

Urbanization and Food Production in Owerri North Local Government Area, Nigeria

Ngozi Mary Obilor¹, Charles Olisa Awogu²

¹Lecturer, Department of Sociology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

²Lecturer, Department of Sociology and anthropology, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria.

Correspondence: nm.obilor@unizik.edu.ng¹

ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: Urbanization as a social change brings with it, numerous opportunities. It however, may constitute a threat to food production thereby leading to food insecurity in Owerri North LGA. Therefore, this study investigated the impact of urbanization on food production so as to make recommendations that will foster food production in the face of urbanization. The study answered three research questions and adopted the population theory of Thomas Malthus because; it explains the ills of urbanization.

Methodology: The study adopted a descriptive research design because the study relied on the behaviour and opinion of people. Using Taro Yamane, a sample population of 399 was derived. Nevertheless, a sample size of (N=382) was arrived at from the number of questionnaire returned from the field. The researchers purposively selected Orji, Emekuku and Naze to represent the entire Owerri North LGA because these communities in the local government are similar in everything including the trend of Urbanization. Respondents were randomly sampled so as to give each respondent equal chances of representation. The study solely relied on the secondary sources of data collection technique and the use of questionnaires to gather data for this study. Data were presented in tables and analysed using the simple percentage statistical tool.

Findings: Findings revealed that, lands are mostly used for non-agricultural purposes and that; the price of land in the LGA has increased greatly. It was also revealed that most youths who should drive agriculture tend to engage in non-agricultural economic ventures.

Conclusion & Recommendations: Based on the findings of the study, it was concluded that government and NGOs encourage plantation farming and animal husbandry. It was recommended that government and NGOs must provide agricultural lands, fertilizer, seedlings and interest free loans for farmers and investors who seek to engage in farming.

Keywords: Agriculture, Food Production, Urbanization.

Article History

Received:
May 22, 2023

Revised:
September 17, 2023

Accepted:
September 25, 2023

Published:
September 30, 2023

Introduction

Background to the Study

Urbanization can be defined as the growth of cities in the society. It can also be referred to as the transition of rural areas to urban areas. Peng, Chen, Cheng (2019) posits that urbanization is a process by which rural areas become urbanized as a result of economic development and industrialization. They further stated that the term urbanization denotes the redistribution of populations from rural to urban settlements basically, through rural-urban migration.

Based on this assertion, it can be deduced that urbanization can be caused by the development or growth of industries and social change in the physical, economic, environmental, social and demographic components of a society. The Population Reference Bureau (2004) opined that 60 percent of the world population will be urban by 2030 and most urban growth will occur in less developed countries. This will be characterized by urban infrastructural facilities, increased population density, social heterogeneity, individuality etc. all of which differentiates the urban areas from the rural areas.

Browne (2014) opined that, urbanization exposes people to better economic opportunities, healthcare facility and a general improvement in the standard of living of people. This however, does not come without shortfalls like; pollution, overcrowding, housing problems etc. as experienced in most cities (European Commission, 2019).

Even with these shortfalls, urbanization remains one of the oldest and most pervasive processes of social change that has shaped a lot of societies around the world. While urbanization tends to increase and the population in urban areas tends to go up, there remains a need to sustain this population and ensure that the daily nutritional needs of the growing population are met through adequate food production. This entails the utilization of lands for agricultural activities and the prioritization of agricultural activities and food production.

Balasubramanian & Seung-churl (2010) stated that as a city grows, rural landscape is affected and this effect could vary from the loss of land used in farming to the loss of open space for environmental uses thereby, limiting the farmers' option to remain in farming. Wasilewski and Krukowski (2002) further assert that low profitability in agriculture along with high prices of land for urban uses has shifted the interest of land owners in favour of selling the land for non-agricultural purposes than for agricultural use. According to them, families would rather opt for a non-agricultural avenue to earn their livelihood at the expense of agriculture especially with the increased employment opportunities which urbanization provides.

This increased job opportunity may have also, contributed to the decline in the rate of manpower who are available for agricultural activities as most vibrant youth who should engage in agriculture, tend to migrate to the cities in search of non-agricultural employment opportunities. In view of this, the study tends to investigate how urbanization has affected food production in Owerri North Local Government Area (LGA) of Imo state.

Empirical Literature

Balasubramanian and Seung-Churl (2010) carried out a study titled, "Urbanization, Population Pressure and Agricultural Intensification: Evidences from Tamil Nadu in India". The paper analysed the phenomenon that, the transfer of agricultural land and water resources for urban use with adverse consequences to agricultural production has not been adequately addressed in the Indian context, through a case study of the state of Tamil Nadu which stands in the forefront of industrialization and urbanization. Results show that urbanization and land put to non-agricultural uses have strong negative impact on agricultural sector. Therefore, this study recommends that, it is important to give priority for decentralised growth through rural industrialization. Public investment on road network should also be increased not only to reduce the growth of urbanization but also, to promote rural industrialization.

In another study titled, “Food Security Challenges in Rapidly Urbanizing Developing Countries: Insight from Indonesia”, Putra, Tong and Pribadi (2020) analyzed the impact of urbanization on food consumption, food composition, as well as farming performance. Series of consumption data since 1976 and statistical descriptive approaches were employed. The results showed a trend of decline in the share of food expenditures, especially in urban areas, which is commonly regarded as a sign of increasing prosperity. Surprisingly, food composition remained stable, dominated by rice, due to lower-income and higher non-food expenditures of urban inhabitants mainly for housing, transportation, water and energy. The stagnancy of food composition provides less incentive for farmers; thus, farming is dominated by low-revenue paddy fields, uneducated labourers, and older farmers. Based on these findings the study recommended incorporating food composition and farming performance into food security policies, instead of merely focusing on the compliance of food supply and demand, the linking of food issues with non-food issues, especially with urban planning, housing development, and transportation management to increase the income capacity of the society to purchase a greater variety of food, and the development of food diversification served by urban food vendors to support the benefits of the farming business.

Also, Satterthwaite, McGranahan and Tacoli (2010) carried out a study titled “Urbanization and its implications for food and farming.” The study examined the influence of an increasingly urbanized world on food and farming in Indonesia. Findings revealed a relationship between increased urbanization and decline in agricultural activities. It was therefore, recommended that farming be made more attractive so as to attract and encourage people to go into agriculture.

Similarly, these studies investigated the Impact of Urbanization on food production however; it is a departure from the current studies which investigated the impact of Urbanization on Food production in Imo state, Nigeria; Owerri North LGA to be precise.

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, the world has witnessed an unprecedented rate in urban growth. While this may have been accompanied by a host of opportunities like; the improvement in the standard of living, easy access to economic opportunities and other benefits that accompany the growth of cities, the rate of food production may have also dropped drastically. There is a widespread notion that city growth propels rural-urban migration and that the population of migrants tends to be youths who are the active and productive population that should engage in agriculture.

Also, the sale of land for non-agricultural use, seemingly prevalent in suburban areas like Owerri North LGA, may pose a major challenge to food production within the locality and Nigeria as a whole. These actions may have led to food insecurity and food scarcity and may have affected the ability of farmers to sufficiently meet the dietary needs of the entire populace. Thus, this study seeks to draw attention to the food security issues that foster socio-economic growth of the country (Nigeria) at large, and Owerri North LGA in particular.

Research Questions

1. What are the major causes of urbanization in Owerri North LGA?
2. How has urbanization affected food production in Owerri North LGA?
3. How can food production be enhanced in the face of urbanization?

Objective of the Study

The study aims at investigating the impact of urbanization on food production in Owerri North LGA.

Theoretical Framework

This study anchored on the population theory of Thomas Malthus. Thomas Malthus theorized that as population grows in geometric progression and food production increases in arithmetic progression there will be food shortage due to the exponential population growth.

Based on this theory, when population increases faster than the rate of food production there is bound to be food shortage. Thus, as rural areas transits to urban areas, the population tends to increase. However, if efforts are not made to ensure that the population growth does not supersede the rate of food production, there will be food shortage which will lead to malnutrition and other health problems that could result in a decline in population growth.

This theory does not just explains the effect of urbanization on food production but it also, predicts the fate of the urban population if nothing is done to increase the rate of food production in the face of increasing population growth.

Research Methodology

Research Design

The study investigated the effect of city growth on food production in the suburban area of Owerri North LGA. The LGA has a population of 242,800 (Two Hundred and Forty Two Thousand, Eight Hundred) inhabitants as stated by 2016 projection from the 2006 national census by the National Population Commission of Nigeria and National Bureau of Statistics. This population comprised of 87,094 (Eighty Seven Thousand and Ninety Four) males and 89,240 (Eighty Nine Thousand, Two Hundred and Forty) females. The researchers adopted a descriptive research design because the study relied on the behaviour and opinion of people.

Population & Sample

Using Taro Yamane, a sample of (N=399) (Three Hundred and Ninety Nine) was derived from a total population of 242,800 (Two Hundred and Forty Two Thousand, Eight Hundred). In return, (N=382) (Three Hundred and Eighty Two) questionnaires were returned from the field. Hence the response rate was 95%.

Sampling Technique

The researchers purposively selected 3 communities; Orji, Emekuku and Naze to represented the entire communities in Owerri North because they are similar in the rate of urbanization. Thus, 133 (One Hundred and Thirty Three) copies of questionnaires were distributed to each of the sampled communities but a sample size of 382 (Three Hundred and Eighty Two) was however derived from the returned copies of the questionnaire. This population comprised of 130 (One Hundred and Thirty) respondents from Orji, 127 (One Hundred and Twenty Seven) respondents from Emekuku and 125 (One Hundred and Twenty Five) respondents from Naze.

Respondents were randomly selected so as to give every individual an opportunity of being represented in the sample and findings were analysed using simple percentages statistical test. The study relied basically on the use of questionnaire and secondary sources of data collection techniques so as to give the study both theoretical and empirical stand.

Results

Table 1: *What are the major causes of urbanization in Owerri North LGA?*

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Total
1.	Industrialization is the cause of urbanization in Owerri North.	180 (47.1%)	202 (52.9%)	382 (100%)
2.	Commercialization is the cause of urbanization in Owerri North.	195 (51.0%)	187 (49%)	382 (100%)
3.	Urbanization in Owerri Municipal is expanding to Owerri North.	201 (52.6%)	181 (47.4%)	382 (100%)

From the table above, respondents are of the opinion that the urbanization in Owerri North is as a result of commercialization and the urban expansion from Owerri Municipal which is the capital of Imo state.

Table 2: *How has urbanization affected food production in Owerri North LGA?*

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Total
4.	Lands are used for non-agricultural purposes.	328 (85.9%)	54 (14.1%)	382 (100%)
5.	The price of land has increased greatly.	359 (94%)	23 (6%)	382 (100%)
6.	Most youth who would have engaged in agriculture, now engage in non-agricultural economic ventures.	308 (80.6%)	74 (19.4%)	382 (100%)

The table above shows that lands are used for non-agricultural use in Owerri North LGA and the price of land has increased greatly. It also showed that most youth who are supposed to be drive agricultural activities, engage in non-agricultural activities.

Table 3: *How can food production be enhanced even in the face of urbanization?*

S/N	Questions	Yes	No	Total
7.	Plantation farming will enhance food production even in the face of urbanization.	199 (52.9%)	183 (47.9%)	382 (100%)
8.	Animal husbandry will enhance food production even in the face of urbanization.	226 (59.2%)	156 (40.8%)	382 (100%)
9.	Provision of agricultural lands, fertilizers, seedlings and interest free loans for farmers by the government and NGOs can improve food production even in the face of urbanization.	271 (70.9%)	111 (29.1%)	382 (100%)

The above table shows that food production can be enhanced in the face of urbanization if the inhabitants of Owerri North LGA are provided with agricultural lands, seedlings and interest free loans by NGOs and the government. It also shows that animal husbandry and plantation farming can enhance food production in the face of urbanization.

Discussion of Research Findings

The findings of the study places the primary cause of urbanization in Owerri North LGA on commercialization, which is a concomitant of its closeness to the capital city; Owerri Municipal LGA. This is in contrast to what is obtainable in the more civilized countries where urbanization is attracted by industrialization. Nevertheless, the impact of urbanization on food Production has so far, posed a threat to human development especially as population tends to grow geometrically with the advent of urbanization.

This threat is made visible by the high cost of land which has hindered those who seek to acquire lands for agricultural purposes from acquiring lands; the increased use of land for non-agricultural use and the disengagement of most youths in the LGA from agricultural activities to non-agricultural economic activities that seem more attractive economically and socially.

Therefore, this study recommended that, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and governments at all levels (Federal, State and Local), provide agricultural lands, fertilizers, seedlings and interest free loans for farmers so as to make farming more attractive socially and economically. It was also recommended that private individuals and government invest in plantation farming and animal husbandry so as to tackle food insecurity in the face of urbanization.

Conclusion

City growth can be influenced by many factors but these factors tend to vary from one geographical zone to another. In the case of Owerri North, the primary cause of urbanization in the area is the expansion of Owerri city into suburbs like Owerri North. Even as this is an inevitable change, it is also a welcome development that comes with lots of ills especially as it has to do with the rate of food production.

Similar experiences will also, be observed in other suburbs that are gradually developing into cities due to their closeness to the city centre. Therefore, it is necessary to make recommendation that will not halt urbanization but encourage food production in the face of urbanization because urbanization has come to stay.

Recommendation

The following recommendations were made based on the research findings. They are;

1. The government and NGOs should make provision for agricultural lands, fertilizer, seedlings and interest free loans for farmers and those who are interested in agriculture but lack the resources to bring it to play.
2. The government and NGOs should encourage plantation farming in Owerri North LGA as well as suburbs experiencing similar challenge.
3. Government and NGOs should invest in animal husbandry so as to reduce the dependence on cash crop farming.

Acknowledgments

None

Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

Funding Source

The authors received no funding to conduct this study.

ORCID iDs

Ngozi Mary Obilor ¹  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3362-1482>

Charles Olisa Awogu ²  <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-7600-1235>

References

- Balasubramanian, R. & Seung-Churl, C. (2010). Urbanization, Population Pressure and Agricultural Intensification: Evidences from Tamil Nadu in India. *Journal of Rural Development*, 33(2), 87-108.
- Browne, E. (2014). *Benefits of Urbanisation in Asia* (GSDRC Helpdesk Research Report 1082). Birmingham, UK: GSDRC, University of Birmingham.
- European Commission (2019). *The Future of Cities: Opportunities, Challenges and The Way Forward*. Bloomsbury Press, New York
- Peng, X. Xiangming Chen, X. Yuan and Cheng, Y. (2019). Urbanization and its Consequences. *Demography* – Vol. II
- Population Reference Bureau (2004). 1875 Connecticut Avenue, N.W. Suite 520 Washington, D.C.
- Putra, A. S., Guangji Tong, G. and Pribadi, D. O. (2020). Food Security Challenges in Rapidly Urbanizing Developing Countries: Insight from Indonesia. Retrieved from www.mdpi.com/journal/sustainability on 23rd October, 2021.
- Satterthwaite, D., McGranahan, G. and Tacoli, C. (2010). Urbanization and its Implications for Food and Farming. *Phil. Trans. R. Soc.* Retrieved from rstb.royalsocietypublishing.org on 23rd October, 2021.
- Shabir, G., Iqbal, A., Riaz, S., Safdar, G., Javed, M.N. (2021). Government Media Campaign for Agriculture Perfection in Punjab, Pakistan. *Journal of Agricultural Research*, 59(1), 89-94.
- Wasilewski, A., and Krukowski, K. (2002). *Land Conversion for Suburban Housing: a Study of Urbanization around Warsaw and Olsztyn, Poland*. (CEESA Discussion Paper, 8/2002). Berlin: Humboldt-Universität Berlin, Institut für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften des Landbaus, Fachgebiet Ressourcenökonomie. Retrieved from <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-112918> on 15th October, 2021.