Migration and Urbanization of Poverty in sub-Saharan Africa: The Case of Nairobi City, Kenya

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Abstract

Urban population growth in sub-Saharan Africa is driven by migration of young adults seeking better livelihoods in cities. This study contributes to understanding the dynamic process of rapid urbanization amidst increasing urban poverty in African cities by describing demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of migrants, identifying push and pull factors, and determining the relative magnitude of rural-urban and urban-urban migration streams using rich data from the ongoing longitudinal health and demographic surveillance study in the slums of Nairobi covering 60,000 people. The results show that while a significant proportion of the population has lived in slums for many years, there is considerable turn-over of the population, with 40% of immigrants coming from other urban areas. Most immigrants come to Nairobi to escape rural poverty, but end up living in slums characterized by poor environmental sanitation, overcrowding, social fragmentation, unstable livelihoods, poor health outcomes, and high levels of insecurity.

Background

The rapid urbanization process in sub-Saharan Africa and the declining economic performance of most African countries have created a new face of poverty characterized by a significant proportion of the population living below the poverty line in over-crowded slums and sprawling shanty towns around major cities. Estimates by UN-Habitat show that about 70% of all urban residents in sub-Saharan Africa live in slums (UN-Habitat 2003). The experiences of the urban poor are unique and often characterized by reliance on cash economy, overcrowding, poor environmental sanitation, lack of security, lack of social and health services, greater indulgence in risky sexual practices, social fragmentation, and high levels of migration (APHRC 2002; Zulu et al. 2002; Brockerhoff and Brennan 1998),

Urban population growth in sub-Saharan Africa is principally driven by rural-urban migration of young adults seeking jobs and other livelihood opportunities in urban areas (NISSER 1997; Andersson 2001; APHRC 2002). For instance, the proportion of Nairobi city-born residents is no more than 20% up to age 35 and less than 10% after age 50, and that half of the Nairobi population came to the city between 17 and 23 years old. Indeed, despite the fall in employment opportunities associated with the economic downturn in Kenya from the 1980s, Nairobi's population continued to grow at about 5% per year between 1969 and 1999 9Government of Kenya 2000). It is estimated that over 605 of the population of Nairobi live in slum settlements.

Given the increasingly poor living conditions and livelihood opportunities that are observed in most metropolitan centres in the region (Brockerhoof and brenna 1998; World Bank, 2000; APHRC 2002). it appears paradoxical that many rural residents continue to flock to

urban areas. Classical migration theories portray migrants as homo economicus moving to areas which maximize their household incomes and overall well-being (Harris and Todaro 1970; Fields 1975; Stark 1984; Stark and Bloom 1985;Oucho 1998). In Nairobi, for instance, attempts to move squatter residents to better and more expensive housing have had limited success. Many prefer to live in the relatively cheap squatter settlements in order to accumulate savings for various investments their home communities (Johnston and Whitelow 1974). This study contributes to understanding the dynamic process of rapid urbanization amidst increasing urban poverty in African cities by describing demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of migrants, identifying push and pull factors, and determining the relative magnitude of rural-urban and urban-urban migration streams using rich data from the ongoing longitudinal health and demographic surveillance study in the slums of Nairobi covering 60,000 people.

Data and Methods

The paper utilizes data from the Nairobi Urban Health and Demographic Surveillance System (NUHDSS) being implemented by the APHRC in two slums in Nairobi, Kenya since 2002. The NUHDSS covers about 60,000 and involves visits to all households once every four months to record all migration movements, reasons for migration, destination and origin places, and so on. Appropriate descriptive statistics is used to show the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of migrants, reasons for migration and the extent of in and out migration to and from the slums.

Preliminary Findings

The migrant population in the slums of Nairobi is youthful (70% aged 24 or less), with low levels of educational attainment (70% with primary education or less). While 72 percent of female migrants have primary education against males 59 percent, 38 percent of males against 23 percent of females have post-primary education. Improving one's economic well-being is the most common reason for migration into the slums. However while most migrants from other slums (43%) and non-slum Nairobi (51%) emphasize lower cost of living as the economic reason for moving into the slums, rural origin and other urban area migrants cite seeking for employment as their primary economic reason for moving. Conflict and associated insecurity and the desire for safer havens are also cited as significant push factors for migrating from places of origin. Females are more likely to move for family reasons and issues relating to conflict and insecurity, while male migrants are more likely to move for economic reasons. While most migrants moved together as households of parents and their children, we observed a special category of migrants: children aged 14 or less who moved alone into the slums (24% from other urban areas and 17% from rural areas).

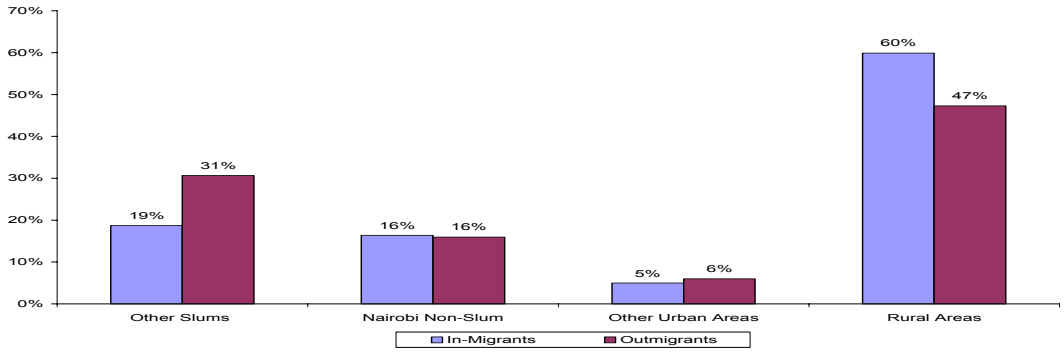
In terms of population mobility in and out of the slums, we observed an average in-migration rate of 25 percent (23% for males and 27% for females). In contrast, the out-migration rate was 23 percent (22% for males and 24% for females).

The paper will build further on the preliminary findings presented in the charts below.

Population Change and Mobility in the Nairobi DSS (Jan-Dec, '03)

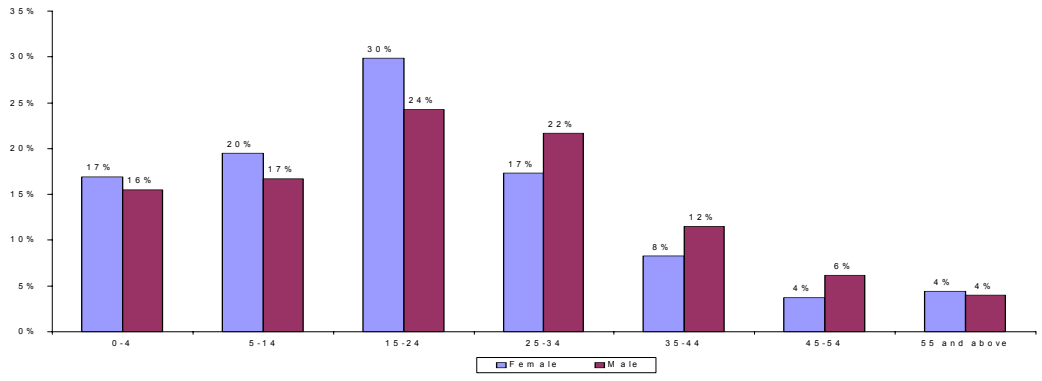
MEASURE	TOTAL	Korogocho	Viwandani
Population Size in 2003			
Total number of people lived in the DSA in 2003	68540	30276	38264
Population on January 1, 2003	49789	23619	26170
Person years lived in 2003	54345	25104	29241
Total Population as of December 31, 2003	56103	25669	30434
Size and Rate of Attrition			
Of 01/12/2003 population in system on 31/12/2003	39637	19686	19951
Annual Attrition Rate	20.4%	16.7%	23.8%
Population Change Indicators in 2003			
Number of Births in 2003	1687	796	891
Number of In-migrants in 2003	12527	4322	8205
Number of Missed out Persons	4224	1473	2751
Number of Deaths	515	327	188
Number of Out-migrants	7803	3045	4758

Origin and Destinations of Migrants



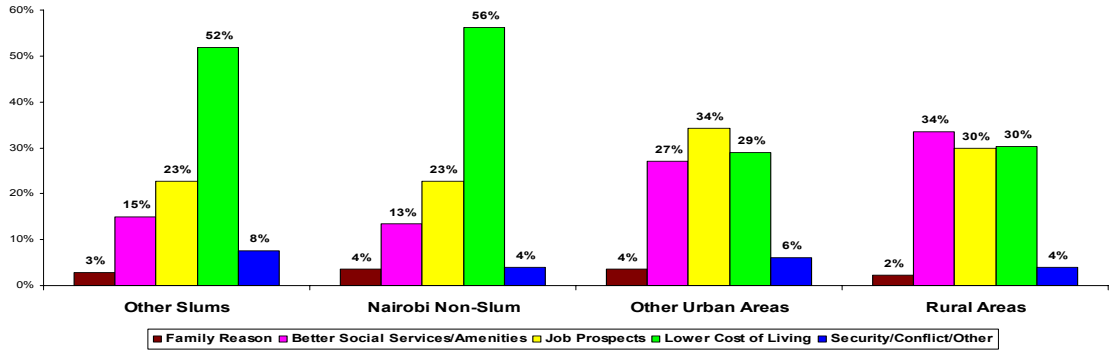
- Rural areas constitute the primary source and destination of migrants
- There is also considerable intra-urban migration exchanges

Age-Sex Distribution of In-Migrants



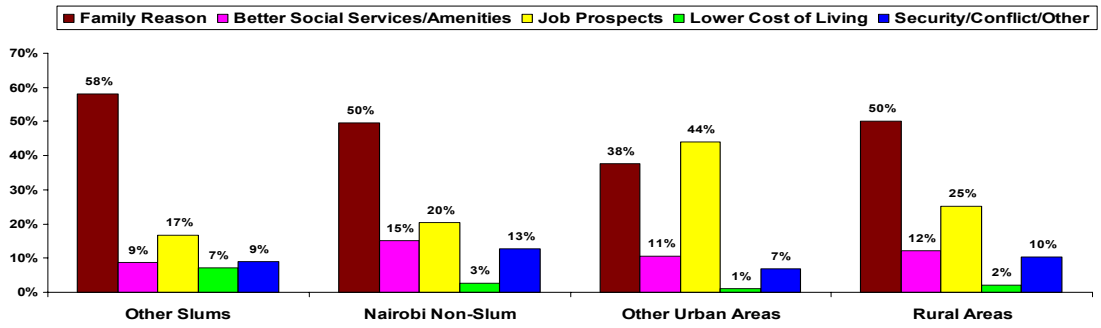
- Close to half of all male and female migrants come between ages 15 & 34
- The same pattern prevails for out-migrants

Reasons for In-Migration by Origin Place



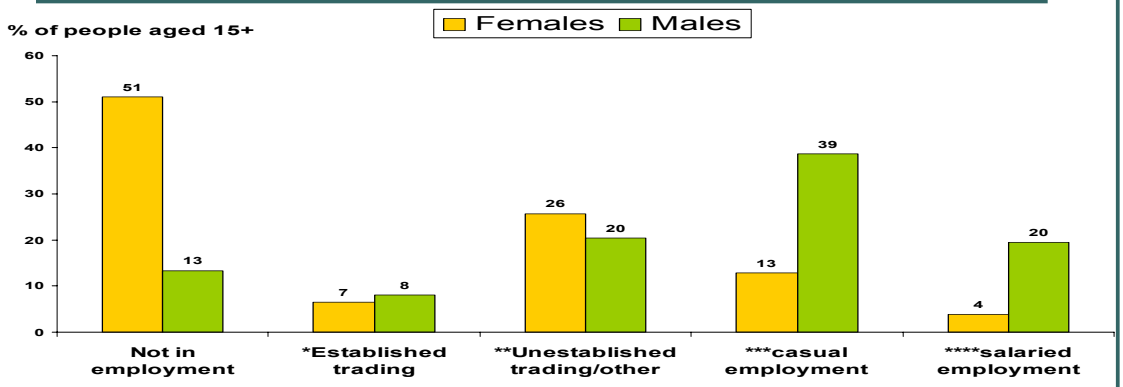
- Lower cost of living is the main pull factor for migrants from other parts of Nairobi
- Better job & economic prospects are the key pull factors for migrants from rural & other urban areas.

Reasons for Out-Migration by Destination



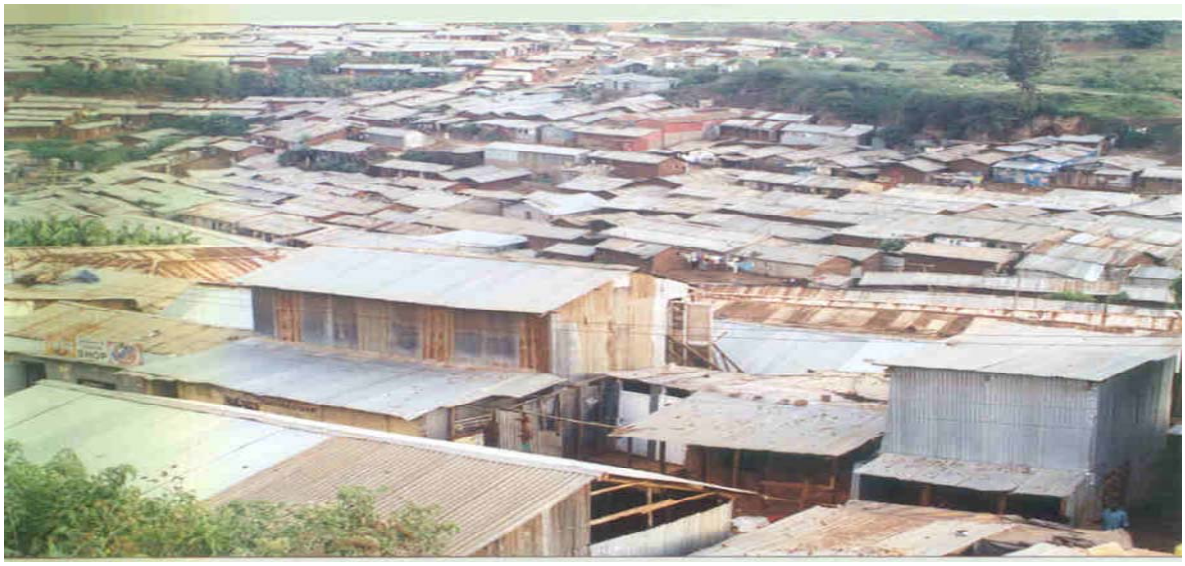
- Family related reasons are significant factors for out-migration.
- Better job prospects is the dominant reason for migration to other urban destinations

Employment Status for NUHDSS Residents



Although most rural in-migrants come to Nairobi to improve their wellbeing, they end up in poverty due to unstable and low-paying livelihoods in slums

Many rural-urban migrants end up living in densely populated informal settlements with sub-standard amenities. It's estimated that over half of Nairobi City's population live in informal settlements.



Migration and Attrition

- Out of the population that was in the NUHDSS on 1 January 2003, 23.8% were not there at the end of 2003
- Out-migration accounted for 61% of the attrition
  - 4% was due to mortality, and 35% (7% of the initial population) were lost to follow-up due to massive demolitions that took place in one of the study areas
- The 2004 data show that the level of attrition has declined dramatically as field operations for tracking population movements have been improved

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