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Peri-urban morphology and indigenous livelihoods in Ghana

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ABSTRACT

Recent studies indicate and predict rapid urban growth in developing countries. Such growth results in physical transformation of the environment and changes to livelihood activities. This paper examines how indigenes of Feyiase, a peri-urban area in Kumasi, one of the fastest growing cities in Ghana, are adapting to the effects of rapid physical transformation of their environment. Using mixed methods approach including interviews, household surveys and agency consultations, the paper analyses the nature and extent of physical development, its effects on peri-urban livelihoods, and the coping strategies of peri-urban indigenes. Findings show an increasing trend of conversion of peri-urban agriculture land into residential and other uses because of relatively low land values, high demand due to increased population, and proximity to the city centre in terms of accessibility. This situation has led to transformation of livelihoods and low income for peri-urban indigenes who are predominantly small scale farmers. As a result, many peri-urban indigenes are abandoning agriculture and resorting to migration and urban-based employment options as coping strategies.

1. Introduction

The term 'peri-urban' has emerged at the forefront of urban planning and policymaking as the world, particularly developing countries, comes to terms with the effects of rapid urbanisation and its associated climate change impacts and modern urban lifestyles (Hamin & Gurran, 2009; United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs/Population Division [UNDESA/PD], 2012, 2014). Recent studies (Cobbinah, Erdiaw-Kwasie, & Amoateng, 2015a, 2015b; UNDESA/PD, 2012, 2014; United Nations Human Settlement Programme [UNHABITAT], 2013) indicate an alarming rate of urbanisation with increasing concentration of people in urban areas compared to regional areas in developing countries. For example, official statistics estimate urbanisation levels in Africa to reach about 58% in 2050, with urban areas on the continent hosting nearly a quarter of the world's urban population (Cobbinah et al., 2015a; Darkwah & Cobbinah, 2014; UNDESA/PD, 2012). Rapid urbanisation and its associated impacts have emerged among the biggest threats confronting urban areas in developing countries, with both short and long term consequences on the sustainability of the built and natural environments (Cobbinah et al., 2015a, 2015b; UNDESA/PD, 2012). However, the threats are not limited to urban areas but also peri-urban areas. Given the magnitude of urbanisation in developing countries, peri-urban areas have become a haven for residential and economic development (Mbiba & Huchzermeyer, 2002; Ravertz, Fertner, & Nielsen, 2013; Simon, McGregor, & Nsiah-Gyabaah, 2004), due to the availability of undeveloped land at a relatively low value and close proximity of such areas to job centres within the city (Kombe, 2003; Thuo, 2010).

Urban planning researchers across the globe and some international organisations have described the emergence of the term peri-urban as a contemporary idea used to describe the peripheral regions of urban areas that absorb urban population spill-over and provide opportunities for the formation of new urban morphology (size and form) comprising rural and urban characteristics (e.g., Akrofi & Whittal, 2011; Amoateng, Cobbinah, & Owusu-Adade, 2013; Iaquinta & Drescher, 2000; McGregor, Adam-Bradford, Thompson, & Simon, 2011; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1979). Peri-urban areas are frequently described as a less complex heterogeneous regions at the outskirt of an urban area – usually spanning 10–25 km from the city centre (Cobbinah & Amoako, 2012) – that provide urban residents an improved quality of life, in terms of environmental and social benefits, and hence sanctuaries for less stressful urban living

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(Afrane & Amoako, 2011; Brook & Dávila, 2000; Mbiba & Huchzermeyer, 2002; Ravertz et al., 2013; Simon et al., 2004). As a result, the morphology of peri-urban areas is constantly in a state of flux with urban residents, land speculators and developers competing and often displacing existing land uses as cities expand (Aberra & King, 2005; Amoateng et al., 2013).

As a reflection of global urban population trends and peri-urban development dynamics, a majority of Ghana's population live in urban areas with an urbanisation level of 50.9% (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012, 2013). The increase in Ghana's urban population particularly Kumasi – one of the fastest growing cities with an annual growth rate of 5.4% – has led to rapid physical transformation of peri-urban areas, in terms of land development, due to increasing demand for land by urban settlers (Amoateng et al., 2013; Cobbinah & Amoako, 2012). A major issue stemming from such growth is the conversion of agricultural land into other land uses such as residential and commercial uses. Previous studies (Gough & Yankson, 2000; Owusu & Agyei, 2007; Simon et al., 2004) indicate that the transformation of peri-urban morphology disrupts the livelihoods of peri-urban indigenes – those living in peri-urban communities since birth – who are predominantly small scale farmers, making their living conditions difficult and uncertain. As argued by McGregor et al. (2011), continuous physical transformation of peri-urban areas often marginalises peri-urban indigenes particularly small scale farmers.

Complicating matters further is the complex land tenure system in developing countries (Baryeh, 1997). A case in point is Ghana, where the literature indicates that peri-urban areas are characterised by insecure land tenure system as about 78% of the total land area is categorised as stool lands controlled, managed and allocated by traditional authorities often without the knowledge of urban planning agencies (Afrane & Amoako, 2011; Baryeh, 1997). Conventionally, traditional authorities in Ghana are supposed to act as custodians of the land under their jurisdiction for past, present and future generations, while urban planning agencies determine the use. However, research suggests that many traditional authorities, in the face of rapid urban growth, use their influence to allocate and re-allocate land from peri-urban indigenes to urban settlers for residential and other purposes (Aberra & King, 2005; Kasanga & Kotey, 2001) often without appropriate compensation (Kasanga, 1998). In such situations, the traditional livelihoods of peri-urban indigenes are threatened as peri-urban areas assume new urban morphology dominated by urban settlers. While many (Afrane & Amoako, 2011; Maxwell, Larbi, Lamptey, Zakariah, & Arma-Klemesu, 1999; McGregor et al., 2011) have argued that the new peri-urban morphology results in considerable loss of peri-urban agricultural land, others (Abass, Afriyie, & Adomako, 2013; Maxwell et al., 1999; Simon et al., 2004) are particularly worried about the future of traditional livelihoods particularly agriculture.

The need for research into the patterns of peri-urban development and its socio-economic ramifications in developing countries is unquestionable, and with a common consensus in recent studies (e.g., Abass et al., 2013; Afrane & Amoako, 2011; Amoateng et al., 2013. McGregor et al., 2011), peri-urban areas are increasingly recognised as the main receptive end for spill-over urban population and a dynamic region of socio-economic and physical development. In a variety of ways, it is true that the issue of peri-urban development has received some research attention in recent times in developing countries (e.g., Browder, Bohland, & Scarpaci, 1995; Narain, 2009) including Africa (Kent & Ikgopoleng, 2011). For example, focusing on the pattern of peri-urban development, Browder et al. (1995) examined urban fringe expansion across three developing country cities of Bangkok (Thailand), Jakarta (Indonesia) and Santiago (Chile). Kent and Ikgopoleng (2011) also explored the city profile of Gaborone (Botswana), focusing on, among others, the dynamics and patterns of peri-urban development. This paper contributes to ongoing discussion on the changing morphology of peri-urban areas, and how peri-urban indigenes are coping with such changes using Ghana as a case study.

This article analyses the morphology of peri-urban areas resulting from urban growth and physical development. Focusing on indigenes of Feyiase, a peri-urban area of Kumasi, the paper further provides empirical evidence of specific aspects of indigenous livelihoods that have been affected, and examines the alternative livelihood options available to them. This paper consists of five parts. Section 2 reviews literature on development of peri-urban areas and the ramifications on livelihoods focusing on developing countries. Section 3 describes the research area and methods. Section 4 presents the results and discussion of the research, and Section 5 presents the conclusion of the research.

2. Peri-urban development and indigenous livelihoods: a focus on Ghana

2.1. Understanding the morphology of peri-urban areas

Since its emergence in academic and planning literature in the 1980s, the term 'peri-urban' has remained elusive, despite its widespread usage (Iaquinta & Drescher, 2000). However, previous and recent studies (McGregor et al., 2011; OECD, 1979) have provided different interpretations to the term. For instance, the OECD (1979, p.10) explains peri-urban as "the grey area which is neither entirely urban nor purely rural in the traditional sense; it is at most the partly urbanised rural area". In describing the size and form of peri-urban areas, McGregor et al. (2011) consider peri-urban morphology as the physical structure that areas located at the peripheries of cities assume due to rapid urban growth, changes in urban lifestyle patterns and rapid physical development. In many cases, peri-urban morphology is perceived as resulting from the interactions between the rural and urban boundaries characterised by physical features and activities of an urban area (Akrofi & Whittal, 2011; Amoateng et al., 2013).

The literature further indicates that the notion of peri-urban morphology transcends a sense of place (Akrofi & Whittal, 2011; Amoateng et al., 2013; OECD, 1979) to include a process (Marshall, Waldman, MacGregor, Mehta, & Randhawa, 2009). As a process, Marshall et al. (2009) argue that peri-urban morphology is a pathway for transitioning from rural to urban context, where there is inevitable retirement of rural socio-economic activities and lifestyle. According to this view, peri-urban morphology occurs at the interface between rural and urban activities, institutions and perspectives. Thus, as a rural area begins to 'peri-urbanise', it loses the rural character of homogeneity to become a complex and heterogeneous location for both urban and rural residents with different socio-economic backgrounds (Afrane & Amoako, 2011; Brook & Dávila, 2000).

It is worth acknowledging, however, that the heterogeneous character of the peri-urban morphology is a less complex one compared to urban morphology. Yet, with the mix of indigenous residents, informal settlers, industrial entrepreneurs and urban middle class commuters coexisting in peri-urban areas, different and often competing interests, practices and perceptions arise, making the morphology of peri-urban areas increasingly complex (Allen, da Silva, & Corubolo, 1999). These competing interests, for Allen et al. (1999), often lead to invasion and conversion of agricultural land by non-agricultural activities particularly residential development. In most cases, the resulting peri-urban morphology is typified by rapid socio-cultural change and physical transformation as indigenous farming communities are compelled to adapt to an urban lifestyle, often within a limited timeframe