



# Taking advantage of rural assets as a coping strategy for the urban poor: the case of rural-urban interrelations in Botswana

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**SUMMARY:** *This paper describes the importance of rural-urban links for many of the inhabitants of Botswana's cities. This is described in more detail for Old Naledi, a low-cost, self help settlement in Botswana's capital, Gaborone. A third of all households there own cattle, half retain land in the village from which they come and the proportion of households with such rural assets does not decline with people's length of stay in the city. These rural assets are valued both in monetary and social terms and serve as a valuable safety net for households with low incomes and uncertain livelihood prospects within the city.*

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## I. URBANIZATION IN BOTSWANA

**BOTSWANA IS NOT** an ideal model of urbanization processes in Africa. Most of its population of some 1.5 million still live in rural areas and less than one-third were officially classified as "urban" in 1996.<sup>(1)</sup> Although the growth rates of Botswana's urban settlements lie between 5 and 10 per cent per year and are among the fastest in sub-Saharan Africa, the cities are still small compared to those in most other African countries. The largest urban settlement is Gaborone, the capital of Botswana, with a population of some 160,000 in 1997. It is followed by Francistown with about 80,000 inhabitants while all other urban centres have less than 30,000 residents.

Urban centres' population growth rates lie well above the rate of natural increase. In Botswana's cities, there is some evidence that the rates of natural increase are not above the national average. For the country as a whole, mortality rates are almost similar in rural and urban areas but the Total Fertility Rate in urban regions is significantly lower than in rural areas.<sup>(2)</sup> Thus it must be assumed that urban growth is still largely due to in-

1. FAOSTAT Statistics Database (1997), *Internet*: <http://apps.fao.org/lim500/nph-wrap.pl?Population&Domain=SUA>

2. VanderPost, Cornelis (1992), "Regional Patterns of Fertility Transition in Botswana", *Geography*, No. 335, Vol. 77 Part 2, pages 109-122; also Diamond, Ian and Naomi Rutenberg (1995), "Recent Trends in Fertility in Botswana", *Journal of International Development*, Vol.7, No.1, pages 145-161.

3. Census data from Central Statistics Office (1991), *Stats Brief* No.91/4, Gaborone.

4. Feddema, Hans (1990), "Survival through cooperation in Naledi", *The Botswana Society Occasional Paper* No.4, Gaborone.

5. See reference 4.

migration from rural areas. This is especially true for Gaborone. Gaborone was designed on the "drawing-board" in the early 1960s to become the capital of the newly independent Botswana. Under colonial rule, only a small British police camp and a railway station existed on the site of the future capital. Almost all of the population of new Gaborone consisted of people from rural villages who came to look for lucrative jobs on one of the numerous building sites of the evolving capital. After all of the capital's necessary infrastructure had been set up, the migration streams did not subside. One major push factor for the migrants to leave the rural areas has always been the threat of drought, to which Botswana is extremely susceptible, and, before government relief programmes were established, the risk of famine was high. When designing the capital, the planners had estimated that Gaborone's final size would reach around 20,000 inhabitants in 1990. This figure was reached in 1970 and today, it is more than eight times this figure. The continuous flow of people to Gaborone has led to an average increase of its population of about 8 per cent a year.<sup>(3)</sup> The likelihood of a food crisis has been mitigated by the relief programmes but drought still threatens the economic basis of rural dwellers and continues to be one of the causes of extensive rural-urban migration.

In Gaborone, most migrants from rural villages move to degraded housing areas which show signs of slum or squatter existence, mainly to Old Naledi in the southern part of the city. Feddema described the residents of these areas as "small farmers, herdsman and unwed mothers".<sup>(4)</sup> While perhaps too condensed a summary, since many in-migrants have found work in town, and many were or have become husbands or wives, Feddema's statement clearly indicates both the former and the current socio-economic background of many urban households in Botswana. As will be shown below, a considerable number of these households continue to engage in farming activities even when working in the formal or informal urban employment sector on a more or less regular basis. A lot of migrants still look upon the city only as their second home, their true home being the village where they were born. A survey conducted by the author in 1992-93 and research carried out by Feddema<sup>(5)</sup> and others show that this attitude towards the city persists for a very long time after arrival in town and over great distances: most members of urban households who had come to Gaborone or Francistown more than 15 years ago still referred to their village of origin as their first and true home, even if it lay hundreds of kilometres away. Many indicated that they had always planned, and would still like, to move back as soon as possible although they had in fact already been in the city for decades.

When these strong mental links to the countryside persist for so many years, then parts of a traditional, rural value system must have been brought to the city and kept there despite the presence of "modern", urban lifestyles. How is this preservation of rural attitudes possible and in what ways does it contribute towards sustaining or weakening the urban and rural livelihood systems of these households? These are questions that are con-

sidered in this paper. It draws on a survey conducted by the author in Gaborone and Francistown in 1992-93, with additional field work carried out in 1996. The aim was to analyze the living conditions and survival strategies of vulnerable urban population groups in low-cost, self-help and squatter settlements in Botswana. The empirical part of the survey was carried out in five low-cost/low-income housing areas (Old Naledi, Extensions 31, 32 and 48, and Somerset West) and included semi-structured household interviews. The systematic sample was based on cadastral maps with indicated plot boundaries. Every 15th plot was visited and all households living there were interviewed. Additional households (e.g. living on informal plots not on the maps) and experts were interviewed where appropriate. The overall sample size was approx. 230 out of some 5,000 households living in these areas. Although the sample size was rather small, the systematic method used for drawing the sample implies that it is possible to generalize for Old Naledi and even most other urban low-income housing settlements in Botswana.<sup>(6)</sup>

6. The study was funded by the International Geographical Union (IGU) and by the German Research Council (DFG). For a detailed report see Krüger, Fred (1997), *Urbanisierung und Verwundbarkeit in Botswana*, Centaurus, Pfaffenweiler.

7. Latest census data in Botswana do not look into migration patterns in detail. These assumptions are based on experts' estimates from the Central Statistics Office in Gaborone and on household interviews carried out by the author in both rural and urban regions of Botswana.

## II. PRESERVATION OF RURAL LIFESTYLES

**THERE ARE AT LEAST** three reasons why rural attitudes are preserved in the cities and close linkages to the home villages of migrants remain present and active for many years:

- Normally, not all family members migrate at once. Usually, only a few members of rural households, mostly men, move initially to the cities.<sup>(7)</sup> If migrants are married, they may be followed by their spouses and children a couple of years later. In most cases, the household will be divided, with some members of the family remaining in the village and others living on their own in town. Members who have migrated not only face a "new way of life" in town but must also cope with the fact that the rest of their family, household or clan probably live hundreds of kilometres away. This in itself puts a strain on those who have migrated, making it **desirable** for them to keep in touch with those left behind in the home village. But maintaining strong links with the rural areas is also a **necessity** for the new, urban way of life: although many migrants have moved to the urban centres in order to find employment and send some remittances or goods to their home village, a considerable number of them have difficulties in generating enough income to survive in the cities, let alone to support their families back home. Deprived of direct access to rural in-kind income such as food produced on a subsistence basis, and pushed into an almost entirely monetary market economy, it becomes vital for the new urban residents to have cash available. But it is also extremely beneficial if they can rely on rural assets to safeguard their livelihoods in the cities. When rural assets serve as safety valves for urban dwellers, this is one element of what has often been called "ruralization" of the African city. This process of ruralization has

8. *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie* (1992), Vol.36, No.1-2, special issue focusing on urbanization processes and demographic change in sub-Saharan Africa.

9. Among many others, this term has been used by Gugler, Josef (1991), "Life in a dual system revisited: urban-rural ties in Enugu, Nigeria, 1961-1987", *World Development* Vol.19, pages 399-409.

10. Potts, Deborah (1995), "Shall we go home? Increasing urban poverty in African cities and migration processes", *The Geographical Journal* Vol.161, Part 3, pages 245-264.

11. Silitshena, Robson (1990), "The Tswana agro-town and rural economy in Botswana" in Baker, Jonathan (editor), (1990) *Small Town Africa*, The Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, Uppsala, pages 35-50.

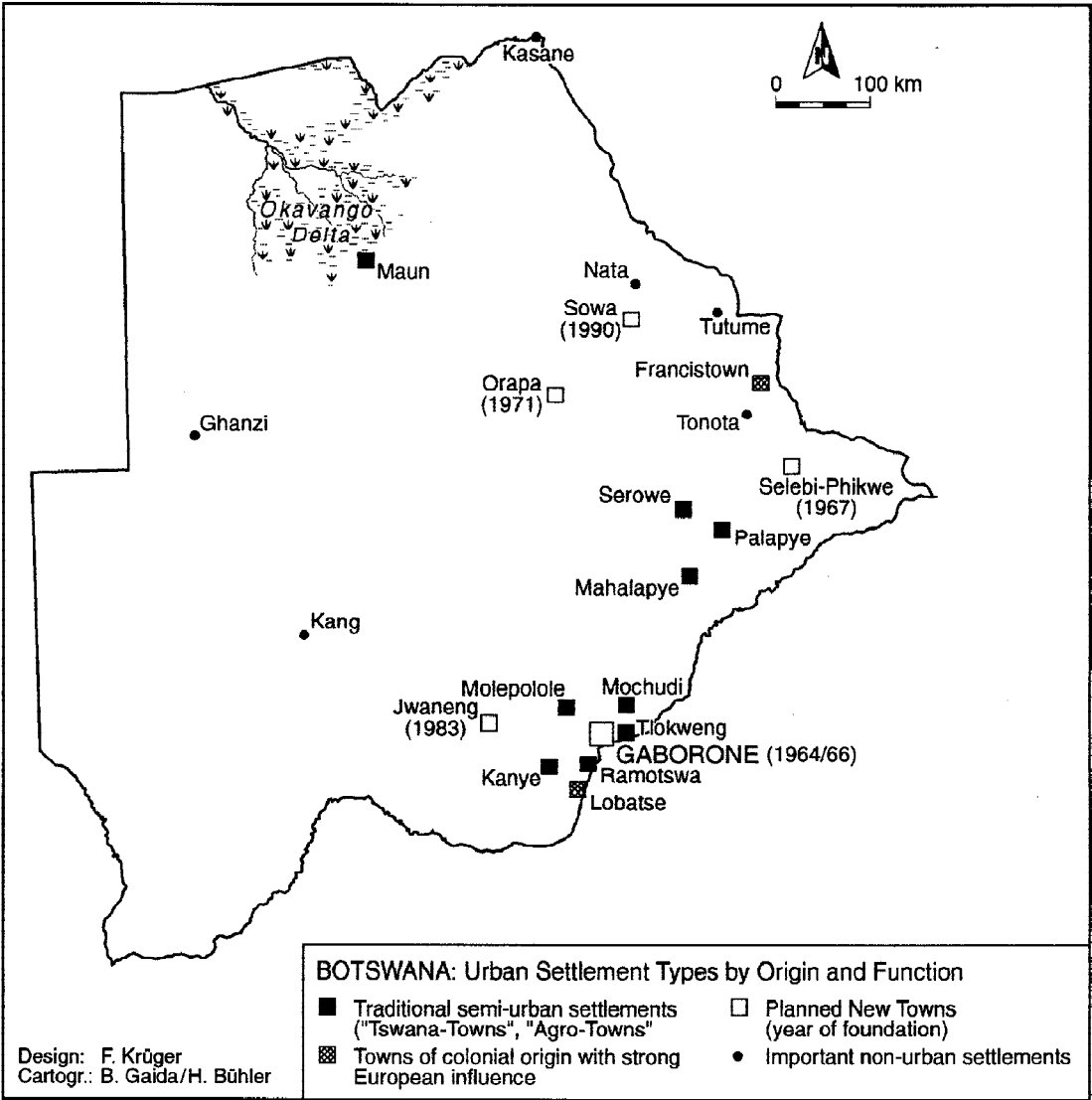
been described sometimes as something totally new, and assumes that African cities were not under rural influence earlier in the century and have never before been part of intense urban-rural interactions. It must be argued, however, that cities in sub-Saharan Africa have **always** been somewhat ruralized, as will be pointed out in the case of Botswana below. Social groups affected by this process have sometimes been described as "displaced"<sup>(8)</sup> or as groups or households living in dual worlds,<sup>(9)</sup> thus stressing the fact that their true home is neither town nor village or, in other words, that the close linkages to their home village make it impossible for them to become properly integrated into urban society.

- In many African countries the gap between real rural incomes and real urban incomes has narrowed considerably in the last years,<sup>(10)</sup> thus increasing the necessity for some urban dwellers to fall back on rural assets for their own well-being in town instead of supporting their families in the countryside. This is certainly the case in Botswana, as the author's own findings from a survey conducted in 1992-93 reveal. By maintaining close ties to the home villages, rural attitudes are nourished and kept alive in the cities despite the existence and influence of what might be called "typical" urban lifestyles.
- A society which has always been basically rural (in the case of Botswana one which has always been a cattle-breeding society) and which experiences urbanization and the emergence of cities as something very new will always value rural lifestyles as natural and obvious even in urban surroundings which are heavily influenced by westernized or globalized conditions. In Botswana, cities in a modern sense are very young. Only two towns, Francistown and Lobatse, date back to colonial British influence (see Figure 1). Most of the urban settlements in Botswana were founded as new towns in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. The traditional, pre-colonial Tswana settlements were large villages with often more than 10,000 inhabitants. These settlements are often referred to as "agro-towns" in the literature<sup>(11)</sup> and they had not only had housing functions and were centres of agricultural activities but also served as commercial and political nodes for large regions. From some of these Tswana settlements, the chiefs exercised control of their states. The agro-towns were functionally divided into overlapping economic, social and administrative units (wards), and the pattern of their socio-spatial differentiation was based on social rank, kinship and tribal membership and showed clear traits of contemporary intra-urban structures. These ward divisions are still recognizable today and most functions have remained intact. The agro-towns acted and still act as growth centres and sources of diffusion and, in general, combined a lot of functions which, today, we would possibly divide into "rural" and "urban". Many of these agro-towns are now officially classified as "urban" and serve as primary or secondary centres within the settlement sys-

12. See reference 3.

tem of Botswana<sup>(12)</sup> but a clear definition as "city" from a geographical viewpoint remains impossible because many rural elements are still present, too. With the structure and functions of these agro-towns as part of its culture, Tswana society - which has been confronted with what we call urbanization only for the last few decades - still easily preserves traditional rural attitudes and a rural value system under modern urban conditions.

Figure 1: Botswana: Urban Settlement Types by Origin and Function



13. Larsson, Anita (1990), *Modern Houses of Modern Life*, University of Lund, School of Architecture, Report R1, Lund.

### III. THE TRANSITION FROM RURAL TO URBAN LIFE IN BOTSWANA

**BUT WHAT EXACTLY** happens to rural lifestyles when migrants move to the city? What are the “modern” urban conditions these migrants confront? Larsson<sup>(13)</sup> has argued that in Botswana many of these changes take place in the housing context. She developed a set of keywords to describe different aspects of traditional and modern housing in order to gain a better understanding of the transformation process relating to rural-urban migration. However, a focus on housing alone is not sufficient to explain the transition from rural to urban life. In a society where livelihood systems are under constant threat from drought, entitlement declines, health hazards etc., variables which describe income-generating activities and the provision of food must be considered as well. Figure 2 illustrates some of the variables under change. It must be pointed out, however, that the keywords presented form the extremes of a continuum. Many intermediate stages of the transition process are possible and - in the case of the agro-towns - likely.

The figure shows three major spheres: the cultural, social and economic setting; the use of space; and the elements of housing and income provision. Characteristic attitudes, gender issues and lifestyles mingle with the socio-economic variables. It becomes clear that monetarization and commodification are probably the most important features of the rural-urban transition. Attitudes towards the use and function of space also change significantly. As space is scarce in the overcrowded low-income housing areas in the cities, a lot of privacy is lost and the use of space for one’s individual needs is usually limited to a few square metres. Many activities that traditionally take place outside, (for example, cooking, chatting, etc.) have to be shifted indoors (where there is not much room either) and a trait of African lifestyle which Larsson summarized as “outdoor living” is lost.

One important element of the cultural, social and economic context is that of identity. As mentioned earlier, migrants often lack a clear definition of what is their home. Many will refer to the villages of their ancestors as their home village even though they moved away long ago and have lived in town for decades.

Another key variable is the housing issue, which represents the transition process very well. In the rural context a dwelling is always an integrated part of the household. To sell a house or a plot of land or to rent out accommodation is usually unheard of. There is also a clear definition of shared responsibilities when constructing or maintaining a dwelling. Both men and women collect materials and engage in the construction of the house but it is the task of women to keep the housing compound in good repair and to take care of the *lolwapa*, an open space in front of the huts which is surrounded by a low, often richly decorated mud wall serving as outdoor kitchen and living room. In the urban context, households are often separated and clear gender definitions and responsibilities break up. Dwellings are mostly built and maintained by men alone. Rooms or shanties

**Figure 2: The Transition from Rural to Urban Life in Botswana: Housing and Income Generating Activities**



Sources: LARSSON 1990, KRÜGER 1997, altered

14. See Krüger 1997 in reference 6.

15. For a detailed report on low-income rental housing in the Republic of South Africa and a list of other rental studies, see Gilbert, Alan, Alan Mabin, Malcolm McCarthy and Vanessa Watson (1997), "Low-income rental housing: are South African cities different?", *Environment and Urbanization* Vol.9, No.1, pages 133 - 147.

16. See Mokobi, K. F. and S. Asefa (1988), "The role of the government of Botswana in increasing rural and urban access to food" in Mandivamba, R. and R. Bernstein (editors), *Southern Africa: Food Security Options*, University of Zimbabwe, Harare; also Ministry of Finance and Development Planning (1992), *Aide Memoire: The Drought Situation in Botswana and the Government Response*, Gaborone (unpublished paper).

17. Small livestock, especially goats and chickens, are of some importance for food security in the peri-urban regions. In the cities they play no role in urban micro-farming.

are frequently rented out, dwellings become a commodity for which money has to be paid and cash income be provided. A detailed analysis of the living conditions in low-income urban housing areas in Botswana showed that over 40 per cent of the sample households had to pay rent for their dwellings - even for temporary shelters and backyard shacks made from cardboard, plastic or corrugated iron sheets.<sup>(14)</sup> Renting out temporary dwellings for cash is something almost never encountered in rural areas of Botswana.<sup>(15)</sup> The rent absorbed so much of their cash income that one-fifth of these households were left with practically no money for food or clothes. Up to 15 per cent of the landlords, on the other hand, had no cash income other than the little rent they received from their tenants, leaving them in the same bleak economic state as their lodgers.

The transition from subsistence to cash economy and the need for a monetary income particularly relates to access to food. Food entitlements in Botswana are above all a question of having cash available. Although Botswana's domestic food grain production is low, and more than two-thirds of the annual grain requirement has to be imported,<sup>(16)</sup> there has never been a critical supply shortage in recent years due to very efficient drought relief programmes. These relief measures (employment schemes, feeding programmes, etc.) focus on rural areas where some additional food can be produced on a subsistence basis. In the cities, however, there are neither drought relief schemes nor enough possibilities for growing food. This does not mean that people in rural areas are generally better off than those in urban centres but it implies that a lot more food has to be **purchased** in the cities than in the countryside. Alternatives are scarce: horticultural activities and home gardening, which are often found in urban and peri-urban areas in other African countries, still contribute little towards securing an urban food supply in Botswana. The growing of food by urban households is limited: irrigation is almost impossible due to a lack of water, the fertility of the mostly sandy soils is low, and gardening and the growing of vegetables generally have been of little importance in the traditional Tswana society where cattle-breeding dominates. However, the number of urban home gardens has slowly increased in the past years. Field assessments carried out by the author in 1993 and 1996 revealed that on 5 to 10 per cent of all plots in low-income housing quarters and site-and-service areas in Gaborone and Francistown home gardens can be found, where a small variety of vegetables (mainly pulses and cabbage) and sometimes maize or sorghum are grown during the rainy season. In all cases, production was for subsistence only and the output was small. In the peri-urban area around Gaborone, some cultivated patches for the market production of vegetables were found but their number is still almost insignificant.<sup>(17)</sup>

In terms of transition, it must be noted that the (still slow) increase in urban home gardening in Botswana is **not** a classical transfer of rural activities to the cities and therefore does not stand for a preservation of rural lifestyles. As noted above, home gardens have a comparatively small role in traditional



Tswana society. Horticulture and home gardening must be seen as an innovation in order to obtain sufficient food rather than as a survival strategy of rural dwellers which is being transferred to urban areas.

The relative unimportance of urban subsistence agriculture makes the purchase of food inevitable. But the necessity to have cash available is aggravated by the fact that food is expensive in Botswana's cities. Apart from a small number of street vendors who sell small quantities of maize, fruit or vegetables, there are hardly any public markets, unlike so many cities on the African continent. This lack of open markets may be explained historically by Tswana society traditions: in pre-colonial and even colonial times, kings (*kgosi*) and village chiefs planned and organized inter-tribal trade while intra-tribal trade activities were often prohibited. Open markets did not exist. Following good harvests, all surplus yields had to be stored for times of drought and crop failure, a simple yet effective survival strategy. If at all, livestock and food were, and often still are, obtained from fellow tribes members by barter.<sup>(18)</sup> Many of these restrictions have ceased to exist but what may be called the development of a "trading mentality", or the encouragement of public food marketing, set in relatively late. The small number of open markets and food stalls in the towns today is remarkable. Official efforts to promote open food trade by building market squares and halls have partly failed. In Gaborone alone, two or three market halls built by town planning institutions a couple of years ago to attract food vendors have remained vacant since construction.

Major trade activities have always been dominated by Indians, the British and South Africans, and it is in the branches of South African chain stores and supermarkets where most food has to be purchased. Their assortment of goods meets all "western" standards but so do their food prices. Cheaper alternatives are not easily found and even the urban poor are often compelled to shop in these supermarkets in order to buy food. Apart from that, prices are not only high but fixed - haggling or buying on credit is impossible. The absence or scarcity of petty markets, which traditionally acted as a survival strategy, now serves to increase the vulnerability of low-income urban households.

#### IV. INTERACTIONS BETWEEN URBAN AND RURAL LIVELIHOOD SYSTEMS

**TO MANAGE THE** change in economic conditions, i.e. the increasing importance of monetary income and assets, most rural-urban migrants have to develop numerous survival strategies. Some of these have been well-documented in the literature over the past years and include all kinds of diversification of income-earning opportunities (supplementary cash-earning activities in the informal sector in particular) as well as the formation of new social self-help networks. Many of these coping strategies can be found in Botswana, too; the author's own research findings reveal that more than 50 per cent of all house-

18. Schapera, Issaac and John Comaroff (1991), *The Tswana*, revised edition, Kegan Paul International, London; also Schierholz, Petra (1989), *Bauern im Transformationsprozeß*, Breitenbach Publishers, Saarbrücken.

holds living in low-income and squatter areas in Gaborone and Francistown are, in one way or another, involved in these activities. Of these, about half of all households interviewed have family members who engage in informal cash earning through vending activities like street hawking. In over 30 per cent of the households women were found brewing and selling beer. Other households offer services such as hairdressing or carpentry. Men often hire themselves out as unskilled builders whenever workers are needed to erect new houses. Women frequently form small neighbourhood groups and engage in what might be called a "rotating credit association" (Setswana: motshelo): each participant regularly pays a small amount of money into a cooperative "savings' account", and every weekend one partner is paid out and may use the money to organize a party where beverages (often home brew) and some food are sold. The earnings may be kept by the partner so once in a while she has some spare cash available to spend on food or clothes. The variety of these activities is very large. This paper, however, focuses on the rural-urban interface. If typically rural attitudes and lifestyles are being preserved in the cities, they will certainly contribute in some way to strengthening the livelihood systems of the urban poor.

We have seen that home gardens are one, although not a major, element of urban food security. Much more important are long-lasting rural-urban linkages. In Gaborone alone, some 50 per cent of all low-income urban households maintain pastoral and/or arable farming activities in their former home villages. This is especially true for Old Naledi. This low-income housing area emerged as an informal settlement for workers who were employed during the course of the construction of the new capital. In 1971, it already had about 6,000 inhabitants.<sup>(19)</sup> After some reluctance the government legalized the settlement and began with upgrading measurements, mainly a restructuring of plots and an improvement of public sanitation facilities. The living conditions did improve at first, but during the 1980s the settlement began to degrade again. Today, according to official census data, over 20,000 people live in an area not much larger than the original settlement, and the actual number of inhabitants in Old Naledi probably is much higher. The area is overpopulated and now shows clear signs of a 'slum' quarter.

In Old Naledi, more than one-third of all household heads are cattle holders (see Table 1) and of these, one-third moved to town more than 20 years ago. About half of the Old Naledi households own or have access to a plot of land which is ploughed and cultivated regularly. Overall, about 25 per cent of the households hold both cattle **and** land. The results of the survey show that these numbers also apply to households living in other low-cost housing areas in Gaborone or Francistown.

While some households possess fewer than 15 cows, the average herd size is well over 20 animals (see Table 2). The cattle herds are usually kept at grazing-posts (so-called "cattleposts") which are often situated hundreds of kilometres away from the city. In most cases, herdsman are hired to look after the cattle and they are usually paid not in monetary terms but "in kind"

19. Ministry of Local Government and Lands (1971), Gaborone Planning Proposals, Gaborone.

**Table 1: Households in Gaborone - Old Naledi: Cattle and Land Ownership and Length of Stay in Town**

Duration of stay in town	(%)	Still holding land (%)	Still owning cattle (%)
Less than 10 years	37.8	57.1	42.9
10 to 19 years	30.7	52.9	23.5
20 and more years	31.5	37.1	2.9
All households	100.0	47.8	36.9

Source: Own survey 1992-93

**Table 2: Livestock Holders in Gaborone-Old Naledi: Size of Cattle Herds**

Up to 15 animals (%)	15-24 animals (%)	24-34 animals (%)	35 and more animals (%)
25.7	38.4	7.7	28.2

Source: Own survey 1992-93

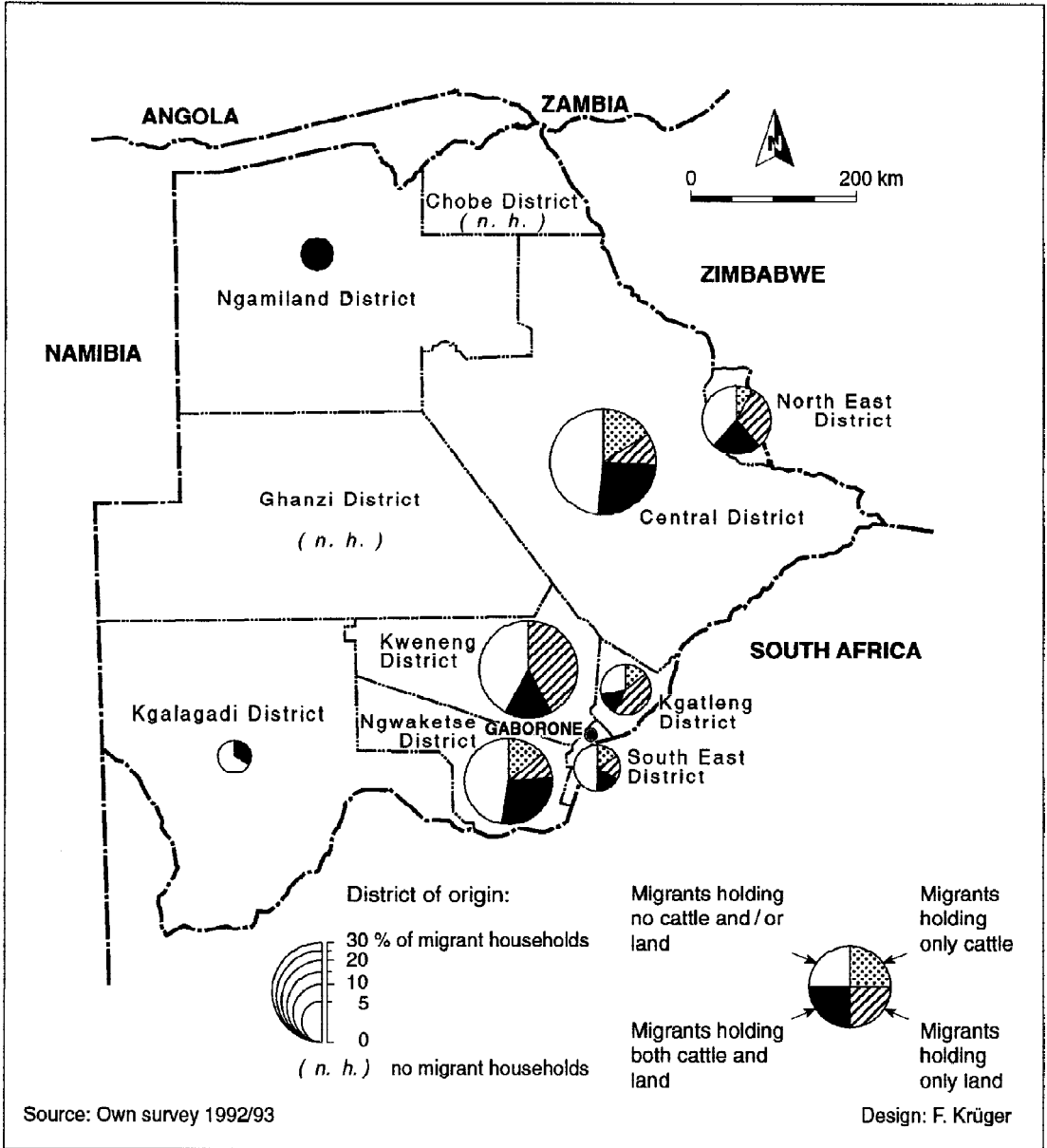
(milk and meat). Arable farming is done mostly by family members or relatives in the home village and, occasionally, external workers are employed.

Having to pay herdsmen or other hired persons is a burden for all those urban dwellers who have only small incomes themselves. But the great advantage of these rural assets is that they serve as a safety reserve for the urban poor: if all other means in the city fail to provide enough income or food, then a goat or cow can be slaughtered or sold, or one can fall back on grain and vegetables produced in the home village. The average market price for a cow depends on the actual rainfall situation but is usually in the region of 600-800 Pula (ca.US\$ 180-250). If minimum living standards are assumed, then it can be estimated that this sum is sufficient for one person to survive in town for three to six months. A goat may be sold for about 40-80 Pula (US\$ 12-15). Of course, selling livestock means a reduction in assets so it is normally only done when there are no other coping options.

The maintenance of rural-urban linkages and of rural assets as an emergency reserve is almost ubiquitous in sub-Saharan Africa and has been widely reported and documented in literature.<sup>(20)</sup> However, the fact that migrant households successfully maintain these linkages and rely on them even decades after moving away from the countryside is surprising. There appears to be little correlation between cattle or land ownership and the length of stay in the city. Table 1 reveals that access to land seems to decrease over the years but cattle ownership does not. Long-lasting ties also exist over large distances: indeed, the distance between city and home village does not seem to influence the existence of, and access to, rural assets. The case of Gaborone-Old Naledi shows that not only the majority of migrants from neighbouring districts own cattle or land but also the majority of households whose home villages lie in remote parts of the country. Figure 3 proves that there is no correlation between the actual migration distance and the number of migrant households who hold cattle or land.

20. See reference 10; also Vorlauffer, Karl (1992), "Urbanisierung und Stadt-Land-Beziehungen von Migranten in Primat - und Sekundärstädten Afrikas: Dakar/Senegal und Mombasa/Kenya", *Zeitschrift für Wirtschaftsgeographie* Vol.36, No.1-2, pages 77-107.

Figure 3: Cattle and Land Ownership of Migrants in Gaborone - Old Naledi



Source: Own survey 1992/93

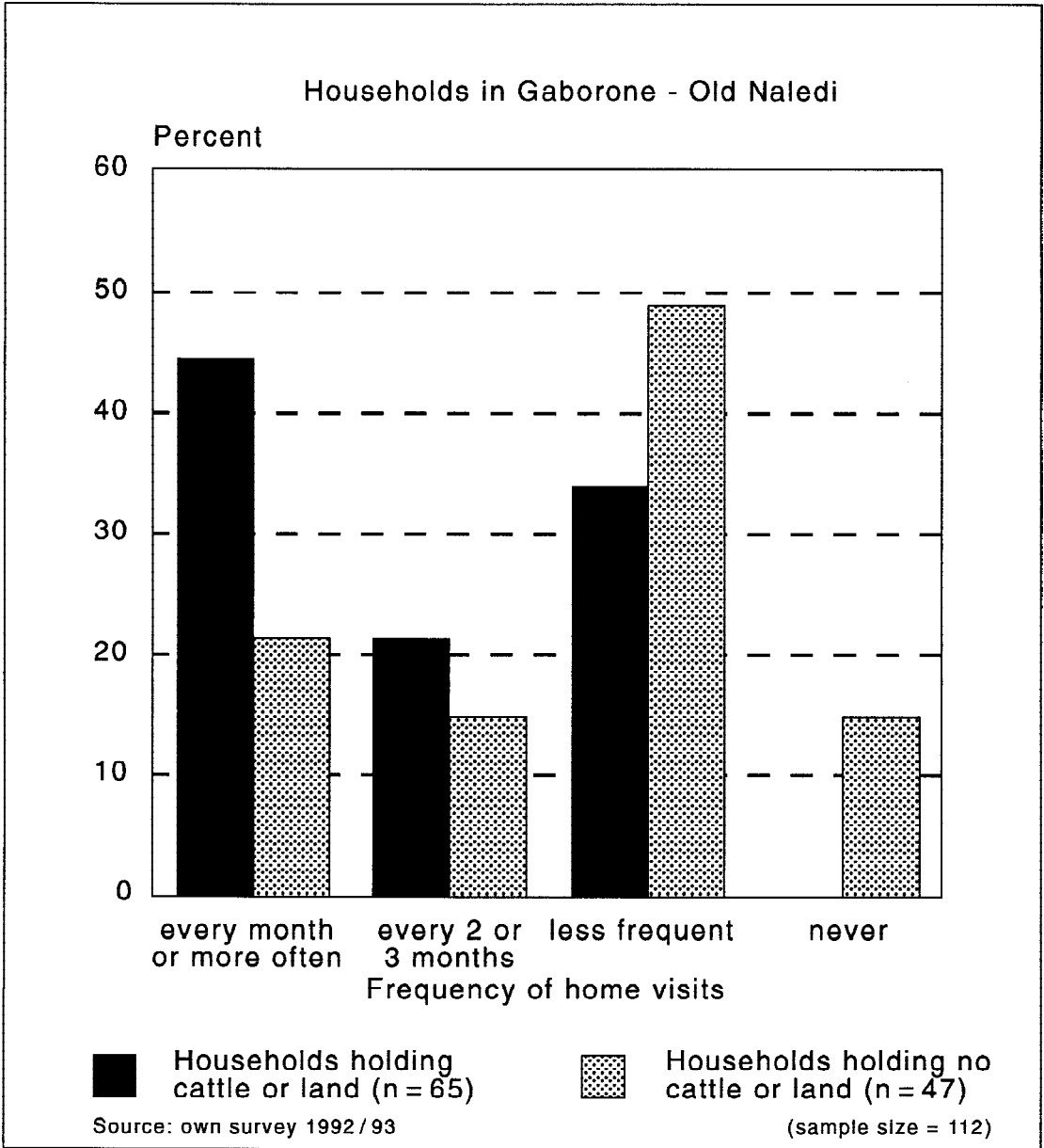
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Access to these rural assets is at least a supplementary if not an essential element for securing and stabilizing the livelihood systems of many vulnerable urban households. Without cattle or land, many urban residents would face severe problems of income and food security. The importance of keeping a rural economic base over large distances and long periods must not be underestimated in the context of material safety within a commodified, commercialized and monetarized urban sphere of life. But there is more than just the material aspect of safety. Animal husbandry plays a central role in Tswana society. To own livestock implies reputation and influence in society and the number of cattle in one's possession is directly associated with one's social power. Those who do not own cattle are not without power or influence but those who do are regarded socially with more esteem and respect. This is particularly important in an urban environment where in-migrants are losing some of their social influence and participation because extended family relations are deteriorating over distance and time and social networks are being reconfigured. Particularly in the urban low-income or squatter areas where most migrants settle, cattle ownership helps sustain an individual's dignity and authority in the group. Therefore, to own cattle not only has financial advantages but is also morally sustaining which, in turn, may have positive effects on well-being because it reduces some of the frustration of having to live in rundown and degraded surroundings with little money or food.

Livestock ownership and land tenure also contribute to strengthening or sustaining urban-rural social links which otherwise would probably decline more easily. An indicator to prove this is the frequency of home visits: urban dwellers who own cattle or land travel home more often than those who do not have any rural assets. Figure 4 illustrates the results of a sample taken in Gaborone. It is clear that all migrant households who own livestock or have access to land travel back home on a more or less regular basis. This is in order to look after their cattle or to help with ploughing and cultivating activities. What Figure 4 does not show, but which can be concluded from interview samples, is the tendency towards increased home visits and prolonged stays in the rural areas at the beginning of the rainy season. This has led to distinct monthly or seasonal movement cycles between town and home village or cattlepost. In any case, however frequently or seldom these visits take place, they help preserve urban-rural ties which, themselves, must be seen as both a coping strategy in case of urban income shortages and as some sort of buffer network which cushions a probable ineffectiveness, malfunction or disruption of urban social networks.

It may be argued of course that the term "urban poor" does not apply to cattle owners or land holders. How can an individual or household be termed "poor" or "vulnerable" if there are assets and access to emergency reserves? It must be noted, however, that many in-migrants from rural areas have **nothing else**, i.e. no decent dwelling, no regular employment, no bal-

Figure 4: Frequency of Visits to the Home Village



anced food intake, etc. This is the case in most site-and-service ("self-help") and low-income housing quarters in the cities of Botswana. It must also be considered that rural assets are never really safe. On the contrary, arable land and livestock are severely threatened by drought, and cattle or harvest losses do occur frequently. Moreover, in cases of loss, urban residents find it difficult to benefit from government drought relief measures which focus exclusively on rural areas. Unfortunately, the impact of non-urban factors - i.e. drought - on urban livelihoods has received little attention in the literature and has as yet not been taken into account when designing drought relief schemes in Botswana. A number of town dwellers who were interviewed stated that a drought related loss of crop yield or livestock would be particularly devastating because it would mean the end of their last potential food or income reserves.

Urban households holding livestock or land may face another entitlement decline if the cattle or landowner dies. In this case - depending on the laws of succession - sometimes the land rights and cattle are not automatically inherited by those left behind but have to be given either to members of the family who still live in the home village or to the village or tribal community. This problem has to be viewed in the context of Botswana's legal system: legal questions are handled by both customary and common law and sometimes there is choice between the two. In practice, customary law is more often employed in rural areas and usually involves all private issues such as matters of inheritance. Whenever legal questions arise about their rural assets, urban dwellers will want to settle the issue according to tribal customary law. In the case of the death of a person who owned livestock or land, the bereaved family members who live in town have to apply to the village headman or tribal chief to regain access to these resources. The necessary negotiations may take one or two years and even after that period may not be successful. It is obvious that women are particularly affected because, according to customary law, they are usually not entitled to inherit a deceased person's property of value, such as cattle,<sup>(21)</sup> and access to land is also not granted automatically. In the past years, some changes in these customary rules of succession have taken place but, in general, they still leave women in an unfavourable position. If the worst comes to the worst, the bereaved spouse and children have not only lost a family member (and - in terms of urban livelihood systems - an actual or potential provider of cash income) but are also deprived of their last emergency resources.

When the point was made that although households have rural assets they must, in certain cases, still be categorized as vulnerable, this does not mean that there are no other urban social groups in equal or even greater distress. About 45 per cent of all the urban poor have neither access to arable land nor own cattle. In cases of entitlement decline, e.g. when income-generating opportunities collapse, family members fall ill etc., these households have no means left for coping. The survey undertaken in Gaborone and Francistown showed that of those town dwellers who cannot secure a foothold in the rural economy

21. The Botswana Society (editor) (1993), *Changing Roles of Women in Botswana*, Gaborone.

or who cannot fall back on urban-rural social networks, about 10-15 per cent must be classified as living under severe risk. The base of their livelihoods is highly unsafe. What is pointed out in this paper is that functioning rural-urban linkages are an invaluable safety element for many vulnerable groups but they do not guarantee a secure sustenance.

## V. CONCLUSION

**AT THE BEGINNING** of this paper, it was suggested that rural-urban migrants are displaced because they live in two worlds. The transition from rural to urban life expresses itself in many forms and generally includes maintaining rural coping strategies in order to survive in the city. In fact, for those who can successfully preserve ties to their home village and make use of backup resources, being displaced stands for having the means to survive. The fact that linkages are kept up over decades, that there are regular movement cycles between town and country, and that rural assets are valued both in monetary and in social terms all stress the point that any disruption of these rural-urban interactions may easily become a severe threat to many urban households. At best, their living standards will decrease, at worst they will lose the economic means of surviving in the city.

Whilst the persistence and adaptation of rural-urban interrelations as an integrated part of the urbanization process in sub-Saharan Africa has been widely recognized, their impact on urban livelihoods has received little consideration. In Botswana, most relief and aid measures have been designed exclusively for rural dwellers. There are numerous programmes for so-called "remote area dwellers", drought affected rural households, smallholders and large-scale commercial farmers but, up to now, only one major scheme (an extensive self-help housing programme) has been set up in support of low-income urban residents. The political implication is that more attention should be paid to the rural-urban interface. To have access to rural assets does not automatically stand for being invulnerable. Further studies have to be undertaken, especially to analyze the negative effects of drought, and drought related damage to rural assets, on urban households. Drought relief programmes have been particularly successful in Botswana (although a number of shortcomings have been revealed in the past years) but if measures were developed to further mitigate the risk of declining incomes after loss of rural assets, this might lead to a considerable reduction in social vulnerability not only in rural but also in urban areas.