

REGAINING CONTROL OF TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT

Against the backdrop of globalisation with tensions running high, while our planet struggles against climate change and the depletion of non-renewable resources, Africa is faced with the challenge of inventing original development models. These models need to address the considerable requirements generated by improvements in the standard of living, population growth and economic diversification, without reproducing traditional growth models that are no longer sustainable. This challenge is central to the African Union's Agenda 2063 for the structural transformation of the continent. It implies mobilising all territorial resources available, in both urban and rural areas, in order to make full use of the range of existing spatial dynamics.

• Enhancing territorial dynamics

After two decades of structural adjustment policies and their consequences, Africa has entered a new phase of change over the last 15 years: continued demographic and urban transition, sustained economic growth driven by an expanding domestic market, rising commodity prices and growth in foreign investment. Although the recent situation marked by conflicts and a slowdown in growth linked to falling mining and oil product prices calls for caution, these changes have moved the continent forward from the risk of deadlock to the hope of emergence.

These dynamics could give the impression that according to past transitions observed in other continents, the rural world is doomed to gradual decline in favour of rapidly expanding cities, supported by a solid industrialisation process. A careful examination of changes in African economies and societies, however, reveals a far more complex, diverse picture, with major differences across the countries and regions of the continent.

First, the population boom, with the arrival of 1.35 billion more people by 2050, will not be confined to the cities, which will continue to grow rapidly, without reaching the pace observed over the last 25 years. The population should remain predominantly rural until the 2040s, and population density in rural areas will continue to increase, with 350 million new people by 2050. Africa will also be the only part of the world where the rural population will continue to expand beyond that date. Next, for the time being, urban economies are not following the industry-based development model observed elsewhere. African cities are largely built on commercial and administrative income and are characterised by the scale of informal employment, which is often low-skilled, in trade, services and very small craft and building enterprises.

However, increasing population density in Africa is also shaping territories due to ever closer linkages between cities, rural areas and the small towns connected to them. The unprecedented scale of circulations – of products, people and ideas – facilitates the emergence of new territorial dynamics based on the mobilisation of resources of different origins, encouraging innovation and contributing to spatial reshaping.

On the one hand, the rapid development of telephony, the – still tentative – progress of access to energy and the construction of major transport and irrigation infrastructure all vastly increase the attractiveness of some regions, sometimes to the detriment of others. The growth of mining activities and local and foreign investors' interest in the most fertile agricultural land are often presented as new leverage for development. Because of the concentration of capital they imply, the variety of stakeholders they mobilise, the different decision-making levels they involve and their ambivalent impacts on the development of their host regions, these activities illustrate the complexity of the processes underway.

The other side to rural change, which is not as visible being more fragmented and less publicised, is driven by the efforts of rural families to combine their multiple activities, which straddle urban and rural areas and are sometimes supported by remittances, and to sustain places that may be remote. The growing audience of farmers' organisations gives greater visibility to these actions, which often build on the dynamism of local, national and cross-border markets associating farmers, small traders, and entrepreneurs engaged in agricultural and food product processing, who all feed the cities and generate the vast majority of current jobs. The examples of the Ouagadougou-Accra and Nairobi-Kampala corridors, the Senegal River Valley and the Lake Chad region illustrate this intensity of linkages between urban and rural areas. These linkages are reshaping the economic geography with the emergence of new development centres, beyond the outward-looking agricultural or mining export sectors that have until now been associated with economic modernity in Africa.

Between hope, tension and conflict, linked in particular to use of and access to natural resources, there is a growing chorus of voices stressing the importance of including these territorial dynamics in discussions underway on development models. The extent of needs connected with sustainable improvements in the standard of living implies striking a balance between economic performance, equitable wealth redistribution and respect for the environment. Although Africa's increasing integration in the global economy continues to provide numerous opportunities, the vagaries of international markets also imply effectively mobilising the breadth of the African domestic market and developing the resources provided by territorial dynamics.

• Avoiding the excesses and risks of metropolisation

Only a small number of countries situated at both ends of the continent have so far truly initiated their structural change, with more diversified, wealthier economies that are supported by territorially balanced urbanisation with a high density of economic activity and more effective integration in the global economy. Elsewhere, economic changes paint a mixed picture, in which structural elements still override recent dynamics. Agriculture remains the bedrock of activity for a predominantly rural population and urbanisation is continuing, mainly in favour of the capitals, based on an informal sector that makes it difficult to finance the infrastructure needed and to shift the balance to other cities and rural areas. Integration in the global economy remains fragile, with exports of primary commodities that undergo little or no processing (mining, forestry and export agriculture).

These activities, and especially those in the mining sector, inflate growth in absolute terms and, in some countries, stimulate investment dynamics. However, they rarely have any real spillover

effects, create few jobs and are of little benefit to the majority of the population. They stimulate growth in the biggest cities through investment in property and public works, which often leads to neglect of urbanisation from the below, that of small towns, and of agriculture, by fostering the apparently easier option of food models based on imported products.

These dynamics accentuate the metropolisation movement, which further reinforces the territorial imbalances inherited from the colonial period – where the capital was usually the port of export – that were amplified after independence. For political reasons, the states have largely focused on their capitals to the detriment of small and medium-sized cities. These cities have grown in size due to population growth, but without benefitting from public investment in infrastructure and services, thereby increasing the appeal of the big city and enhancing population differences. Today, there are considerable threshold effects between the biggest city and the secondary towns in many countries, and the growing demands linked to this urban macrocephaly are an obstacle to the overall regional development. The situation is heightened by the horizontal, often poorly controlled nature of urban development, which magnifies network costs (highways, transport, water, sanitation and electricity) and the burden on public finances.

Because of this metropolisation, which is reflected in the progressive extension of large-scale conurbations that are increasingly difficult to manage, the public authorities are paying more attention to urban matters, to the detriment of “rural affairs”. This trend is encouraged by the new economic geography rationale, which sees agglomeration economies as a key driver of growth, whereas the concentration of activities and people provides only very limited leverage where low value-added activities are involved and people are poor.

The challenge is therefore to restore balance between regions, which requires support for rural dynamics and for the development of secondary towns. Failing this, there is a major risk of further rural depopulation and large-scale migration towards the most populated urban areas – with heightened economic, social, environmental and political tensions – and the simultaneous development of spatially marginalised areas with no prospects for the people living there. In the absence of significant compensatory financing, government withdrawal and neglect of entire regions are an open door to long-term instability. The areas of influence won over the last 10 years by Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram in the Sudano-Sahelian region, or by the older Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda and its northern and western neighbours, stand as a strong reminder of this harsh reality.

• **Fostering activity and employment through territorial development**

Avoiding dangerous dual strategies that assume areas of investment and growth on the one hand and areas of decline on the other, while meeting the needs of structural change, implies getting off the beaten track of “business as usual” and the traditional view of public policies.

This change is all the more necessary given that Africa is facing a surge in its working age population, which will become the main source of growth in the global workforce. Over the next 15 years, 440 million young people will reach working age. This massive influx of young working-age people is an exceptional opportunity for the dynamism of African economies, provided that the level of training is enhanced and that the economic and institutional environment is conducive to

investment.

Meeting this challenge implies moving away from an excessively segmented, centralised approach to public policies. Despite progress in regional policies and decentralisation, most policy and public investment decisions are still made by states and their sectoral administrations, which are disinclined to take account of the diversity and complexity of territorial issues. The statistical segmentation of rural and urban areas, whose boundaries are increasingly blurred by densification and lifestyle changes, as well as that of public action between sectors and fields of activity, makes it difficult to identify existing economic, social and spatial dynamics and their support.

There is no sectoral silver bullet – like industrialisation, which is often put forward – that would tackle the scale of the continent’s needs. There is, however, an urgent need to reinvest in multi-sectoral, place-based sustainable development strategies that help to build on assets and to take into account the constraints inherent in the development of the different regions.

This “re-territorialisation” of public policies calls for the implementation of participatory approaches, stronger local authorities and concerted regulations between different levels of governance, as well as reinvestment in infrastructure and services in rural towns and small and medium-sized cities. It could help to revitalise local development processes and to create jobs through the densification of rural-urban linkages and better support for initiatives. By simultaneously planning the development of agriculture and that of small towns from a territorialised approach based on the idea of supply and employment basins, the renewal of public policies is one of the key drivers of structural change in Africa.

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