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South Africa goes with the urbanisation flow

Two-thirds of people in South Africa now live in urban areas as a result of growing urbanisation over the last few decades. This is according to the latest *South Africa Survey*, published by the South African Institute of Race Relations in Johannesburg this week.

The proportion of people living in urban areas increased from 52% in 1990 to 62% in 2011. The share of those living in rural areas dropped from 48% to 38% over the same period.

The data comes from the World Bank.

South Africa's long-term urbanisation trend is partly the result of post-apartheid freer movement of people, especially Africans, from rural to urban areas. Higher economic growth in urban areas has also drawn people to cities in search of employment, including immigrants from outside the country.

Among African countries, Rwanda had the most rapid rate of urbanisation, with the proportion of people living in urban areas increasing nearly threefold (256%) between 1990 and 2011. Other countries, however, have had shrinking proportions of their populations living in urban areas, a notable case being Zambia (-9%). By 2030, Africa's rate of urbanisation is expected to be faster than that of Asia.

In South Africa, smaller cities have experienced the most rapid growth, owing, in part, to small initial populations, as well as growing economic activity. Thuthukani Ndebele, a researcher at the Institute, cited Polokwane, Rustenburg, Vanderbijlpark, Nelspruit, and Ekurhuleni as the country's five fastest-growing urban areas, with average annual population growth rates of between 1.6% and 2.9% over the last decade, compared to Cape Town, for example, with a rate of 1.4%. Population growth results from a combination of natural growth (higher fertility and life expectancy) and in-migration.

'Among other things, urbanisation creates conditions for concentrated economic activity. The downsides, however, may be that urbanisation fuels crime and social tensions, creates greater environmental and health risks, and poses challenges for government service provision', said Mr Ndebele.

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