



## Review

# Migrant Groups and the Development of Urbanization in Tiv Society of Central Nigeria: Colonial Period to Post Colonial Era

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## Abstract

The process of urbanization leading to the emergence of towns among the Tiv people of central Nigeria is traceable back to the pre-colonial setting up to the colonial era. In the pre-colonial setting, little settlements existed on the banks of the River Benue and Katsina-Ala. During the colonial era, as a result of the intervention of the Royal Niger Company, these settlements became trading stations thereby growing up into small towns. The further development of colonial infrastructure such as the railways and roads further accelerated the growth of these towns. The sitting of colonial administrative structures in these towns gave a further boost to the growth of population originated as towns. This paper will adopt the use of oral traditions and archival sources in studying the emergence of towns in Tiv society overtime

**Keywords** Urbanization, Development and Migration

## INTRODUCTION

As far back as the pre-colonial era, small settlements existed on the banks of the River Benue occupied by the Tiv, Jukun, Etulo, Alago and Hausas. These little communities traded with each other and lived side by side for centuries before the age of European imperialism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, British imperialism brought all these riverine communities under conquest and occupation unifying them into the Northern Protectorate. This marked the era of company rule through the Royal Niger Company with headquarters at Abinsi, one of such settlements. Through the articulation of trade, these settlements such as Abinsi, Makurdi and Katsina-Ala became important points of commercial articulation attracting a great influx of migration into these areas. The migration phenomenon was to change the history of the area together with the provision of basic infrastructure by the colonial state in these growing settlements.

After the end of the Second World War of 1945, these towns especially Makurdi had become important

headquarters for the Benue Province thus, accelerating the space of urbanization of the town. This paper intends to look at this urbanization phenomenon beginning from the earliest times to the colonial era.

## Conceptual Issues

**Urbanization** as a concept has assumed several definitions and dimensions that are both historical economic and sociological in nature and character. According to Fadayomi:

Urbanization is a process that bring with it rapid social change and new behavioural pattern that effects social institutions like marriage and the family.

This definition of urbanization places more emphasis on the sociological effects or dimension of the phenomenon known as urbanization. In the same way, Lious Worth defined urbanization as:

Urbanization no longer dominates the process by which person attracted to a place called the city and incorporated into its system of life. It refers also to the cumulative accentuation of the characteristic distinctive of the mode of life which is associated with the growth of cities, and finally to the changes in the direction of modes of life recognizes as urban which are apparent among people, whatever they may be, who have come under the spell of the influence which the city exerts by virtue of the power of its institution Herbert Gans saw urbanization as, "number, and heterogeneous created a social structure in which primary group relationship were inevitably replaced by secondary contacts that were predatory in nature and personalities operating through the means of communication and transportation.

The sociological definition of urbanization placed key emphasis on the increasing atomization and individualism of the urban center caused by social and economic forces. The definition also looks at the key role that economic and impersonal force plays in the socialization experience of the individual in the urban center. The shortfall with the sociological assumption of the urban center is that it ignores the fact that in Africa, especially in Nigeria, ethnic and kinship ties still survived and strived in the urban centers thereby reducing the effects of anomic and atomization.

The ethnic or tribal unions and associations in the towns provided the basis for the collective and social interaction of the African. This argument does not however erode the fact that urbanization indeed is associated with behavioural changes that affect kinship ties and the family.

In economic terms, the urban center or urbanization is associated with the process of rapid industrialization, job opportunities, specialization, trade, the provision of social amenities and infrastructure.

The economic perspective of urbanization places too much emphasis on industrialization and trade which is a key feature of urbanization in the western capitalist countries. In Africa, during the pre-colonial and colonial period, the urban centers that began to emerge although centers of economic circulation yet were void of the process of industrialization as compared to the west. This is no doubt that economic institutions and factors occasioned by the exigencies of the colonial state were responsible for the rapid urbanization of towns in Nigeria. The economic dimension of urbanization also attempts to estimate what should be the census population of an urban centers.

The census estimate give a figure of between 4000-10,000 inhabitants in what

could be termed or defined as an urban center.

In other words, a town that has population that is below the minimum of 4000 inhabitants cannot classified as urbanized. From the economic perspective, other feature of urbanization includes the provision of communication and transport facilities that links up the urban centers to the international world. In other word, the transport and communication facilities ought to confirm with international standard as in other parts of the world.

**Development** on the other hand means different things to different people. While Rodney (1972), viewed development at the individual level as something that implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well being, Rogers as cited in Walter Rodney describes development as a type of social change in which new ideas introduced within a social system produce higher – per capita income and levels of living through more productive methods and improved social organization. It also means the process of economic and social transformation that is based on complex cultural and environmental factors and their interactions. Thus, for a society to develop there has to be order, stability or a peaceful co-existence within and among the various ethnic groups.

**Migration** according to Collins English Dictionary (2003) means to move from one country, region or place to another. It is the movement of people from one place in the world to another for the purpose of taking up permanent or semi-permanent residence, usually across a political boundary. In other words, migration simply put refers to go from one region, country, or place of abode to settle in another especially in a foreign country.

### Early Growth of Towns: The Colonial Era

In the Benue Valley, the three cornerstones of farming, specialization and trade provided the basis for migration for migration of ethnic such as the Jukun, Hausa, Alago, Igbira, Nupe and Tiv and the subsequent creation of settlement areas along the banks of River Benue. The emergence of settlement areas as Abinsi, Katsina-Ala, Wurukum and Wadata were handwork and the contribution of migrant groups to the gradual evolution of towns in the Benue Valley. The pre-colonial history of the Benue valley, as previously indicated, showed that the emergence of these settlement areas was the product of the activities of Jukun, Hausa and Tiv migrants in the Benue valley.

Each of these ethnic groups, as indicated before had an area of specialized salt producers, fishermen, boat

builder and brewery export. Tiv population, on the other hand were specialized in farming of grain and tubers, and as well as the production of textiles materials. Hausa and Fulani population were specialized in the production of species beads, mirrors, horses, cattle and the procurement of slaves. Each ethnic groups had to enter into trade relation with the other in order to complement its efforts at production. Specialization in various crafts and industries, and as well as production became a strong compelling force for the exchange of trade. The exchange of trade provided the framework for the mutual interdependence and interwoven nature of relationship among these ethnic groups.

The trading activities of these ethnic groups along the banks of the River Benue and Katsina-Ala triggered the gradual development and growth of earlier towns in the Benue Valley. The pre-colonial towns later during the colonial era became the center for articulation of the colonial economy and development. The initial population of these early settlement areas ranged from 100-300 migrant who settled in these growing towns.

The colonial period beginning from 1900-1959 witnessed the rapid acceleration of these pre-colonial settlement areas into major urban center. What colonial once did was to build on the pre-existing pre-colonial structure in Tivland. The emergence of urban centers such as Makurdi and Katsina-Ala was to consolidating the past pre-existing gains of the pre-colonial era.

The history of Makurdi town clearly shows that the evolution of the urban center in the colonial period was the handwork of migrant activities in the socio-political and economic setting. The report from the National Archival center in Kaduna indicates the role of migrations in the population increase of Makurdi town. The report state that:

In giving advice on the future planning of Makurdi I have assumed that an increase of population is probable among to the strategic position of the town i.e it is an important North – South entering, which is on the river Benue and served by rail. Apart from a probable natural increase there is almost bound to be an increase in population by immigration. An increase of 2,500 has been allowed for in the plan, 500 in Makurdi town and 2,000 in the Walomayo area near the High level railway station.

This report reflects the importance and the contribution that further migrations continued to play in the urbanization process of Makurdi town. Makurdi town beginning from the pre-colonial period to the present is a town of immigrants. This is not an understatement against the backdrop of the pre-colonial history of the area and as well as that of the colonial period. The history of the area in the two major epochs clearly reveals

that the town owes its origins to the activities of migrant groups.

Makurdi was declared a settlement area under the land settlement Regulations of 1946 and 1954. The town, in modern times, originated as a labour camp during the construction of the railway from Port Harcourt between 1910-1930. The national archival records further states that during the colonial period:

Politically the town is divided into 10 ward Lafia Road, North Market, South Mission to the South of the River Benue: Walomayo ward, Wadata, Ankpa Road, South Mission, Clerk Quarters, Central and South Market wards to South.

These political division of Makurdi towns still exist up to the present era with slight modification and adjustment been made overtime. By the end of the 1955/56 financial year, the colonial states declared that the tax population in Makurdi town stood by 5,000. This figure clearly shows an appreciable growth and increase in the population content of Makurdi town thus meeting the criteria for the town to become an urban center.

The distribution of population in the several wards of Makurdi clearly revealed the ethnic configuration of the town. Wadata and Wurukun areas, especially on the bank of the River Benue were heavily populated and dominated by Jukun population. Lafia ward and North bank areas were heavily populated by peoples of Hausa speaking extraction. The areas around the clerk quarters, central and with market wards, the new G.R.A area now referred to as the Old G.R.A, were heavily populated by civil servants and traders mostly of Yoruba and Igbo extraction. The High level areas and the areas around the medium market wards were exclusive reserves of concentrated Tiv population. The ethnic association also fostered close kinship and commercial ties among the various ethnic groups. For ethnic groups such as the Igbo and Yoruba, the town unions and professional association formed by the groups became the corner stone for control and domination of the economy of Makurdi town. These associations from time to time reviewed and assessed the potentials of the market in Tivland, readjusted prices through price discrimination in order to suit their economic interest. The town unions and the professional associations have persisted into present era and they provide an important framework in understanding the economic politics of Makurdi town and that of Tivland as a whole. Peter Enahora in his book “how to be a Nigerian” observed that ethnic associations and the town unions are the basic and essential features of Nigerian social and economic life. In the same way, Okwudiba Nnoli in his book *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* observed that ethnic associations provided the bedrock for the centers in Nigeria. The point is that these association and unions became effective instruments in

the regulation and de-regulation of the socio-economic life of urban centers.

During the colonial period, record shows that Gboko had an initial population of about 5000 inhabitants. This population was made up of mostly migrants from the rural areas who were predominantly of Tiv origin. Other migrants such as the Hausa and Igbo made up the other aspect and segment of population of Gboko town. Apart from working in the colonial service, opportunities of the town to invest in aspects of trading and exchanged of goods and services. In order to development gave a major commerce, the Gboko market was established and the development gave a major boost to commercial enterprise in the town. Colonial records indicated that the number of stores at Gboko market that were less than fifty were mostly occupied by Hausa and Igbo traders who had migrated there during the colonial period. Migrant traders provided for modern commercial enterprise in European manufactured goods and hardware such as building material, textile fabrics, soaps and detergents, cosmetic and reams etc. trade in these imported articles was concentrated in the hands of Igbo and Hausa commercial class. Sources from oral tradition clearly indicate the tremendous role that rural – urban pull played in the urbanization process of Gboko during the colonial period.

The origin of Gboko town is traceable to the colonial period in Tivland between the 1930s and the 1940s. Gboko town was initially chosen as a site the administrative headquarters of Tiv division in the 1940s. Beginning from that period, the town over the years has witnessed the massive influx and inflow of migrants who subsequently have influenced the tremendous transformation of the town into an urban center.

### **Urbanization Process: Post Colonial Period**

The post colonial period witnessed the greater urbanization process of Makurdi town. The peak in the urbanization process of Makurdi occurred when in 1976 as a result of the 19 states creation, Makurdi became the headquarters of the newly created Benue state. The creation of the town as the administrative and political headquarters of the state had far reaching implications on the development of the town as urban center:

- a. There was expansion in the development of infrastructural and social amenities such as the provision of portable water electricity, the establishment of schools and hospitals.
- b. There was the movement and establishment of new banks and financial institutions in Makurdi town. This was complemented by the state establishment of industries and financial institution.
- c. There was the expansion of political and administrative structure thus creating room for jobs and employment.
- d. All these policies and development of government and the private sector had far reaching impact on the volume

and inflow of migration to Makurdi town. This development laid the bedrock of contemporary urbanization process of Makurdi town.

The report of the regional plan of Benue state shows that the population increase of Makurdi town after the state creation rose to about 60,000. This figure shows a rapid increase of population from the colonial period to the early 1980s. The sharp increase in population was in terms of the inflow of migration most especially rural-urban migration. As previously discussed before, migrant groups took advantage of the business and job opportunities existing in Makurdi town to invest and exploit. The state creation marked the first accentuation of exodus of migrations to Makurdi town thus indeed transforming the town into urban center.

The years from the 1990s to present has witnessed a greater of migration to Makurdi town thus increasing the population and exalting real pressure on social amenities and facilities. The inflow of migration during this period has been caused by the ethnic cleansing and ethnic genocide of some ethnic group in the north and as well as the southern part of Nigeria. As observed in the colonial report on Makurdi town, the town is major artery between the Northern region and the Southern belts. The entire and religion crisis in Northern Nigerian has caused a massive inflow of migrants mostly to Makurdi town. The town served as a meeting point and reservoir of peeling both from the far North and the Southern belt. As a result of these migrations, the town in recent years has witness a population explosion that has caused tremendous hardship Housing and shelter.

The post-colonial period witnessed greater accentuation of the population increase and urbanization process of Gboko. During this period, several factors accounted for urbanization process of the town. There was the further expansion of administrative infrastructure giving rise to expansion of employment opportunities thus accelerating impetus and tide of rural – urban migration. The postcolonial period also witnessed an increase in the expansion of trading opportunities induced by the provision of transport infrastructures and the provision of law and order. These development the further promoted acceleration of migration.

The Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1969 had a negative impact on the urbanization process of Gboko. The war caused the massive exodus of Igbo traders from Gboko thereby leading to a decrease in population content of the town. The Igbo exodus also impacted negatively on commercial enterprise as most businesses were closed up.

The post war period witnessed major developments such as the oil boom and the creation of Benue state. In 1976, these major national developments the oil boom and state creation all had great impetus on the urbanization process of Gboko. From a population of five thousand people during the colonial period the town witnessed a sharp increase of population to a figure of

about 30,000 in the post war period.<sup>27</sup> This astronomical increase in population was only made possible as a result of the factors of the oil boom and state creation.

The oil boom and state creation opened up great frontiers in the expansion of trade and the expansion of administrative infrastructure. The new economy opened up oil exploration and extraction, which eventually led to the setting up of our filling stations in Gboko and the introduction of oil tankers. The Igbo commercial class, and other migrant groups such as the Hausa and Yoruba also took advantage of the oil boom and invest in the oil sector and other related sectors. Statistics shows that most of the filling station in Gboko was established during this period.

The oil boom era also witnessed the expansion and establishment of schools, hospitals water, electric and financial institutions in Gboko. The provision of these social amenities and social services had a far-reaching impact on the influx of migration to the town. Educational institutions such as the Gboko High School and government Secondary School Gboko were established during this period. In addition to schools, the Bristow High school was established as far back as the colonial period, Gboko witnessed a population increase that was caused by socio-economic development. The establishment of the Gboko General Hospital and setting up of financial institutions and banks such as union banks, first bank and bank of North gave further impetus to migration and the subsequent population increase of the town. The oil boom period generally provided enough capital and investment in the social and economic aspect of the economy. These contributed immensely to rural-urban migration and urbanization of towns. The period witnessed and increase in government investment in social infrastructure and amenities. The period witnessed and increased public spending targeted at providing the basic infrastructure and social amenities that was needed by the nation as a basic prerequisite for industrialization.

The setting up of the Benue Cement Company Yandev near Gboko by the Federal government was another basic industry that saw to the rapid population growth of the town and as well as the urbanization process of the town. The company established in the 1980s became the nerve center of the commercial life of the town. The industry with its linkage benefits and activities has transformed the town from a petty trading and commercial town to a modern commercial center. The population estimate of the town in the 1990s showed that population has grown to a figure of about one hundred thousand inhabitants. This increase is understandable and appreciable against the backdrop of the role that the Cement factory has played in the overall growth of the town. The factory has provided opportunities for job creation and employment, the expansion of business and commercial opportunities, the provision of social amenities and a general inflow of capital and investment into Gboko town. These

developments, without doubt has transformed the status of the town. This development also further attracted a massive wave of migrants into the town thus leading to population growth.

The sitting of the cement factory has great encouragement and promoted the concept of small-scale business enterprise in Gboko town. Statistics from the ministry of trade and industry shows that these business enterprises constitute over 50% of the employment needs of the town. The small-scale business enterprise has become the fastest scheme of generating job and employment in Gboko town and a good source of income and revenue generation. The distribution of business enterprises shows that migrant groups such as the Hausa, Yoruba and Ogoja groups accounts for about 50% of the business enterprises in Gboko town. This figure represents a sharp difference from the distribution pattern of business enterprises in Makurdi town that is predominantly in the hands and control of migrant groups. In Gboko town, indigenous enterprise accounts for as much as 40% of the business enterprise. In recent years, following the mass exodus of Igbo commercial class from Gboko to other towns in Tivland, indigenous entrepreneurs have come to dominate nearly 60% of the commercial enterprise in Gboko town.

## CONCLUSION

Urbanization is a process of the fusion of several ethnicities or races concentrated in a given geo-political unit overtime. Several factors have aided the urbanization process in Tivland. The towns of Makurdi, Gboko and Katsina-Ala were points of colonial economic articulation which attracted a great influx of migrants and population increase. Population increase is one important variable that defines an urban center. The development of infrastructure such as roads and electricity also provided a great impetus in the rise of urbanization. The use of these towns as administrative centers overtime, also have contributed to their space of urbanization. These are all important variables of urbanization of any town in world history.

However, the urbanization process of towns in Tiv society deviates from the character of urbanization of towns in Western Europe and America which was characterized by rapid industrialization as well as job creation. The towns in Tivland lack the industrial character and as such, cannot be truly referred to as urban centers. However, this history gives insight into what is happening or had happened to the urbanization process in Africa from the colonial period to the post colonial era.

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