

CONTAINED URBAN GROWTH IN POST-INDEPENDENCE MALAWI

EZEKIEL KALIPENI

Department of Geography, University of Illinois,
Urbana, Illinois 61801.
E-mail: kalipeni@uiuc.edu

ABSTRACT

In this paper Malawi is used as a case study of an implicit urban development program during the Banda regime that succeeded to a certain extent in slowing the growth of large urban areas while encouraging the proliferation and growth of small urban centers throughout the country. The paper examines the dynamics of population growth and change in Malawi's urban hierarchy during the 1966-1977 and 1977-1987 intercensal periods. An evaluation of the relative success of governmental strategies in redistributing urban population and implementing spatially balanced development across the three regions is also offered. The paper concludes that the development oriented strategies implemented during the Banda era had profound direct and indirect effects on Malawi's urban landscape resulting in a desired trend in population redistribution and urban growth throughout the country.

Key words: Contained urban growth, push-pull hypothesis, population redistribution, Malawi.

INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth most African cities have experienced during the post-independence era threaten their noble function as engines of sustainable development. Contained and planned urban growth appears to be the key to the competent governing of African cities. Political restructuring of the city government by itself will not solve the innumerable problems facing the modern African city. In this paper, Malawi is used as a case study to examine an implicit program during President Banda's tenure (1964-1994) that had the goal of arresting the growth of large cities while encouraging the proliferation and growth of smaller urban centers throughout the country. Until Malawi gained independence in 1964, population concentration had gravitated toward the Southern Region of

the country where Blantyre, the country's primate city, was located. Since then, in the wake of governmental efforts to encourage population redistribution and discourage rural-urban migration, the trend appears to have reversed in favor of the Central and Northern regions (Kalipeni, 1992a).

The principal goals of this paper are to examine the growth of urban centers in Malawi between 1966 and 1987, especially the trend in growth rates across the urban hierarchy, and to evaluate how successful governmental strategies have been in achieving desired levels of urban growth through population redistribution and spatially balanced development at the national, regional and district levels. The paper also highlights some of the major problems of urbanization Malawian cities are currently facing and suggests policy initiatives for sustainable urban growth.