NEW TOWNS AS GROWTH CENTRES
A Case Study in Nigeria
by E. Sokari-George

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the selection of seven new towns as growth centres in Rivers State. Hosted, based upon financial constraint and other variables, it suggested only two locations suitable for growth centres. These centres are integrated with rural development policies so function as alternative destinations for rural migrants to the state's capital city and to strengthen the service hierarchies of the rural region. The general arguments are illustrated with a case study of Rivers State of Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

Rivers State is the only State in the Federal Republic of Nigeria which has a single major city - Port Harcourt. Port Harcourt, the State's capital is used for administrative and both for public and private sectors of the economy. Also, Port Harcourt is the centre of Nigeria's petroleum production. Because of the petroleum industry, multinational oil companies such as Agip, Elf, Mobil, Phillips, Shell-BP as well as the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) and the Nigerian Petroleum Chemical Industry (NPCI) head offices are located in Port Harcourt while others like the Nigerian Petroleum Refining Company (NPRC) and the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria (NAFCON) are located at the periphery of the city. Apart from the companies mentioned above, there are other major manufacturing establishments at Port Harcourt (Table 1).

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TABLE 1. MANUFACTURING ESTABLISHMENTS IN PORT HARCOURT: 1970—1983

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food, beverages and tobacco</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
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<tr>
<td>Textiles, clothes and Leather</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wood and wood products</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>Paper and paper products</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chemical and plastic products</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-metal mineral products</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic metal industries</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fabricated metal products</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, gas and water</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Repair services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>204</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>297</td>
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</table>

Source: Rivers State, 1983.

Due to these activities and others, Port Harcourt therefore pulls massive migrants to itself for better employment and for a response to spatial earnings differential in the capital city (Sakan-George, 1985). For instance, in 1973, migrants into Port Harcourt from within the Rivers State were 107,720, while those from other states were 61,739 (Salau, 1984). On the whole, the total migrant population in 1973 was 169,459 and represented 73 percent of the population of the city in that year.

As a result of the massive migration into Port Harcourt and with an “annual growth rate of 9.5 percent, the dangerous phenomena of over-crowding, sub-urban sprawl, traffic congestion, unplanned shortage of housing, crime, and other urban facilities have begun to manifest themselves…” (Ndumu 1981: 1).

To ameliorate the above urban problems in Port Harcourt, during the Third National Development Plan 1976—80 period, with a civilian administration at the helm of affairs in 1979, seven new towns (Eleranm, Boni, Wil, Bor, Ogbia, Abu, and Ologho’s) were constructed to be growth centres with a target population of about 50,000 of each new town when completed” (Ndumu: 1981: 2). These were selected from seven local government areas by the Rivers State Government in 1980. Four of the designated centres were found in four local

1. Actually, all of these are existing villages of different sizes in population. The Government felt the expansion of these towns is a less costly alternative than the creation of new towns and as they are conceived as growth centres, we have also tagged them the term “growth centres/growth poles.”
government areas on the main land of the state, three were located in the smaller (by population) local government areas in the Rhine area, and none was designated in the two larger (by population) local government areas.

It is likely that the State Government was in for growth pole or growth center strategy, little did the government know that there has been a controversial debate on the issue for almost two decades. During the period opposition to growth centre strategy became stronger especially in developing countries. From a golden national or regional development catchphrase, growth pole or growth centre has become almost a dirty word. The debate, however, is more of a semantic one than of substance one. Similarly, the more relatively recent disenchantment is more a product of new fashion and pet phrases ("new international economic order," "basic minimum needs," and "integrated rural development") than of long experience with attempts to implement growth pole strategies. The purpose of this paper is not to review the debate on the growth centre controversy but to determine if the seven designated centres are feasible for growth pole strategies and if they are not, to suggest end or to indicate how the strategies might play a significant part in the development process of Rivers State.

GROWTH CENTRE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

In some developing countries, as indicated earlier, the growth pole strategy to national or regional development has received a very strong opposition (Friedmann, 1975; Faber and Seris, 1972; and Metakovic and Pestel, 1974). This opposition arises from (1) the application of the concept copied and used from the Western strategies in an indiscriminate without modification to suit the socio-economic development pattern of the countries, and (2) the size of the strategies at location for planned development instead of integrated national or regional urban development (Richardson and Richardson, 1975; and Conroy, 1975). In other developing countries, the strategies of growth pole are accepted and integrated into national developing policies in national planning documents and planning legislations (Shikan, 1978; and Sauers, 1978). In these countries the strategies have either been applied as decentralization policy in both medium size city levels and in small cities in rural areas to provide a driving force for regional development, in particular the reduction of regional disparities, to cope with polarization phenomenon of prime cities or as strategic public investment policy.

1 The author does not engage in any semantic discourse on the distinction between the two terms here for all throughout the paper use them interchangeably.
in the establishment of industries in potential core regions or rural areas to cope with rural-urban migration and regional disparities.

In either case, emphasis is placed on the creation of industrial employment either in agricultural processing industries producing food for export or for the home market or a considerable number of small-scale industries, smaller workshops and factories that can act as feeders for industries for a number of activities in the large urban centers.

Case histories of many cities in some developing countries with population ranging between 100,000 and 500,000 show that they are highly dependent on their hinterlands for agriculture small-scale industry (Ho, 1979; Sundaram, 1970; and Galick, 1967).

In centers for small-scale industry, for example, Taiwan presents some cases where medium size or small cities set up as growth centers support a substantial number and variety of manufacturing establishments. Ho (1979) points out that between 1930 and 1956 industrial employment increased by nearly four percent a year in Taiwan's seven largest cities, and between 1956 and 1966 it increased by about 5.6 percent a year in small cities outside Taipai metropolitan area. In 1966, Taipan, Kaohsiung, Taitung, and 23 urban townships adjacent to these medium size cities had 23 percent of Taiwan's employment in manufacturing and eight smaller cities had an additional ten percent. Ho argues from his review of experience in Taiwan that a decentralised pattern of industrialisation based on medium size and small cities in rural areas improved non-agricultural employment opportunities for rural households by allowing them commute to manufacturing jobs in near cities and still engage in farm activities on weekends and create other linkages with small commercial, service, and repair establishments in rural towns, making it possible for small business to develop in the farming communities. Decentralised industrialisation created employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for rural people, giving them more income to spend on manufactured goods produced in growth centers outside the large urban areas, and making the ruralities to remain in the rural regions (Ho, 1979: 90–92). This suggests that growth center offers alternative destinations for migrants, strengthens regional settlement hierarchies, gives regions more demographic stability, and stimulates development of rural regions.

Another interesting concept to develop the rural regions of developing countries is that of the “agropolitan district” (Friedmann and Douglas, 1975). This approach is quite in contrast with the growth pole concept. Friedmann and Douglas argue that growth center simply means an urban industrial strategy, and
instead suggest that elements of urbanism should be introduced into rural areas via agro-polars or "city-in-the-fields" approach. This approach involves the creation of a spatial unit larger than the village, named the "agro-politan district." The district would supply services, provide off-farm jobs, and will be self-sufficient. In normal circumstances, the agropolar district would have an average population density in excess of 200 persons per square kilometre would contain a major town of 10,000–25,000 with a commuting radius of 5–10 kilometres (walking or cycling distance). Most of the labour force would be agricultural but there would be some small-scale light industry, agro-processing and agro-supplying industries, and a variety of service activities. The functions of the districts would be financed by raising local savings, the substitution of volunteer work for taxes, the transfer of capital from a regional capital city to rural areas, and changing the internal terms of trade in favour of agriculture.

The two major differences between the growth pole and the agropolar district are: (1) the former is ideally set up in a national or regional urban strategy, whereas the latter aims to resist urbanisation; and (2) the growth centre strategy is very selective spatially, with the chances of success declining as the number of destinations increases. The agropolar district approach calls for an even scattered of a large number of districts. It is unclear how the districts would be created —whether by selection of certain villages for expansion or by establishment of new rural towns. The implementation issues have not been properly taken care of by the proponents of the agropolar district approach.

GROWTH CENTRE IN IVER'S STATE PLANNING:

In 1980, as indicated earlier, the River State Government embarked upon the development of seven growth centres. The purpose of the census, "is to provide alternatives to the over growth, congestion and sub-urban sprawl of Port Harcourt by creating new medium size growth poles in which people can have good homes in healthy and pleasant surroundings near their places of work with urban services and cultural facilities... To give them priority in public works, developing them as industrial centres, and developing them as alternative destinations for migrants to Port Harcourt. This is a major and necessary element in the State's regional planning policy..." (Ndinwou, 1981). This is not to say that Port

1. The judgements for the part of the study were formed in 1984 while the writer was preparing a course on National and Regional Planning in Nigeria. It should therefore be stressed that the text reflects personal observation of the study and does not in any way represent the views of the Government of Rivers State. Apart from official government documentation, the main information is from informal interviews. This explains the very 'loose' references.
Harcourt is too large. It is a relatively medium size city of less than one million in population (Table 2). It accounts for only about 12.5 percent of the State's population but its income distribution is very unequal (Sokari-George, 1989).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1915</td>
<td>5,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>7,385</td>
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<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>22,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>20,060</td>
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<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>30,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>35,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>73,300</td>
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<tr>
<td>1963</td>
<td>179,653</td>
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<tr>
<td>1967</td>
<td>183,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>231,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982/83</td>
<td>911,731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Ogonosu (1979: 73); Sibko (1989).

It appears, however, the Rivers State Government has proposed to have a growth pole strategy. It has been more nominal than real. The discussion here will deal with what type of growth centres might be implementable in Rivers State rather than with evaluation of extant policy. An attempt will be made to suggest a strategy that helps to achieve regional spatial objectives and that is complementary with emphasis on rural development.

In the first instance, the seven centres identified, none of them had municipal status because their sizes are far less than 70,000 in population and even if they are fully developed to the targeted population figure of 50,000 each they would not acquire the municipal status. Irrespective of none municipal status, they could either be chosen on their individual economic merit (i.e. potential for industrial development) or they could be chosen for purely political reasons.

If either of them is correct, it made little or no sense in terms of a regional spatial strategy. For example, two of the designations Woji and Obigbo are within three and seven kilometre distance and 3,000 and 5,000 in population respectively are too close to Port Harcourt to maximise returns on scarce resources and have no potentials for future growth. Second, because of their population sizes and the proximities to Port Harcourt, Woji and Obigbo must not be given the status of growth centres. After all, Port Harcourt is still growing rapidly and this means Woji and Obigbo will soon be swallowed up to reinforce metropolitan
polymatisation rather than to undermine it. Third, different levels of growth centre is needed for different purposes. A regional growth centre is to stimulate decentralisation from the largest city or to stabilise a region’s population. These include varying urban sizes and different selection criteria, but most important, they place growth pole selection with the consideration of urban hierarchy.

Other centres such as Abua, Borokiri, Elekeremor and Ogbia have population of 10,000; 7,000; 2,000; 3,000 and 8,000 respectively, are all within 60–80 kilometres and have no municipal status. They are neither of medium size (even if they have acquired the targeted population figure of 50,000 each) nor far enough from Port Harcourt to be its competitive pull or as counterweights but are close enough to benefit the agglomerante of Port Harcourt’s economics.

Borokiri, Elekeremor, and Ogbia are located along Rivers, Nun, Fardaco, and Kolo respectively. During high tides the rivers overflow that banks and the towns are always completely flooded. Again, the three towns (Borokiri, Elekeremor, and Ogbia) are all located on marshy or swampy ground unsuitable for further development.

The designation of growth centres is a good idea in the right direction but as indicated, the selection of the seven centres were wrong and for a State Government alone to embark on such number of projects is too much for effective implementation and in view of resource constraints and scarcity of infrastructure capital. A developing nation with these constraints cannot singularly rely on a project of seven growth centres at a time much less a State Government in developing country in Africa.

Spatial considerations suggests that if a major centre were to be established it should be in a medium size city. Apart from Port Harcourt there is no other metropolitan centre in Rivers State. This means that the state is still predominantly rural. However, there are cities of different sizes from different local government areas that can be considered as growth poles or catchment centers. For example, Buguma City the second largest community in Rivers State has a population of about 125,000, Abonnema (about 90,000), Bakasi (about 70,000), and Tobbio (about 65,000); all are in Old Government Area (OEGA). In Bonny Local Government Area (OLGA), Bonny has a population of about 85,000, Obupu Town (about 70,000), and Ndo about 60,000. These cities or towns are all in the Riverine area of the State, and except Bakasi are all 120–240 kilometre range from Port Harcourt. Furthermore, these cities or towns are all unconnected by road network because of difficult terrain of the area. If the Government of Rivers State actually wants to develop some growth centres to stimulate decentralisation to its rural areas and to minimise the migration to Port Harcourt, consideration should be given to urban hierarchy in the selection of the growth centres, and the number of centres must also be reduced.
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to two small cities in two local government areas at a time for effective implement-
tion. Bonny and Begraea Local Government Areas can qualify for the two cen-
tres because they have some medium size and small cities to merit the growth pole
status.

BONNY LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (OLGA)

Although OLGA has a difficult terrain, a major growth centre in the area
can easily be established. The local government is endowed with untapped
natural resources, it has substantial agricultural potential, it contains about 50 per
cent of the state's population, and it has a rapid population growth rate of 5.2 per
cent, yet there is no major or small-scale industrial activity and lacks a major urban
centre. This lack of activity has contributed to massive migration northwards to
Port Harcourt (See Figure 3). The massive migration, however, can be alleviated
if an urban centre nearer home is set up to accommodate the northward bound
migrants. An expansion of one of the towns (Bonny, Opobo Town, and Ngod)
preferably Bonny, because it is the headquarters of the local government area and
it has a population of about 85,000, is necessary to attain urban-rural balance,
since local migrants to this centre will easily be able to contact their rural origins as
compared with migrants to Port Harcourt. The rural-urban contacts in OLGA can
be an important vehicle of development diffusion, mainly as an instrument for
raising agricultural productivity.

On grounds of interregional equity, priority should be given to OLGA since
the area lags in infrastructure and services but has unexploited natural resource.
The area, because of the difficult terrain, has no road network to the mainland ex-
cept by speedboats, health services are very poor, and there is no electricity con-
necting the national grid. But Bonny has oil fields and oil terminal, glass sands,
and fibre processing while Ngo has copra. Glass sands, fibre processing, and
copra have not been fully exploited because of non-availability of infrastructure
and several hectares of coconut farm is neglected or abandoned since the end of
the country's civil war in 1970. This, if proper care is taken, can bring about
foreign exchange earnings. It is also said that infrastructure and services are func-
tionally related to the degree of development of regional urban hierarchy. In other
words, if infrastructure and services are developed in OLGA, they will strengthen
the area's larger towns and will improve the general welfare level of the popula-
tion in both the rural and urban areas.

A further advantage of Bonny is that its industrial potential is substantial.
Recently, the Federal Government of Nigeria has completed arrangements to
build a liquefied natural gas plant at Bonny to process gas for both domestic use
and for export. This shows that Bonny has economic potential and to promote
Bonny, would automatically increase economic and social flows between the southeast of the state and Port Harcourt, and would benefit the neighbouring communities such as Ogoni, Tomo, and Bel. The designation of Bonny as a growth centre and subsequent priority to the city in the allocation of infrastructure and industries' decentralization efforts would strengthen a basic development axis from Port Harcourt through Onne (where the petro-chemical complex is billed to be sited and the National Fertilizer Company of Nigeria will start production in 1987) to Bonny.

DEGEMA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA (DELGA)

Just as OLGA, the cities and towns in DELGA are all unconnected with the mainland because of the difficult terrain of the Riverine area. However, if OLGA is a suitable area for a growth centre, there is a stronger case for giving priority to DELGA. It is larger in area than OLGA (see Figure 1), some of its cities or towns are twice larger than the towns in OLGA, and it contains about 45 per cent of the State's population.

Buguma City, one of the cities, has a population of about 120,000, it is the capital of the Ileh arriving tribe in DELGA and has an agglomeration of about 500,000 population. Although Buguma City is not the administrative headquarters of the local government area, it is an ancient city with a unique location and offers several advantages, such as a potential trading centre and diversification of small-scale industrial structures like textiles, rush-based industries, boat building (speedboats), government craft centre, and has some prospects as a tourist centre. Buguma City has oil wells and has harnessed the substantial potential for rice cultivation which is undeveloped. This and others could be developed as rural industrial base which would strengthen Buguma City to act as a counterweight to Port Harcourt and bolster the regional urban hierarchy of the state. There is a good supply of skilled labour and low income housing by provincial city standards. It has a giant electric generator to serve the citizens' activities and because of its size and the small-scale industries in the community, plans are in advance stage by the Federal Government of Nigeria to connect the national electric grid.

Another advantage to Buguma City is its neighboring town—Abonnema. Abonnema has about 50,000 inhabitants, used to be a commercial and seaport town. With the closure of the port during the 1960's (in the middle of the Nigerian Civil War) the commercial activities had ceased to function. In order to limit the growth of Port Harcourt, the sea port at Abonnema should be reopened. As it is well known, ports are indispensable for export oriented industries and industries with a high import content. Compared to ports, internal transportation costs are
less significant as locational factors, since Rivers State is a small state within a country with a somewhat well-developed transportation network. Second, Rivers City, with an agglomeration of nearly 500,000 population, is a potential counterpole to Port Harcourt, serving as a partial central place for Biafra Local Government Area (BLGA). Third, with a seaport, Abonima will enjoy locational advantage of high accessibility to the neighbouring countries of Cameroun, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon, a big market as well as a source of capital. Similarly, a road connecting Oyigbo (the administrative centre of O£GLA) and the mainland, would strengthen the prospects of Rivers City for trade and for the tourist industry.

CONCLUSION

The growth pole strategies adopted in Rivers State of Nigeria did not merit the name because the designations were insufficiently selective, the centres were too small to be integrated into an overall strategy for the state as a whole, and the implementation was very ineffective. This paper has therefore suggested an internally consistent strategy for correcting the imbalances between the mainland and the Riverine areas of the State, for promoting a viable regional urban development policy, and for increasing the interaction between the urban and rural areas. It is believed that the recommended strategy is compatible with the accepted policy goals of slowing down the growth of Port Harcourt and continuing the attention given to agriculture and rural development.

REFERENCES


