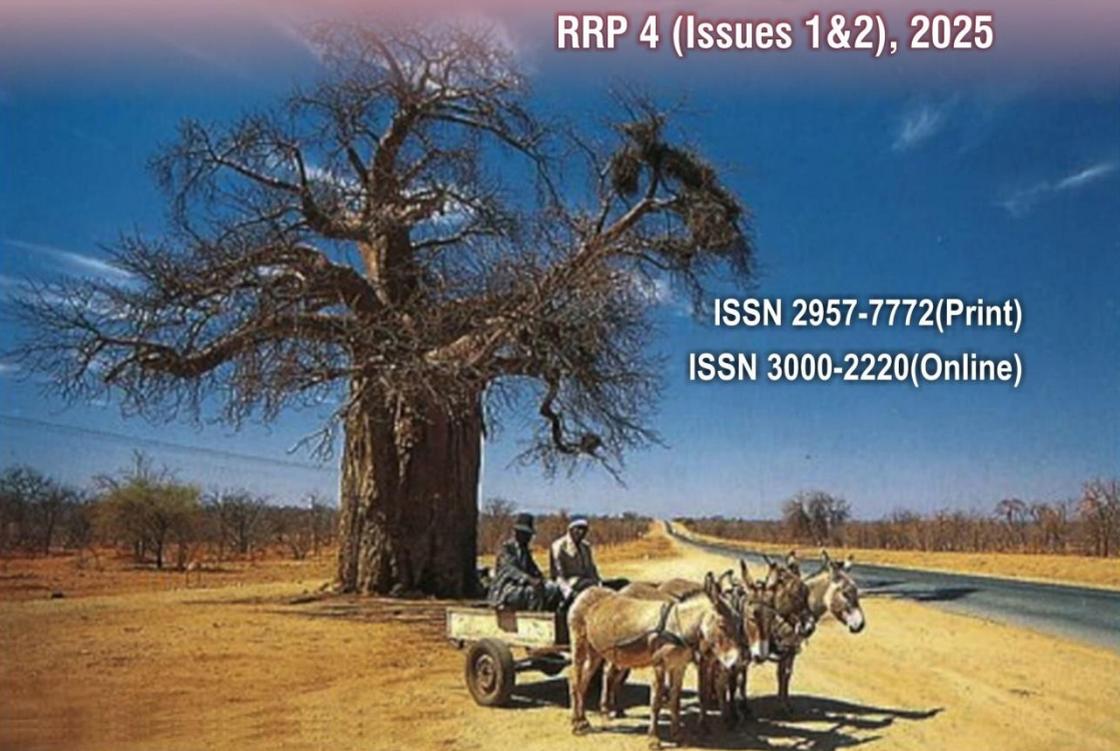




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About the Journal

JOURNAL PURPOSE

The purpose of the *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis* is to provide a forum for disaster risk mitigation, adaptation and preparedness.

CONTRIBUTION AND READERSHIP

Sociologists, demographers, psychologists, development experts, planners, social workers, social engineers, economists, among others whose focus is that of rural resilience.

JOURNAL SPECIFICATIONS

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SCOPE AND FOCUS

As much as the urban territory is increasing by each day, the rural economy, especially in many developing countries, still retains a great proportion of the extractive and accommodation industry. Retaining some space as rural remains critical given the sectors role in providing ecosystem services to both wildlife and humanity. In this light, rural resilience as practice beckons for critical studies especially in the face of the ever-threatening extreme weather events and climate change that then impact on the livelihoods and lifestyles of the rural communities. *Review of Rural Resilience Praxis* (RRRP) comes in as a platform for critical engagement by scholars, practitioners and leaders as they seek to debate and proffer solutions of the rural sector and trying to champion the philosophy of the right to be rural. The issue of conviviality between the different constituencies of the sectors, compiled with the competing challenges of improving rural spaces while also making the conservation and preservation debates matter is the hallmark of this platform of criticality. The journal is produced bi-annually.

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Articles must be original contributions, not previously published and should not be under consideration for publishing elsewhere.

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A total number of words: 5000-7000 words and set in 12-point font size width with 1.5 line spacing.

Language: British/UK English

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The Right to be Rural: A Discussion with Reference to Africa

NYASHA N'ONZWE¹, NOTION MANZVERA² AND MARLVIN MALINGANISO³

Abstract

The study examines the concept of being rural in the context of Africa, particularly in light of the expansion of unplanned peri-urban settlements encroaching on rural areas. Rural communities in Africa have been threatened by the outwards growth of urban areas and the illegal sale of communal lands by village heads, leading to the disappearance of rural livelihoods in the process. The study problematises the lack of rural development and planning which are causing the loss of the right to be rural due to the development of peri-urban centres and counter-urbanisation, leading to the failure of communal livelihoods. The research employs a qualitative research methodology with a case study design. The study utilises secondary data, sourced from Google Scholar articles and news reports. The research employs thematic data analysis as the method of data analysis to examine the study's findings. The study findings reveal that the right to be rural is slowly disappearing in Africa as evidenced by the growth of peri-urbanisation. The study concludes that it is upon African governments to initiate rural development and planning initiatives that protect communal lands and give ownership to residents. The study recommends the implementation of policies that reduce illegal sale of communal lands.

Keywords: livelihoods, peri-urbanisation, communal land, governments, counter-urbanisation, rural development planning

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INTRODUCTION

Rural transformation involves sweeping changes. These changes include shifts in farming practices, a change in the use of rural areas, locations and sectors, and new dynamic interactions between the primary and other sectors (Wang *et al.*, 2023). The transformation brings productivity improvements, develops non-farm economy and generates benefits for migrants and their communities of origin and destination (FAO, 2017). The success of rural transformation cannot only increase the welfare of the entire society through poverty reduction, but can also cause displacement of farmers, diversification and commodification of agricultural production, food security and dietary transition (Li *et al.*, 2016; Imai *et al.*, 2017; Ecker 2018; Liu *et al.*, 2018; Zhang *et al.*, 2020; Benfica and Henderson 2021). Rural areas are undergoing transformation due to population growth, with urban areas encroaching on them, leading to the erosion of their rural identity for many communal areas.

With rapid urbanisation, urban sprawl is a common phenomenon, particularly in the global south, creating peri-urban spaces where rural-urban interface occurs (Rejendran *et al.*, 2024). Peri-urban spaces are generally rural spaces transformed because of the growth of cities relying on resources of their surroundings (Robinson, 2018). The dynamic and constant interaction of social, economic and environmental systems that occurs in the peri-urban areas can offer critical insights on the impacts of the stretching of urban areas into rural centres. In the midst of agrarian distress, increasing unemployment, natural resources degradation, the right to be rural in most countries of the Global South is slowly disappearing, leading to constraints on rural livelihoods. The study looks into rural areas that are closer to urban centres to understand the impacts of the urban sprawl into prime lands.

The study problematises the loss of the right to be rural and the loss of autochthonous rights in developing countries with rural livelihoods being lost at an alarming rate. Rural areas in these countries are slowly disappearing with rural communities and their residents losing most of the privileges that are entitled to them as rural dwellers (Maja and Oyano, 2021). The Africa Research Institute (2022) observes that in Zimbabwe, 472 small urban centres in the form of growth points, district service centres and rural services centres, have been affected by urbanisation. Rural-urban divide is slowly disappearing

in the developing countries where planning is not always systemic. The rural agrarian spaces are under attack from the stretching of urban areas into communal areas, leading to the restriction of rural livelihoods. The growth of urban centres in rural areas has created a planning challenge, as rural residents are losing their autochthonous rights as life changes in rural areas.

The study brings to the fore the impacts of the encroachment of urban centres into rural areas and the implications it has on the right to be rural and autochthonous rights of rural people. The right to be rural is under threat from the extending urbanisation and this study is important as it informs on the academics on the implications of lack of rural settlement planning in developing countries. The research is significant in that it moves beyond the academic corridors into the policy-making arena and informs policy-makers on the need for improved rural development planning. The study outline is an introduction, conceptual framework, a literature review, followed by a methodology section, the findings of the study, followed by a discussion of the findings, and a conclusion and recommendations section. It is against the backdrop of the urban-rural divide disappearance with urban laws moving into the rural areas threatening the rural livelihoods, that this study investigates the right to be rural in African countries.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The study uses the Marxist concept of uneven development, observing spatial disparities as the root cause of disintegration of rurality and the right to be rural in developing countries. Developing countries have several undeveloped rural centres that are losing their identity to the encroachment of urban areas (Balana and Oyeyemi, 2022). Harvey (1989) interprets the spatial disparities through the introduction of the concept of uneven geographical development pushing urban dwellers into the rural centres. The Marxist perspective and understanding of spatial inequalities started to form around the concept of uneven distribution of resources and development, causing the lack of development in the rural centres and leading to the replacement of rural livelihoods (Gyuris, 2015). Due to the lack of resources and development planning in rural areas, urban centres are finding their way into rural centres, criminalising some of the rural livelihoods, causing the right to be rural questionable. This indicates that the rural autochthony is under threat.

The uneven development and distribution of resources between the rural and urban spaces causes the right to be rural to disappear as local people sell their land to wealthy home-seekers, who then develop settlements that replace rural settings. Harvey (1989) observes that the unequal development between urban spaces and rural spaces causes the disappearance of rural settings with rural people being forced to change their livelihoods. The rural economies are vulnerable to the intrusion of the urban push due to the distress that agrarian economies are going through because of climate change and other extreme weather events, which points to lack of resilience building and uneven development. The concept is relevant to the study as it shows the root cause of the questioning of the right to be rural due to urban infringement. The idea of uneven development and distribution of wealth in urban centres has made the right to be rural questionable due to lack of rural development. It can be argued that uneven distribution has caused the right to be rural questionable as urban spaces infringe into the rural areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section of the study presents the literature review to craft the discourse for this study. The research consulted past studies to understand the encroachment of urban areas into rural centres. The literature is reviewed along the lines of peri-urbanisation as an encroachment of urban life into the rural centres.

PERI-URBANISATION INTO RURAL CENTRES

Peri-urbanisation are the settlements built illegally on the borders of rural areas and urban centres without proper planning and service delivery in developing countries. These settlements create a change of land use in rural centres (Kumar *et al.*, 2023). The creation of peri-urban areas with lack thereof of service delivery creates situations that changes the land use in the rural areas, limiting the rural livelihoods and, at times forcing the rural councils to change the rules within these areas (Wajih and Mani ,2020). Butch and Heinkel (2020) observe that lack of planning and policy attention to peri-urban areas has exacerbated social, environmental, economic and health inequalities. The changes caused by peri-urbanisation force change of land use in rural areas as these stretch into rural centres causing a limit on agriculture and reducing open spaces, increasing pressure on resources such as

water and land for grazing (Kamal *et al.*, 2014). The direct result of the changes induced by the stretching of urban centres into rural areas is the changes in land use and the pressure that is mounted on farmers to change their ways of life.

In addition, IPCC (2007) observes that peri-urbanisation and the encroachment of urban areas into rural centres cause poor land use and unplanned development which can have negative implications on hygiene and sanitation in rural areas. Rural areas right to be rural is under-siege from the demand of land to develop urban centres within rural areas, in some cases threatening environments. In areas around Dar es Salaam, Tanzani, peri-urbanisation has been creating tension for poor rural communities with pollution of rural lands because of the subsequent urban settings development (FAO, 2019). Makinde *et al.* (2023) allude that in Ethiopia, urban development and changes in socioeconomic conditions in the peri-urban areas are altering sensitivity in environmental degradation with traditional leaders and urban governors clashing over land use strategies. The right to be rural in most developing countries is under-fire due to the lack of authority on the part of traditional leaders. The sale of rural land for the development of urban centres in rural areas has affected the right to be rural in most countries, with various communities losing their identity.

Furthermore, rural areas are known for their abundance of resources but, with the encroachment of urban centres, there has been a deterioration of resources, leading to the disappearance of the right to be rural. Singh *et al.* (2024) argue that the stretching of the urban centres into the rural areas is affecting the availability of resources in rural settings, causing stress on the environment as available resources are failing to sustain the number of people living in these areas. The right to be rural, as determined by the abundance of resources, has deteriorated in various rural settings, making rural people struggle and have their existence limited through council by-laws and regulations. Mohanasundari and Balasubramanian (2015) observe that the Bhavani basin in southern India, presents a different picture of water scarcity as it has led to chronic indebtedness which does not just contribute to increasing the vulnerability of rural settings with the coming of peri-urbanisation. The right to be rural is also lost due to peri-urbanisation as it puts a strain on the available

resources, causing rurality disappearance as most rural livelihoods are limited by the change of lifestyle.

CASE STUDY OF CHENNAI TAMIL NADU INDIA

In India, Tamil Nadu has grown and become the state with the highest level of urbanisation, as Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu, lost more than one fifth of its greenery in 20 years and has the least open spaces and is predicted to convert 30% of its total area into urban areas by 2026 (Rajendran *et al.*, 2024). Chennai has an intensely developed urban core, and the urban sprawl of sub-urban and peri-urban development has resulted in poor infrastructure, quality of life challenges and low level of economic activities (Marshall and Randhawa, 2017). The growth of peri-urbanisation in Chennai has resulted in extensive land use patterns with unregulated growth and shrinkage of water bodies and other resources in rural areas (Gupta, 2022). The greenery has been lost in Chennai with most rural areas around the city losing their identity and straining rural livelihoods (Gupta and Nair, 2011). The right to be rural is involuntarily taken away from the rural communities around developing big cities through unregulated developments. The development of urban centres in rural areas is a strain on resources and rural livelihoods as resources shrink.

The notion of peri-urbanisation has strained the right to be rural in most countries causing the rural life to disappear as environments fail to cater for the needs of both the rural dwellers and the new residents due to differences in lifestyles and socioeconomic pathways. The reviewed literature shows that the stretching of urban centres into rural settings strains the resources in the rural areas. This causes exploitation of rural dwellers through the limitation of their livelihoods. It is concluded that the right to be rural has come under fire due to the growth of urban centres and lifestyles in rural areas as the former strains the latter's environment and resources. The stretching of urban centres into rural areas is causing a loss of identity on rural areas the right to be rural is being taken away from the rural residents through rapid development of urban-like areas that demand a change of livelihoods. The agrarian livelihoods that have been under fire from climate change are continuing to suffer from the development of urban centres and lives in rural areas. The rural centres are losing their identity to new urban centres developing through the

encroachment of urban lifestyles. The right to be rural in developing countries is under threat.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This section of the study presents the research approach, data collection methods and data analysis methods adopted in this study. The study uses a qualitative research approach to understand the right to be rural in the Global Southern countries, Nigeria, South Africa, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, amid the growth of peri-urbanisation. This approach is preferred because it can uncover trends. Weil (2017) supports this assertion by arguing that the qualitative research approach uncovers and establishes patterns in social facts. The study has a bias towards the case study research design to understand various cases of the right to be rural in the Global Southern countries. The appeal of the case study research design, as posited by Grant and Kara (2021), offers multiple realities to the phenomenon under study.

The study used secondary information as the source of the data, through newspaper articles, Google Scholar articles and higher learning institutions' websites reports. The criteria of inclusion were the right to be rural, the development of peri-urban areas and associated conflicts in Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa and Zimbabwe. This approach was preferred also because of its avoidance of duplication of works already carried, while allowing the research to fill the gaps and solve the puzzle as alluded by Peters (2014)..

The study is content analysis to analyse the research findings. Content analysis is cost-effective due to its ability it give researchers to conduct it at any given time and location. The charm of content analysis is its flexibility, allowing researchers analyses of a multiplicity of materials, including dialogues, social media posts and articles (Wei *et al.* 2022).

FINDINGS

This section of the study presents the findings to show the right to be rural and the dynamics in Africa. Africa, as a continent, is facing various changes from rural-urban migration and population growth to changes in rural settings.

TANZANIA

The UN-Habitat (2022) observes that Tanzania, with a population of 61.7 million people has 40.2 million (approximately 65%) living in rural areas and 21.5 million (about 32%) in urban areas. Macrotrends (2024) observes that the Tanzanian population is increasingly becoming rural, while keeping its rurality. The right to be rural in Tanzania is still in existence as most people in the country still live in their rural homesteads without much change in their settings. In Tanzania, the concept of replacement of rural areas is not common as the country has a large and diverse rural population, and the focus is on rural development and revitalisation, not replacement (Gilliard, 2023).

Rural revitalisation refers to a strategy that encompasses policies and initiatives aimed at improving the socio-economic well-being, infrastructure, and quality of life in rural areas (Liu *et al.*, 2023). Rural revitalisation is of utmost importance to the Tanzanian government, which has put in place various initiatives to promote rural development. These initiatives include investment in infrastructure such as roads, irrigation systems, electricity grids, providing access to education, healthcare, services promoting rural industries like agro-processing, tourism and supporting farmers to enhance their productivity and income (Gilliard, 2023). The right to be rural in Tanzania is upheld as the government has initiated programmes that support villagisation. The government has revitalized rural areas through the promotion of sustainable agriculture by practices like agroforestry, conservation agriculture and the integration of renewable energy in farming operations (World Bank, 2022). Tanzania has kept alive the right to be rural, giving farmers a chance towards sustainable development and improved rurality.

NIGERIA

Nigeria is a West African country with a total population of 237 million people, and of those, 102.3 million (45.7%) live in the rural areas and still relying on agriculture and other rural livelihoods (Macrotrends, 2024). Nigeria is experiencing significant urbanisation, with projections showing a substantial increase in the urban population. This has caused a shift in land use, with agricultural land being converted into built-up areas (Ayuba *et al.*, 2023). In Nigeria the shift from urban to rural areas or rural transformation is a growing trend where people are moving to rural areas, driven by factors like

the search for land and a change of lifestyle, leading to the emergence of new urban settlements (International Growth Centre, 2023). This phenomenon has been dubbed the ‘new ruralism’ with people leaving urban centres for the rural areas, leading to rural transformation, which has seen the emergence of new forms of rural life questioning the right to be rural (Sakketa, 2023). People in search of change of lifestyle have moved to the rural areas for more a relaxed pace of life, turning the rural settings to urban-like settlements (Fox *et al.*, 2018).

With the expansion of urban centres, land use has been impacted by the change from agriculture to residential and industrial lifestyles, affecting the livelihoods of different groups, particularly the poorest (*ibid.*). The right to be rural in Nigeria is threatened as there has been a decline in the number of people engaged in agriculture, and a shift in consumer preferences towards processed foods, leading to a decrease in agricultural production (Sakketa, 2023). The stretching of urban lifestyles into rural Nigeria has impacted the poor in rural communities as it has limited their livelihoods, while diversifying the livelihoods of the rich.

SOUTH AFRICA

South Africa is a country in Southern Africa, with a rural population of 19.7 million people, representing a significant portion of the total population. The rural areas encompass diverse landscapes and communities (Trading Economics, 2024). The movement of people from urban to rural areas, a phenomenon known as counter-urbanisation, is transforming South African rural settlements, impacting demographics, infrastructure and livelihoods often due to factors such as a desire for simpler lifestyles (Mthiyane *et al.*, 2022). Counter-urbanisation is fuelled by the desire for to escape the challenges of urban life and find opportunities in rural areas of South Africa (National Planning Commission of South Africa, 2024). This has led to the revitalisation of rural areas, with the influx of new residents and a shift in age and skills. The right to be rural is questioned as the new demographic changes lead to different lifestyles that threaten rural livelihoods (Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, 2022). Counter-urbanisation in South Africa has led to changes in social structures and norms as new residents interact with existing communities, labelling existing rural

lifestyles as archaic (Tacoli, 2022). The right to be rural has been phased out by counter-urbanisation that has seen the growth of urban centres in rural South Africa.

Counter-urbanisation in South Africa has destroyed agricultural initiatives which had provided labour for the South African economy, leading to the limitation of rural livelihoods (Antal and Bhutani, 2023). In South Africa agriculture, is losing its face as most people are fleeing the urban areas to reconnect with their places of origin. Meso *et al.* (2016) argue that urban-rural migration in the form of counter-urbanisation has created problems for rural people as it has strained land and the environment, grazing lands, leading to the limitation of livestock at growth points. The growth of counter-urbanisation in South Africa has led to the questioning of the right to be rural with most residents losing their livelihoods to regulations imposed in favour of the new residents.

ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe is a Southern African country with a rural population of 15.2 million people, 67% of the total population (Macrotrends 2024). In Zimbabwe the movement of people from urban to rural areas is driven by factors like economic hardships and land reform. This transforms rural settlements by changing land use. Peri-urbanisation in Zimbabwe is forcing rural activities such as agriculture to co-exist with urbanrelated developments, such as residential apartments, private schools, informal industries and recreational resorts, altering rural livelihoods (Mudapakati *et al.*, 2024). Such land-uses are unfavourable to the communal residents who wish to continue with their agricultural practices, thereby increasing the complexity of rural-urban land use, resulting in the loss of the right to be rural.. *NewsDay* of October 17 2021, carries a story that in Goromonzi, the sale of rural land for the development of peri-urban areas has created land conflicts, leading to the loss of the right to be rural, with most people struggling to continue with their communal livelihoods.

Rural areas are under threat of peri-urbanisation with most communities experiencing conflicts for land use leading to communal residents lacking

alternative livelihoods. African urban population growth is leading to the creation of peri-urban areas that are becoming a threat to the right to be rural.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study is to show the right to be rural and how some rural areas in Africa have lost their right to be rural through being replaced by peri-urbanisation. The study findings reveal that some African countries have implemented policies that revitalise rural areas through the building of infrastructure, investment in rural development programmes, promoting sustainable villagisation. African countries with populations that are largely rural, have invested in rural sustainable development to reduce conflicts for resources between rural people and urban people. In support of the study are Zhou and Gu (2025), who note that rural revitalisation has become a strategy to build rural resilience in Wushi Village in Hunan Province, China, leading to the creation of sustainable livelihoods in this province. Rural revitalisation provides a chance for rural areas to modernise and maintain their identity, creating economic sustainability that can reduce rural-urban migration. Unlike Tanzania with its rural revitalisation, Nigeria, South Africa and Zimbabwe, are experiencing counter-urbanisation and peri-urbanisation that is limiting communal residents right to be rural.

The African countries have been having a new form of ruralism, which involves the replacement of rural areas with urban settings through the expansion of growth points, eradicating village life. Rural transformation has seen the growth of peri-urbanisation impacting rural practices such as biodiversity conservation and rural livelihoods that co-exist with the environment in harmony. The transformation has increased pollution and land degradation. The right to be rural through the conservation of biodiversity has seen a change due to the new ruralism that creates urban centres within the rural areas. In line with the study findings is Peters *et al.* (2019), who allude that rurality has been threatened by urban development in developing countries with most communal areas losing their identity with forestry and grazing lands affected by the need for residential lands. The right to be rural has been lost due to the development of counter-urban settlements that have focused on the extension of urban areas into the heart of rural areas. South Africa and Nigeria are experiencing counter-urbanisation causing the

disappearance rural livelihoods, questioning the right to be rural in African countries, as new urban centres make rural livelihoods impossible to access.

Furthermore, the right to be rural is under fire in countries like Zimbabwe as conflicts between the rural and the growing cities are ensuing, leading to the limiting of rural livelihoods. The study findings reveal that in Zimbabwe, the right to be rural is under fire from peri-urbanisation with rural areas lands being sold to unplanned urban settlement developers expanding the growth points into the rural hinterland and causing conflicts in these areas. Rural lands are being lost and this disrupts agrarian economies, the major source of rural livelihoods. Coulibaly and Li (2020) agree that urbanisation stretching into the heart of rural areas is causing loss of agricultural lands and the destruction of sources of income for communal residents who are losing their land. The right to be rural has been lost in most parts of Zimbabwe and Africa in general due to poor rural development and urban planning.

The study findings reveal that rural revitalisation can work as a strategy to protect the right to be rural in most African countries by reducing environmental impacts on rural lands. This section reveals that the right to be rural is slowly disappearing in some parts of Africa as communal residents are losing their lands to the illegal sale of land, causing stress on rural livelihoods. It can be argued that in Africa, spatial planning is the missing link that is stifling the right to be rural.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is argued that rural people are entitled to their right to be rural in Africa as it is their autochthonous right but, due to poor rural development and urban planning, communal lands are succumbing to the pressure and need to sale land to urban house-seekers. African rural planners need to come up with solutions to the problem of peri-urbanisation as it is a ticking bomb that can detonate at any point as rural ecosystems are coming under pressure.

In conclusion, in most African countries, rural land ownership is vested in the state, implying that the state has a stake in what goes on in rural areas. The question then arises, how does the state stop the vulnerabilities that peri-urbanisation exposes rural people to and restore their right to be rural? The

study concludes that it upon the African countries to put in sweeping policies and regulations to control the development of urban centres and counter-urban settings.

The study recommends proper planning of peri-urban areas as its lack can lead to the degeneration of these areas into slums or shanty towns without proper service delivery. It also recommends the crafting of win-win policy situations that protect vulnerable rural communities during the acquisition of communal lands by municipalities. The study recommends the promotion of educational and public awareness campaigns to reduce encroachment into rural areas as these have delicate livelihoods that sustain families. The study directs future studies to look into the impacts of rural revitalisation in African countries.

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