



Working Paper Series on  
Rural-Urban Interactions and Livelihood Strategies

WORKING PAPER 4

**The case of Aba and its region, southeastern Nigeria**

by

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# **1. Introduction**

## **Background to the study**

This report presents the findings of a study of the interactions and linkages between the urban centre of Aba in Abia State (south-eastern Nigeria) and five peri-urban and rural towns and villages in the same state. The basic proposition underlying this study is that rural and urban areas are interdependent localities characterised by exchanges of people, ideas, goods and services, to support livelihoods, rather than two separate and isolated socio-economic entities.

While rural-urban interactions are not a new phenomenon, researchers and policy makers have often treated rural and urban areas, and their residents, as distinct from each other with unique problems that should be studied and solved separately. Such an approach overlooks the fact that what happens to the people in the rural areas affects the city dwellers, and vice versa. It also neglects the fact that the livelihoods of different groups are not affected by artificial rural or urban boundaries. The problems faced and the strategies formulated by people vary instead according to economic, socio-cultural and ecological factors. Such strategies are also affected by macro policies like economic reform and globalisation, which, among other effects (see e.g. Okali *et al.*, 1997; Kalu, 2000), have often increased the cost of production inputs for small-scale producers without a corresponding increase in profits.

## **Differentiating between rural and urban settlements in the Nigerian context**

Urban centres are usually defined on the basis of their population size. In Nigeria, the current official designation is based on a threshold of 20,000. However, this was not always the case: in the 1952 Nigerian Population Census, a community with less than 5,000 people was regarded as rural. By the 1963 Census, this had been changed to the present figure of 20,000 which resulted in the reclassification of over 2,350 communities with populations of between 5,000 and 20,000 from urban in 1952 to rural in 1963. This had obvious problems in comparability of data over the ten-year period (Nelson *et al.* 1972).

Moreover, in the Nigerian context there is a certain amount of fluidity in perceiving a community as rural, urban or somewhere in between. Over the years, because many Nigerians feel more comfortable talking about their hometowns, when in fact they are referring to villages or even hamlets, rural settlements have come to be seen as backward. The apparent endless exercise of state creation, which started in 1963, and the creation of local government areas (LGAs), in an attempt to bring governance closer to the grassroots, has also further compounded the rural/urban definition problem. Each of the new states and LGAs has a capital or headquarters, which has been declared to be an urban centre by administrative fiat. Many erstwhile rural settlements were elevated overnight to an urban status to fit their new designation, regardless of their population size or level of infrastructural development.

On the other hand, many large Nigerian cities still retain elements usually associated with rural communities. Part of this phenomenon is due to urban expansion where former villages were 'swallowed up' by sprawling cities, with changes in land use and livelihood patterns, although some people are still able to retain a rural lifestyle predicated on subsistence farming and other forms of natural resource use.

## **Types of interactions**

**Migration between rural and urban areas** in Nigeria has had a significant impact on both the rural and urban areas because of the number of people involved and the fact that most of these have been the young, often male, most productive members of the rural population. Inequality of opportunities for economic advancement is the major factor that compels rural-urban migration.

Another factor leading to rural-urban migration is the neglect of the infrastructure of rural areas. Many people may move to the city for better economic or educational opportunities due to a lack of markets, good transportation facilities, schools, health facilities, and so on, in the village. From their survey of rural infrastructure in Nigeria, Idachaba *et al.* (1981) found that wide urban-rural disparities were a major reason for the massive rural-urban migration of the 1970s, and they emphasised that looking at wage differentials alone was misleading. The Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) was set up by government in 1986, largely in response to the findings of the survey.

However, the complexity of migration should not be underestimated. Trager (2000) suggests that migrants can often be described as 'multilocal', as they participate in social activities and organisations in more than one place and move among these places. It should also be noted that migration patterns are not restricted to rural to urban movement.

There is growing evidence that urban to rural migration is on the increase in Nigeria, and includes not only the retired people who formed the majority of earlier return migrants, but also of younger people. A number of factors, many of which were exacerbated by the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) initiated in 1986, account for return migration, including disillusionment with urban conditions, declining business fortunes, loss of work, serious ill-health, death of the family breadwinner, disgust with urban noise, congestion or other urban living conditions (Okpara, 1983). Akinwumi and Olawoye (1994) found that some urban residents had to send their children back to relatives in rural areas for school, in order to reduce their financial burden.

In Nasarawa State of Nigeria, Yunusa (1999) found that many urban informal sector workers moved to the rural areas with their businesses to avoid the increasingly stiff competition in the cities. In her study in a northern Kaduna State village, Meagher (1999) reported a trend towards return migration in a significant number of rural households. She noted, however, that, 'this process does not appear to be bringing skills and capital back into the community. On the contrary, return migration has involved a retreat from collapsed opportunities outside' (Meagher, 1999: 62).

Rural to rural migration is another important feature linking different areas. Some activities, such as palm or rubber-tapping, lumbering, trading in farm produce or working

as a hired labourer, require regular movement between rural areas. Many people migrate from rural areas due to a shortage of farmland because the family land allocated to them is too small to feed their families, or because of soil impoverishment and severe erosion. Udo (1975) traces the extension of migrant tenant farming beyond one's local territory to the establishment of British rule around 1900. Before this time, the threat of slavery restricted one's movement to within one's own village area.

Migration is important in the Igbo-speaking areas of south-eastern Nigeria, where the 'mass exodus of people from the overpopulated areas of Iboland has been one of the most striking phenomena of the present (20<sup>th</sup>) century' (Magobunje, 1970). By 1966 as many as two million Ibos were to be found in Northern Nigeria and a million and a half in other parts of the country as temporary or seasonal migrants (ibid), amounting to almost half the total population. The specific example of Abiriba (one of the present study sites) quoted by Mabogunje (1970) is even more striking: 'In a sample survey of randomly chosen families in Abiriba in 1963, it was found that of a total of 177 people, as many as 116 (or nearly 70 per cent) had migrated'.

**Economic exchanges** are an important link between rural and urban areas. Several studies, particularly during the 1960s to 1980s have shown that many rural people depend upon economic help from relatives in the cities. At the same time, gifts and cash have also been sent from rural to urban areas, particularly in the form of food to urban relatives and assistance with the expenses of family members moving to the city. The exchange of cash and gifts between the rural and non-rural areas has been adversely affected as a result of the current economic decline.

There are also changes in social and economic relations between urban and rural residents. The rural dweller now places a high premium on the small piece of land that, in years past, he could offer as a gift to an urban kinsman for building a house. NEST (1991: 8) explains why land acquired as a gift has been relatively rare in Nigeria in recent times as a 'reflection of the somewhat sharp increases in the market values of rural and urban land within the last 15 years' [since the mid 70s]. This in turn is a result of 'serious shortages of land in the face of a rapidly rising population and not-so-rapidly rising family and personal incomes'.

**Social linkages:** Interaction is also facilitated by the strong social support network transcending rural and urban areas. Members of the extended family living in both localities provide a base from which their relatives can move back and forth. Increasing transportation costs in recent years, however, have reduced the frequency of home visits for many people, particularly the poor. Social groups, such as improvement societies or development unions, which enable individuals to be brought to the city for apprenticeships or as house helps, are an important avenue through which rural communities can be improved by the contributions and assistance of the urban-based indigenes.

Characteristics such as age, gender, ethnic background, socio-economic status, educational status and religion influence the decision to migrate to the city, remain in or return to the village, practice urban agriculture or provide an urban service in the rural areas, visit home regularly or not at all, and so on. The social norms and values in a locality may be significant determiners of the type and intensity of such reactions.

Chukwuezi's (1999) study in Anambra State found that many Igbo families encourage members to migrate, believing that staying in the village will not bring financial success.

**Sectoral interactions** refer to occupations and activities characteristic of one locality, but found in both places, such as rural non-farm employment and urban agriculture.

The increasing emergence of sectoral interactions, at least as it is reflected in rural areas, is what Bryceson (1996) refers to as 'de-agrarianisation' or a 'process of occupational adjustment, income-earning reorientation, social identification and spatial relocation of rural dwellers away from strictly peasant modes of livelihood', leading to diversification into non-farm activities, but not necessarily to abandoning farming. Bank (as cited in Iliya, 1999) sees this process as a way to 'incorporate rural to urban, farm to non-farm, traditional to modern movement of rural people in their bid to improve their livelihoods'. These non-farm activities are often a means for small households to accumulate capital (Iliya, 1999). However, the existence of non-farm activities in rural areas is not a new phenomenon. Yunusa (1999) and Meagher (1999) both underline that historically both farm and non-farm activities complemented each other in meeting the needs of the rural family in Nigeria.

### **Policy implications of understanding rural-urban interactions**

It is important that policy-makers and development workers realise that their target populations rely on rural-urban interactions to meet their needs, and interventions must take these linkages into account to provide a holistic approach to improving the welfare of the people who may not strictly fit into the 'rural' or 'urban' way of life. As Trager (2000: 2) states, 'in order to understand what is happening in rural communities today, and to find ways to improve the situation of rural people, we need to look at a wider social field – one that includes people located in urban areas, both elites and non-elites, as well as those located in rural areas'. For this reason, the study provides the end-users, such as policy-makers and development workers, with a better understanding of the complex types of assets and activities needed and used by the average citizen to achieve a sustainable livelihood.

### **Objectives of the study**

The overall aim of the study is to reach a better understanding of rural-urban interactions in south-eastern Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

1. To highlight the forms and extent of interdependence between rural and urban areas;
2. To determine the inter-relatedness of gender, generation and social class with rural-urban interactions;
3. To investigate the social groups and support networks that affect rural-urban linkages;
4. To identify aspects of national, economic and agricultural policies that affect rural-urban interactions;
5. To make recommendations to help formulate policies which enhance the positive role of rural-urban interactions for the livelihoods of rural and urban dwellers.

## **Outline of the report**

The report is presented in seven chapters. Chapter 1. gives a brief overview of the topic, highlighting the difficulty of clearly differentiating between rural and urban localities and the types of interactions that take place between them. The conceptual framework and methodology of the study are discussed in the second chapter. In Chapter 3. the profile of the study area is thoroughly reviewed. This profile is based upon both secondary data and selected findings of the study. Chapter 4. follows with more details on the characteristics and activities including migration patterns in south-eastern Nigeria in general and the study sites in particular. The next chapter reports specifically on the types of spatial and sectoral interactions, including flows of people and goods and other forms of social and economic ties. Chapter 6. reviews policy dimensions of rural-urban interactions, identifying policy effects that most account for rural conditions and particularly the disparity between rural and urban locations. The final chapter gives a summary of the main findings and offers recommendations relevant for policy.

## **2. Conceptual Framework and Methodology**

### **Conceptual framework**

In order to ensure that the linkages between different aspects of rural-urban interactions are clearly identified, a conceptual framework was developed (Figure 2.1). The framework is informed by the proposition that rural and urban areas are interdependent localities, characterised by activities that link different areas, as well as exchanges of people, ideas, goods, services and money, all aimed at meeting similar human needs.

The interactions between rural and urban localities are reflected by flows of people, goods, money, information and other factors, and by sectoral activities like farming, manufacturing or trading that straddle the two localities. However, livelihoods are usually organised around different assets; for example, in rural areas they are likely to be based more on access to natural resources than to paid employment. The interactions are affected by four groups of factors: historical, political (policy)/economic, socio-cultural and environmental, each of which includes several elements.

Each of these groups of factors is also related to the other three groups. For example, while policy on the preservation of forest reserves might be aimed at enhancing sustainable livelihoods in the long run by preserving forest products, it might nevertheless have a negative effect on livelihoods, particularly those of the poor and vulnerable, by reducing access to the forest products that they gather and sell to urban consumers for added income and security. In this case, people may be forced to engage in other activities which might challenge existing socio-cultural factors, force new political or economic policy or further threaten the environment.

The framework considers four levels of analysis: the regional level – in this case, south-eastern Nigeria; the community level – the urban area (Aba) and the villages selected for the study as separate communal entities; the household level; and the individual level.

The differentiation between households and individuals is important because there are



gender and generation distinctions in roles and responsibilities. These can result in tension and conflict over access to resources or use of produce between males and females, young and old, even within households. Throughout the study, the findings reflect these distinctions.

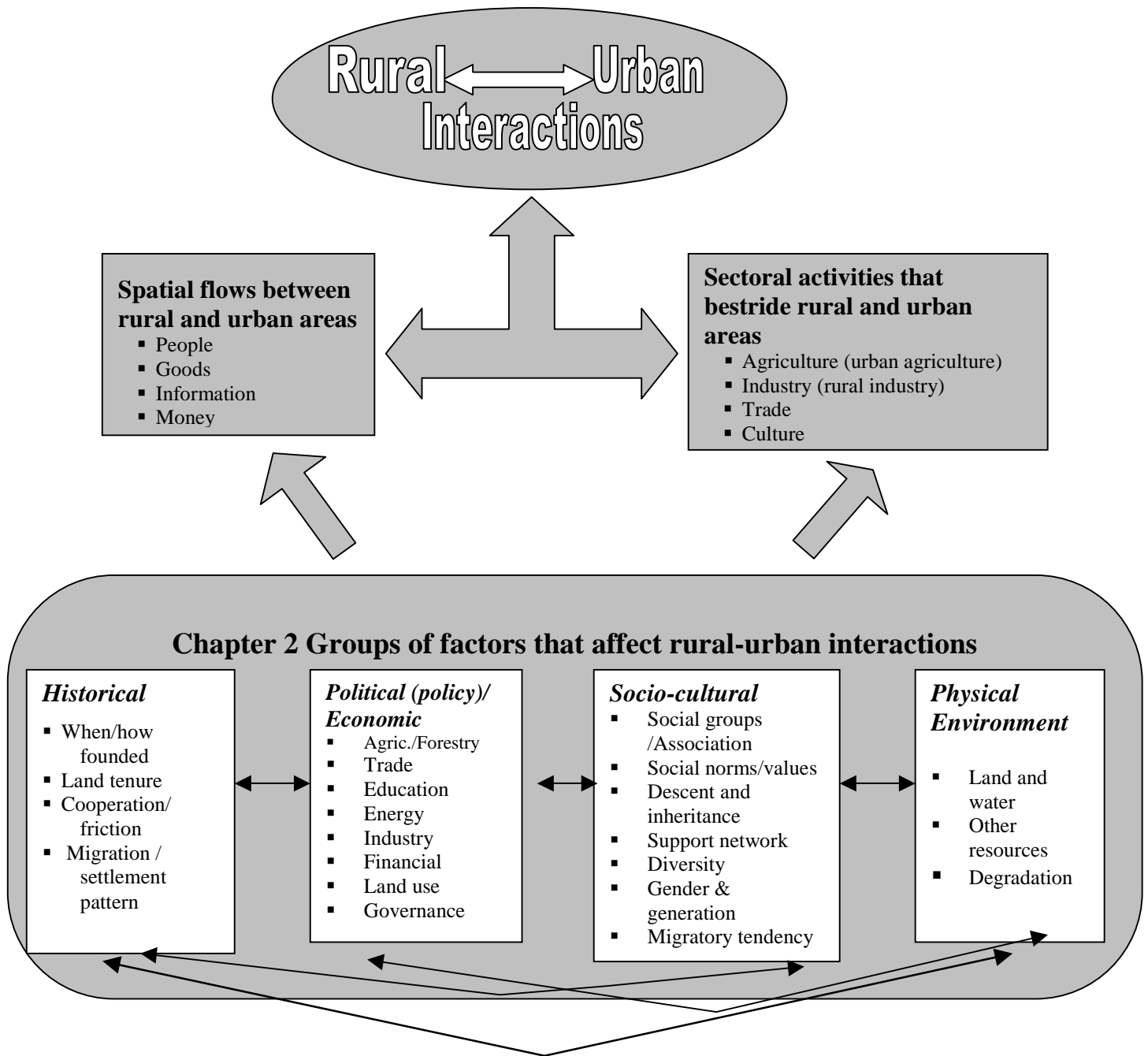
Several of the factors relate to the regional level of analysis, particularly the political or policy/economic level. This is because most of the policies, such as land use, trade, energy, and so on, have a national, or in a few cases, regional dimension. Nevertheless, implementation is likely to vary at the community level. For this reason, the community or settlement is a more relevant level for analysis.

Historical factors relate to both the regional and the community levels. Socio-cultural factors are largely community-based: certain forms of social organisation may be common in the area, but within each town or village, there are different groups and associations with varying types and levels of activity and support networks for members. Similarly, the unique historical development of each community, including migration trends over time, will determine the degree of social diversity.

While some towns and villages are socially homogeneous, with nearly all residents having similar socio-cultural backgrounds, others may exhibit significant diversity. This may affect social cohesion and will result in some households having less secure access to productive resources. Family structure may also vary between communities, as shown in the case of Abiriba having a largely matrilineal descent and inheritance pattern (Nsugbe, 1974), while other surveyed localities are patrilineal. In addition, gender, generation and social class are important socio-cultural variables.

Most of the environmental factors affect communities and, in many cases, particular households. For example, gully erosion may be a problem throughout a community, but it may be more severe in certain locations with the result that some farmers suffer more than others. Loss of soil fertility, coupled with population increases has resulted in greater pressure upon the land and lower productivity. In the case of physical endowment, residents in communities with abundant natural resources can engage in activities that are not possible in others. Distance from an urban centre will affect the type and frequency of 'flows' between village and city. Proximity to rivers and waterways was historically advantageous to trade and development, as well as for establishing industrial activities.

In line with the sustainable livelihoods approach, variation in the type, intensity and frequency of rural-urban interactions is likely to be related to access to capital assets, whether physical, financial, social, human or natural. This approach cuts across the four groups of factors in the conceptual framework. Understanding the factors, types of planned or spontaneous interventions and what has been the effect can lead us to a better idea of what can be done at different levels for the general area, communities, households and individuals. The conceptual framework was critical for monitoring, identifying and filling gaps during the course of this study.



**Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework for Rural-Urban Interactions**

## **Methodology**

### **Study sites**

The study focused on south-eastern Nigeria with Aba in Abia State as the urban centre, linked with five other peri-urban towns or villages in the same state. Detailed descriptions of these sites are given in Chapter 3. Aba was selected because of its intense commercial activity and the large number of relationships it has with other urban centres, as well as rural communities in Nigeria. Aba has the widest migration field of all cities in this part of Nigeria, and is not only ethnically diverse, but shows great social diversity from one part of the city to another. To reflect this diversity, three research sites were selected in Aba for the study:

- Abayi-Umuocham / Umungasi: a sparsely populated residential area characterised by big houses with large compounds owned by wealthier inhabitants;
- Ogbor Hill: a densely populated area of mostly lower class residents, usually tenants; and
- the Ariaria/Express Road area: an industrial/marketing area with some of the traders also residing near their shops.

The five rural communities studied with Aba were selected on the criteria that they:

- should not exceed a distance of 100 kilometres from Aba;
- ensure geographical spread – Akwete to the south, Owerrinta to the west and the other three to the north and north-east, where the people are known to be highly migratory;
- possess a local reputation as a fairly important community at present and/or in the past;
- fit into a peri-urban or rural classification; and
- have established significant social and economic links with Aba.

Thus, the selected communities were:

- Akwete: spatially peri-urban to Aba; known for traditional cloth-weaving and agriculture with market access to Aba and Port Harcourt.
- Owerrinta: almost subsumed by the continuing expansion of Aba metropolis; is in the transition zone and commuting between Aba and Owerrinta is the major form of movement of people.
- Ndi Ebe: separated in space from Aba by about 80 kilometres, but its residents have very strong and direct links with Aba, despite the other urban centres between the two;
- Abiriba: selected as an example of a rural locality with a rising urban profile; is within 100 kilometres of Aba with which it has strong migratory links; and
- Uzuakoli: selected for its unique position as a former important urban centre that is now in a state of decline.

## **Data collection**

A combination of qualitative and quantitative tools was used, although, because of the dynamic nature of the processes involved in rural-urban interactions, more attention was paid to qualitative tools. These included Focus Group Discussions (FGD) and In-Depth Interviews with key informants (IDI). Case studies were derived from the data collected with these two tools.

The field survey was carried out in two phases. During Phase I, qualitative tools were applied broadly to identify the key issues from the viewpoint of respondents residing in rural or peri-urban areas and in Aba. Phase II was designed mainly to fill gaps identified in Phase I, and to investigate more closely issues of land tenure, production, market access, remittances and commodity flows.

### ***Phase I.***

This phase aimed specifically to:

- Increase understanding of specific rural-urban interactions used by different groups to ensure that needs are met;
- Investigate the gender and generational differences in attitudes and activities;
- Seek out the socially accepted ideas regarding the bridge between rural and urban areas; and
- Use the results obtained from this phase as a guide for further qualitative investigations and for designing and implementing a complementary quantitative survey in the second phase of fieldwork.

### ***Focus Group Discussion (FGD):***

The FGDs conducted in this study were tape-recorded, with the permission of the participants, and later transcribed to ensure that the ideas of the people were not wrongly recorded or forgotten. Four FGDs were conducted in each of the research sites, controlling for gender and generation differences, as follows:

- young men (18-25 years of age);
- older men (35 years and older);
- young women (18-25 years of age); and
- older women (35 years and older).

A total of 32 FGDs were conducted in the first phase of the study. Each FGD had six to ten participants. Selecting participants was not too difficult in the rural communities, but more skill was required in gathering individuals with the required characteristics in the larger town, where it was sometimes necessary to gain the cooperation of local associations to select participants.

The major topics for group discussions were:

- Characteristics and activities that are prevalent in rural and urban places in south-eastern Nigeria;

- Types of rural-urban interactions;
- Factors affecting the types, frequency and trends in rural-urban interactions; and
- Impact of rural-urban interactions.

*In-Depth Interviews (IDI) with Key Informants:*

The following are among the key informants for the purpose of the study:

- traditional leaders, such as the *Eze*, local chief or clan head;
- religious leaders,
- leaders or officials of formal or informal local associations,
- officials or workers in governmental agencies, such as local government officials,
- traditional service providers,
- local opinion leaders, and
- staff of NGOs working in the locality.

In Phase I, six key informants were interviewed in each research site, with the exception of the industrial/marketing area of Aba where 7 were interviewed, yielding a total of 49 IDIs for the study.

***Phase II***

In Phase II, ten additional FGDs were conducted, two each (one with men and one with women) in the five rural communities. The major objective was to investigate poverty levels and the effects of social class on rural-urban interactions. After the first phase, it was also apparent that information on the historical background of Aba was very limited. During the second phase, therefore, a specially designed interview schedule was developed to gain a picture of the economic and political history of Aba. A total of 15 respondents (ten male and five female), all of whom were around 70 or older, were selected. These informants were local residents indigenous to original rural settlements that presently make up Aba. The findings from this exercise are presented in Chapter 3 under the description of the study area.

*Commodity Flow Analysis*

Rapid Rural Appraisal (RRA) was used to capture the magnitude and direction of the flow of produce between the urban and rural areas. A large number of randomly selected people at each rural research site was presented with a list of commodities, and asked to specify those commodities coming into or going out of their locality and the relative importance of each. From these responses, the commodities were ranked on the basis of the frequency of mention. The five commodities with the highest ranking, flowing out of and into each community, were identified. In each community, 20-25 major actors and the same number of minor actors (based on the amount of commodity handled) in the commodity chain were identified, and a semi-structured questionnaire administered to them. Five cases from each of the two groups in each location were selected for in-depth interviews using the questions in the semi-structured questionnaire as guides. While the questionnaire explored issues of land tenure and remittances further, the interviews focused mainly on remittances. In-depth interviews were also held with three to five

migrants from each rural study site in Aba to further explore the issue of remittances.

### **3. Profile of South-Eastern Nigeria and Description of the Study Area**

#### **Profile of south-eastern Nigeria**

##### **Location and population characteristics**

South-eastern Nigeria is an area covering about 76,358km<sup>2</sup> east of the lower Niger and south of the Benue valley. The region is located between latitudes 4 and 7 degrees north of the Equator and between longitudes 7 and 9 degrees east. In geo-political terms, it contains nine out of the 36 states of the nation, namely Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers States.

The area is one of the most populous regions in the country. Its population stood at 13,467,328 in the 1963 census, but by the 1991 census, it had grown to around 22,000,000 of the approximately 88.5 million people nationwide, or 25 per cent of the population of Nigeria on only 8.5 per cent of the total area of the country. Ethnically, the region is inhabited by numerous different groups, but predominantly by the Igbo-speaking people that are found in Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers States, the Ibibio people that live in Akwa Ibom State, the Efik and Ekoi who live in Cross River State and the Ijaws that live in Rivers and Bayelsa States, along with the Ogoni people who also reside in parts of Rivers State.

Close to 70 per cent of the population of the region live in rural areas. The most densely inhabited belt stretches across the region from Onitsha through Awka-Orlu-Owerri to Calabar, with the density falling away both to the north-east and to the south-west, except for the urban node of Port Harcourt, which is surrounded by a belt of high population density. Average densities in this zone lie between 250 and 500 people per square kilometre.

Traditional attachment to land, which is seen as an inheritance from ancestors, means that it is not given up and has to support an ever-increasing population. Some parts of the region, on the other hand, have much lower densities. The relatively sparse population of the Niger Delta has been attributed to difficult environmental conditions. Other demographic characteristics of the population include a high birth rate, a declining death rate, a gradual increase in life expectancy and a declining illiteracy rate.

##### **Settlement patterns**

Scattered and dispersed hamlets represent the normal settlement pattern in most of the Igbo and Ibibio lands. This is a product of the gradual disintegration of nucleated settlements as populations grow and demand for farmland increases. Land is of two kinds – house land (*ala ulo*) and farmland (*ala agu*), which form two successive zones. The inner zone is for houses and the surrounding area where people grow oil palm and other trees. The outer zone is where people farm, but do not live (Anigbo, 1987).

Nucleated village settlements are found in the north-east area of Ogoja, and in much of

the Niger Delta, encompassing lowlands of the Niger Valley and Owerri areas. Here, houses are grouped into compounds on either side of one or more narrow streets. The typical village is composed of family units, with each unit living in a compound, made up of houses built of mud and thatch. Recently, sandcrete blocks, corrugated iron sheets and aluminum products have been replacing the traditional building materials.

The social structure of the village group is based on agnatic descent, which regards each village group as a patri-clan (descendants of a common ancestor) and its component villages and their subdivisions as maximal, major and minor lineages of this clan. This correlation between the kinship and village structure is closer among the Igbo than many other Nigerian peoples (Uchendu, 1965).

Urban settlements were virtually absent in this region until the advent of British rule during the second half of the 19th century. Colonial rule contributed to the development of a number of urban settlements, especially along the evolving rail and road-river networks in the region. Such centres include Port Harcourt, Aba, Enugu, Owerri, Umuahia, Okigwe, Calabar and Onitsha. By virtue of their easy accessibility, each of these serves as a point of trade articulation for their tributary areas in the expanding international economic relations involving the export of agricultural produce and minerals, and the import of manufactured goods. Such roles have immense population-pulling potential. With such a head start, these centres have continued to attract the bulk of the modern urban infrastructure, and of the industrial and commercial activities.

### **Socio-economic activities**

Crop farming, raising livestock, fishing and petty trading are important means of livelihood among the people of the area, with men and women engaging in three, four or even five different income-generating activities, normally on a small scale.

Yam, cocoyam, cassava, rice, plantain and vegetables are the main food crops, while palm produce, rubber, coconut and cocoa are the most important cash crops. Compound farms dominated by semi-domesticated trees such as *ube* (African pear, *Dacryodes edulis*), *ogbono* (wild mango, *Irvingia gabonensis*), *ugba* (African oil bean tree, *Pentaclethra macrophylla*) and *ukwa* (breadnut tree, *Treculia africana*) are a common feature of land use in the region. Livestock is usually raised on a small scale with poultry, goats, sheep and dwarf cattle reared on a domestic basis. Poultry reared commercially are also important throughout the region. The Efiks, Ibibios and Ijaws carry out both subsistence and commercial fishing in the swamps, creeks and rivers and in the coastal waters.

Extraction of mineral resources is an equally important activity employing both skilled and unskilled labour. Solid minerals extracted include coal at Enugu, limestone at Calabar and Nkalagu, and zinc, lead and iron at Ishiagu and Abakaliki. Crude oil extraction for petroleum products and natural gas is very important in states such as Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Imo and Rivers. Manufacturing industries abound in the urban centres in this region.

Lumbering is an important economic activity, especially in the high forests of Cross River, Akwa Ibom, Rivers and Bayelsa States. The extraction of non-timber forest products, including firewood, fruits, nuts, leaves, vegetables, is an indispensable

dimension of local economic activity throughout the region.

Petty trading is mainly an adjunct to farming with local and imported goods being exchanged for cash. Market places consist of open spaces under a large tree in small hamlets, or large cleared spaces with temporary sheds for display of goods in the larger rural settlements. In the main urban centre of Aba, the market place is very large and serves a catchment area covering the entire south-east and beyond. As well as daily urban markets, there are also village markets running on eight-day and four-day cycles. Women play an important part in retailing small articles and foodstuff, while men buy and sell the bulkier goods. Full-time traders in the area are either agents of large firms or distributors of products of large manufacturing companies. Other urban activities include private and public sector employment in health, finance, education, and other professions.

### **Political development**

There were no early kingdoms and empires in this region, unlike the several notable cases in other parts of West Africa. However, long before colonial rule, the city states of the Niger Delta - Brass, Bonny, Opobo and Calabar - had made contacts with European traders, and had evolved relatively stable socio-political systems and functional commercial relationships benefiting from their location along the coast. The city-states had profited immensely from the trade in slaves and even more so from legitimate trade following the abolition of the slave trade in the 19th century.

The Ibibio people had their own system of political organisation and governance, while the Igbos, though homogeneous, had a highly decentralised administration. Throughout much of Nigeria and south-eastern Nigeria in particular, traditional chiefs have occupied positions of power in their localities. They have less authority now than in the past as some of their responsibilities have been taken over by state and local governments. Nevertheless, the traditional council of chiefs administers customary provisions. Officially recognised leaders are also paid a regular stipend.

British colonial impositions came gradually to the region, beginning with trade contact, then missionary activities and later the creation of the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1895 with Calabar as the headquarters. Although the region was merged with the colony of Lagos in 1900 to become the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, administratively it remained distinct as a geo-political entity in Nigeria up to 1946 when the three regions, North, West and East emerged, with Lagos as the capital of the Federation. Nigeria gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960 with the three-region structure, but by 1963 had added a fourth region, the mid-western Region.

The separation into 12, 19, 21, 30 and 36 states in 1967, 1976, 1991, 1994 and 1996 respectively dismembered the former south-eastern region of Nigeria into 3, 5, 7 and 9 political entities. As more states were created out of the previous ones, more LGAs were set up. With small towns and villages becoming state capitals and LG headquarters, several rural areas became 'urbanised' almost overnight, with accompanying in-migration and return migration as people anticipated employment opportunities. This urban growth also necessitated infrastructural development. Many lands formerly used for farming were taken over for roads, offices, residential estates, schools and shops. The change in land use patterns put greater pressure on the remaining land and forced some farmers to



change their livelihood strategies.

Like Nigeria as a whole, south-eastern Nigeria is a conglomerate society and opportunities for conflict are inherent in all aspects of society. Persistent demands by minority peoples in the region based on language and other cultural differences resulted in the creation of the first three states out of the former regional unit. Subsequent agitation for the creation of more states in the area led to further subdivision of the region and ultimately into today's nine autonomous political/administrative entities.

### **Natural resources**

This region is richly endowed with minerals such as coal, limestone, lead, zinc, clay, shale, glass sands and petroleum. The latter accounts for over 90 per cent of Federal export revenue. The soils support a variety of food and cash crops. Even the highly leached and impoverished sandy soils of the densely populated zones of Anambra, Imo and Abia States are fully cultivated with crops tolerant of poor soils, including oil palm, cassava and vegetables which support the large population.

The abundant rainfall in the region that ranges from over 3,000 mm in Brass and Calabar to 1,750 mm in Nsukka and Ogoja areas is spread out in two distinct peak periods in July and September. The entire south-eastern region lies within the forest and derived savanna belt of Nigeria. Much of the forestland has been converted to farmland and palm bush dominated by the oil-palm tree. The rainfall supports agricultural activities with little need for irrigation. It also supports luxuriant forests outside farmlands and the recharging of underground and surface water bodies.

### **The study area**

The area of study is in Abia State, made up largely of Igbo peoples living in the forest zone. The estimated population of Abia State is 2,899,417 (projected from the 1991 population size with estimated annual growth rate of 3.0).

Deforestation, soil erosion and biodiversity depletion are the major ecological problems of the area. In south-eastern Nigeria as a whole, erosion has carried away many homesteads and much farmland. Over 300 major erosion sites have been identified in Imo, Abia and Akwa Ibom States (Olawoye, 1997). This has had an adverse effect upon the population in affected areas, largely through further reduction of land available for cultivation, which has contributed to the increasing out-migration and changes in livelihood activities.

### **The research sites**

**Aba:** Colonial Aba was established at the crossing between the Owerri-Calabar road and the Port Harcourt-Enugu railway. This position attracted several manufacturing industries and trading enterprises. In general, the pre-independence era is remembered as a time of considerable development in trade, expansion of residential areas and population growth. Many of the farmlands were bought up and compensation was paid. Farmers moved further away to other farmlands, reduced farming and combined it with trading, or went fully into trading or factory work.

The Biafran War had a devastating effect upon Aba and its residents. This was also a time

of great famine, and many residents were forced to leave in 1968, becoming refugees or returning to their original villages. Their properties in Aba were destroyed and most of the respondents reported that some of their relatives were killed during the war. One elderly man said that the horror did not end with the war because even then Nigerian soldiers forcefully carried away many of their young girls, including some of the young married women.

After the war, people started returning to Aba and economic activities built up again. Industrial enterprises developed, but the main economic activity remains commerce in all its forms, much of it driven by vibrant informal sector activity, including manufacture of textiles, clothing, shoes, polyethylene products, beverages and so on. Aba's growth as a commercial centre was greatly boosted by the relocation of many Igbos from Port Harcourt and Calabar, where many Igbos owned thriving import-export trading businesses before the war. Because of hostility towards the Igbos in these port cities during and after the war, many re-located their businesses to Aba. In the case of Port Harcourt, Igbo property left during the war was seized as 'abandoned property'. Many traders now operate their export/import business through the ports of Calabar and Port Harcourt, commuting daily from Aba. Because of the trading and employment opportunities, Aba's population has grown rapidly from a few thousand in the early 1970s to over half million in 1991.

**Akwete:** Akwete is an ancient village. Its location on the bank of the Imo River made it a slave centre during its early days. Afterwards, most economic activities involving European trading firms relocated to Aba and many Akwete migrants went with them. The current population of Akwete (as of 1996) is estimated to be about 5,578 people (NPC, n.d.).

Akwete is located in Ukwa East Local Government Area (LGA). Administratively, it is organised in about 24 families or compounds. There is a move to re-designate existing compounds as villages, while maintaining the practice whereby each unit is headed by a traditional Chief or Village Head. A council of traditional Chiefs under the *Eze* (literally meaning king) of the community administers the affairs of Akwete. The *Ezeship* of the community is handed down through inheritance.

Fishing, farming and trading, most often combined, are the main occupations of the men. As farmland is insufficient, they frequently rely on leasing land from neighbouring communities to supplement their inherited land. The primary occupation of most women, both young and old, is cloth weaving (Box 1). Akwete cloth is known all over the country and beyond. The inhabitants of Akwete engage in other income-generating activities, but, as in other localities, it is the in-migrants rather than the indigenes who engage in providing goods and services.

The present day population of Akwete is not homogeneous. 'Stranger elements', as non-indigenes are called, have migrated from near and far, including Ibibios, Hausas and Yorubas, as well as people from other parts of the Igbo heartland. Many of these migrants stay for a relatively short period, trading or providing other services. Before the Nigerian Civil War, most migrants from Akwete headed for Aba as their final destination. At the end of the war, however, Aba was perceived to be a city in ruins and was not as attractive to immigrants as Port Harcourt and Lagos. Given the rapid resurgence of the

economy of Aba, it has again become an important destination.

**Box 3.1: Akwete Cloth Weaving: An Important Local Industry**

Three women from Akwete were interviewed about their cloth weaving activities. Two of the interviewees were elderly (60 years or older) and one was 19 years old. This indicates that the activity still continues to be an important, and often the primary, income-earner for women. Both daughters of one of the older respondents, presently at university, have their looms in the family house and they weave any time they are home. The 19-year-old respondent is involved in weaving because 'it is the tradition of Akwete women', and though she hopes to gain admission to university, she would still continue cloth weaving.

All three women had been taught weaving by their grandmothers in early childhood. The initial capital to purchase their own loom and the first skein of yarn came from their mothers or other relatives.

The average weekly output for most weavers is two pairs, when they do not spend too much time on other activities. The cost of producing one pair is about N1,500 to N3,000, depending on the quality of the materials used. The finished product sells from between N2,500 to N5,500, gaining an average profit of N1,000 to N2,500 per pair. The older respondents maintained that it was from the proceeds of their cloth weaving that their children were educated.

Buyers come from Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Aba, Lagos, Abuja and other cities. Some customers are Akwete indigenes who take the cloth to the urban markets. One of the older women said that while the activity yields a good income, it does not meet the needs of the family as well as it used to, so she practices a little farming, too. Nevertheless, women in Akwete still consider cloth weaving to be their primary source of income.

One of the women regretted that, despite the popularity and importance of Akwete cloth, the government had not made any attempts to improve on the technology. One of the other women said that if there was a yarn-producing mill nearby, it would reduce their difficulties of obtaining the yarn. Recently, the women have formed the 'Akwete Women Weavers Association' from which they can obtain a small amount of credit for their business when necessary.

*Owerrinta*, almost mid-way on the Owerri-Aba highway, is located on the eastern bank of the Imo River, within commuting distance from Aba. Its projected population for 1996 was 2,384 (NPC, n.d.). It is made up of two distinct groups: the indigenes on the one hand and 'stranger elements' (or migrants) on the other. The indigenes inhabit the more easterly portions of the territory, while the migrant population or non-indigenes inhabit the westerly strip close to the waterside. Many of the non-indigenes are descendants of early colonial era migrants who either had established private trading ventures during the period, or had come as employees in one of the several European trading firms that exploited the advantages of river transport to conduct business. The presence of such companies acted as a stimulus to migration during the colonial period when Owerrinta was an important trading centre for palm oil produce. The heterogeneity of the population structure has been maintained ever since. These migrants have stayed in Owerrinta, despite the fact that the companies that attracted them in the first instance disappeared following the Nigerian Civil War.

The major activities of the indigenous population are farming and fishing, but the

'migrants' cannot engage in fishing as an occupation, as this is the exclusive prerogative of indigenous Owerrinta people. Several waterside residents of Owerrinta are second generation migrants who still perceive themselves as strangers or migrants because they cannot hold title over land outside the parcels or plots of land their fathers or forefathers had acquired during the colonial days. One lamented that when they want to engage in farming, 'land is leased to us by indigenous land-lords on a yearly basis as if we are migrant farmers'. As a result, many non-indigenes engage in trading as their major activity, while some others are involved in factory work.

Sub-urbanisation of industrial activities from nearby Aba is evident in Owerrinta. As well as three paper-manufacturing plants, there is also a plant that produces packing cartons, all of which increase the opportunities for income diversification.

A good road network links Owerrinta with the two major cities of Owerri and Aba, both of which are within commuting distance. As a result, urban employment has not involved large-scale out-migration from the village as it has in other communities located further away and with poorer access to transport.

**Ndi Ebe:** According to the publication, *Abia at a Glance, 1992*, of the Bureau of Budget and Planning Office of the Governor of Abia State, there were 345 farming families distributed in ten compounds in Ndi Ebe in 1992. The population size of the community in 1996 was estimated to be 3,522 (NPC, n.d.).

Ndi Ebe has a flat, swampy terrain with fertile soil that is good for rice production, further encouraged by the Imo River Basin Development Rice Project. Favourable conditions for rice production have encouraged in-migration to Ndi Ebe from within and outside Abia State. The migrants often stay for short periods before leaving the village to start different businesses with the profits they have earned. The 'pull' to the community for rice farming with its handsome profits among the migrants is, at the same time, a 'push' for young people who want to escape the drudgery of farming. For them, the 'pull' to the cities for trading is a stronger force. The young people that remain in the village prefer to work as labourers for large-scale farmers who will pay them in cash, rather than cultivating their own farms

There are several development unions/associations present in the village, with branches in several major towns or cities in the country. The out-migrants maintain close relationships with those at home and contribute to various community development projects. The major cultural activity is the *Ekpe Aka* (long masquerade), which takes place every two years.

A low level of infrastructural development characterises Ndi Ebe. The access road is very poor, particularly during the rainy season. This negatively affects the reliability of public transport and access to markets. Small rice farmers often sell their paddy rice to entrepreneurs who buy it very cheaply, process it – sometimes in their own mills – and then sell the processed rice at a much higher price. Large, commercial farmers are usually able to arrange a way to market their products by using tractors. The major functioning facilities available in Ndi Ebe are the primary, secondary and commercial schools and a health centre.

**Abiriba** is in Ohafia Local Government Area of Abia state, about 100 km from Aba. The

population size for 1996, projected from 1991 census figures, was estimated to be 45,821. Abiriba is essentially a rural town located within relatively short traveling distances to several administrative and commercial centres. It is made up of three contiguous large villages with ill-defined boundaries – Amaeke, Agboji and Amogudu – each of which comprises many compounds.

Out-migration as a strategy for alleviating poverty and for accumulating wealth has a long history in Abiriba. In pre-colonial times, out-migration was undertaken mainly to market skills as smiths and artisans, fabricating all manner of tools and items, particularly weapons for inter-tribal warfare. Abiriba people also migrated as mercenaries. From colonial days to the present, migrants from Abiriba have been involved in trading all types of commodities, but particularly textiles and clothing.

Despite the prevalence of out-migration, so strong is the tie with home that it seems a major goal of every migrant is to accumulate enough funds to build a modern house as a retirement home. This practice has made a far-reaching impact on the physical environment in Abiriba, and construction work has become an important employment opportunity for farmers, although virtually everyone still does some farming. The acreage of farmland has shrunk and farms are now more distant from each other. More marginal areas are now being farmed to compensate for those taken up for residential expansion. Abiriba also has an unenviable record for severe gully erosion which threatens some buildings (NEST, 1991). Visits from out-migrants are frequent, and the size of the population fluctuates between weekends and weekdays. At weekends, particularly when there are burials or other events, and during holiday periods such as Christmas / end of year, the population more than doubles.

The age-grade system is very strong in Abiriba. Initially organised for the defence of the settlement, it now provides organised service to the community. The culmination of the service of any given age-grade is the rulership of the town in the last four years before that age-grade retires from communal service, handing over to the succeeding age-grade. Most of the development projects in the town are attributable to age-grades. They include communal amenities like the official residence of the chief, town halls, schools, colleges, technical training institutions, hospitals, post office, library, motor parks etc.

*Uzuakoli*, in Bende Local Government Area, has a long history dating back to the time of the slave trade when its market, Agbo Agwu, was a major centre for slave exchange. The community is made up of five villages, Agbozu, Amamba, Amankwo, Eluama and Ngwu. According to the projected population size for 1996, the number of residents is about 1,845 people (NPC, n.d.). Uzuakoli is known for the Leprosy Colony, the railway station and the Methodist College established in 1923. The other existing infrastructure includes primary and secondary schools, a post office and a library.

Its location along the railway line connecting northern and southern Nigeria brought some prosperity to the village before independence, with trading companies establishing themselves there. However, the development of alternative transport networks and the alleged lack of support from local politicians favoured a nearby town and marked the decline of Uzuakoli.

Farming is the predominant activity, supported by trading and crafts. Agbozu village is particularly well-known for its yams, rice and okra, which attract traders from other

areas. Male farmers in Uzuakoli specialise in yams, while women grow cassava, cocoyams and okra.

There is limited in-migration, although some people do come for rice farming, palm cutting and trading. There is, however, a sizeable population of non-indigenes who have lived here for a long time in settlements around the railway line known as 'quarters', but who do not mix with the indigenous population.

There are several associations with branches throughout the country in charge of the upkeep and development of the town, maintaining law and order in the community, and helping to maintain ties between indigenes at home with those elsewhere. The associations also have branches all over the country. These associations assist new migrants to the urban areas by providing them with accommodation, money and moral support. Uzuakoli is known for its *Ilaoso* festival, which is usually held biennially in December. During this festival, the traditional census is conducted and celebrations are held.

#### **4. Characteristics, Activities and Migration Patterns of Rural and Urban Places in South-Eastern Nigeria**

##### **Characteristics of urban places and people**

Participants in the focus group discussions, as well as key informants, were of the general view that there is a clear distinction between rural and urban. In both rural and urban areas, there was little gender or generational difference in the way that the two localities were described, but the characterisation of rural and urban was usually made through comparison, relating the two localities with each other. The major aspects of differentiation between the two were in terms of job opportunities and level of infrastructural development.

##### **Better employment and commercial opportunities**

From both rural and urban respondents, urban centres were seen as places for more opportunities in business and for employment. Rural respondents particularly felt that there was a relative abundance of 'white collar jobs' in the urban as compared to the rural setting. The presence of a civil service population and technically oriented factory workers were cited as an important distinguishing characteristic between the urban and rural community. Several respondents described an urban area as *Obodo mepere emepe* (literally meaning 'opened up town' or developed town). Urban people were perceived to be 'better-dressed, better-fed and better-exposed to modern civilisation than rural people'. Many respondents recognised the importance of the population characteristics in defining an urban place. They described an urban area as a place with high population density, composed of people from different ethnic groups.

### **Infrastructural development in south-eastern cities**

There was a general feeling reported that cities in south-eastern Nigeria were disadvantaged compared with cities in other parts of the country. The argument was based on what was considered to be the federal government's attitude of neglect of the region's infrastructural development. Electrical and communications services, NEPA (Nigerian Electric Power Authority) and NITEL (Nigerian Tele-communications) were perceived to be more efficient in other parts of the country. There may be some support for this claim. A survey by Idachaba *et al.* (1981) revealed significant disparities among states and broad ecological regions in rural infrastructure. They note that these 'disparities are partly due to historical factors and partly due to varying levels of seriousness and commitment of successive LGA and State governments to the issue of rural basic needs and rural welfare'.

Young male respondents from Aba presented the claim in the following manner:

'Obsolete transformers and outdated telephone cables are usually sent down to the East in comparison with better equipment sent to the North in particular'.

supply to the south-eastern states is 'the most terrible in the nation' (Box 4.1).

As a result, the incidence of power failure is higher in the cities of the south-east than in northern cities. The Federal Government appears to be aware of this, and admits that electricity. Despite this, urban centres were still seen as benefiting from a better infrastructural base, allowing greater potential for industries and leading to more possibilities for personal advancement. Participants went on to state that urban centres are 'the origin of every good thing, centres of excellence', particularly in cities outside south-eastern Nigeria 'where you can see more Federal Government presence'. They also noted that cities have basic amenities such as electricity, pipe-borne water, good roads, big markets, and planned streets. .

#### **Box 4.1: The Federal Minister for Power and Steel Laments Power Supply to the South-East**

'ABUJA – Power and Steel Minister, Dr. Olusegun Agagu, said Tuesday that the state of electricity supply to south-eastern states was the 'most terrible' in the country.

Answering questions from newsmen during the inauguration of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) monitoring committee in Abuja, Dr. Agagu said: 'It is a fact that electricity power to the eastern states is very bad, in fact, the most terrible in the nation.'

The minister gave the reason for this as the bad state of the two power stations in the region – Afam and Oji River power stations. 'The zone has the ill-luck of having the oldest power station (Oji River power station) in Nigeria and this station has been shut down completely. The other one, Afam, is operating at very low capacity,' he stressed.

Government, he explained, had, however, constituted a technical team to reactivate the power stations soon. The reactivation, which he said would take over 15 months to complete would begin in November, 2001, as according to him, the funds would come from the 2001 budget. He, however, assured that the Federal Government would construct a 132 KVA plant to take care of the area'.

Source: Okechukwu Jombo: Vanguard, Thursday, November 2, 2000: p.3.

Urban people are able to gain current information and have greater access to the government.

At the same time rural respondents were particularly critical of the poor sanitary conditions in the cities. During the FGD with young men at Akwete, the discussants argued that rural areas enjoy better standards of environmental sanitation than most urban centres. They supported their view by calling attention to improper waste disposal in many urban centres where refuse blocks streets and emits a foul smell. Respondents identified both advantages and disadvantages to life in the city, as seen in the summary below (Box 4.2).

**Box 4.2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Life in the Urban Areas**

*Advantages of living in the city:*

- Improved quality of life;
- More opportunities for securing a better income;
- Availability of social amenities;
- Exposure to people from different ethnic groups, with greater exchange of ideas;
- Access to better medical facilities; and
- Presence of large markets for sale of products in large quantity.

*Disadvantages of living in the city:*

- High crime rate including armed robbery, fraud and assassination;
- Impersonality - people in urban areas do not care about the welfare of others;
- High rate of accidents;
- Environmental pollution;
- Immoral living;
- High level of taxation; and
- High cost of living

**Economic activities in cities get a boost from commercial bus services**

Economic activities are clearly influential in promoting the flow of people and goods between rural and urban areas. Most respondents agreed that rural-urban interactions had increased over the last ten to 20 years. The main reasons for this were easier transportation to and from the cities and greater economic opportunities opening up in the urban areas. An important factor has been the emergence of the 'night flight'; luxurious, commercial bus services that link major urban centres all over the country. The buses depart from an urban centre by evening and arrive at their destinations early the next morning. Many traders coming to or leaving Aba and other commercial centres are able to travel at night, conduct their business during the following day and then return overnight. This has the dual advantage of reducing the time and expenses for people conducting business or attending meetings, since they do not have to stay overnight in a hotel.

**Prominence of Aba as an important urban centre**

Aba was generally considered to be one of the most important urban centres in south-eastern Nigeria due to its commercial activities. Respondents from Aba proudly pointed out that local traders import goods through Port Harcourt only to re-sell them to local



distributors based in Port Harcourt, Enugu or Onitsha. Other prominent cities that were often cited included Enugu for its administrative importance and Port Harcourt for the job opportunities with the oil industry and its seaport and airport. Onitsha was also commonly mentioned for its commercial activities.

## **Characteristics of rural places and people**

### **Natural environment and traditional values**

Urban respondents from Aba characterised villages as places where inter-personal relations are closer than in the cities and rural people as more 'innocent' in their dealings with fellow rural residents. In Ndi Ebe, a respondent noted the advantage of rural living in the abundant play areas for children. Respondents from Abiriba maintained that rural dwellers enjoy closer family ties, have greater security and spend much less on rent and food. Moreover, rural areas are governed by customary law, while urban areas rely on statutory law. The advantage of customary law carried out in local courts is that the traditional rights and obligations of people, not always recognised by statutory law, can be upheld. Justice can also be more quickly carried out. Carrying a case to the urban court is not only expensive, but time-consuming as a case may drag on for years. With more serious offences like armed robbery or murder, the customary court would be out of its jurisdiction. Determining the exact limitations of the customary court is sometimes difficult. In the past, all matters were handled by the customary system, but the influence of formal agencies of social control, including the police and modern courts have extended into the rural areas.

### **Varying significance of different villages**

Many respondents from both urban and rural areas recognised that there are differences between villages and that some rural areas are more important than others. The reasons associated with the perceived importance of a rural location include:

- Personalities associated with different villages;
- Differences in natural resource endowment from one village to another;
- Location of a village such as being at the convergence of road and/or rail networks;
- Historical background of a village, such as the slave trade centre of Uzuakoli or the well-known traditional cloth of Akwete;
- Presence of a four-day or eight-day cycle market; and
- Direct link and short distance to urban centres

### **Poverty conditions in rural areas**

For many respondents, the rural areas are considered to be synonymous with want and lack. The people of several sites described the rural area as *Obodo na emepeghi emepe* ('an unopened town'). An elderly woman from Owerrinta summarised her perception of the rural area as a place in 'darkness' (*Ha ka no n'isi*, literally 'they are still in blindness').

Some respondents believe there is a higher mortality rate in the villages, as shown in Box 4.3.

**Box 4.3: Do Rural Areas have a Higher Death Rate?**

During the FGDs, there was some discussion as to whether a distinguishing characteristic between rural and urban areas could be a difference in the mortality rates, noting that the death rate in the rural areas appeared to be higher. On the one hand, it might be argued that medical attention may be easier to attain in the urban areas. On the other hand, however, it was argued that the seemingly higher death rate in the rural than in the urban centres is the fact that the rural areas attract a large number of retired people who lived in the cities until they reached an advanced age and then returned home. 'They invariably make the rural area a place to come and die' said one respondent. The apparent high mortality rate in rural areas was also partly due to the fact that wherever one dies, the body is brought home for burial. Weekends in the village are often marked by funeral ceremonies, giving the impression of a high death rate even though many of the funerals are conducted for people who died in the city. Another commented that when you compare the frequency of death among the younger people living in the urban and rural areas, there seems to be no difference in the death rate among this age group.

It should be noted that young and old, male and female, better-off and poorer respondents for the most part shared the common view that life in rural areas was more difficult, had fewer opportunities and was less likely to lead to economic progress than life in the cities

In Ndi Ebe, participants in the FGDs commented that children in rural areas generally lacked learning stimuli. They also bemoaned the lack of variety of food. A young male respondent in another rural community described the rural area as 'a poor man's place'. His mates compared the tall modern buildings of Abuja and Lagos to the 'mud huts' built of thatch in the rural areas.

In the FGDs with young men from Uzuakoli, the point was made that 'there are no things to help life' in rural places and that rural people do not get anything unless they move out. The view was presented in a FGD with older men in Abiriba that, 'Living in rural areas makes the poor poorer, because they will not be able to find a better job'. Older men in an FGD in Ndi Ebe compared the conditions of rural and urban working as follows:

'Village money is made in a hard way, by working long hours in the farm, while making money in the urban area is easier. However, the urban dweller, unlike the rural dweller is prone to disasters such as motor accidents, armed robbery attacks and fire outbreaks'.

Despite the claim of official neglect, respondents were of the view that villages in south-eastern Nigeria were better developed than those in other parts of the country due to the serious community efforts at self-help, resulting in more rural schools, clinics, postal agencies, and more modern architectural buildings. Nevertheless, they also noted that there is more land available for farming in the northern and south-western parts of the country, which allows for crop rotation, meaning that farmers get better yields in those regions.

### **Different social classes in the rural communities**

There was a general consensus among the key informants from the different rural research sites that the socio-economic status of most rural residents was average to below average, the majority of the population falling into the latter category. The fine homes being built in the communities were constructed by those who had moved out and made money in the urban areas and were preparing for their later return to the village. This serves as a constant reminder that to move up, one has to move out.

From the FGDs in the second phase of the study, the respondents noted that there are three distinct social classes evident in the rural areas:

- rich (*ogaranya* or *aka ji aku* or *ndi akaji aku*),
- middle class (*ndi na achuta ihe ha ga eri* or *obere ogaranya* or *ndi ekpere afo*), and
- poor (*ogbenye*).

These classes are distinguished by their manner of dressing, housing, amount of land, livestock, cars and level of education. The very rich have solid and comfortable houses, expensive cars, many livestock and large amounts of farm produce, and are able to send their children to university. In Ndi Ebe, a characteristic of the rich was that they also have large cocoa and rubber plantations. Farmers may fall into the rich or poor categories. The distinguishing factors are the scale of operation and type of crops grown. For the most part, poorer rural residents, do not own plots of land, except for the small area where they have built their houses. They acquire most of their farms by leasing and have small yields. Tenant farmers form a significant proportion of the poorer class. Those engaged in trading or other activities are similarly divided between rich and poor. As with farming the scale of operations is the major feature distinguishing between them.

### **Changing land tenure practice**

The Land Use Act of 1978 (Box 4.4) is the statutory instrument controlling land tenure in Nigeria. But, in reality, there is some variance between the policy and actual land acquisition practices.

In most of south-eastern Nigeria, as well as other places in the country, land ownership is rapidly slipping away from the hands of the community to individuals or families through outright purchase. This is largely informal, in the sense that formal procedures such as the ob In general, individually owned land that is not clearly assigned by will or so before the owner dies reverts to the family; hence the frequent family disputes in the country over such land. It would appear that the less distant and more accessible a location is from an urban centre, the more likely it is that land would be in private hands. Thus in Ndi Ebe, which is remote and least accessible to Aba, communities or families predominantly own land under the customary system. In contrast, relatively little land is so owned in Akwete which is very near to Aba. Nevertheless, other factors, including ease of transportation, are very significant determinants of land tenure. In all cases, land tenure rights are different for non-indigenes. In other words, acquiring land for farming is more difficult for non-indigenes than for indigenes, who, under the customary system can rent land and farm only for limited periods. The Land Use Act makes land available to all Nigerians, regardless of migrant status, but this is only for land allocated by the

governor of the State.

**Box 4.4: Land Acquisition and Transfer under the Land Use Act of 1978**

‘Enacted on 28<sup>th</sup> March 1978, as the Land Use Decree and re-christened Land Use Act (LUA) in September 1980, the chief objective of the LUA was and still is to make land for development easily available to all individuals, groups, institutions and governments. The Act provides for the granting of statutory rights of occupancy over rural land. The LUA makes it clear that anyone or any group can apply for and obtain land in rural or urban areas. Further, it specifies the maximum sizes of land, which may be granted to each applicant for various purposes: crop farming (500 ha.), livestock grazing (5,000 ha.), quarrying or building materials (400 ha.), and so on. Having provided for the acquisition of land, which is easier talked about than practically achieved, the LUA unequivocally forbids the surrender or alienation of rights of occupancy or of even the certificates conveying those rights, except under very stringent conditions. Sections 21 and 22 of the Act make it unlawful for any right of occupancy to be sold or otherwise transferred to some other person without the prior consent of government. In addition, when the holder of a statutory right of occupancy dies, the land he had held or the rights thereto ‘shall not be divided into two or more parts’, except with the consent of the Governor.

Finally, the LUA vests all the land of each State in the Governor of the State, to hold in trust and administer for the use of all Nigerians. Thus, the Governor can revoke a right of occupancy for a number of reasons, including ‘overriding public interest’. Such broad revocation powers, the immense difficulty which ordinary Nigerians have been experiencing in securing land under the Act and the ease with which many influential citizens seem to have acquired vast areas of land belonging to poor and illiterate villages are among the cases of widespread disenchantment with the LUA and underlie incessant calls for its repeal’.

Source: NEST, 1991: 8-9.

**Effect of soil fertility upon rural livelihoods**

The soils in south-eastern Nigeria are generally fragile and prone to erosion. Soil fertility can be an important factor in rural-urban migrations. Overall, less than half of the indigenes rated soil fertility as high in the study areas, with the least fertile soils occurring around Abiriba. At Ndi Ebe, the majority of the respondents rated soil fertility as very high, and this comparative biophysical environmental advantage explains why a greater number of the residents in Ndi Ebe engage in farming as their primary occupation. This is also the case in Uzuakoli.

**Migration and home visits**

**Who is a migrant?**

In most research sites, respondents considered migrants to the urban areas as ‘people living abroad’, those living in their rural place of origin as ‘people living at home’ and the non-indigenes of a rural community ‘strangers’. As Honey & Okafor (1998) note, ‘Nigerians draw an important distinction between ‘indigenes’ and ‘strangers’. Indigenes are people who trace their paternal ancestry to a particular place. All others in that place are ‘strangers’ (or migrants), even if born there. In pre-colonial times the distinction may have had a security function, especially given the dangers inherent during the slave trade

and the various wars that occurred periodically among the tribes'. The label of 'migrant' or 'stranger' remains for anyone outside his or her place of origin, regardless of the length of time one spends in that locality, and this has implications for the rights accorded to people living together in a place. Only the 'indigene' has full rights to land and sometimes to harvesting of natural resources such as non-timber forest products.

### **Temporary rural-urban migration**

The phenomenon of 'temporary' migration refers to the movement of rural-based craftsmen, technicians or even herbalists to the city to engage in a particular assignment, after which they return home and resume their normal rural-based activities. Other migrants go to the cities to earn a specific amount of money or learn a particular skill or trade and later come back to establish their enterprise at home. While there may be some 'push' from family and friends to migrate, the fact remains that 'home is home' and that parents and peers will want their loved ones to remember where they are from and one day to return.

Urban respondents of all categories expressed a strong opinion that these days, there is no such thing as temporary migration, where 'temporary' refers to short term. It is temporary only in the sense that ultimately (even if it is at retirement or death) the migrant returns to the village. Otherwise, it is argued, the migrant stays on for as long as it takes him/her to accomplish the major objective for which he/she set out in the first instance. However, this does not prevent the migrant from visiting home occasionally or regularly while permanently domiciled in the urban centre.

### **Reasons for migration**

The economic motive appeared the most common reason for rural-urban migration. Respondents in the market/industrial areas of Aba emphasised the attractions of the commercial life of Aba as a major reason for their migration. 'Aba is synonymous with wealth' and once you are there, you will always do well economically. It was agreed that 'no matter the small scale of your business when you begin, those who show determination always rise to the top.' The local perception seems to support the idea that no-one can have economic success in the village and that going to the city will bring riches. This has not always been the case in reality as evidenced by some people not coming home because they do not have the money to build a house or establish a business. Nevertheless, the belief serves as a strong 'pull' to the city.

This view also serves to label a young person who remains in the village as an 'idle person loitering about the village'. He or she may become the object of local ridicule unless they show the initiative to go and achieve something better in the city.

From the IDIs conducted in Aba, the following were given by most key informants as the major reasons for migrating to Aba:

- Join relatives / friends who were already in town;
- Escape the drudgery of rural life;
- Pursue wage employment;
- Learn a trade by being apprenticed to an older person; and

- Engage in business.

Perceptions of high living in the urban centres are communicated to the rural areas directly by the higher standard of living achieved by those who have migrated, and indirectly by various means including exposure through trade, newspapers, television, radio, gossip or education.

### **Gender dimensions of migration**

Respondents from all study sites generally agreed that in the past young men were much more likely to migrate than women, particularly if unmarried. Today, they argued, males and females migrate to towns in search of opportunities in about equal numbers. They explained this change in terms of increased exposure of women to formal education, which has eliminated many of the cultural barriers against them to pursue a trade or profession. Box 4.5 presents an example of some of the social forces that have led to a change in the migrating behaviour of young Igbo girls.

Respondents from Akwete stated that a major destination for their migrating male and female youth is Port Harcourt due to the attractions of the oil industry. Lower patronage of the Akwete cloth has been one of the reasons for the present-day migration of young women, whom the local cottage industry can no longer fully support at home. A common reason for young women to migrate to other areas, whether rural or urban, is marriage to someone from another locality. For women who migrate first to the urban areas to learn a skill or to trade, the likelihood of marrying someone from a more distant place has greatly increased.

#### **Box 4.5: When Should a Young Woman Leave the Village? Changing Views from Igboland**

In traditional Igbo society, the former taboo against unmarried women moving out of the village is becoming relaxed if their migration is for gaining more education or learning a skill. Normally they will go to live with relatives in the city, who then supervise their training as well as their movements.

The traditional values dictating when a woman could leave the village of Abiriba was challenged by the civil war. In the 'olden days' when an unmarried Abiriba girl 'ran away' from the town, she would be located and returned to the town by the town members in the city to which she had gone. Only married women were allowed to leave and only with their husbands. After the war, however, some girls ran away with soldiers, and when they later sent home gifts, the views of their relatives changed somewhat. This was the beginning of the changing values for young women leaving the town on their own.

### **Apprenticeship: a common strategy for migrating to cities**

One of the most common ways of making the transition from rural to urban life is by being apprenticed to an older person, as described in Box 4.6.

**Box 4.6: Apprenticeship System in Igboland: An important Form of Rural-Urban Linkage**

Many of the rural-urban migrants have the goal of learning a skill or trade such as shoe-making, tailoring, hairdressing, or marketing a particular commodity. Usually a young migrant will come to the city to become an apprentice to a relative or acquaintance from the rural place of origin. The ‘master’ is responsible for the training and welfare of his or her ‘townsman’. Igbos regard apprenticeship as a prerequisite to starting any non-farming activity. There are three types of apprenticeship:

1. formal – an agreement (sometimes written) is drawn up giving the terms and nature of the work and conditions;
2. informal – no formal agreement, but apprenticeship is not a family relation; and
3. family – no formal agreement, yet rooted in family relationship.

‘The apprenticeship system in some cases goes beyond learning a trade and leads to a personal relationship. In many cases, if the apprentice serves his master well, he will be rewarded with capital and the necessary facilities to start his own business. Many successful traders and businessmen were former apprentices and, having received a good start in business, have acquired large capital of their own.’

Source: Chukwuezi (1999: p. 28)

**Urban destinations of rural migrants**

From the IDIs, the following table shows the most common urban places to which people of specific rural communities migrate. As shown, the most common urban destinations are Aba, Lagos and Port Harcourt for those migrating from the rural areas.

The most common urban destinations are Aba and Lagos. These are major commercial centres and it is likely that the opportunity for trading is the primary motivation for these preferences. At the same time, migration flows often demonstrate a ‘follow the leader’ pattern, since having people from your locality is a big advantage for settling down in a new environment and getting started in a new activity. Nearly everyone would know someone residing in Lagos and certainly in Aba.

**Table 4.1: Place of Origin and Most Common Urban Destinations of Migrants from Study Sites**

<b>Place of origin</b>	<b>Most common urban destinations in order of importance</b>
Abiriba	Aba, Lagos, Cotonou
Akwete	Lagos, Aba, Port Harcourt
Ndi Ebe	Lagos, Aba, Port Harcourt, Abuja
Owerrinta	Aba, Lagos, Port Harcourt
Uzuakoli	Lagos, Aba, Umuahia, Cotonou

### **Return of urban migrants to rural areas**

It is sometimes possible for urban residents to relocate to the rural area. In the past this usually involved only older men and women as they return home due to retirement or retrenchment or sickness. When older people move back to the village, they often leave their children behind.

More recently, however, all categories of people are involved in return migration, even though the circumstances may differ. Thus, young and old, male and female, poor and well-off come home some time or other. Urban-to-rural movement is, more often than not, back to the rural home base and hardly ever to another rural settlement.

#### ***Returnee migrants***

The respondents estimated that nearly one-half of households in rural areas are headed by returnee migrants who average about 50 years of age. The average age of returnee migrants was highest in Uzuakoli (estimated to be 55-60 years) and lowest at Akwete (about 40 years). Migrants who make money early return to their rural areas at a relatively younger age than those who are less successful. This hypothesis could be stretched to argue that Akwete and Abiriba migrants are more successful in capital accumulation than migrants from Owerinta, Ndi Ebe and least of all Uzuakoli. Migrants have to ensure that they have enough to retire with because revenue from remittances in general tends to be lower for returnee migrants than those to non-migrants partly because returnee migrants are usually assumed to be well-off.

If the rural population is now almost evenly composed of returnee migrants and non-migrants, this could be attributed to the fact the most urban centres have lost some of their glamour due to decay in infrastructure, higher crime rates and urban unemployment. In more than half the cases, the returnee migrants leave their children behind, entrusting them with their estates or large businesses.

But there are also other circumstances that may affect one's movement back to the village. When an urban resident can no longer cope with the demands of urban living because of prolonged hardship or some other adverse circumstances, and such a person constitutes a burden or disgrace to the place of origin, his or her relatives or townsmen mobilise funds and escort the person home compulsorily. This action is usually referred to as '*igbara mmadu ugbo nwankpi*', which conveys an image of dumping a he-goat into a motorised vehicle and carrying it away, without giving it an option. Some people decide to go back to the rural areas to establish their business due to the excessive competition in the city. The possibility also exists that there is increasing opportunity for non-farm occupations, e.g. trading in building materials and providing services, in rural areas to attract younger returnees.

#### ***Inter-ethnic conflicts***

While Igbo people have travelled throughout the country for trade and other activities, they tend to return to their place of origin during times of inter-ethnic conflict. This was particularly evident during the events leading up to and after the Civil War. Similarly, many Igbos returned home following the annulment of the election of 1993, which Chief M.K.O. Abiola was widely acclaimed to have won, and when demonstrations and disturbances took place all over Nigeria, providing opportunities for conflicts between



people of different ethnic backgrounds. The conflicts between Hausa and Igbo peoples in northern Nigeria, most recently brought about by the introduction of the Muslim *Sharia* law in some northern states, have also been associated with waves of return migration. Respondents stated that the present era of democratic rule in Nigeria has been an encouraging sign. Nevertheless, the historical events since independence have led many people to construct a house in their home community in case they need to rush home for safety.

### Home visits and visits to the cities

Many migrants are unlikely to visit home until they have found employment and have something to show for their period of absence. Thereafter, they may visit home more often. During one of the FGDs in Abiriba, the respondents remarked that some migrants prefer to go far from home if they know they will end up doing menial or socially degrading jobs, such as labouring, prostitution, cart- or head-loading etc. By migrating to Lagos, for example, their type of employment or business is less likely to be known at home, than if they settled in Aba or Umuahia.

Rural residents sometimes go to the urban centres for short-term visits. The most common reasons for such visits include:

- To see their urban-based relatives;
- To buy goods for resale in the village;
- To get medical attention; and
- In the case of older women, to help their daughters for some time after the birth of a baby, referred to as ‘Omugu’.

Each locality has closer ties with some rural and urban communities than others. In Table 4.2 each rural research site is listed with the rural and urban areas that are generally regarded as being the ‘closest’ to their town or village in terms of social and/or economic ties.

**Table 4.2: Research Sites and their Closest Rural and Urban Areas**

Research sites	Closest rural areas	Closest Urban Areas
Abiriba	Nkporo, Igbere	Aba, Umuahia
Akwete	Ohanku, Azumini	Aba, Port Harcourt
Owerrinta	Umuocheala, Umuoojima	Aba, Owerri
Ndi Ebe	Ndi-Amuru Abam, Ndi-Ojiugwo Abam	Umuahia, Aba
Uzuakoli	Ozuiem, Nkpa	Umuahia, Aba

Migration between rural centres is generally led by farming activities – clearing and tilling land, cropping or processing, e.g. palm produce or *garri*-making. Such migration

might be seasonal or based on longer-term residence in traditional farm settlements known locally as *ogo ubi*. Much of the rural-rural migration is related to kinship ties.

Trading in Aba, paid jobs with the oil industry in Port Harcourt, civil service work at the state headquarters in Umuahia or service provision, such as catering in Abuja, are some of the reasons for preferences of particular destinations by rural-urban migrants.

## **5. Social Ties, Remittances and Commodity Flows**

### **Introduction**

This chapter describes several forms of linkages including income-generating activities that are conducted in both localities, residential and occupational patterns that involve both areas, and groups and associations that help people retain their relationships with friends and relations elsewhere.

In addition to the movement of people considered in the previous chapter, movements of goods or commodities usually overlap with and somehow determine migration patterns. Even social visits increasingly overlap with business-related travel. What goods, what services are most common as reasons for people's movements to and from specific areas? In what directions do such products flow? These questions are explored in relation to exchanges between Aba and each of the villages or towns selected for this study.

Apart from the physical movements of commodities and people, there are well-established traditions of exchange of cash or other gifts regarded as remittances. The flow of remittances can be in both directions and the frequency and volume vary from location to location and over time. The reasons for remittances and related interactions are also examined in this chapter. The data upon which these inferences were made were collected through the rapid rural appraisal techniques described in Chapter 3.

### **Organisational ties between rural and urban areas**

#### **Common income-generating activities**

Respondents from Aba agreed that, even though rural-urban migration may be on the increase, the simultaneous growth of urban-type income-generating activities in the rural areas has succeeded in reducing the volume of migration to the cities. Cabinet-making, block-molding, motor vehicle repairs metal fabrication, catering, hairdressing, tailoring and vigorous buying and selling were mentioned as examples of 'urban-type' activities that had previously been restricted to urban areas, but which are now spread across the rural areas as well. Common 'rural-type' jobs found in both urban and rural areas are blacksmithing, local brewing of gin, cloth-weaving, local food e.g. cassava processing, livestock-rearing and farming. The major difference in these activities is in their scope: farming in urban areas is usually small-scale, and conversely urban-type activities are not as extensively practised in rural as in urban areas.

Absentee landlords involved in farming in the village may take two forms:

- Someone living in Aba may hire someone to take care of his farm(s) in the village, but the proceeds will go to the urban-based owner, or
- Money is given to assist in providing farm labour to rural relatives in the village, and the proceeds are left for the rural family members as a form of remittance.

### **Reside in one area, work in the other**

Another avenue through which occupational ties help to span the 'divide' between rural and urban places is when some people live in the village but work in the city, commuting back and forth each day. In Owerinta, some residents whose primary occupation is either in Aba or Owerinta find it easier to reside at their rural homes and take public transportation each day to their urban-based job. Respondents stated that some rural women come to the urban areas on a daily basis to weed gardens or do household chores for urban dwellers as casual labourers.

Similarly, some technicians and craftsmen who are based in Akwete undertake daily journeys to Port Harcourt to work at construction sites. Unable and unwilling to rent accommodation in Port Harcourt where housing is very expensive, they return to Akwete on a daily basis until their services are no longer needed at that site. Another example was given in Abiriba of drivers working in Umuahia, but living at home, again due to the high cost of renting in the city, but sometimes also due to caring for aged parents at home. Some civil servants from Uzuakoli also live at home, but work at Umuahia.

Conversely, some workers in the LGA headquarters located in Akwete reside in Aba and come to work in Akwete each day. Urban-based contractors also supervise the construction of houses in the rural communities, but do not live there. In Owerinta, residents stated that they are witnessing a trend where some employees of secondary manufacturing plants based in Owerinta commute daily from Aba. A number of reasons was given for this, including a sense of greater security in Aba than in Owerinta during the night (which is also indicative of the trend of urban-type problems extending to rural areas), better residential accommodation in Aba, more reliable power supply in Aba and a desire to retain the status of an urbanite. Naturally, this lifestyle has its economic implications as well.

The major determining factors for commuting are distance between the two areas and the road/public transportation network. Owerinta is close to the urban centres with a very good road constantly served by buses passing through it. Even women on a low income, working as cleaners or gardeners can afford to commute on a daily basis. In other more distant rural communities, served by poorer roads, the option might be open only to higher earners. Residents in Ndi Ebe, for example, do not have this option because of the poor condition of the roads which makes daily commuting difficult.

### **Social and association ties that bridge the gap**

Social groups and associations are very strong in south-eastern Nigeria and have an important influence on the continued attachment of migrants to their homes, no matter the distance they have travelled, their gender or their age. This agrees with findings by Chukwuezi (1999) that Igbo migrants maintain strong roots and constant interaction with villages. Each year, most people try to go 'home' at least once and plan their visit to coincide with the annual meeting of their association. Widespread in Igboland is the

practice whereby married women return home every year to deliberate on development issues affecting their village, the so-called 'Home and Abroad Women's Yearly Meetings'

### ***Town Development Unions***

In most urban localities, residents originally from towns or rural areas of south-eastern Nigeria have 'Town Development Unions' that hold regular 'town meetings'. These are the same as 'Home Town Associations' (HTAs), about which Honey & Okafor (1998) have written extensively.

In Abiriba, it is said that as long as there is more than one Abiriba indigene in a place, a branch of the association is formed. Members may give financial help to a member in need and monitor the behaviour of others, calling to order those who engage in wrongful acts. On the community level, they contribute money and carry out development projects at home. In a few cases, the residents of the village have protested that their input in terms of time and labour is greater than those living in the city who may contribute money, but leave the actual implementation to those at home (see Box 8). Such associations are praised for their contributions to the development of their hometown, which also enhance members' social status.

#### **Box 5.1: Local Demands on Rural Residents**

Young male respondents from Akwete lamented that living in the rural areas leaves one operating within a limited social network that does not open up opportunities for advancement. Considered equally disadvantageous is the practice whereby the youth living in the rural area are bound to respond to every summons by the town crier to participate in village activities without payment such as flood control or other self-help projects. The young people affected say they find this frustrating because whilst they are engaged in unpaid labour, their counterparts in the urban centres are 'busy making money'.

### ***Age-grades***

Most urban dwellers from south-eastern Nigeria belong to rural-based social clubs and age-grades, regardless of the city of residence. Age-grades perform an important socialising role, as well as developing the infrastructure of the town, and payment of dues is taken very seriously. As one respondent stressed, 'Whenever someone moves back to the village, the person can identify with his age-grade only if he shows that he is financially up to date.' Another respondent stated that the fees of 'home-based' members are lower than those 'abroad' due to the greater labour input of members living at home. Box 5.2 gives a more detailed account of how age-grades operate, using Abiriba as a case study. There are, however, some locality-specific differences. In Ndi Ebe, for example, only males have age-grades and older men arrange for initiation of boys into their groups. Older men are also responsible for 'tasting' the food during festivals.

### ***Kinship ties***

The extended family network is another very important social tie to one's home base, ensuring the re-integration of return migrants who are provided with land, seeds and tools

to resume farming. For those who have disgraced their family and community, however, no assistance is given.

### ***Religious affiliation***

In south-eastern Nigeria, the majority of the population is Christian, mostly Catholic or Protestant with a growing population of Pentecostal churches. Each of these churches has a network of branches in nearly every city, town or village. Programmes at the diocese level bring together parishes and their members from both rural and urban areas. Many urban residents retain membership of the church at home, while attending regular services in the city where they live. During harvest or other church festivals in the home church, the urban residents may travel to participate in the activities and will contribute financially even if they cannot attend.

#### **Box 5.2: The Age-Grade System in Abiriba**

Throughout Igboland, age-grades are an important component of social organisation. The age-grade is a grouping of people born within the range of three to four years. Every member of the age-grade is treated equally regardless of differences in social status.

In Abiriba, the age-grade system is very pronounced (Smock, 1971: p.28) and at any one time there are about 13 active age-grade sets for males and females separately. It is important to stress that the Abiriba age group system operates wherever Abiriba people migrate to. At about 32 - 36 years of age, the group takes a name and becomes recognized as a definite group that can be assigned duties. Eight years after taking a name, the group forms the vanguard of the force for communal service, the most prominent of which, in the olden days, involved fighting to protect the borders of the town. Precisely 12 years after taking a name, the surviving members of the age-grade celebrate the important festival of *Igwa Mang*, to mark their survival. This occasion is commemorated by accomplishing a notable development project. At about 60 - 64 years, precisely 24 years after the *Igwa Mang* ceremony, men of the age-grade retire from community service, having served for the previous four years to that date as the effective rulers of the community, responsible for major decisions concerning the town. The retirement is marked by a very elaborate ceremony, and in the past, members also retired from their careers and were obliged to settle permanently in Abiriba. Nowadays, this latter requirement has been relaxed as many men past the retirement age are still very active with businesses or other activities in other towns and cities. Women's age-grades are also important, but not as strictly organised. Women are eligible to join grades younger or older than their real age. They also engage in development projects, but conventionally do not perform the retirement ceremony.

### ***Alumni associations***

Anyone who attended a secondary school is an 'old boy' or 'old girl' of that school. This may not have a significant effect upon bringing the person home, but it does serve as a significant social and psychological link for individuals living outside their hometown. Many school leavers and graduates of higher institutions capitalise on this tie to secure employment or other favours. Where the school is based at home, school celebrations provide additional opportunities for home visits, and alumni association members' contributions to their former school are often a major source of funds for the maintenance and improvement of facilities.

### **Functions served by social groups and associations that link rural and urban areas**

There are several important roles played by these groups and associations for both rural residents and urban migrants. They include:

- Facilitating access to resources such as land, market stalls, housing and employment opportunities;
- Providing social security or a ‘safety-net’ in times of emergency;
- Helping to maintain cultural identity;
- Assisting in regulating conduct;
- Assisting in savings and credit; and
- Encouraging the flow of different types of information.

From the FGDs in Owerinta, it was generally accepted that peaceful co-existence of indigenes and non-indigenes is a prerequisite for development in a multi-ethnic society like Owerinta, even though it is a rural area. This realisation led to the formation of the *Otu Obi (One Mind) Social Club of Owerinta*. Membership of the club is open to both indigenes and non-indigenes as a forum for addressing common problems in the community, which touch on the lives of all inhabitants. However, there is also the Owerinta League that is only open to indigenes.

### **Remittances between urban and rural areas**

Remittances flow both ways. Urban residents send a variety of items to relations in the rural communities – cash, clothing, factory-processed goods such as beverages, sugar and milk, and unprocessed foodstuffs, including rice, beans, onions and so on. Remittances from the villages to urban-based relations include locally-produced foodstuffs, especially *garri*, condiments and leafy vegetables. Remittances to the villages can be a mere gesture of goodwill, to improve the nutritional standards of relatives and to finance their primary/secondary education. They might also be used to assist relatives at home in setting up small-scale businesses such as hairdressing salons, tailoring outfits, machines for grinding foodstuffs and retailing shops. Very rarely are remittances made in cash as a form of repaying relatives for their earlier care of the migrant. Case studies describing remittances from migrants in Aba to relations in Ndi Ebe and Akwete are described in Box 5.3.

Gender, generation and social class exert some influence on the nature, timing, quantity and quality of remittances between urban and rural areas. Urban-based richer migrants are more likely to remit money for personal capital-intensive projects, while poorer ones

do so for less capital-intensive projects. Younger, newly-employed migrants send money less regularly than older, well-established migrants.

Most respondents agreed that the quantity and frequency of cash and goods sent from urban centres to rural home areas have declined over the past 10 years. This was generally attributed to national policies and trends such as the Structural Adjustment Programme and the resultant inflation.

### **Box 5.3: Remittances from Urban to Rural Areas**

#### *From Aba to Ndi Ebe*

To people residing in Aba, remittance to their rural relations in Ndi Ebe is obligatory. The beneficiaries include fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, aunts, in-laws, nieces and nephews of migrants. Remittances are generally based on a sense of responsibility and obligation, but can also be a form of investment. As an example, one of the respondents from Ndi Ebe that lives in Aba has invested in developing a private estate as well as providing free accommodation for teachers in a UNICEF-funded primary school at home. Cash remittances range from N 2,000 to N 20,000 at a time depending on how trusted the courier is. Remittances through associates and relatives often fail to achieve the intended purpose: in many cases, money is misused and cash sent to a farm or for erecting a building is used for something else. When remittance is in kind, it was in the form of clothing materials, processed food, e.g. seasoning, bread, sugar, salt or plastic wares, *garri* processing machines and farm implements.

#### *From Aba to Akwete*

'Everybody remits!' This was the general view of Akwete indigenes resident in Aba. The following personal accounts further illustrate this position.

Chief Rowland Asobie, a medical doctor and managing director of Asobie Foundation, and a member of Akwete Council of Chiefs has lived in Aba since 1972. Although he visits home weekly, his remittances remain undiminished. About 20-50% of his earnings go to Akwete for the maintenance of his country home and the maintenance of relatives. His investment in fish-farming proved unprofitable because of poaching and was subsequently dropped. Instead, he has invested in a 20-hectare oil-palm plantation.

Remittance is not always for personal reasons. Chief I.O. Akparanta, a kin of Dr. Asobie sometimes remits to support social networking. As the head of the Akparanta family assistance is rendered to any member of the compound who is distressed. For example, if a member of the compound dies without children or anyone to fund the burial, assistance is given to ensure a decent burial. At other times, remittance may be for community development e.g. building a town hall or police post.

Some key respondents from Aba maintained that many urban residents have been facing serious economic hardship and therefore cannot afford to give as much to rural relatives as before. This is consistent with the findings of Chukwuezi (1999) who reported that not all migrants are successful and remittances to rural relations have generally decreased.

There was a minority view, however, that where people in both rural and urban areas have more money, remittances are less necessary as a form of assistance. One respondent believed that the rural dwellers were gaining a higher income from their farms now than in the past and therefore were in less need of remittances. The rural respondents did not share this view, however. Other respondents held the view that an increasing number of urban people have become affluent and actually send back more cash and gifts today than was the situation about 20 years ago. While this view seems hard to reconcile with the prevailing economic conditions in the country, it does point out that some rural and urban dwellers are still able to make a good income in either locality. At the same time, however, higher cash income does not necessarily translate into a better standard of living in either locality, given the high inflation rate which often results in spending much more just to maintain the same level of consumption.

### **Remittances for investment or consumption**

In FGDs at Ndi Ebe, participants recognised that profits acquired from the towns are often sent to the village for different investment purposes. They recounted the example of one man who established a large poultry farm and another who started a *garri* processing industry, both employing local residents as labourers. Other migrants used their profits to expand cocoa or rubber plantations and rice farms that would yield more revenue.

Most respondents in the FGDs stated that material exchanges in the form of gifts are generally limited to close family members. The most common commodities sent by rural residents to their urban relations are foodstuffs including *garri*, yam, plantain, traditional condiments and spices, vegetables and traditional delicacies such as *asusu* (corn meal) from Abiriba. Urban dwellers commonly send money, clothing, alcoholic drinks and beverages, medicine, imported spices and condiments, and 'foreign' rice which is considered better in taste and appearance than locally produced rice.

In one of the rural FGDs, it was stated that remittances to women in the rural areas, particularly the elderly ones, are generally for consumption purposes rather than for investment. This is partly because the women are in charge of managing the household food resources, but also because children are more likely to send such items to their mothers because of their nurturing role. Although the food items exchanged are mostly for consumption, some of them, especially tinned foods, processed rice or other foods not locally produced, are sent for trading. In this way, migrants help their rural relatives increase the scope of their income-generating activities. The dilemma for low-income households, whether in the rural or urban areas, is that they rarely have any capital base to fall back upon. Very often, when they receive quantities of goods sufficient for consumption and for surplus, the latter is sold to meet more pressing needs rather than starting a process of accumulation and re-investing the profits in income-generating activities.

### **Retaining social ties through material exchanges**

Sending gifts home is also considered necessary to ensure that one is welcomed back when returning. One respondent put it this way:

'People have now realised that home is best. If you don't remember them (people at home) now, when you come back, they may not receive you.'

Generally, material exchanges are viewed as occurring on a regular basis and for two purposes: the first for social reasons where gifts are sent home to ensure that one is welcomed back on returning, and for ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and chieftaincy conferment, where they bring along food and drinks and other forms of entertainment for their guests as well as gifts, usually cash, to the celebrant.

### **Commodity flows**

In the commodity flows analysis, the frequency of mention by respondents was used to estimate the importance of each commodity as an article of trade or exchange. The results are discussed in this section in terms of exchanges between Aba as the urban



centre, and the five peri-urban or rural areas studied. In the figures that follow the commodities are identified by numbers as given in Table 5.1.

**Table 5.1. Key for the Identification of Commodities in a Commodity Flows Analysis between Aba and Five Peri-urban or Rural Centres in South-eastern Nigeria.**

Identification Code	Commodity	Identification Code	Commodity
1.	Palm produce	15.	Farm tools
2.	Cassava/Garri	16.	Crayfish
3	Plantain	17.	Bread
4	Assorted vegetables	18.	Pharmaceutical drugs
5.	Woven cloth	19.	Power generators
6.	Fish	20.	Yarn
7.	Timber	21.	Building materials
8.	Yam	22.	Beans
9.	Maize	23.	Groundnut oil
10.	Rice	24.	Footwear
11.	Cocoa	25.	Plastics/Rubber
12.	Rubber	26.	Fertiliser
13.	Chewing stick	27.	Clothing
14.	Firewood		

### **Flows between Aba and Akwete / Owerrinta**

The most important commodity moving out of Aba into Akwete is yarn, which is used in the production of their famous cloth (Fig. 5.1). Next to yarn is yam, which is surprising since food crops are expected to flow from the rural production sites to the urban centres. The RRA revealed that yams from Aba come largely from Abakaliki and Akaeze in Ebonyi State and from a number of locations in Benue State. Other locations supplying yams to Aba include Oguta in Imo State and Atani in Anambra State. With yam supply concentrated in Aba, it becomes relatively cheaper for the villages to come to town to buy their yams. Some traders supply the rural areas with yams on a regular basis. Thus, yam flows from Aba to a few of the villages such as Akwete. Other commodities that flow to Akwete from Aba include *garri*, rice and assorted vegetables in that order.

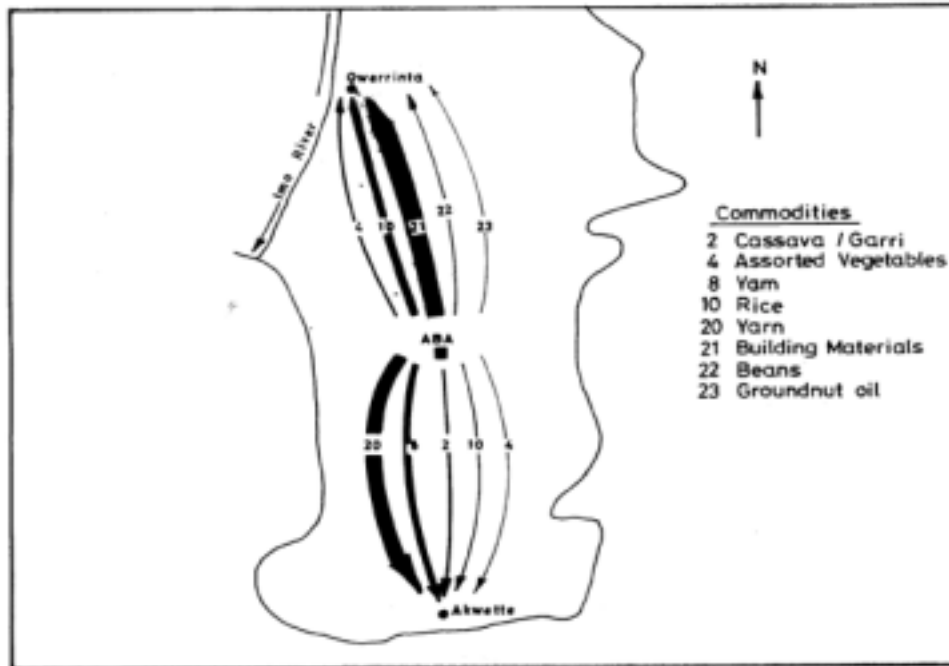


Fig.5.1: Commodity flows: Aba to Akwete and Owerinta, Abia State

Building materials are the most important item flowing from Aba to Owerinta, followed by rice, assorted vegetables, beans and groundnut oil. Once again, food items are being purchased in Aba for sale and consumption in Owerinta, a rural community. Two items feature in both flows – rice (as the 4<sup>th</sup> in importance) and assorted vegetables (as the 5<sup>th</sup>) from Aba to Akwete; the two items rank 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> from Aba to Owerinta.

Figure 5.2 presents the flow of commodities from Akwete and Owerinta into Aba. The list of commodities is very different from that of out-flows from Aba, although cassava/*garri*, yam and assorted vegetables are common to both. The most important ‘import’ into Aba is palm produce, which flows in from Owerinta and, to a lesser degree, from Akwete. Next are cassava and its processed product – *garri*. It is important to distinguish between the two since many traders scout around for raw cassava tubers which they take to their processing outfits in and around Aba. Some *garri* is also ‘imported’ into Aba from Owerinta. The third most important commodity entering Aba from Owerinta is yam. It is not unusual for yams to flow into Aba in the early post-harvest season only for the flow to be reversed later when the locally produced yams have been exhausted and yams from distant lands, such as Lafia, Gboko or Abuja, arrive in Aba market. Assorted vegetables and plantains also flow into Aba from Owerinta.

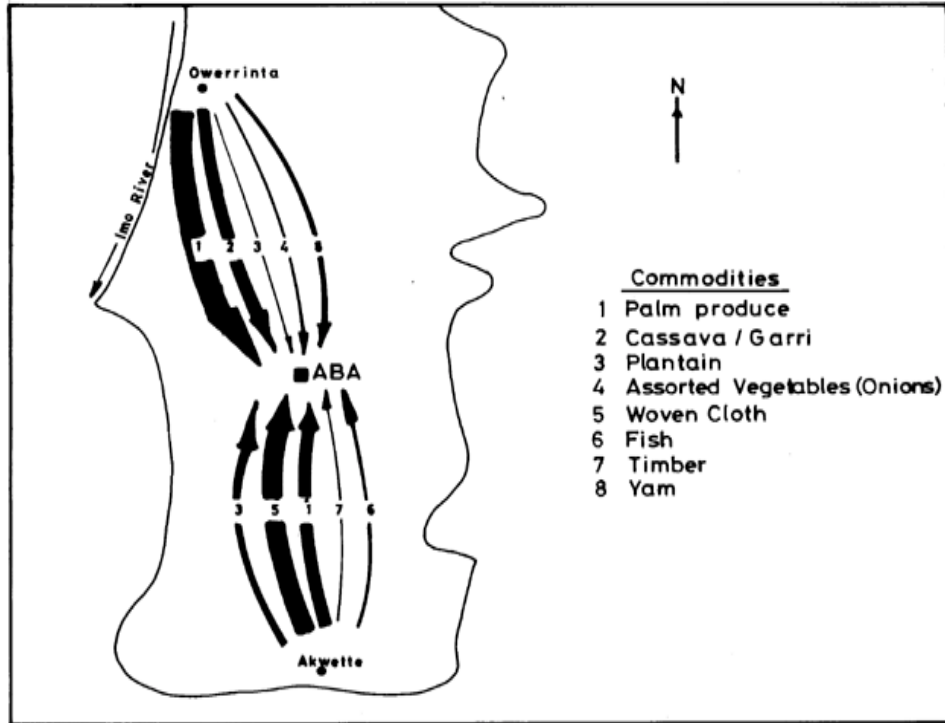


Fig.5.2: Commodity flows to Aba from Owerinta and Akwete, Abia State

As would be expected, the most important commodity flowing from Akwete into Aba is the local woven cloth. The cloth is sold all over Nigeria, Africa and beyond. Palm produce, an important agricultural commodity also moves into Aba from Akwete. Fish and timber are the next most important commodities entering Aba from Akwete. The rainforest vegetation permits good development of plantains, which thus flow from both Owerinta and Akwete into Aba. Table 5.2. presents a more detailed description of commodities exchange between Akwete, Aba and other urban areas.

**Table 5.2. Commodity Flows into and out of Akwete and the Urban Destinations and Origins**

Outflow	Principal Destinations	Inflow	Principal Origins
Akwete cloth	Port Harcourt, Lagos, Aba	Yarn	Lagos, Aba
Fish	Port Harcourt, Aba	Yam	Aba
Plantain	Aba, Port Harcourt	<i>Garri</i>	Port Harcourt
Palm fruit	Aba, Port Harcourt, Akwa Ibom	Rice	Aba
Timber	Port Harcourt, Aba	Vegetables	Akwa Ibom, Port Harcourt

### Flows between Aba and Uzuakoli/Abiriba

The most important commodities that flow from Aba to Uzuakoli are clothing and building materials as seen in Figure 5.3. Footwear, assorted vegetables (especially onions), plastic and rubber products follow these. Moving into Abiriba are building materials, farm tools and fertiliser.

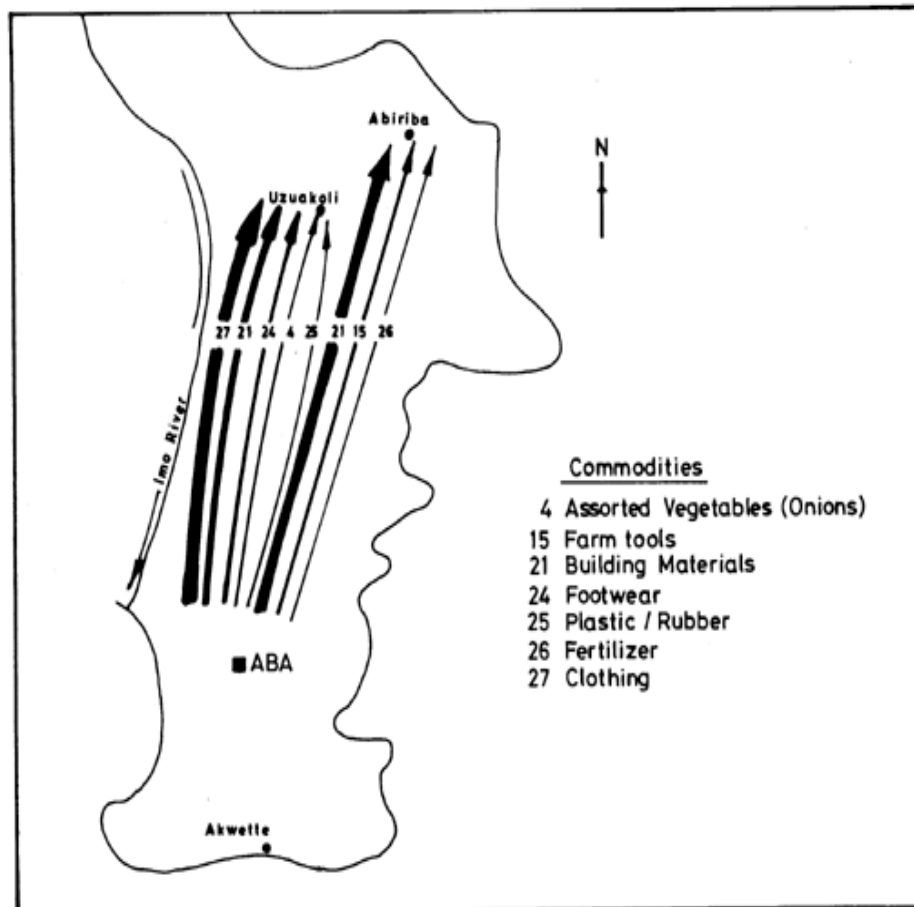


Fig.5.3: Commodity flows from Aba to Abiriba and Uzuakoli, Abia State.

In the reverse flow from Uzuakoli (Fig. 5.4), the most important commodity is cassava tubers and *gari*. As in the case of Owerinta, traders scout for cassava tubers, which they take to processing plants in urban or peri-urban centre near Aba. This is one of the rural-type of activities in which urban residents now engage. Next to cassava are yam and maize, while mucuna (*ukpo*) and rice follow in that order. However, flows are often complex and involve a variety of locations and traders, as shown in the case of maize (Box 5.4).

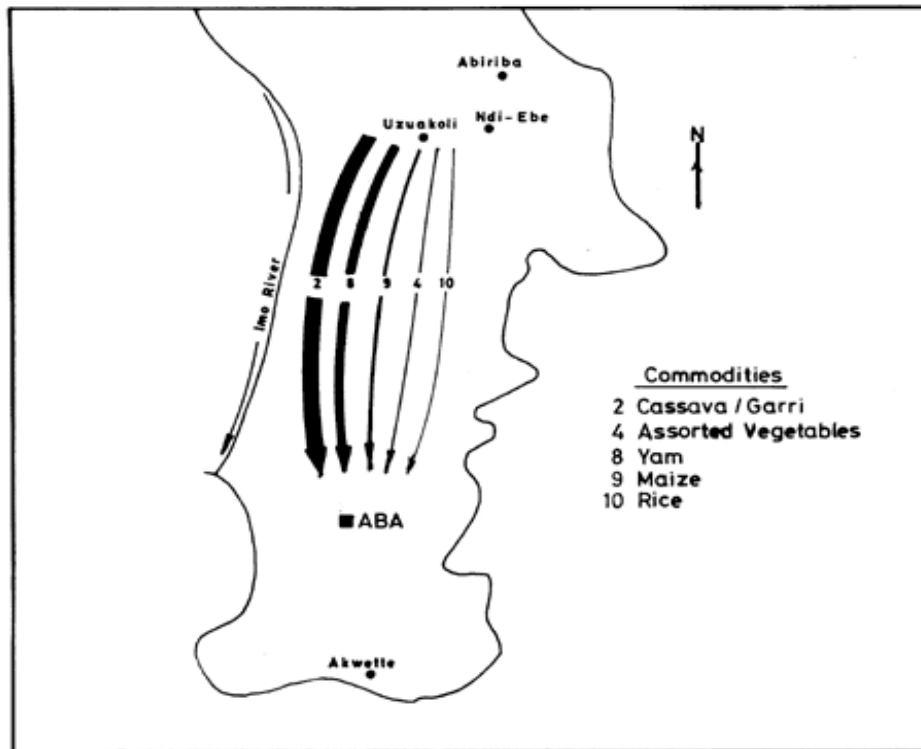


Fig.5.4:Commodity flows to Aba from Uzuakoli, Abia State

#### Box 5.4: Flow of Maize to Aba

The supply chain for maize involves different locations and different groups of traders along the chain. At Umungasi market in Aba, 30 traders were interviewed. All buy and sell maize at one time or another. They source their material from Port Harcourt, Ngwaland and Umuahia. They could not trace the origin of the maize to any rural area – least of all, any of the five selected for this study. The investigations in Uzuakoli, for example, showed that maize from there is usually sold to traders from Umuahia who re-sell to traders from Aba. The same is true for respondents in Ndi Ebe who said that they sell their maize at Ozu Abam, Bende and Umuahia.

The only instance where respondents were sure that maize from their villages reaches Aba is when they receive it as remittance from their relatives who live at home or when they harvest it from farms that they invested in at home. In such instances, however, the maize is consumed at home or given out as a gift to friends and relatives. Those who neither receive remittance in kind (maize) nor invest in distant farming were completely oblivious of how rural farming supported their urban livelihoods.

The major commodities entering Aba (Fig. 5.5) are chewing-sticks (wood of selected, usually wild species, cut, sliced and sold as sticks chewed for cleaning the teeth), *garri* and yam. In fourth place is maize, while firewood comes fifth. Much value is placed on chewing-sticks and firewood in terms of volume and number of actors involved in the trade. Both items provide gainful employment for a substantial number of traders from Abiriba. While they are ordinarily regarded as minor products, their importance for Abiriba and environs is reflected in the prominence given to them in the flows.

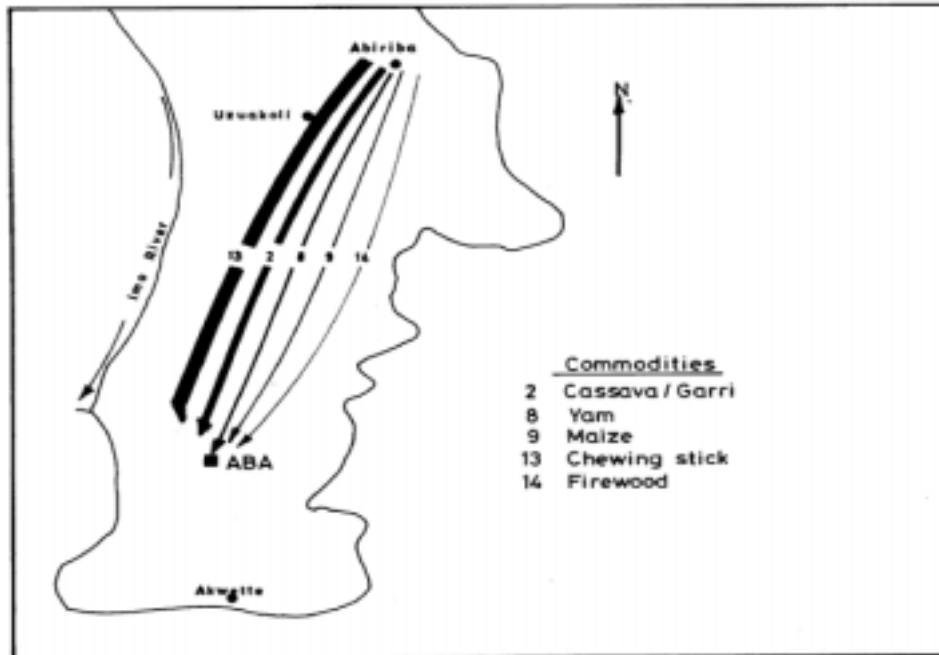


Fig.5.5: Commodity flows : Abiriba to Aba, Abia State

### Flows between Aba and Ndi Ebe

Figure 5.6 presents the flow of commodities from Ndi Ebe to Aba. The most important item listed is rice, followed by yam and *garri*. The fourth is maize, while palm produce comes fifth. Two tree (cash) crops, cocoa and rubber feature in the Ndi Ebe to Aba flow. Movement of yams from rural areas to Aba occurs early in the season. It is not uncommon for yams to flow in the opposite direction when the local stocks are exhausted. The reverse flow takes place much later in the year when yam from major producing areas of the country first comes into Aba and is re-distributed to the villages. Prices are higher for the yams moving from Aba to the rural areas due to scarcity and transport/handling costs.

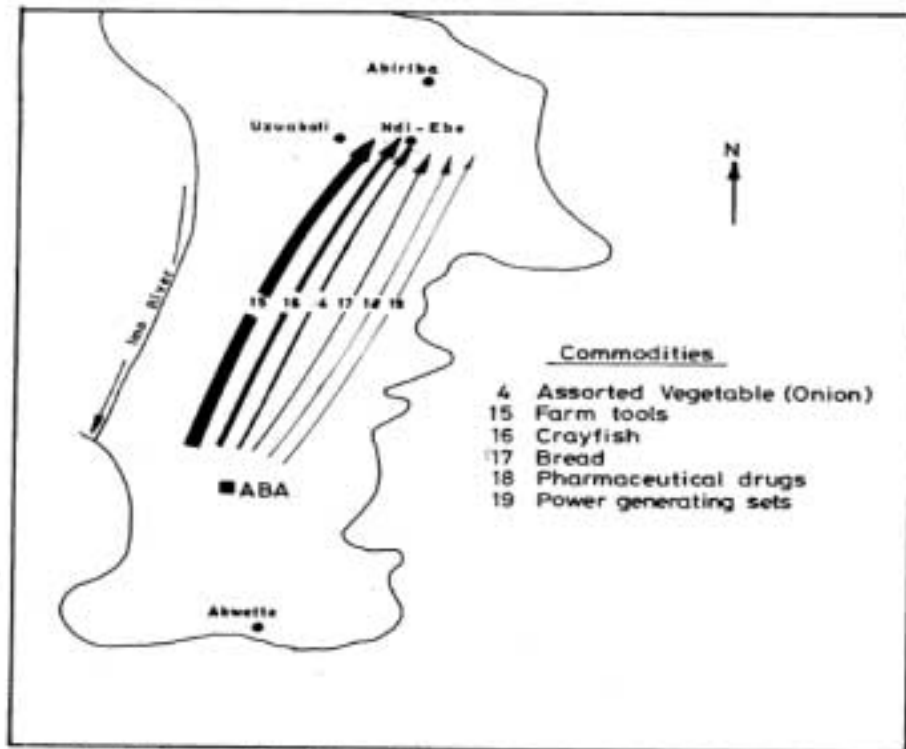


Fig.5.6:Commodity flows : Aba to Ndi-Ebe, Abia State

Figure 5.7, shows the flow of commodities from Aba to Ndi Ebe. As expected, farm tools are the most important item, followed by crayfish, onions, bread, pharmaceuticals and electricity generating sets. Crayfish is often ground and added to dishes as a condiment and to raise the protein nutrient level. Onions are articles of interstate trade from the northern states, which are 'imported' in large quantities into Aba and other southern cities and from there, re-distributed to smaller towns and villages. The electric power generating sets are important because the power supply through the national grid is irregular and most rural small-scale industries depend on these power sources.

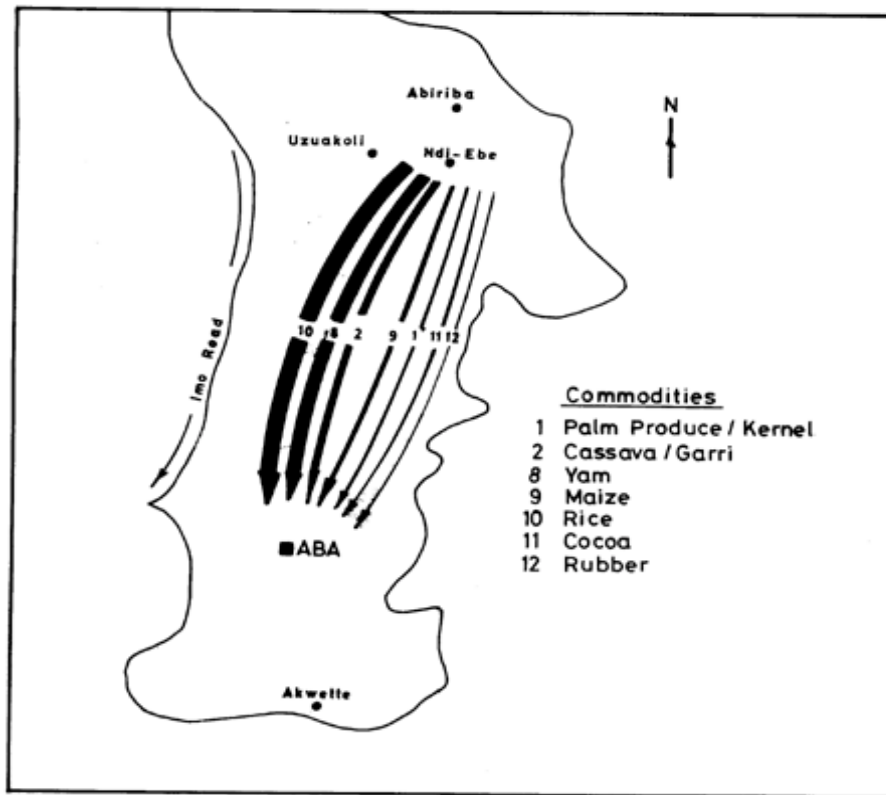


Fig.5.7:Commodity flows : Ndi-Ebe to Aba, Abia State .

### Marketing channels for rural produce

Commodity flows, particularly from the rural point of production to the urban traders, take place through four types of markets:

- farm site – or the waterside in the case of fishermen;
- homestead – where neighbours may buy some of the produce;
- village market – the major marketing outlet for most locally-produced commodities. Such markets attract many urban traders who buy in large quantities to resell in the cities. Villagers usually carry their produce to markets by head portage, bicycle or motor bike; and
- urban market – local producers rarely carry their produce to the urban markets. An exception is the case of large-scale palm producers in Owerinta who transport their produce by special arrangement to Aba and Port Harcourt.

With respect to the fourth channel, the rural producers often face difficulties. In the urban areas, associations for traders have sometimes blocked the rural producers from participating in urban markets. Rural respondents complained that the market unions in the city do not allow the rural farmer to sell his products directly to consumers. Consequently, even if the rural farmer transports his farm produce to the urban centre,



he is forced to sell to the foodstuff unions in the urban market or else members of the union will frustrate the rural farmer's efforts to sell his produce. Understandably, this results in a substantial loss in potential income for the farmer who is forced to sell to the urban market unions at a much lower than the retail price.

### **Concluding remarks**

In general, many items feature in the flow of commodities between Aba and the surrounding villages. Changes in the direction of flow often occur as local supplies are exhausted and scarcities lead to rising prices. When prices rise sufficiently to make reverse trade profitable, the flows are reversed. But it is well known that large cities serve as terminal markets for locally produced food items, while they are also the depots for large quantities of food and other commodities found in interstate trade.

An important item which did not feature, but which is part of the daily interstate trade is cattle. When cattle arrive in the central market at Umuahia from the north, the bulk herd is broken up and fewer heads of cattle are transported to Aba and to some of the villages for slaughter. There are some villages whose populations are too small to consume a cow in one day. Such groups receive their beef from the larger towns through butchers who move around hawking the commodity. Similarly, goats are distributed and slaughtered all around the study area for food.

## **6. Policy Dimensions**

In this section we briefly review some of the more important policy initiatives and programmes that help to explain the disparity between rural and urban sites in the study area. Consistent with the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter 2, attempt is made to highlight the policies that most affect rural-urban interactions, as a step towards formulating appropriate recommendations for interventions to enhance positive, and reduce negative, interactions, all aimed at contributing towards poverty eradication. For the two purposes, the agricultural and rural development policies are perhaps the most central.

### **Past agricultural and rural development policies**

Since colonial times there have been agricultural and rural development programmes, aimed at transforming peasant agriculture into mechanised, irrigated forms (Forrest, 1985). Principal elements of these programmes have included government-organised and patronised farm settlements, marketing cooperatives, marketing boards, credit facilities, plantation schemes, and agricultural extension and protection services, all backed by expensively maintained government research stations. The colonial efforts were directed mainly towards export crop, rather than food crop agriculture. The colonial programmes were continued for a time after independence in 1960, but were soon to be replaced by new initiatives. Table 6.1 lists policies and projects since 1986, which broadly correspond to the implementation of Nigeria's structural adjustment programme.

**Table 6.1: A Sample of Major Agricultural Policies and Projects, Nigeria, 1986-2000**

Agricultural Policy Initiatives and Reforms	1986-93
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Directorate of Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI)</li> </ul>	1986
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Streamlining of RBDAs</li> </ul>	1986
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Economic deregulation / disengagement of government from direct involvement in agricultural production and distribution</li> </ul>	1991
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Statewide ADPs</li> </ul>	1988
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Universities of Agriculture (UNAAB, UAM)</li> </ul>	1988
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National Agric. Land Development Dev. Authority (NALDA)</li> </ul>	1986
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Disengagement of government from fertiliser procurement and distribution</li> </ul>	1987
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Withdrawal of fertiliser subsidies</li> </ul>	1992
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Scrapping of People’s Bank</li> </ul>	1999
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Transfer of Agric. Research Institutes from Fed. Ministry of Science and Tech. To the Fed. Ministry of Agric.</li> </ul>	1992
Agricultural Policies under the Obasanjo Administration	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restoration of fertiliser subsidies at 25%</li> </ul>	1999
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Establishment of Dept. of Fertiliser, FMA</li> </ul>	1999-2000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Restoration of Producer Price Support Scheme for Grains</li> </ul>	2000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food Security and Poverty Alleviation Programme</li> </ul>	2000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)</li> </ul>	2000

Source: Idachaba, 2000: pp. 15-16

It is perhaps more profitable to examine the efforts since independence in three phases, as delineated by Richards (1985: 38). Because Richards would have been covering only up to the early 80s in his book published in 1985, we can recognise a fourth phase of policy initiatives stretching from the implementation of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the early to mid-80s.

During the first phase in the first decade after independence, the colonial policy of support for export crop agriculture was continued. The idea was that the agricultural sector could be “milked” to provide resources for industrial take-off. Little investment

expenditure (less than 14 per cent in two development plans between 1962 and 1974) was directed towards the sector even though it contributed about 50 per cent of GDP at the time. Development capital was directed to the urban/industrial sector in pursuit of an import-substitution industrialisation policy, believed to be the quickest route to development. However, it failed to stimulate an industrial revolution, leaving a legacy of a very weakened rural agricultural sector and a high level of poverty and unemployment in urban areas.

The second phase began in the early 70s with renewed emphasis on integrated agricultural development, focusing on smallholder farmers. With international support from agencies like the World Bank, the aim was to achieve improved food production by small-scale farmers, at the same time as improving 'the attractiveness of economic opportunities in rural areas' in order to stem urban migration. With research support from organisations such as the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), farmers were offered 'biological packages' of fertiliser and 'improved' high-yielding crop varieties, through the agency of institutions like the Agricultural Development Projects (ADPs). Various other programmes (e.g. the DFRRRI programme,) up to the early 80s, fall within this phase, where much emphasis was placed on removing some of the most urgent infrastructural constraints to increased agricultural production – providing/improving access roads, water supply, health, nutrition and education.

These initiatives did not stimulate an agricultural revolution and largely failed to make any significant improvement in rural conditions. Reasons for failure included acceptance of food aid, government import of cheap food and subsidy of urban food prices, all to the detriment of peasant farmers. The agricultural packages were also deficient by not taking the farmer and her/his already well-developed farming system sufficiently into account (Richards, 1985).

The recognition of the latter marked the beginning of the third phase of agricultural development policies, christened the *populist* phase by Richards (1985:40). Recognition of farmers' associations reflected this orientation. The fourth phase is marked by disengagement of government from direct involvement in agricultural production and distribution, privatisation of fertiliser procurement and distribution, withdrawal of fertiliser subsidy etc. We have probably entered a fifth phase with the agricultural policies of the present civilian administration, after 15 continuous years of military rule. Partial restoration of fertiliser subsidy and a focus on poverty alleviation already distinguish this phase. It is too early to judge the outcomes of the present phase, but low agricultural production, and the disparities in infrastructural development and economic opportunities between rural and urban areas, are still very evident.

Except for programmes in the first phase, all the policy initiatives above can be said to have had two main concerns: stimulating agricultural production and removing the infrastructural constraints to agricultural production, thereby improving the attractiveness of the economic opportunities in the rural areas. For the latter, the assumption (e.g. Anikpo, 1995: 22) was that access roads and canals would enhance the evacuation of agricultural products, while rural electrification would not only enhance technological inputs to agriculture, but would also stimulate the growth of cottage industries, thereby contributing to a reduction in rural-urban migration.

In addition to reasons already given above for the failure of these programmes, Nigerian reviewers raise questions about institutional factors and the policies themselves and point to mismanagement – bureaucratic excesses, corruption and lack of true commitment or dedication – as a contributor to the failures. Specifically relating to agricultural development prior to 1986, Idachaba (1986) blamed the lack of a progress on (a) technological failures, largely related to the inability of the research system to provide appropriate support; (b) failure to provide economic incentives and rural infrastructure; and (c) institutional and policy failures, relating to a lack of clarity on the proper roles of the three tiers of government and the lack of a clearly defined strategic food policy. With respect to the failure of later agricultural and rural development policies, Idachaba (2000: 3) observes that ‘undesirable agricultural policies were at the centre of Nigeria’s agricultural decline during the period of the 1940s to the 1990s’. He reviewed the intended and unintended beneficiaries of some agricultural policies in Nigeria and concluded that in each case, while the intended beneficiaries in the rural areas were small-scale farmers, the real beneficiaries have been urban-based merchants, contractors, middle-men, government officials and transporters.

Similar observations have been made for the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) initiative of 1986, which was intended to benefit rural areas but ended up benefiting unskilled contractors and entrepreneurs (Ezeani, 1995: 67); for the Better Life for Rural Women programme which became monopolised by wives of military governors and other prominent women (Anikpo, 1995); and for several agricultural development programmes that ended up serving the needs of big farmers rather than those of the poorer farmers (Ezeani, 1995). Nzimiro (1985) maintains that Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) launched in 1976, which was meant to stimulate food production by individuals and corporate bodies, failed because it was controlled and directed by bureaucrats ‘whose sole interest in the OFN was the huge financial rewards they reaped from clandestine deals with business men.’ Some government officials involved retired and became consultants to the same programme, receiving huge consultancy fees for ‘reproducing ideas that never worked in a peasant society’. Further on the OFN, Anikpo (citing Forrest, 1985) points out that the programme was a ‘hurried political initiative launched in the middle of the farming season by a military regime anxious to secure support from urban groups and students’.

The agricultural and rural development policies reviewed above failed because they were ill-conceived (the first phase), undermined by contrary actions of the government itself, technically defective in their implementation, and grossly mismanaged. The direct effect of policy failures on rural migration is illustrated by this example from Mustapha (1999) who studied cocoa producers in Ondo State. Mustapha found that by 1985, several policy-related factors, including the failure of marketing boards to ensure that profits reached farmers with the fall in cocoa prices, greater emphasis upon petroleum oil than agriculture, and food imports discouraging food crop production, led to many cocoa farmers going into other ventures such as petty trade as well as migrating to urban centres. Similar examples can be found in the experience of rubber production in the mid-west and south-east, oil palm from the south-east, and groundnut and cotton from the northern states of Nigeria.

These examples of agricultural and rural development policy initiatives that failed or ended up with unintended beneficiaries are relevant for this study as they contributed to promote the stagnation of rural areas, which encourages migration of rural people to urban areas.

### **Other policies**

Virtually every government development policy affects rural-urban interactions in one way or another. But it should be noted at the outset that in Nigeria, policy-making on matters such as land tenure, education, energy and natural resources, takes place at the national level, while implementation is handled at the state and local government levels. States and local governments are taken as merely devising strategies for the implementation of national policies. There may, therefore, be differences in the manner in which different states or local governments implement national policies. In some cases, as with education, state action may even precede the enunciation of national policy. Although the country had long been committed to universal primary education, this was not articulated in a policy until 1971 and was not, in fact, launched federally until 1976, whereas the regional governments and the states which succeeded them had been implementing free primary education since 1955 (Igwe, 1990; Onokerhoraye, 1995).

If, as suggested by Mabogunje (1970), education is a factor in raising expectations, which in turn stimulates migration, early emphasis on education in south-eastern Nigeria may be part of the explanation for the high migratory tendency of people in the area. Mabogunje, himself cited school enrolment data which showed that in 1959 the percentage of children of school age at school was higher in eastern Nigeria (89.5) than in any other place in West Africa. By 1980 there were 1,095,023 pupils in primary school in Imo State (which included Abia at the time). This exceeded those in Ondo State (583,847) and Kaduna State (649,211) (Onokerhoraye, 1995). Abiriba, one of the rural sites in the present study, was cited by Mabogunje as an example of a place with a high rate of migration. Travel and trade rather than education may have been the means of raising awareness and hence expectation in this case, as, until recently, educational facilities were poorly developed, while there is a long history of traveling for trade in Abiriba. This last case notwithstanding, it can be taken that educational policies have had a profound effect on rural-urban migrations in south-eastern Nigeria.

In a different sense, educational policies are currently accentuating rural-urban interactions in the study area. Studies, mostly by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef), have shown that south-eastern Nigeria, including the study area, currently has one of the highest school drop-out rates in the country. Evidently, disenchantment with certain educational policies and practices, as well as lack of employment opportunities for the educated, prematurely drive a sizable proportion of the youth away from education into various other occupations, most notably street hawking. The armies of street hawkers in many Nigerian cities today are recruited largely from the ranks of school drop-outs many of whom migrate from rural areas. Educational policies that do not present the youth with a future of available opportunities for employment are a failure. Worse than this, many of the drop-outs do so out of frustration by practices that discriminate against merit in favour of ethnic or geographical balancing. In the Nigerian educational system, as a matter of federal policy, admission to federal universities is

zoned with the entrance examination scaled on a state basis, such that students with low scores but from certain states are admitted in preference to students with high scores from other states (Honey & Okafor, 1998:4). The idea is to balance the opportunities so that students from all states and hence ethnic backgrounds are admitted. This zoning policy is extended to federal employment and is a cause of much frustration for students in the study area.

National policies clearly have significant effects upon the livelihood patterns of rural dwellers and the types of interactions they maintain or establish with urban areas. For example, rural energy supply policy, and indeed the whole of infrastructure development policy (Onokorheraye, 1995), if properly implemented at the different levels could help to stem the tide of rural-urban migration, by ensuring attractive economic opportunities in the rural areas. A dependable power supply in the rural areas, for example, could facilitate non-farm, small-to-medium scale industrial activities as well as urban-type informal sector livelihood activities. In Nigeria, electricity is generated nationally by the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA). However, concerned that rural areas may be neglected in the distribution of electricity, some state governments have established bodies to promote the supply of electricity to rural communities. Imo State, which until 1991 included the territory now designated as Abia State, was one such state with a rural electrification board.

Okpara (1990) describes the experience of the rural dwellers in gaining access to electricity for their people and the effect of unstable government policy in providing infrastructure facilities and services to the local population (Box 6.1).

### **Box 6.1: Rural Electricity Supply in Imo State**

“At its inception in the early 1980s, the Imo State Rural Electrification Scheme was conceived both as a social service and a political imperative. The supply and installation of the main power lines was effected at no cost to the benefiting communities or settlements along such lines. Some strategic areas of Okwelle, particularly the central business area, were among the recipients of the infrastructure during this period. Following the emergence of military rule in early 1984, the state’s rural electrification programme lost its political and social service complexion. In consequence, communities (including the insular parts of Okwelle) which had hitherto not benefited from the extension of the power lines to them at public expense, now undertake the funding of the extension of this infrastructure to their various localities. It seems ironical, therefore, that whereas the urban-based electric power consumer pays little or nothing for the overhead capital involved in supplying electricity to his neighbourhood by the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), the so-called underprivileged and impoverished ruralites are currently burdened with the task of raising huge sums of money to defray the capital cost of extending power supply to their various villages. In Okwelle, as elsewhere in Imo State, this has constituted a burden in which even the urban dweller who characteristically maintains a rural home, equally has a share commensurate with his socio-economic status. Currently, only about 200 households enjoy electricity supply from the Rural Electricity Board [out of approximately 7,000 in the locality]. The obvious constraint is the financial burden involved in getting power supply to isolated communities without adequate government subsidy. Thus, complete rural electric supply is yet a dream to be fully realised.”

Okpara, 1990:67-68).

In addition to the change in government, a further factor that may have contributed to the experience in the Okwelle example above is that by 1982, the Nigerian economy deteriorated to the extent that many ambitious rural electricity schemes collapsed (Onokerhoraye, 1995).

The experience with the electrification policy, and with the agricultural and rural development policies reviewed above, can be recounted for many other policies that are relevant for rural-urban interaction. Reference has already been made to the import-substitution industrialisation policy that failed because it was misconceived. Along with the provision of education and electricity, domestic water supply, the provision of health, housing, transport and communication facilities are parts of the infrastructural development (Onokorheraye, 1995) that is required to raise the standard of living of rural areas, and the policies governing these have all suffered a strong urban bias, mismanagement in implementation or unpredicted economic downturns. Exchanges, particularly the spatial flows, between rural and urban areas depend strongly on a good transport network, which in the study area is mostly by road; they also depend on well developed market systems and on a good system of information exchange. Policies that govern the provision of these facilities suffer the same predicaments as outlined above for other policies.

The significance of infrastructure development to rural-urban interactions will not be appreciated fully without linking it to the creation of states and local governments which has occurred intermittently in the country since 1963 (p.3). State and local government

creation has been a means of decentralising governance and development. This process is linked to the urbanisation policy in the sense that the headquarters of any local government or state is thereby given an urban status, which implies the provision of the infrastructure that distinguish urban from rural areas. This attitude betrays the basic bias in the provision of social amenities and serves to accentuate the perceived difference between rural and urban areas. The government's housing policy strongly reflects this bias, for although the National Housing Policy of 1991 (Agunbiade, 1997) exhorted all tiers of government, including local governments, to participate actively in housing delivery, it did nothing to specify extension of the facility to rural areas. Participation by local governments would have ended by promoting building in the headquarters or other already urbanised towns. Bias in the policy of providing amenities like housing is clearly of interest in the study of rural-urban interactions.

Finally, it should be stressed that in the study area, as in other parts of Nigeria, associations of civil society, in particular the town development unions, have operated as 'shadow governments', taxing themselves to provide many of the facilities that government has failed or neglected to provide for their localities. As recounted in this study, town unions or age-grades have contributed to the provision of educational and health facilities, water, electricity, roads and transport systems, markets and postal facilities. In many cases, the community provides the infrastructure while government contributes to the operation of these facilities. Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) must be mentioned here as increasingly playing an intermediary role between donor agencies and communities, in delivering development to communities. It follows from this, that government policy towards these associations of civil society is an important factor especially in developing rural areas. Right from colonial times, governments have exploited these associations to mobilise development effort. Government collaboration with civil society associations is a matter of policy which should be taken into account as a factor affecting rural-urban interactions.

## **7. Summary and Recommendations**

### **Summary of the major findings**

There was a clear distinction between rural and urban places from the perspective of residents of each area. The distinguishing characteristics were more concerned with the higher level of infrastructural development and economic opportunities available in 'urban' areas than with population characteristics. Although there were some perceived advantages to living in the rural areas and dangers in the city, most people felt that to progress in life it is necessary to move out of the village and into the city.

The main economic activity in the urban centre, Aba, is commerce in all its forms, including small-scale manufacturing of textiles, shoes, polyethylene products, beverages and so on, much of this through very vibrant informal sector activity. The commercial importance of Aba increased manifold after the Nigerian Civil War (1967 – 1970) due mainly to the relocation in Aba of much of the businesses of Igbos from other places in



Nigeria.

The most common economic activity in all the rural sites is farming, with fishing carried out in sites by the river (Akwete, Owerrinta and Ndi Ebe). Trading is the second most common economic activity. Subsistence farming is dominant, but Ndi Ebe is noted for commercial rice farming, cocoa and rubber production. The specialised craft of cloth weaving carried out by women is dominant and has historically been so in Akwete. Reduced patronage of Akwete cloth is contributing to increasing migration of young females.

Income diversification is increasing in the rural areas through sub-urbanisation of industrial activities like paper mills and packaging factories in Owerrinta, and intensified home construction activities in places like Abiriba. The latter has brought a significant shift in occupations from farming to working on construction sites. The continued spread of Aba urban area coupled with improved transportation and higher literacy levels has facilitated the incidence of commuting from peri-urban rural sites like Owerrinta and Akwete to Aba for employment.

Migration from the rural areas to the urban centres, primarily with an economic motive, was therefore a common livelihood strategy. The conditions for 'high expectations' as the underlying reason for migration were satisfied in the study area. There was adequate awareness of the potential of migration leading to a more satisfying standard of living.

In many cases, young males were the predominant category of rural-urban migrants, but young females are increasingly joining this movement to take advantage of greater educational and occupational opportunities in the city. Movement to urban areas is made easier by social and organisational ties that also bridge the gap between urban and rural areas. The apprenticeship system, age-grades, town development unions and kinship ties, as well as religious affiliations, alumni associations and trading houses or guilds, all provide support to migrants.

Migration patterns between rural and urban areas also take the form of return migrants coming back to the rural areas and rural-rural migration. Return migration is driven mainly by the attraction of rural-based income-generating activities like farming, retirement and sometimes difficulty in making a living in the city. In the past return migration involved mostly older men and women, but in recent times, more younger men and women are returning home. With this trend has been the greater incidence of 'urban-type' occupations being practised in the rural areas.

In south-eastern Nigeria, home visits, particularly for town meetings or end of year festivals, are a common practice for people living 'abroad' in the cities. During these visits, social ties are renewed and strengthened. The social groups, particularly age-grades and town development unions, are often responsible for many of the developments in the rural community.

Remittances in cash or kind are another important type of linkage between rural and

urban dwellers and often an important factor in meeting the livelihood needs of residents in both areas. Food is a common item remitted and usually features as an important part of survival strategies. Urban residents commonly send materials for building houses or establishing a business as an accumulation strategy for themselves or for their rural relatives.

Commodity flows of goods between Aba, the urban centre, and the five rural and peri-urban communities showed some interesting findings. In a few cases, food crops were found to flow from the urban centre to the rural, agricultural areas. Other types of flows were more predictable, such as building materials flowing from urban to rural or specialty items like yarn from Aba to Akwete for its famous cloth weaving industry.

Commodity exchange between rural and urban areas is, in some places, constrained by a lack of major markets in the area, poor roads and, for most commodities, by urban market associations that block rural producers from selling directly to consumers in urban markets.

## **Effects of rural-urban interactions**

### **Effects of interactions upon the rural and urban places**

One of the major consequences of rural to urban migration upon the rural community is that the majority of migrants are the young, most productive residents which are leaving behind an older population. In Abiriba, it was stated that part of the communal farmlands had been lost to neighbouring communities because young people who should farm are not at home.

Some respondents also remarked that in the days before so much interaction with outside localities took place, most young people married from within the community. Now there are many cases of marriage with people from outside the locality and even outside the state. Some respondents felt this had led to greater disunity of the people, and some also lamented a loss of cultural values and norms as people were now embracing 'foreign' ideas.

The effects of greater rural-urban interaction upon the urban areas have included congestion leading to urban squalor, housing shortages, invasion of urban open spaces and green belts with low quality housing, as well as the rapid accumulation of urban waste and a breakdown in urban infrastructure.

Neither locality is independent of the other. While in previous generations, the rural dwellers were largely self-sufficient, they have now become more dependent upon urban goods and services, (that might not have been perceived to be a 'need' before), as well as remittances. Similarly, though urban areas have always been dependent upon the primary products from the rural areas for consumption or for further processing at the individual level, these goods are more significant for household security.

### **Effects of interactions upon the individual**

Older participants in the FGDs held at Akwete commented that 'in the good old days', everyone was his 'brother's keeper' and there was social cohesion among families and

clans. The urban centres, they believed, have negatively transformed social values and watered down previously cherished principles, and the ruling principle is 'everyone for himself; God for us all'.

On the other hand, one respondent noted that interaction with the city was beneficial because villagers were now 'bold'. In a FGD with young rural males, the complaint was made that urban youths are 'arrogant and lack manners'. For the rural residents that do not leave the village, there is often a feeling of being left in the 'dark' concerning things going on. Those who in earlier years would have felt content with their rural life, now feel down-graded.

### **Effects of interactions on the environment**

In an attempt to meet the ever-increasing urban demand for firewood, furniture and housing construction materials, rural people and urban commercial wood vendors interact to degrade the forests. Increased vehicular traffic to and from the rural areas has damaged the earth roads that never supported such a volume of traffic in the past.

In Owerrinta, industries have polluted the river, causing lower fish yields now than around 30 years ago. Dumping of solid wastes has also been observed.

The effects of rural-urban interactions are also felt in urban areas. Due to the increase in population, waste disposal has become increasingly problematic. Rural-type industries in the cities have also created problems. For example, water draining from *garri* processing plants in town collects in the gutters and creates a foul odour, polluting the air.

### **Policy dimensions**

Agricultural and rural development policies since colonial times have largely failed to improve rural conditions and, coupled with the strong urban bias of most other policies, help to explain the disparity between rural and urban areas. Past agricultural and rural development programmes failed because they were conceptually faulty, technologically deficient, and not backed by appropriate economic incentives, infrastructure or institutional arrangements. Attempts to improve agriculture and rural infrastructure also failed because of gross mismanagement at the implementation stage. Policies, generally made at the national level, may be implemented differentially at local levels, and in some cases policy implementation was set back by political instability or deterioration of the economy. Decentralisation of governance is associated with urbanisation of state or local government headquarters and this accentuates differences between rural and urban areas.

Civil society organisations like town development unions, age groups or NGOs contribute significantly to rural and urban development. Therefore government policy towards these organisations is an important factor in positive rural-urban linkages. Overall, rural-urban interactions are subject to the influences of government economic policies and macro policies such as the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and globalisation.

## Recommendations

1. Since rural-urban interactions are a significant part of livelihood strategies in south-eastern Nigeria they should always be taken into account by development policy makers in designing interventions for poverty alleviation and urban or rural development. This implies that the idea of setting up separate administrative units (ministries) for urban or rural development should be reconsidered and replaced by an arrangement that sees rural and urban areas as two ends of a continuum of the urbanisation process. The bias in the provision of infrastructure should be minimised by such an arrangement.
2. Arising from the observation that a wide range of policies ultimately have an impact on rural-urban interactions, all national policies should be closely scrutinised to minimise adverse consequences for the good elements of rural-urban interactions.
3. To reduce bias, inequity and mismanagement in the provision of economic and social infrastructure such as roads, markets, housing, transport and communications systems, educational and health facilities, electricity and water supply, so vital in determining the level and pattern of urban-rural interactions, there should be greater transparency and participation by civil society, fostered by an adherence to democratic principles, in the planning and provision of these facilities.
4. The enabling environment should be created, through infrastructural development and the provision of incentives such as tax relief, to encourage the siting of industries by private enterprise in rural areas, in order to provide alternative sources of employment and income and minimise rural-urban migration. An imaginative educational programme, siting skills acquisition centres in the rural areas, should complement the above idea by enabling the youth to be trained within their rural domain while still having the opportunity to participate in farming.
5. Educational policies and practices that frustrate merit should be reversed while at the same time effort should be intensified to generate employment opportunities for school leavers in order to tackle the problem of school drop-outs in the study area.
6. The State government should, as a matter of policy, promote indigenous crafts such as the Akwete cloth weaving industry by itself popularising the use of the products of such industries. If, instead of using fabric imported from Taiwan and other places, the Abia State government insisted on the use of Akwete cloth in all its establishments, the high demand could stimulate production and help stem the increasing rate of female migration out of Akwete. Increased government patronage should be accompanied by technical assistance to modernise the technology, to encourage the weavers to produce narrow strips of cloth that can be more readily afforded by the buying public, rather than the large pieces currently produced, which are priced beyond the reach of many potential buyers.
7. Since farming remains the primary occupation of most rural people, programmes to enhance agricultural production should continue to command priority attention. Programmes should continue to be directed at improving the technology for farming and providing an enabling environment to sustain high agricultural production.
  - In view of the high population density, consequent scarcity of land and proneness

- of the region to severe soil erosion, agro-forestry technologies involving minimum tillage and incorporating multi-purpose trees in the farming landscape, which are the most ecologically stable for the zone, should be actively promoted.
- Immediate attention should be given to providing rural farmers with sustained incentives by making inputs such as fertilisers, tree seedlings, farming implements and credits accessible and affordable to them. NGOs and farmers' organisations could be used to facilitate the delivery of these inputs.
  - Government should pay special attention to the development of markets and feeder roads for the ready delivery of inputs and evacuation of produce. In addition, farmers should be encouraged to form associations of producers in order to strengthen them in bargaining with commodity associations for marketing their goods.

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