban areas are so important and complex and settlement and livelihood types so varied that it is best to avoid the binary of ‘rural’ versus ‘urban’ and accept that we are discussing a spectrum or need a more differentiated set of terms (eg Champion and Hugo 2004; Cohen 2004; University of Copenhagen 2016), or that the power of urban influences has become so pervasive that there is no longer any meaning to the term ‘rural’ and we now live in an era of ‘planetary urbanism’ (Brenner 2013). These are important debates and different ontological starting points can all lead to thoughtful insights about the processes. However, since this article seeks to contribute to contemporary discussions which are still working with ‘conventional’ ideas and data on ‘the urban’ in SSA (or anywhere else) it is necessary to engage with the ontology used (and thought to be understood) by those beyond academe, including those in policy circles.

### **African case studies: Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Rwanda and Botswana**

#### *Labour force data: a crosscheck for ‘structural’ urbanization*

The analysis of the five African case studies starts by comparing official urban data taken directly from published census reports with the share of total employment in agriculture (Table 1). From the emergence of urban settlements around 12,000 years ago, the association between towns and labour *specialization* in economic activities that are different from those based directly on natural resources (ie land, forests, fisheries) has

been conceptually central to differentiating between rural and urban places. It is why some countries include significant reliance on non-agricultural activities as one criterion for defining urban centres.

Table 1: Selected African and Asian urban and rural populations and agricultural labour forces

Country/area	Census date	Urb pop % <sup>1</sup>	Agricultural labour force (% of all employment) <sup>2,3</sup>				Rural pop %
			Year of survey	Total	Male	Female	
Botswana	2011	64	2011	12	17	7	36
Bangladesh	2011	28	2010	48	..	..	72
India	2011	31	2013	50	..	..	69
Thailand	2013	49	2013	42	..	..	51
<b>Countries with high agricultural employment levels for official level of urbanization</b>							
Côte d'Ivoire	2014	50	2015	44	50	27	50
Urban areas excluding Abidjan			2015	27	...	..	
Ghana	2010	51	2013	45	48	41	49
Urban areas				20	14	17	
Cameroon	2005	49	2007	64	59	69	51
Urban areas			2007	16	..	..	
Mali <sup>4</sup>	1998	22	1987	79	..	..	78
			1998	81	..	..	
Rwanda	2002	16.9	2002	87	81	92	83
Urban areas			2002	46	34	60	
Rwanda	2012	16.5	2012	75	65	84	83.5
Urban areas			2012	23	16	32	
Kenya	2009	23 or 30 <sup>5</sup>	2005	75	..	..	77 or 70

Notes: 1. Urban and rural population % from national census data 2. Agricultural labour forces in all sources use standard ILO designations and include farming, forestry and fishing except for Cameroon where the data are for those designated as working in 'informal agriculture' 3. Sources of agricultural labour force data for African countries: Côte d'Ivoire: calculated from Table 6.6 in République de Côte d'Ivoire (2015); Ghana: from Table 5.8 in Ghana Statistical Service (2014); Kenya: from Alila and Atieno (2006) citing Republic of Kenya (2005) and cross-checked with Salami et al (2010); Cameroon: from Table 8.12 in Institute National de la Statistique (2014) citing ECAM (2007); Mali: from Bernard et al (2012); Rwanda: 2002 data calculated from Table TA20 in Republic of Rwanda (2003), 2012 data calculated from Table 7.4a in RGHP (2014); Botswana: calculated from Tables 1.13 and 1.14 in Statistics Botswana (2011) 4. Urbanization level at time of 2009 census is debatable and thus not presented here; see text. 5. See text for explanation of the different estimates of Kenya's level of urbanization.

Table 1 also includes some comparative data for three Asian countries: India, Bangladesh and Thailand. The employment data for these countries are the latest available in the World Development Indicators (WDI), which will have been provided by national statistical offices. The sources of the data on employment in agriculture for the African countries are more varied. This is because there are few recent data in the WDI or any other global dataset (such as ILO) on this variable for most sub-Saharan African countries. Furthermore the scattered data that are available for occasional years can fluctuate quite wildly and in unexpected directions over time. For these reasons it is believed to be preferable to use national sources directly, either census data on employment or, where possible, labour force surveys as these are regarded as more reliable due to their focus. Where original sources could not be found online, reports which reproduced national data have been tracked down and used. The individual sources are recorded in the notes to the table.

Both the Asian and African agricultural employment data are based on standard ILO designations to categorise employment and include farming, forestry and fishing. It helps to note that the issues of whether such employment is formal or informal or, for example, is waged or involves self-employment are not factors in recording employment *by economic sector* (eg agriculture, manufacturing, construction, retail etc) where the categories are the same for societies in the Global North and the Global South. This is fortunate as there are often variations between countries in how informality is defined which can make other types of employment comparisons between countries in the Global South difficult. One drawback of any such data is that they only indicate the main employment sector of each individual enumerated and disregard the issue of multiple livelihoods which are found everywhere but are far more common in the Global South (in both urban and rural settings) than the Global North. Nonetheless such data are widely used in analyses of urban and economic processes in SSA (and other parts of the Global South), sometimes to support a narrative of the pace of the shift out of the primary or agricultural sector as evidence of economic progress (eg African Development Bank et al 2016; World Bank 2015; Mcmillan and Harttgen 2014). There is no reason to believe such data are any *less* reliable if they are felt to point to mismatches between employment

changes and urbanization. Furthermore, the collection and reliability of national data in SSA have improved during this century, as government revenues have improved and donors have recognized that national statistics are needed.

In sum, the data are believed to be sufficiently useful and comparable to be indicative and are regarded as a useful *starting point* for assessing whether the urbanization data are a good proxy for structural changes in economic activity patterns. Where this is the case, the share of agricultural employment must be somewhat lower than the rural share of the population since evidently not all rural people farm (or are involved in forestry or fishing); some are traders, teachers, shop keepers, local government workers and so on. If agricultural employment levels are nearly as high (let alone higher) than the population officially designated as rural, this suggests that the population classified as ‘urban’ includes many people who are functionally rural. Table 1 shows that the Asian countries and Botswana all have the ‘expected’ patterns of employment, given their levels of urbanization. However in Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana, Cameroon, Mali and Kenya the proportion of the labour force in agriculture appears high compared to the ‘officially’ rural population. The first three reached the point of half their populations being officially designated as ‘urban’ at their last census and are therefore of particular interest.

In Mali and Cameroon the agricultural labour force share actually exceeds the rural percentage of the population. Table 1 also shows that there is sometimes significant employment in agriculture *within* urban areas. More than a quarter of recorded employment in Côte d’Ivoire’s towns excepting Abidjan was in agriculture, and a fifth of the men employed in Ghana’s towns (including Greater Accra Metropolitan Area) were also in this category, for example.<sup>2</sup> This ‘rural’ employment element in the towns contributes to the high share of agricultural employment in relation to the population defined as rural in these cases. However the broad analytical point remains: if such a high proportion of working people are farmers (or in forestry or fishing), is the society as a whole as ‘urban’ as the censuses report in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, particularly in

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<sup>2</sup> The World Bank (2015) reports a level of 41.6% in agricultural employment which tallies with the census. However the source used here – the Ghana Living Standards Survey Round 6: Labour Force Report – is regarded as more reliable for employment data; it also tallies with the WDI data which, in this case, have a recent figure for Ghana.

economic terms? In Kenya, where the official census urbanization level of 30% includes millions of evidently rural people (listed separately as peri-urban in some official tables but incorporated into the headline urban figures) (see Potts, forthcoming), the agricultural labour force data suggest that even the 'core' urbanization level of 23% is problematic in economic terms. Similar issues exist for Tanzania although there the complexities of urban definitions are such that they require more space for discussion than available in this article. However the 2002 census recorded that the vast majority (67%) of employed people in small towns and townships was working in agricultural activities as were one third of all the urban employed (Muzzini and Lindeboom 2008). Significant dependence on the primary sector occurred even in some of the larger towns. For example, it accounted for over a third of total employment in Tanga City, which at independence was Tanzania's second largest mainland urban area (calculated from data in United Republic of Tanzania 2008).

The Asian comparisons make it clear how out of kilter the African examples, excluding Botswana, are in terms of the relationship between employment structure and recorded levels of urbanization. In India, Thailand and Bangladesh, as expected, the share of workers in the agricultural labour force is significantly lower than the rural population. The case of Botswana is also highly indicative. This is now a middle-income developing country with urban fertility rates and general mortality rates approaching developed country norms, and very high levels of waged employment, incomes and general development indices compared to nearly everywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. Although about a third of the population is still regarded as rural, agricultural employment levels are around those for Greece, Mexico and Poland, and below levels in some other Eastern European countries. As will be discussed later, there has been real structural transformation there.

The labour force data thus suggest that there are mismatches between recent urban and economic activity data for selected African countries. They are however only a starting point. The following sections provides a range of other types of evidence as to why these questions arise for these countries by interrogating their census data further. Various

other instances of mismatches between patterns of ‘urban’ settlement growth as defined by the census, and patterns of economic change (actual or claimed) are indicated. Mismatches between the census and the WUP data are also sometimes identified as well as various other possible sources of error which appear to be somewhat inflating reported levels of urbanization. It also discusses how different ways of presenting and analysing the data, including whether rapid *in situ* urbanization in small centres is differentiated from what is often much slower growth in cities, can lead to very different understandings of what is happening on the ground. Ways in which some of these interpretations could be misleading for policy makers trying to use the data to deduce trends in economic change in either rural or urban areas are also discussed.

### *Côte d’Ivoire*

Côte d’Ivoire’s 2014 census report states that half its population was urban (RGPH 2014). WUP data record an even higher level of 54%, implying a significant surge since the previous census in 1998, for which both the WUP and the 2014 census report a level of about 42%. However these figures bear further scrutiny. There is no evidence from disaggregated census data that this ‘surge’ has been experienced in either the capital city, Abidjan, nor the top tier of the largest ten cities (which includes Abidjan’s satellites of Anyama and Bingerville), nor indeed in the country’s urban settlements taken together if a threshold population of 10,000 is used. Instead, the share of the national population living in these various settlement categories has remained almost unchanged since the 1988 census (see Figure 1). The share in all urban settlements with over 10,000 residents increased from 39.2% to only 41.9%, for example.<sup>3</sup> Between 1998 and 2014 the combined average annual growth rate of the largest ten towns (2.51%) was slower than that of the national population (2.54%) so they were losing population share overall. Their growth must have been largely or entirely accounted for by natural increase; indeed, most grew so slowly they were evidently experiencing significant net out-

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<sup>3</sup> All urban growth rates have been calculated by the author from census data. The data for towns with populations over 10,000 for 1998 were taken from Brinkhoff’s website which publishes urban census data for individual towns. For 2014 the data were compiled from the lengthy list of enumerated areas published by the national statistical office. No single list of urban settlements by size or type has been published and no mention is made in the published census lists or reports so far seen of the criterion of non-agricultural employment for settlements defined as ‘urban’.

migration, including Bouaké, the country's second largest city. Even Abidjan scarcely outpaced the national population, growing at 2.77%. The unavoidable conclusion is that nearly all the urbanization (in the sense of a relative shift between rural and urban settlements) reported in the 2014 census was accounted for by the lowest tier of settlements defined as urban. This should now refer to centres with populations between 4,000 and 10,000 where over 50% of households engaged in non-agricultural activities, since Côte d'Ivoire is one of the few African countries currently to include an economic activity criterion in its urban definitions. If this is so, it would have important implications. For example, theoretical economic advantages ascribed to urbanization such as agglomeration economies or economies of scale are mainly relevant to much larger settlements so these could not be assumed to have been enhanced by the country's recent urbanizing patterns. Attempts to identify the key forces behind the apparent surge in the urbanization level would have to focus almost entirely on these small centres and compare their seeming attractiveness with the relative stagnation in the population share in larger towns and cities. Furthermore, whether the lowest tier's rapid expansion is real or not, any analysis of recent urbanization in Côte d'Ivoire should recognize that the economic situation in larger towns, taken together, has not been sufficient to encourage much net in-migration from rural communities and that, based on their experience alone, the country would scarcely have urbanized at all for more than two decades.

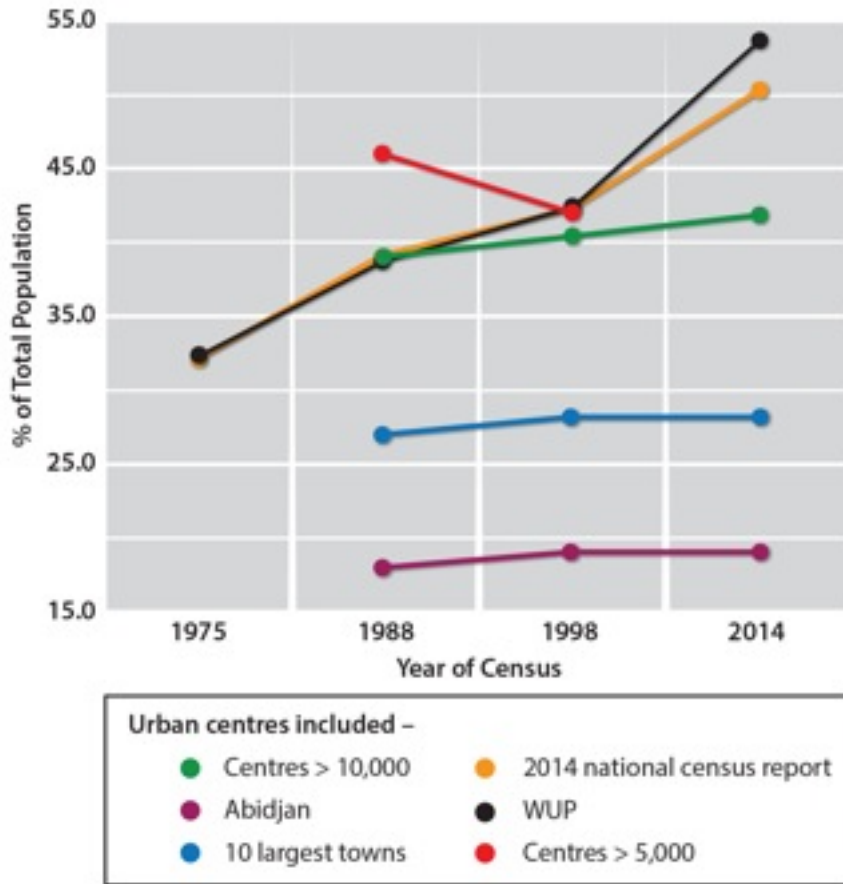


Figure 1: Differing trends in urbanization levels in Cote d'Ivoire

However Côte d'Ivoire's high levels of employment in agriculture may also suggest that the rapid 'urbanization' in the lowest tier of the urban hierarchy is more apparent than real. Doubts have been cast before on what Côte d'Ivoire's urban data are really measuring. There had been various changes in the national criteria for defining urban centres but analysis of the 1998 census demonstrated that, using a simple population threshold of 5,000, the urbanization level had fallen since 1988 from 46% to 43% (Beauchemin 2011). Furthermore, although the official criteria are ostensibly much tighter and should exclude small centres where farming predominates, the officially reported level for 1998 was much the same as Beauchemin's. Taking this together with the sectoral employment data, it seems possible that the employment criteria are not being effectively applied. If this is the case, then not only has the pace of urbanization in centres with more than 10,000 residents been very slow since 1988, but some or possibly much of the latest recorded 'surge' in very small towns may not meet the national urban criteria, and much of the growth may be due to *in situ* 'urbanization' as villages passed the 4,000 residents' threshold.

Careful interrogation of the census data, triangulated with the labour force survey, therefore indicates that the narrative of urbanization for some time has been complicated and can hardly be understood in terms of a rapid and continuing shift of the rural population to cities with attractive and modern economic opportunities. Yet is not fanciful to think that an unwary user of the WUP or census data might assume, mistakenly, that the reported surge in urbanization implies positive structural changes in the country's output and employment characteristics, particularly in large towns, with new improved and higher-income formal livelihood opportunities leading to rapid net in-

migration.<sup>4</sup> Nor would this impression be challenged by a recent World Bank summary of its 2016 report on urbanization in Côte d'Ivoire which states that 'in recent years, the pace of urbanization has accelerated in major Ivoirian cities' and that 'Abidjan continues to experience an explosion in population growth' (Sid'ahmed 2016). The full report is more circumspect but nonetheless refers to many of the key discourses about African urbanization and economic development outlined in the introduction to this paper, with frequent reference to the 2009 World Development Report which was so influential in (re)linking high rates and levels of urbanization to modernization and structural economic transformation. The report notes that Côte d'Ivoire 'needs a structural transformation seen in the increasing role of urbanization in economic performance. The experience of developed and emerging economies shows that gross domestic product (GDP) per capita has risen with increasing urbanization', and that the 'stark urban-rural poverty difference [in Côte d'Ivoire] causes heavy migration to urban areas' (Fall and Coulibaly 2016: 12). These points are made despite the fact that it is also noted how population growth in the largest cities has slowed since the 1970s and growth rates are reported for towns like Bouaké and Yamassoukro (the capital city), evidently drawn from census data, which are well below natural increase rates. A trend of steady *increases* in urban poverty rates are also discussed (which have also been the subject of concerned analysis in the 2015 living standards survey (Republique de Côte d'Ivoire 2015)). Yet the implications of these changes are not pursued. Instead the report asserts that the country's urban population growth rate is 'on par with that of other countries in the region' citing the WUP. The report even argues that, 'With an urban population at 50 percent, Côte d'Ivoire's economy is underperforming urbanization: GNI per capita should be about \$2,700 if urbanization economies worked as economic geography theory predicted' (Fall and Coulibaly 2016:4). The presumption of rather mechanistic links between rises in urbanization and economic growth is evident here, as is the significance attributed to the 50% level of urbanization. Yet so is a recognition that something is 'wrong': the level is not working as a good proxy for development even though it should. The point that the rises in the urbanization level in past decades are mainly attributable to the way the

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<sup>4</sup> Leaving aside the issue of urban definitions and agricultural employment levels, such an assumption would be misleading, as the 2015 household survey in Côte d'Ivoire states, 'Employment is largely informal in Ivory Coast. Indeed, almost all of employed persons work in the informal sector (91.8%)' (Republique de Côte d'Ivoire 2015).

census treats *in situ* urbanization in very small centres is completely missed; indeed their role in the larger urban narrative is never mentioned although there is reference to larger more established market towns.

In sum, Côte d'Ivoire exemplifies the issues related to understanding contemporary urbanization data in SSA that this paper seeks to analyse. The rather high levels of agricultural economic activity compared to reported rapid urbanization were suggestive of mismatches in the urban data. Interrogation of the census data found that the patterns of urbanization were indeed somewhat unusual, and suggestive of settlement changes far more linked to rural and agricultural developments than the bolder, more modernistic narratives of what urbanization trends mean for SSA economies. Furthermore, it is possible that some small settlements characterised by predominantly agricultural occupations have been wrongly recorded as urban, inflating the level of urbanization even according to the country's own definitions (which should exclude such settlements). Nonetheless this situation is not recognized by key policy makers.

### *Ghana*

Ghana's population was enumerated as just over half urban (51%) in 2010 and the significance of this milestone was highlighted in census reports. This was a large rise of seven percentage points from 44% in 2000 and suggestive of important and positive economic change. The pace of urbanization was very much faster than it had been over the decades before when the level had risen only five percentage points (from 36% to 41%) over the 24 year period from 1960 to 1984, and only three percentage points (to 44%) over the next sixteen years to 2000.

There were reasons to expect a more vigorous urbanizing trend with the commodity boom from 2003 until about 2014. Ghana's GDP growth had been impressive (World Bank 2015) with increased value of exports in gold, cocoa and timber and major investments in its newly found oilfields off the coast. As elsewhere in Africa the end of the commodity boom brought new economic problems. The return of IMF conditional

loans required Ghana to ‘restore debt sustainability by sustained fiscal consolidation’ (IMF 2015) but, for the intercensal period under consideration, the national economy was doing well. The economic stimuli from these developments were logically reflected in strong population growth, evidently fuelled by in-migration, in towns with central roles in the new exports and investments. Kumasi, the historic capital of the Ashanti Region, with a population of 2.04 million in 2010, was one of the fastest growing at an average rate of 5.4% since 2000. It had always had a key marketing role for its hinterland which benefited from production of important exports of cocoa, gold and hardwood. Ghana’s main ports benefited from the new oil and gas industry and therefore attracted many economic migrants over this period, with Sekondi-Takoradi growing at 6.1% per year and Tema (which is part of Greater Accra) at 6.7%.<sup>5</sup> The congested capital city, Accra, grew very slowly at about 0.1% per year. However boundary changes mean it is better to consider the population of the wider conurbation, Greater Accra region, which grew from 2.6 million to 3.6 million at an annual 3.4%, compared to a national rate of 2.5%.

A recent review of the country’s urbanization, entitled ‘Rising through cities in Ghana’, by the World Bank and the government presents its shift to being a majority urbanized society as ‘momentous’ and in very positive economic terms (World Bank 2015). In the preface a Ghanaian Deputy Minister is quoted as arguing that, ‘No country in the industrial age has ever achieved significant economic growth without urbanization’. Emphasis is put on the higher productivity of economic activities in urban areas and a decline in the share of primary sector employment. However, the report notes that the decline was due to shifts into ‘nontraded urban services rather than industry’, that manufacturing employment was still falling and that the ‘bulk of the manufacturing industry in Ghana is now made up of small-scale establishments, often engaging less than 10 workers and typically comprising proprietors and their nonpaid family employees, as well as a few paid employees’; and that, ‘[a]bout 70 percent of Accra’s workers — and up to 85 percent in other large cities — are engaged in the private informal economy in small enterprises often organized around the household, but these informal enterprises are often not productive’ (World Bank 2015:13). Thus there is

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<sup>5</sup> These rates are calculated by combining separately recorded populations for Sekondi and Takoradi, and Tema and Tema New Town, in the 2000 census, and comparing these with the figures for Sekondi Takoradi Metropolis and Tema in the 2010 census.

considerable tension between the general tenor of the report about urban transformation, which clearly places it in the realm of using headline urban statistics as economic proxies and the shift to promoting national levels of urbanization generally, and some of the finer details and actual analysis about the urban economy.

As with Côte d'Ivoire, a mismatch between the level of engagement in agriculture and the urbanization figures is another reason to interrogate these urbanization data more closely. Again, part of the explanation may be in the scale of *in situ* 'urbanization' which has added many settlements where the labour force is still primarily working in agriculture. In Ghana settlements are enumerated as urban purely on size (a threshold of 5,000). Some Ghanaian urbanists at the 'First International Conference on Urbanization and Rural-Urban Migration in sub-Saharan Africa' held in Nairobi at the end of 2012 felt this meant the inclusion of settlements which were still largely villages in their economic characteristics. Indeed, there had been discussions about increasing the threshold to 10,000 but this had been resisted by local chiefs who regarded the designation of their 'settlements' as urban as beneficial. As there is no full list of urban settlements as yet published, the precise situation is not easily ascertained. Size class data are available which show that in 2010 there were 257 small 'Class 8' settlements (5,000-10,000 people) of which 70 had been rural settlements in the previous census. These accounted for 14% of the urban population (Republic of Ghana 2015). Some very limited information is also available on employment sectors for size classes 6 and 7 (towns with 20,000-50,000 and 10,000-20,000 people) in the report already discussed (World Bank 2015:13). This shows that 60% of employment in 'Class 7' towns is in agriculture and mining, and even 30% of employment in the larger 'Class 6' towns. Undoubtedly the proportion in 'Class 8' settlements must be higher still. As these three size classes account for 39% of the country's urban population, were urban definitions used which include labour force criteria, Ghana's urbanization level would be reduced to well below half.

For example, were Indian criteria for defining urban centres applied, it appears that most of Ghana's Class 7 and 8 centres would be 'rural' because of their dependence on agriculture and their size, reducing the urbanization level to around 38%. Were just the

‘Class 8’ settlements excluded, the level would be about 43%. Further supporting evidence for this argument comes from Africapolis, the African database of the French global urban settlements’ research project E-Geopolis, which estimates urban populations using remote sensing and the criteria of density and a threshold of 10,000. On this basis it found that Ghana’s urbanization level in 2000 was 39% (Africapolis Team 2008). A recent update of this database which treats very densely settled rural areas differently estimates the level for 2010 at 45% (Moriconi-Ebrard et al 2016) which is still significantly less than the 51% recorded in the census.

There is another source of error about urban population figures from Ghana. In some census reports some larger urban settlements, which are part of municipal or metro *districts*, have been found to include ‘rural’ areas and people. This is yet another issue of imprecision in definitions. Thus the main analytical report for the 2010 census has a table listing the country’s fifteen largest ‘towns’ with their populations – figures which sometimes reappear in other analyses – but some of the data are for larger administrative units rather than the urban settlement within them (Ghana Statistical Service 2013:227). In most cases the impact is not very significant – the Greater Accra Metropolitan Area, for example, is sometimes listed with a population of 4.01 million but this includes a rural population of 0.38 million, about 10% of the total. However, in two of the largest towns their growth rates are significantly distorted. Tamale in northern Ghana is listed with a population of 371,351 implying an annual growth rate of 6.3% since 2000, as fast as the coastal ports affected by the oil industry. This seemed puzzling as there are no strong urban economic growth stimuli in the district. Once the rural population are factored out, however, Tamale’s urban population was 274,022 meaning it had grown at 2.9%, not much more than the national average of 2.6%. This is more in accord with what might be expected. Furthermore, about 18% of this large town’s employment was in agriculture according to data in World Bank (2015). The other example is Cape Coast which appeared to have recorded an astonishing annual growth rate of 7.3%, when the real figure was 4.5%.

As with Côte d'Ivoire, therefore, it is argued that, in relation to the nature of changes in economic activities, Ghana should probably not, as yet, be regarded as half urban.

*Mali:*

Mali reportedly used an urban population threshold of 30,000 in its 1998 census, and 40,000 in 2009 (Mcgranahan and Satterthwaite 2014). The difference with neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire's definitions is remarkable, so this provides an extreme example of the need to take care when making cross-country comparisons. Only fifteen settlements were 'urban' using the 2009 definition and the urbanization level can be calculated from the census data at 22%.<sup>6</sup> As 40,000 is very high relative to the more usual urban population thresholds used by African countries, calculations were also made using a 15,000 threshold, as reliable data on smaller centres could not be found, yielding a level of 26%. Yet the WUP reports 35% for 2009: this is stated to relate to a 30,000 threshold chosen to be compatible with the 1998 census. Evidently there is a serious mismatch between the two figures which seems particularly inexplicable as the WUP reports it was using census data rather than projections. The WUP figure for 1980 is 19% which appears to be not unreasonable when compared to data in other analyses of Mali's urban data in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Bernard et al 2012). So we either have a measure often used as an economic proxy which has increased by a mere three percentage points over a 29 year period, or perhaps by seven percentage points or, according to the WUP, has almost doubled and increased by 16 percentage points. The very different economic narratives one might deduce from such different trends in the pace of urbanization are obvious, as is the importance of clear and logical urban definitions.

As already noted, the agricultural employment data also point to Mali's strongly rural nature. Other work has shown that in 'urban' settlements with populations between 5,000 and 10,000, 66% of employment was agricultural in 1998 and that even in cities with populations over 50,000 (excluding Bamako) it was 20%. In Bamako itself the

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<sup>6</sup> All figures for individual towns in Mali have been crosschecked using the Mali census and data on Brockerhoff's city population website (<http://www.citypopulation.de/>). The small differences found make no difference to the analysis.

proportion of people working in agriculture increased from 1987 to 1998 from 8% to 12% (partly because boundary extensions incorporated many farmers) (Bernard et al 2012). In sum, the WUP data for Mali appear to significantly overestimate how urban it has become, whether one refers to data from the census or economic activities. Given this source is so widely used, the potential for misunderstandings about this country's recent urbanization is very high.

### *Rwanda*

Rwanda, like its neighbour Burundi, used to be exceptionally rural, even by African standards. However the terrible tragedy of the 1994 genocide caused much displacement, and between the 1991 and 2002 censuses the recorded urban population grew very rapidly at 10.9% per year and the urbanization level increased to 16.9%. As with the other examples in this paper, though, many people in the 'new' urban population had rural economic characteristics. Indeed, the national statistical office noted that the 2002 urban areas included 'some largely rural populations which were only recently incorporated into adjacent urban agglomerations' (Nyirimanzi, no date). This was due to massive boundary changes in 2000; these extended the capital city of Kigali, for example, from 112 km<sup>2</sup> to 314 km<sup>2</sup> (Manirakiza 2014). The impact on the nature of the 'urban' population was reflected in both the 2002 employment data (Table 1), as nearly half of Rwanda's *urban* employed were in agriculture, and in urban settlement patterns with 40% of urban households housed in 'isolated dwelling units fairly distant from each other and surrounded by family farms' (Republic of Rwanda 2005:66). Thus, the much cited and discussed surge in Rwandan urbanization was nothing much to do with economics but, unsurprisingly, largely due to migrations driven by other causes plus some major boundary changes. In 2005 the government more than doubled Kigali's area again to 730 km<sup>2</sup> further increasing its population (ibid). The last census in 2012 showed that the population enumerated within Kigali's current *city* boundaries was 0.86 million, which meant it had grown at an average annual rate of 3.6% since 2002 when its population was

0.60 million. This was higher than the national growth rate of 2.6% but would have partly been due to the boundary extensions rather than net in-migration from rural Rwanda.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, population growth in Rwanda's other towns was very slow over the intercensal period, with evidence of net out-migration from some (perhaps to Kigali although this is speculation). Overall this meant that Kigali's growth was entirely counterbalanced and Rwanda's level of urbanization stagnated. The 2012 census report states, '*16.5% live in urban areas*. Compared to the previous censuses, this represents a continuous increase in regard to the population living in urban areas, as this proportion was 4.6% in 1978, 5.5% in 1991, and 16.9% in 2002' (NISR 2012: 9; emphasis added). The report's precise wording is used here partly because a counternarrative of continued very rapid urbanization in Rwanda since 2002 is so dominant that it seems necessary to establish that the national statistical office itself has documented that there was a slight reduction in the urban *share* of the population over the past decade. However the quote is also used to indicate the extent to which, in line with the new official stance in some African countries to emphasise the speed of urbanization, the report simultaneously tries to suggest this nonetheless.

The official line on Rwandan urbanization from government actors is that the country has continued to urbanize rapidly since 2002. Part of that narrative includes frequent allusion to its longterm plan, Rwanda Vision 2020, which predicts an urbanization level in that year of 30%. This prediction was noted, for example, in the Minister for Infrastructure's preface to Rwanda's last UN-HABITAT Country Programme Document in 2008 where it was also suggested that the urban population was growing at 18.7% annually (UN-HABITAT 2008:5).<sup>8</sup> The official narrative also makes frequent mention of the significance of the development of an urban Master Plan for Kigali. Implementation of

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<sup>7</sup> It is not possible to distinguish the relative contribution of these two elements to Kigali's intercensal growth rate from published census data.

<sup>8</sup> As is often the case the report itself is more circumspect, estimating the urban population was growing at between four and six per cent (which still proved to be an overestimate). It also pointed out that, 'the wider rural areas have now been included as part of the urban areas either in Kigali City or other cities. In all the towns in Rwanda, except Kigali city, agriculture is the main economic activity (more than 50% of the working population)' (UN-HABITAT 2008: 8).

aspects of that plan are felt to ‘contribute to the modernisation and promotion of Kigali’s image and reputation worldwide as a clean and green city, a good place to do business, and a safe and secure city in Africa’ (Manirakiza 2014: 171, citing Rubinoff 2011). One minister has commented that ‘in the long term, Rwanda will probably be 100% urban’ (cited in Goodfellow 2014a: 316) and it has been argued that while ‘[an] anti-urban stance has been dominant across much of Africa, at least since the 1980s. Rwanda’s rulers are different... No country ever developed without urbanising, and the RPF leadership knows this well; on one level, therefore, they welcome urbanisation’ (Goodfellow 2014b). Rwanda’s successful promotion of its urban development resulted in the award of a UN-HABITAT Scroll of Honour in 2008 for ‘many innovations in building a model, modern city’ (Goodfellow 2016:3190 citing UN Habitat).<sup>9</sup> A paper presented to a 2015 World Bank Conference on Land and Poverty by representatives from Rwanda’s Departments of Land Survey and Land Administration and Management refers to ‘phenomenal economic growth and rapid urbanization rates witnessed in Rwanda over the past decade’ and suggests that Kigali’s annual growth rate was 6% in 2006 and 8% in 2008 (Khan and Kanyiginya 2015).

The official narrative has often succeeded in persuading external actors that Rwanda’s urbanization is indeed proceeding apace. Thus the WUP database still records its urbanization level for 2012 at 26% and projects approximately a percentage point increase per year into the near future. The figure in the 2014 State of African Cities report is 19% (UN Habitat 2014). The population of the capital city, Kigali, is almost always reported in any publication as 1.14 million in 2012, although this is the census figure for the province within which it is sited and therefore includes a significant rural population: as already noted the population of the city itself was actually 0.86 million.<sup>10</sup> A recent report for a project on affordable housing and infrastructure in Kigali states that

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=564&cid=5666>

<sup>10</sup> This type of misunderstanding is fairly common when an administrative unit has a similar name to that of a city within it – a classic example in Africa being the outrage in Lagos, Nigeria’s largest city, when the 2006 census reported that the population of Kano *State* was larger. However the *city* of Kano had far fewer people. In Rwanda the problem must partly stem from the fact that the capital city lies within an administrative area called (confusingly) ‘Kigali City’ in which 24% of the population is rural. In addition, ‘Kigali City’ is made up of three sub-districts: Nyarugenge, Gasabo and Kicukiro all of which incorporate part of the capital city and part of the surrounding rural areas.

Rwanda 'is expecting large increase in its share of urban population from current 17% to 35% by 2020, in other words an annual urban growth of 9 percent' (Buckley and Bajpal 2016). Goodfellow, an urban scholar whose analyses of politics and planning in Kigali are extremely valuable (eg Goodfellow 2013, 2014a, 2016; Goodfellow and Smith 2013), has stated that, 'Both in terms of urban growth (the absolute number of urban-dwellers) and urbanisation (the percentage of the population living in cities and towns), the demographic shift has been meteoric. In 1990, there were just 385,000 Rwandans living in towns. Next year [2015], there will be 2.5 million: an increase of over 500%. .... Between 1950 and today there has been almost no other country in the world urbanising faster' (Goodfellow 2014a: 311). This sort of analysis made sense for the 1990s in the aftermath of the genocide, but does not tally with the very different trends in the 21<sup>st</sup> century uncovered by the 2012 census discussed above. Rwanda's total urban population was 1.74 million in 2012.

There is some indication that the extraordinary extent of the rural nature of many livelihoods in 'urban' Rwanda is at least dwindling as the 2012 census recorded 'only' about a quarter of all employment in towns as being in agriculture (see Table 1). Some sort of *in situ* urbanization *in economic terms* has been taking place, therefore, although the figures still indicate, as with other African examples here, that the link between the urban population and urban-type livelihoods is problematic. Furthermore the 2014 State of African Cities report suggests agriculture remains rather more significant in Kigali, stating that, 'With only about one-tenth of Kigali's total land area settled, urban agriculture .... [is] contributing around 25 per cent of the city's food supply and employing an estimated 37 per cent of the city's workforce in small-scale agricultural activities' (UN Habitat, 2014: 183). There is also evidence that the implementation of Kigali's Master Plan, which has involved some draconian evictions of unplanned low-income urban residents and significant rises in the costs of urban living, means that 'the poor are being pushed out of the city' (Goodfellow 2014a:312; see also Manirakiza 2014:171-2). This could further dampen urban growth rates, depending on the destination and livelihoods of the out-migrants.

Analysing urbanization trends in Rwanda is quite challenging. The census data require painstaking work because of the issues arising from conflating rural farming areas and people into urban figures through very large boundary changes and there is sometimes resistance to any revision to the idea that the country must be rapidly urbanizing because that is the official line. Neither of these factors are very useful for making good policy decisions which do need some idea of where things are actually headed, rather than where it is believed or hoped they are headed.

### *Botswana*

The last example of the significance of urban definitions for meaningful analysis of the social and economic changes accompanying urbanization in Africa is Botswana . This provides a strong contrast to the previous examples because Botswana's censuses have, for many decades, taken into account the significance of occupational characteristics in measuring what is meaningfully 'urban'. This makes it possible to track and analyse urban change since independence and understand what has proved to be a highly complex set of processes involving both migration and large-scale *in situ* urbanization.

Botswana has been one of sub-Saharan Africa's best performing economies over the long-term. This is largely based on its diamond wealth which is of sufficient global significance for the state to have succeeded in striking a reasonably beneficial deal with de Beers, the large diamond company. It has also managed its wealth far better than most mineral-rich countries in Africa and is frequently held up as a counter-example to the inevitability of the so-called 'resource curse' (Iimi 2007). As a result it has one of the highest per capita incomes in Africa and human development indices which are outstanding for the region especially now that its HIV/AIDS pandemic is largely controlled by anti-retroviral drugs. Between the last two censuses in 2001 and 2011, for example, its crude death rate halved from 12.4 to 6.25 and infant mortality rates reduced from 56 to 17. In the capital city, Gaborone, life expectancy is 76 years (Statistics Botswana 2015).

The Tswana people who comprise most of Botswana's population had a longstanding tradition of residing in large, nucleated settlements which pre-existed any urbanizing influences from colonialism. This was despite their livelihoods being mainly based on livestock; the large herds were tended by young men at the 'cattle-posts' far from the settlements. These 'agro-villages', as they came to be termed by colonial authorities, were a manifestation therefore of political and cultural norms to do with the exercise of, and access to, authority. There was a parallel with Yoruba settlement patterns in what became southwest Nigeria, where agrotowns like Ife and Oyo housed thousands of people whose livelihoods were mainly derived from agriculture (cultivation in this case). These settlements were also rooted in local socio-political norms. In both cases these patterns fired academic debates about settlements' functions and whether they should be regarded as towns, as their economic basis mainly lay in agriculture (Krapf Askari 1969; Gardner 1986; Silitshena, 1979; Lepekoane 1994).

At independence Botswana's level of urbanization was negligible. This was largely inevitable as the British had administered it from Mafikeng in South Africa; the new state had to build a capital city at Gaborone. The agro-villages, like Serowe which had a population of about 24,000 in 1981, were not defined as urban by the statistical authorities as, in contrast to most African countries but like India, Botswana's urban definitions include occupational characteristics so that 75% of economic activity must be non-agricultural. Nonetheless, aware of the arguments about their status on the basis of their size and form, very usefully the census reports always provided two alternative sets of data on 'urbanization levels'. One excluded these traditional large settlements which were then still primarily agriculturally-based and one included them. The first set portrayed a country which was rapidly urbanizing as at first there was strong net immigration to Gaborone and the population of the entire country was only around half a million at independence. The urbanization level recorded at the first three censuses in 1971, 1981 and 1991 rose from 9% to 18% to 24%. However, were the agro-villages included, by 1991 the level doubled to 46%: Botswana would have been well on its way to being mainly urban. As might be imagined, and perhaps unsurprisingly, the existence

of these two sets of data lead to all sorts of strange analyses of its urbanization by those without understanding of the local context, including the presumption that the country had suddenly become half urban via mass migration processes mainly to Gaborone. Migration to the centres always defined as 'urban' was playing its part in the country's urbanization but, alongside this, the livelihoods of residents in the agro-villages were also gradually being transformed, *in situ*, away from agriculture and into urban-type work. In other words, labour specialisation was occurring. This was in part due to the strong economy and state policies of intervening strongly in these settlements, upgrading their infrastructure and services and providing financial assistance to small businesses. This meant that the settlements began to meet the *occupational* criteria for being 'urban'. In 1971 none of the agro-villages were defined as 'urban' but by 1991 those that were accounted for 51% of the country's urban population and were termed 'urban villages' (Stats Botswana 2014). In many African countries economic change of this sort in small settlements would be characterised largely by informal work by self-employed people and unpaid family workers. However in Botswana an increasing proportion of the new non-agricultural livelihoods was in paid, formal work. In 1991 this accounted for up to a third of the labour force in some of these settlements and had increased to 50% in most of the larger settlements by 2001 (Selolwane 2006).

In 2011 Botswana was 64% urbanized and the large 'urban villages' accounted for 66% of the urban population. The capital city's share of the urban population has steadily decreased. Indeed, without the addition of the urban villages the country's urbanization level would not have increased between 1991 and 2001. And net in-migration to Gaborone is now a very minor element in its population growth. It grew on average at 2.2% per year from 2001 to 2011, but its natural increase rate was 2.03% (higher than the national rate of 1.9%) (Stats Botswana 2014). Many people commute from surrounding settlements, some of them villages on traditional land. This sharply reduces the cost of accommodation. If Gaborone is combined with its satellites, its growth rate was 2.7% (calculated from data in Stats Botswana 2014). However, all Botswana's other main towns which do not have their roots in 'urban villages' but are associated with mining or

other functions lost population share between 2001 and 2011 (ie they were counter-urbanizing).

In sum, Botswana's processes of urbanization over the past fifty years have been unusual. It started with no capital city, it had a traditional rural settlement pattern of large agglomerated centres, and a significant element of the shift to becoming more urban in the past thirty years has occurred through *in situ* urbanization as rural livelihoods have segued into urban livelihoods. However it does have a logical approach to defining what is urban and the data available make it possible to track the economic and social processes involved. Furthermore, in terms of conventional ideas about the types of economic change which accompany rapid urbanization, it contrasts sharply with the other African examples above. Only 12% of its labour force was in agriculture by 2011. Thus were one discussing Botswana's urban trajectory with many development or government actors who assume urbanization indices are an economic proxy, you could use its data and be singing from the same hymn sheet.

## Conclusions

The central aim of this paper has been to contribute to understandings of current urbanization processes in sub-Saharan Africa by demonstrating the continued need for critical analysis of data on rates of urban population growth and increases in the levels of urbanization. Long gaps between censuses lead to overestimations of these measures of urban trends in the 1980s and 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century for many African countries and some misunderstandings about the sensitivity of migration to economic 'signals' from declining or struggling African urban economies (Potts 2009). Census data tend now to be more regularly available and the pace of urbanization in some African countries evidently strengthened as GDP growth rates increased during the global commodity boom from around 2003 to 2014. However, there remains some tendency to overestimate the pace of urbanization in some SSA countries, although in such a vast region it is dangerous to generalise. One source of such overestimates lies in the definitions of what is counted as 'urban'. While this varies between countries, in some

low population thresholds which may have worked to differentiate between rural and urban settlements in terms of their *key economic functions* and characteristics in the past may now be including essentially rural populations in terms of the nature of their livelihoods and role in the national economy. Other possible sources of misunderstanding include lack of rigour in implementing definitions and differentiating between the populations of urban centres and surrounding rural districts. One indicator that African urban data may need to be problematised is when there is evidence that employment in agriculture seems high compared to the officially 'urban' population. This may relate to the redefinition of essentially rural settlements as 'urban' as well as high levels of agricultural employment even in larger towns. This paper has shown that factors such as these need to be taken into account when interpreting recent urbanization data from four of the five African case studies detailed: Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali and Rwanda.

There are many other ways of conceptualising and defining the 'urban' beyond who resides where and what they do for a living all of which can lead to insights into processes of urbanization in African countries and elsewhere. Social and political factors have always been key, and often dominant, elements of the conceptualisation of the 'urban' in urban studies (eg Wirth 1969). Yet continuing to work with 'conventional' ideas and data on 'the urban' based on census enumerations, national urban definitions and sources like the WUP remains inevitable simply because they are used (and thought to be understood) by those beyond academe - public and private sector economic decision-makers. Such data have policy implications: they affect decisions about investments and resource allocation for services, for example, and shape ideas about trends in national livelihoods and employment. They are particularly important for the many developing countries across SSA and Asia where there is still a significant rural element in the economy and urbanization, in the demographic sense, remains an active process. As argued by Montgomery (2008: 17), 'the difficulties of defining 'urban' 'are not confined to demography: they spill over to contaminate measurement of other fundamental aspects of economic development'. Trends in urbanization in regions like SSA are often used as a proxy for positive structural economic change and, as

demonstrated for the case studies in this paper, rapid urbanization may now be seen as something to be officially promoted and publicised. It is believed that this makes it all the more important to identify and understand the ways in which potential mismatches between the apparent pace and level of urbanization and structural economic changes can arise due to problems with the collection or dissemination of data on urban settlements and populations. In sum, since powerful actors *use* official African urban data, there is value in analysing what such data may or may not signify in different places.

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