

## February Topic Analysis

### **Resolved: On balance, the benefits of urbanization in West Africa outweigh the harms.**

#### Definitions:

**On balance:** The phrase “on balance” is a fairly common debate phrase, as [Collins Dictionary](#) notes that it means “all things considered.” This is common in topics that ask you to weigh two ideals against each other, or weigh the benefits against the harms. Teams must ensure that they have a good grasp on how to weigh their arguments to prove that their impacts are more important than their opponents.

**Urbanization:** [Britannica](#) defines urbanization as “the process by which large numbers of people become permanently concentrated in relatively small areas, forming cities.” The growth of urban populations is typically driven by industrialization or perceived benefits to living in larger cities or concentrated areas.

**West Africa:** This may seem like a fairly general term, but there is a specific definition of West Africa used by the UN. The [University of Pittsburgh](#) provides this definition, clarifying that the region known as West Africa includes Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Côte D’Ivoire (Ivory Coast), Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Saint Helena, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Be sure you understand the distinction between African regions and the countries within them.

## Background:

The continent of Africa is undergoing massive, rapid urbanization. The number of urban residents in Africa nearly doubled between 1995 and 2015 and is projected to double again by 2035.<sup>1</sup> The rate of urbanization of the continent as a whole has grown from about 27% in 1950 to 40% in 2015 and is projected to reach 60% by 2050, according to the UN.<sup>2</sup> However, the urbanization rates for different countries vary; they are highest in coastal countries that have not experienced or been threatened by major socio-political crises.<sup>3</sup>

Population shifts and urbanization like what we are witnessing in West Africa can increase access to jobs, public resources, infrastructure, and better healthcare, as cities tend to have better foundations for these resources. Alternately, if city populations grow without economic shifts, they could create high fertility, low wages, and cyclical poverty.<sup>4</sup> The rapid rate at which Africa has been urbanizing means it is difficult for African nations to implement the necessary infrastructure to cope with a growing urban population. Africa has essentially skipped the industrial phase of development, as the service sector constituted almost 60% of regional GDP in 2014.<sup>5</sup> Missing this phase could leave West Africa without crucial infrastructure to ensure stability in growth and a good quality of life.

It's important to understand that this resolution does not pose a policy question; it simply asks debaters to evaluate whether urbanization in West Africa has been more beneficial than it has been harmful. A team on the negation is therefore not advocating that urbanization in West Africa should end, but rather that the benefits do not outweigh the problems and challenges. Debaters should be ready to employ historical analyses of urbanization in the region as well as evaluations of the potential and likely future impacts.

---

<sup>1</sup> CSIS Staff. "Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa." Center for Strategic and International Studies. 12 Apr. 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/urbanization-sub-saharan-africa>

<sup>2</sup> Teye, Joseph. "Urbanisation and Migration in Africa." United Nations. 2 Nov. 2018. [https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/28/EGM\\_Joseph\\_Teye\\_ppt.pdf](https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/events/pdf/expert/28/EGM_Joseph_Teye_ppt.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Hitimana, Leonidas et al. "West African Futures: Settlement, Market and Food Security." OECD. 29 Mar. 2016. <https://www.oecd.org/swac/publications/48231121.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Barofsky, Jeremy et al. "Can rapid urbanization in Africa reduce poverty? Causes, opportunities, and policy recommendations." Brookings. 7 Sept. 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/09/07/can-rapid-urbanization-in-africa-reduce-poverty-causes-opportunities-and-policy-recommendations/>

<sup>5</sup> Barofsky, Jeremy et al. "Can rapid urbanization in Africa reduce poverty? Causes, opportunities, and policy recommendations." Brookings. 7 Sept. 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/09/07/can-rapid-urbanization-in-africa-reduce-poverty-causes-opportunities-and-policy-recommendations/>

## Aff Arguments:

### Economic Growth

Whenever there is a topic around development, urbanization, or industry, one of the key arguments on the aff side is that of economic growth. This argument is popular because the link is very clear and easy to convey to judges of all experience levels; it seems logical that when cities urbanize, there is more industry and thus increased economic growth and development. The evidence is also very clear and easy to find and historical precedence is bountiful, given the fact that urbanization helped Europe and the US become geopolitical powerhouses in the 18th and 19th centuries.<sup>6</sup> Urbanization is also closely correlated with the level of GDP per capita.<sup>7</sup> On top of the wealth of precedence, there is also evidence to suggest that this growth can be observed in West Africa; six West African countries ranked in the top 10 in Africa in terms of real GDP growth.<sup>8</sup>

There are a number of ways economic growth can be impactful. First, it is the number one tool for creating jobs and opportunities.<sup>9</sup> As West Africa continues to urbanize, trade in the region is increasing and international businesses are moving to West African nations.<sup>10</sup> Ghana has been a strong example of growth in West Africa. As more jobs become available, Ghana's economy has grown, and families have seen increases in their income when moving to urban jobs.<sup>11</sup> Foreign direct investment (FDI) is also more likely in places undergoing urbanization. As China urbanized, FDI grew from 109 million in 1979 to 114,734 million in 2010.<sup>12</sup> FDI has proven

---

<sup>6</sup> Africa.com. "Pros & Cons of the Rapid Growth of African Cities." Africa.com. 17 Sept. 2019.

<https://africa.com/pros-cons-of-the-rapid-growth-of-african-cities/>

<sup>7</sup> Chen, Mingxing. "The Global Pattern of Urbanization and Economic Growth: Evidence from the Last Three Decades." PMC National Institute of Health. Aug 6. 2014.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4123908/>

<sup>8</sup> West Africa Brief. "West Africa's Growth Prospects Remain Strong" West Africa Brief. 27 Feb. 2019.

<http://www.west-africa-brief.org/content/en/west-africa%E2%80%99s-growth-prospects-remain-strong>

<sup>9</sup> Fuller, Brandon. "Urbanization as Opportunity." World Bank. Nov. 2013.

<https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/17594>

<sup>10</sup> Hasaan, N. "West Africa: The Growing Market". Africa Business. Last accessed 10 Jan. 2021.

<https://www.africa-business.com/features/west-africa-business-trade.html>

<sup>11</sup> Quitzon, Kimberly. "Does Urbanization Reduce Poverty?" Borgen Project. 27 May 2015.

<https://borgenproject.org/does-urbanization-reduce-poverty/>

<sup>12</sup> Sahu, Kabita Kumari. "Does Urbanization Promote Foreign Direct Investment?" North Orissa University. 2013.

<https://ijac.org.uk/images/frontImages/gallery/Vol. 2 No. 3/2.pdf>

to be beneficial to African nations, as studies have shown that FDI has a positive impact on poverty reduction, particularly in the West African nation of Nigeria.<sup>13</sup>

## Improved Health Outcomes

Urbanization tends to lead to better health outcomes in growing regions. This can be seen in a number of places, as many countries that have undergone a period of urbanization have also taken steps to enact laws and guidelines improving public health.<sup>14</sup> Around the world, the health status in rural areas is worse than that of urban areas, primarily because of a lack of access to healthcare.<sup>15</sup> Major cities are much more likely to have medical facilities, hospitals, and specialist centers.<sup>16</sup> Considering many West African cities, such as Lagos, are growing into major cities, this has the potential to be a big impact.

African nations have already made great strides in improving health. Barofsky of the Brookings Institution compiled the results of multiple studies that found unprecedented increases in health outcomes. Since 2000, infant mortality in sub-Saharan Africa has declined by 40%; between 2004 and 2014, HIV-related mortality dropped by 48%; and malaria-related deaths decreased by over 50% due to the dissemination of treatments and medication.<sup>17</sup>

## Social Integration

An important facet of urbanization and the growth of cities is the opportunity to foster diverse communities. Many major African cities have large youth populations which tend to believe that their cities are good places to live.<sup>18</sup> African cities also bring together many different cultural groups.<sup>19</sup> Most countries in Africa have large divides among ethnocultural and religious groups. As a result of urbanization, cultural diversity in cities is more expansive than

---

<sup>13</sup> Mbiankeu Ngueta, Stéphane et al. "Does Foreign Direct Investment Contribute to Poverty Reduction in Cameroon? An ARDL-Bounds Testing Approach." 2020. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-02570072/document>

<sup>14</sup> Vize, Richard. "How can health services keep pace with the rapid growth of cities?" The Guardian. 24 Feb. 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/2017/feb/24/how-can-health-services-keep-pace-with-the-rapid-growth-of-cities>

<sup>15</sup> Strasser, Roger. "Rural Health Care Access and Policy in Developing Countries?" North Ontario University. 2013. <https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/pdf/10.1146/annurev-publhealth-032315-021507>

<sup>16</sup> "Health care quality in Africa" Aetna International. 2020. <https://www.aetnainternational.com/en/about-us/explore/living-abroad/culture-lifestyle/health-care-quality-in-africa.html>

<sup>17</sup> Barofsky, Jeremy et al. "Can rapid urbanization in Africa reduce poverty? Causes, opportunities, and policy recommendations." Brookings. 7 Sept. 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/09/07/can-rapid-urbanization-in-africa-reduce-poverty-causes-opportunities-and-policy-recommendations/>

<sup>18</sup> OECD Sahel And West Africa Club. "How is life in West African Cities?" OECD. 6 Sept. 2020. <https://oecd-swac.shorthandstories.com/how-is-life-in-west-african-cities/>

<sup>19</sup> Africa.com. "Pros & Cons of the Rapid Growth of African Cities" Africa.com. 17 Sept. 2019. <https://africa.com/pros-cons-of-the-rapid-growth-of-african-cities/>

ever before and affords minority groups the ability to get their voices heard.<sup>20</sup> These cities exemplify the diversity that exists in Africa and promote cooperation between groups in new and innovative ways.

On top of the cultural diversity that urbanization brings, urbanization is also frequently associated with greater independence and a higher quality of life for women. Cities offer better opportunities than rural areas for women to work outside of the family and provide better access to health services for women.<sup>21</sup> Because urban societies are more likely to be heterogeneous, children are more likely to see women in the workplace and men helping out with home and care work, thus eroding gender stereotypes.<sup>22</sup>

## Food Security

Food security has the potential to be an important argument on the topic as the impacts are large and terminal, making it easier for pro teams to convey that the benefits outweigh the harms. Many of these countries have high rates of food insecurity.<sup>23</sup> This is a problem that urbanization could alleviate or even solve. Urbanization generates larger markets which increases competition and ultimately lowers costs for consumers, making food more accessible.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as urbanization occurs, countries are much more likely to trade openly.<sup>25</sup> Trade ultimately leads to a marked increase in food security and dietary diversity.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> "Urbanization, Culture and Innovation". World Urban Forum. 2020. <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/wuf10-programme/dialogues/dialogue-1-urbanization-culture-and-innovation>

<sup>21</sup> Tacoli, Cecilia. "The Benefits and Constraints of Urbanization for Gender Equality." Environment and Urbanization Brief. 24 Jul. 2015. <https://pubs.iied.org/pdfs/10629IIED.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Evans, Alice. "Why is support for gender equality mainly growing in urban areas?" From Poverty to Power. 8 May 2015. <https://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/support-for-gender-equality-is-growing-but-why-is-this-mostly-in-urban-areas/>

<sup>23</sup> Smith, Michael D. and Meade, Birgit. "Who Are the World's Food Insecure? Identifying the Risk Factors of Food Insecurity Around the World." USDA. 2016. <https://www.ers.usda.gov/amber-waves/2019/june/who-are-the-world-s-food-insecure-identifying-the-risk-factors-of-food-insecurity-around-the-world/>

<sup>24</sup> Turok, Ivan and Mcgranahan, Gordon. "Urbanization and Economic Growth: The Arguments and Evidence for Africa and Asia." SAGE Journals. 28 Jun. 2013. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0956247813490908>

<sup>25</sup> Thia, Jang Ping. "Trade and Urbanisation." World Economy. 1 Aug. 2015.

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281146006\\_Trade\\_and\\_Urbanisation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281146006_Trade_and_Urbanisation)

<sup>26</sup> Dithmer, Jan and Adbulai, Awudu. "Does trade openness contribute to food security? A dynamic panel analysis." Food Policy 29 Apr. 2017. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306919216300598>

## Neg Arguments:

### Creating Poverty

This argument is a crucial facet of the topic and a great way to gain offense while also countering some common affirmative arguments. When discussing the benefits and harms of urbanization, all roads lead back to the individual and their quality of life. Unfortunately, urbanization often does not increase quality of life for all populations and instead contributes to poverty. Jobs fill up quickly, leaving many new residents without a stable income.<sup>27</sup> Even with the rapid rates of urbanization across the continent, poverty rates remain largely unchanged, and much of the urban population has access to improved sanitation facilities.<sup>28</sup>

On top of the poverty in cities, urbanization does not alleviate the problems of urban poverty. This argument cannot simply be answered with advocacy for further urbanization, as farmland and rural areas are integral to a functioning society, so some amount of the population will always have to exist in rural areas. The problem, then, is that rural poverty accounts for about 63% of poverty worldwide.<sup>29</sup>

### Environmental Harms

This is another very logical argument that teams should be able to convey to all kinds of judges in the constructive. It is common knowledge that factories and industry contribute to environmental concerns, and the rapid growth of urban areas in West Africa could potentially worsen these harms, if urbanization outpaces the ability of governments to create ways to lessen negative environmental impacts. Urban areas worldwide account for over 70% of CO2 emissions due to the burning of fossil fuels.<sup>30</sup> Continued urbanization has the potential to significantly affect global emissions of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere.<sup>31</sup>

As well as carbon emissions, urbanization demands expansion, which frequently results in deforestation. Urban areas are projected to expand by more than 740,000 square miles from

---

<sup>27</sup> Tobin, Bridget. "Rural Poverty and Urban Poverty." The Borgen Project. 18 Aug. 2014.

<https://borgenproject.org/rural-poverty-urban-poverty/>

<sup>28</sup> Barofsky, Jeremy et al. "Can rapid urbanization in Africa reduce poverty? Causes, opportunities, and policy recommendations." Brookings. 7 Sept. 2016. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2016/09/07/can-rapid-urbanization-in-africa-reduce-poverty-causes-opportunities-and-policy-recommendations/>

<sup>29</sup> Khan, Mahmood Hasan. "Finance and Development." International Monetary Fund Dec. 2000.

<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2000/12/khan.htm>

<sup>30</sup> Churkina, Galina. "The Role of Urbanization in the Global Carbon Cycle." Frontiers. 11 Jan. 2016.

<https://www.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fevo.2015.00144/full>

<sup>31</sup> Live Science Staff. "Urbanization, Aging Will Affect Greenhouse Gas Emissions." Live Science. 12 Oct. 2010.

<https://www.livescience.com/8772-urbanization-aging-affect-greenhouse-gas-emissions.html>

2000 to 2030, causing the loss of up to 7.4 million acres of agricultural land every year.<sup>32</sup> Not only does this threaten agricultural production and destroy habitats, but cutting down and burning trees releases carbon dioxide into the air. Deforestation is responsible for about 10% of all global warming emissions.<sup>33</sup>

## Disaster Risk

This argument presents a really interesting examination of the human cost of urbanization. Urban areas that lack access to adequate infrastructure and important basic services are at a higher risk of being impacted by natural disasters.<sup>34</sup> Cities around the world are now exposed to water scarcity and flooding due to extreme changes in weather patterns as a result of climate change. Unfortunately, this could pose large-scale problems for West Africa. By 2050, the urban population exposed to cyclones is projected to increase from 310 million to 680 million, while exposure to major earthquakes will increase from 370 million to 870 million.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, four out of the five African countries with a significant percentage of their population residing in areas with an elevation below 5 meters are in West Africa,<sup>36</sup> and 60% of Africa's urban population lives in slums.<sup>37</sup> Residents of these high-risk areas could potentially experience great harms if a disaster were to strike.

## Health Concerns

This argument functions well with a lot of the other potential neg arguments on the topic. Urbanization contributes to a great deal of public health issues for a multitude of reasons. As discussed in the disaster risk argument, 60% of Africa's urban population lives in slums, which are characterized by poor housing, a lack of fresh water, and poor sanitation facilities.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, infectious diseases have proven to be more prominent in slums; for example, cholera infections are highest in urban regions with high population density. In West

---

<sup>32</sup> Groumellon, Gaelle. "How Urban Consumption Lies at the Root of Deforestation." Greenbiz. 29 Jul. 2016. <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/how-urban-consumption-lies-root-deforestation>

<sup>33</sup> Union of Concerned Scientists Staff. "Tropical Deforestation and Global Warming." Union of Concerned Scientists. 27 Jul. 2008. <https://www.ucsusa.org/resources/tropical-deforestation-and-global-warming>

<sup>34</sup> CSIS Staff. "Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa." Center for Strategic and International Studies. 12 Apr. 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/urbanization-sub-saharan-africa>

<sup>35</sup> Lall, Somik V. and Deichmann, Uwe. "Density and Disasters: Economics of Urban Hazard Risk" World Bank. 10 Jul. 2016. <http://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/456301468148146720/pdf/WPS5161.pdf>

<sup>36</sup> CSIS Staff. "Urbanization in Sub-Saharan Africa." Center for Strategic and International Studies. 12 Apr. 2018. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/urbanization-sub-saharan-africa>

<sup>37</sup> Lall, Somik V. "Prerequisites to getting Africa's urbanization 'right'." Brookings. 21 Jan. 2020. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2020/01/21/prerequisites-to-getting-africas-urbanization-right/>

<sup>38</sup> Neiderud, Carl-Johan. "How urbanization affects the epidemiology of emerging infectious diseases." Infection Ecology & Epidemiology. 24 Jun. 2015. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.3402/iee.v5.27060>

Africa specifically, increasing population density and negative environmental factors have contributed to epidemics of yellow fever.<sup>39</sup> The World Health Organization estimates that non-communicable diseases that result from urbanization are expected to rise by 27% over the next 10 years in Africa, causing 28 million additional deaths.<sup>40</sup> Crowded cities with sizeable low-income populations are hotspots for outbreaks of new and emerging infections, such as the Ebola epidemic in West Africa in 2014.<sup>41</sup> These discussions are more relevant and important than ever in the context of COVID-19. Urban centers were the first places that COVID-19 spread to and have been some of the hardest hit areas by the virus, largely because of the population density and the networks between these cities and rural areas.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Reyes, Raquel et al. "Urbanization and Infectious Diseases: General Principles, Historical Perspectives, and Contemporary Challenges." *Challenges in Infectious Diseases*. 2013.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7119955/>

<sup>40</sup> Sanofi. "The Rise and Rise of Chronic Diseases in Africa." Sanofi. 29 Jun. 2018. <https://www.sanofi.com/your-health/the-rise-and-rise-of-chronic-diseases-in-africa>

<sup>41</sup> Bollyky, Thomas J. "The Future of Global Health Is Urban Health." Council on Foreign Relations. 31 Jan. 2019. <https://www.cfr.org/article/future-global-health-urban-health>

<sup>42</sup> Perry, Gad and De Silva, Gretchen. "Urbanization in the Age of Pandemic." *New Security Beat*. 20 May 2020. <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2020/05/urbanization-age-pandemic/>