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Translocal Livelihoods, Socio-Economic Differentiation and Lower Level Urbanisation in Uganda

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ABSTRACT

In sub-Saharan Africa, more than a quarter of the urban population lives in small towns, with rapid lower level urbanisation being driven largely by lacking rural opportunities. A growing interest in translocality considers relationships that position livelihoods within multiple spatial contexts. Terms of inclusion in translocal relationships vary, and the socio-economic differentiation emerging out of these relationships is understudied. We use a mixed-methods approach, combining survey data with qualitative data collected in seven small towns in Uganda to shed light on their translocal livelihood dynamics and to elucidate the empirical and theoretical linkages between translocality and socio-economic differentiation.

1 | Introduction

The causality between urbanisation, poverty reduction and economic growth is not straightforward (McGranahan, Schensul, and Singh 2016), even if cross-country comparisons show that urbanisation is correlated with higher economic development and lower poverty rates (Ravallion, Chen, and Sangraula 2007). Recent research has shown the dangers of relying on a growth first model as rising inequalities increasingly endanger both social cohesion and growth in itself as people are excluded from participating in economic and social processes (McGranahan, Schensul, and Singh 2016).

The potential for equalising livelihood opportunities arising from urban growth will differ depending on the size distribution of urban centres but also relates to the drivers underpinning the urbanisation process. Dynamics of urban agglomeration based on innovation generate better prospects for economic inclusivity than a process impelled by poverty and distress-based migration. In the short term at least, urbanisation in sub-Saharan Africa is perceived to be driven by population pressure

on increasingly fragmented and depleted agricultural land (Andersson Djurfeldt 2015). However, limited opportunities outside agriculture suggest that linkages to rural areas will continue to be important to livelihoods, especially in small urban centres (Vandecasteele et al. 2018). Small towns therefore continue to be spatially, socially and economically embedded in surrounding rural areas, with the vitality and strength of rural linkages potentially affecting socio-economic inclusion.

Meanwhile, current and future urbanisation trends suggest a shift in the distribution of urban populations in most regions of the Global South away from megacities and towards smaller urban centres (Randolph and Deuskar 2020). In sub-Saharan Africa specifically, the majority of the urban population lives in urban centres of less than one million residents, and as many as 26% live in small towns of less than 50 000 inhabitants (GOLD IV 2017). Smaller towns and intermediate-sized urban areas are predicted to experience the most rapid population growth in the coming decades, posing a set of specific urban development challenges (GOLD IV 2017). While the literature shows that migration to secondary towns has stronger

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poverty-reducing effects than migration to metropolitan areas (Christiaensen and Todo 2014; Christiaensen, Weerdt, and Todo 2013), urban research and policies are characterised by a metro bias that risks undermining the prospects for social and economic inclusion. Contextualising small-town livelihoods in relation to new empirical realities enriches theoretical debates and adds insights that are needed to practically address development challenges (Lynge et al. 2022; Wilbard, Kyessi, and Limbumba 2022).

In the context of the Global South, multigenerational, translocal households that compensate for inadequate and limited formal and state-based social security systems are central to livelihoods and may be a pathway towards survival or economic opportunities for small-town residents (Andersson Djurfeldt 2012, 2021b). A growing academic interest in translocality considers social, cultural and economic relationships that position livelihoods and people within multiple spatial contexts and networks to different places (Steinbrink and Niedenführ 2020). The terms of inclusion in such networks vary by gender, age and socio-economic circumstances, however, and the socio-economic differentiation emerging out of these relationships is relatively understudied. Existing research on translocal differentiation has an ethnographic focus (Greiner 2011; Naumann and Greiner 2017), whereas our contribution is based on a mixed-methods approach that can shed light on the scale as well as livelihood dynamics emerging out of small towns. In this sense, we are able to quantify as well as explain how the livelihoods of small-town residents and migrants are embedded in rural areas as well as in household and community networks. In turn, this approach offers the possibility of elucidating the potentially stratifying aspects of translocal relationships. Using survey data from 1789 households and qualitative data from 58 focus group discussions in seven lower level towns in Uganda, we show how translocality varies with respect to identifiers that are commonly seen as indicators of vulnerability. By analysing the distributional aspects of translocal livelihood arrangements, including transfers and access to key productive resources such as rural land, the article elucidates the empirical and theoretical linkages between translocality and socio-economic differentiation.

The paper answers three research questions: How are households in small towns embedded in translocal livelihoods that stretch across multiple locales? How and why do translocal livelihoods and access to such systems vary based on individual characteristics, household structure and socio-economic status? Finally, how can translocality contribute to socio-economic differentiation in urban livelihoods and with what theoretical and policy implications?

The article starts with a conceptual framework outlining the links between lower level urbanisation, translocal livelihoods and socio-economic differentiation. This is followed by a background section that contextualises lower level urbanisation in relation to translocality in sub-Saharan Africa. A methodology section then describes the research design and methods used in the study. The empirical findings are presented and analysed in Section 5. Finally, the conclusions of the paper point to the empirical and theoretical implications of the study.

2 | Conceptualising Lower Level Urbanisation, Translocal Livelihoods and Socio-Economic Differentiation

Structural transformation perspectives inspired by agricultural economics take their starting point in the historical experiences of the Global North. In this tradition, urbanisation is seen as an outcome of a broader macroeconomic process in which people leave the rural areas as a result of improving rural livelihoods, increasing agricultural productivity and growing urban opportunities (Timmer 2009). The limits of the applicability of this model to African realities have been recognised by perspectives that suggest that lower level urbanisation can be the outcome of dynamism as well as distress (Hazell, Haggblade, and Reardon 2007). In a positive scenario, regional and local dynamics lead to an interplay between the rural and the urban as small towns link producers and consumers of agricultural commodities. People leave agriculture as productivity increases and move to towns to take up other types of employment. By contrast, a distress-driven process forces people out of agriculture and into rural–urban migration as a result of falling productivity and increasing rural poverty. Nonetheless, in both cases, smaller urban centres are conceptualised as an outcome of a broader process of structural economic change emanating from agriculture.

In sub-Saharan Africa, where the rural population share is high, livelihoods depend primarily on agriculture, and accessibility to larger urban centres is generally low, small towns are especially important in linking rural and urban livelihoods (Andersson Djurfeldt 2021a). Small towns house nearby consumers of agricultural products but also serve as providers of agricultural inputs and urban services, while local nonfarm employment opportunities are often concentrated in rural towns (Tacoli and Agergaard 2017; Tiffen 2003). Household-level economic linkages between rural and urban areas and the integration between urban markets and enterprises and rural farmers mean that small towns are often more strongly embedded in rural areas than in urban hierarchies focused on larger cities (Tacoli and Agergaard 2017).

The possibilities for balancing livelihoods between the rural and the urban, through seasonal or circular mobility and transfers of food and money, can affect economic growth in small urban centres but also the distributional pattern of these processes.

At the level of the household, the study of rural urban linkages and multispatial engagement has emerged out of two separate bodies of scholarship. Unitary household models from the economic subfield of migration studies and the New Economics of Labour Migration (Stark and Bloom 1985) have been used to theorise household behaviour and decision-making. These conceptualise the household as a domestic unit that strategically allocates household members to different sectors and places in the pursuit of a collective goal. Such approaches have been challenged from within the field by feminist economists who question the collectivist assumptions of these models, recognising instead the potentially conflicting interests of household members (Doss and Quisumbing 2020).

Complementary theoretical perspectives can be found in the broader field of sustainable livelihoods research and focus

on how households and individuals combine different types of resources (capitals) to secure or enhance their livelihoods (Bebbington 1999; Chambers and Conway 1992; Scoones 1998). Both of these fields have generated an interest in material flows as an expression of households that function across various spatial units, being described variously as multilocal, multisited and stretched households, for instance. While such studies are overwhelmingly empirical, more recently, the concept of translocality has been used to describe a situation in which people coexist in several locales, culturally, socially, emotionally and economically.

Greiner and Sakdapolrak (2013) trace the origins of the concept of translocality to an intersecting field between geography, anthropology, development studies, area studies and history and develop the concept further. Central to their conceptualisation is the individual's role in relation to kinship-based networks that enable translocal relationships and livelihoods. Literature on the African household (Carr 2005; Peters 2021) as well as more recent scholarship on translocality and translocal households suggests that the household as a crucial conduit of resource access, social support and material flows is a necessary starting point for analysing translocal livelihoods (Andersson Djurfeldt 2021b; Steinbrink and Niedenführ 2020). Steinbrink and Niedenführ (2020, 44) argue for a translocalisation of livelihood research and define a translocal household as: 'a socially recognised, jointly economizing collective, whose members do not permanently live in one place, but do coordinate their activities of consumption, reproduction and resource use over a long period of time'. As such, the productive and reproductive activities of translocal households find their material expressions in translocal livelihoods.

From the perspective of socio-economic differentiation, the notions of accumulative and survival-based translocality are central. Translocality prompted by survivalism suggests a scenario where stretching the household across space prevents the pursuit of economic opportunities in both rural and urban areas. By contrast, accumulative translocal dynamics enable households to explore such opportunities in multiple locales while avoiding covariate risks related to weather, seasonality and markets tied to particular places. As such, translocal processes can aggravate initial household-level differences in resource access (Andersson Djurfeldt 2012). Differentiation occurs not only at the household level, but the distinction between accumulation and survival-based translocality is relevant also at the sectorial and territorial levels (Losch 2015; Satterthwaite and Tacoli 2003).

How individuals, household members and groups of people that are known to be vulnerable are embedded in translocal networks and relationships can in this sense be seen as a potentially differentiating aspect arising from lower level urbanisation. How kinship relations and rural and/or periurban agriculture are able to balance the vicissitudes of urban livelihoods is likely to vary strongly among different groups of urban residents. Recent migrants and urban residents with rural homes located outside immediate rural hinterlands may be less able to cushion economic hardship, engage in rural agriculture or benefit from economic opportunities generated at the interface of rural and urban areas. Moreover, empirical findings show how land tenure relations are affected by gender and generation, with

women, youth and migrants generally having more precarious access to and control over rural land (Andersson Djurfeldt 2020; Chamberlin, Yeboah, and Sumberg 2021). The distributional aspects of lower level urbanisation hence may be related as much to opportunities in the towns themselves as to the material, social and family-based linkages to other areas and to rural areas in particular.

3 | Background: Contextualising Lower Level Urbanisation in Sub-Saharan Africa in Relation to Translocality

Available literature uses the concepts of urbanisation, urban growth, urban development and urban change loosely and sometimes interchangeably. In demographic terms, urbanisation occurs when the national or regional share of the urban population increases relative to the rural. This can result from higher natural growth in urban areas, rural-to-urban migration or the reclassification of rural areas as urban (Satterthwaite, McGranahan, and Tacoli 2010).¹

As noted in several contributions on urban definitions (Potts 2009, 2012; Satterthwaite 2010), defining and measuring urbanisation are not straightforward. Whereas urban definitions differ globally and often combine population thresholds with functional characteristics, many African countries rely on population data that is outdated or encumbered by measurement errors. African countries may also use a relatively generous lower population threshold to define urban areas, as noted by Potts (2018), who suggests that urbanisation rates at the national level were overestimated in four of the five countries covered in her analysis, for instance. More recently, possibilities of triangulating population data with satellite imagery that identifies urban functions and services, as well as using proxies for population density or growth over time, enable combining functional characteristics with population data to establish more accurate estimates of the size and spatial limits of urban areas (Moriconi-Ebrard, Harre, and Heinrigs 2016). Definitions of small towns must therefore be contextualised not only in relation to populations but also in relation to urban hierarchies and relationships and with regard to overall levels of service delivery and urban functions—a small town in South Africa is likely to be very different from a small town in South Sudan (see Agergaard, Kirkegaard, and Birch-Thomsen 2021).

Nonetheless, the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) uses a population threshold of 50 000 inhabitants to define a small town. With this cut-off, 26% of the urban population in sub-Saharan Africa lived in small towns, with small towns and intermediate-sized urban areas predicted to grow most rapidly in population terms in the coming decades (GOLD IV 2017). In the case of Uganda, the definition of urban areas has evolved over time. The Local Government Act 1997 (amended several times) empowers the Minister for Local Government to declare an area urban if it satisfies a number of criteria, among which are a minimum population threshold of 2000 (by the year 2014) and at least 70% of its population being engaged in nonagricultural activities. A set of functional characteristics should also be fulfilled; for example, urban areas need to have a specific set of infrastructural facilities; an integrated

master plan for land use; offices to handle most urban administrative matters; and administrative capacity to effectively and efficiently deliver essential services to their residents, to name a few (MLHUD 2017).

A stylised fact of the urbanisation literature suggests an increasing poverty and falling inequality gradient from rural areas to cities, such that poverty is highest and income inequality is lowest in rural areas, with secondary towns being placed in between rural areas and large cities (Christiaensen and Kanbur 2017). In the case of Uganda, the former pattern is confirmed in recent poverty statistics with a national urban poverty rate of 30% but also suggests an increasing pauperisation in small towns and a concentration of urban poverty in towns with populations below 50 000 inhabitants. Income inequality, meanwhile, is as expected lower in towns than in cities, but changes in Gini coefficients over time suggest that national inequality is growing, fuelled by increasing inequality in the cities (Pozhidaev 2020). Mechanisms of socio-economic stratification emerging out of translocal livelihoods are therefore likely to be different in small towns compared with cities, and the expectation would be that survival-based patterns of translocality dominate, with the potential for accumulation being limited.

4 | Research Design and Methods

The present article is based on data from a project on lower level urban growth in Uganda and Tanzania. A purposive country selection was made of two countries that have among the fastest urbanisation rates in Africa, large agricultural employment and a high share of their urban populations in lower level urban centres but, apart from that, provide variety in terms of total population size, urban histories, decentralisation policies and population density.² The overall research design was based on identifying small towns that had experienced population and economic growth (as proxies for urbanisation) over the decade preceding data collection. The overarching aim of the project was to identify the prospects for inclusive urban growth in the context of lower level urbanisation.

The project used a mixed-methods approach, combining spatial analysis and quantitative data collection with qualitative data collection through focus group discussions and key informant interviews. The present article uses data primarily from the quantitative survey and, to a lesser extent, from the focus group discussions.

4.1 | Site Selection

The seven project sites were identified by using annual night-time light emission data, an indicator of economic development. Change in annual night-time light emissions between 2012 and 2020, based on data produced and described by Elvidge et al. (2021), was used to create polygons of growth as a way to identify potential study sites. With the change in night-time radiation, the data was divided into three classes,³ with the middle class (Class 2) studied in more depth as lower level urban growth was hypothesised to have occurred in areas with a moderate increase in night-time light. The layer containing Class 2 data

was combined in a Geographic Information System (GIS) with a population layer from the 2015 Africapolis dataset to identify overlaps of growth in lights within the relevant population class. A buffer of approximately 40 km⁴ was placed around each of the major cities of Kampala, Mbarara and Mbale, within which urbanisation was deemed to be in the form of urban sprawl from these metropolitan areas. Towns within a 300-km radius of Kampala (but outside the buffer described above) were short-listed, to enable the practical aspects of carrying out data collection within the time and budget constraints of the project. This resulted in a list of 50 towns in Uganda. Google Earth was then used to remove sites that were not towns, such as mines, industrial facilities or unexplained rural polygons not coinciding with a clear settlement. Moreover, an entire town covered with just one polygon was taken to be an indicator of town electrification, and these sites were also eliminated.

The remaining sites were then assessed in more detail using the timeline function in Google Earth to establish that the towns had also changed morphologically, either through physical expansion or by having become more built up over the 8–10 years preceding 2022, depending on what imagery was available in Google Earth. A shortlist of 10–15 towns for each country was produced on this basis, with the final selection of sites determined in consultation with country partners, aiming to cover as broad a variety of drivers of lower level urbanisation as possible. The final selection of study sites—including our initial hypothesised drivers of growth—is presented in Table 1, while the location of the sites can be found in Map 1.

Local urban neighbourhood boundaries (cells) were used to establish the sampling frame for the household survey. With GIS baseline satellite imagery together with shapefiles of Ugandan urban cells, the actual (not administrative) spatial limits of the towns were defined by identifying the contiguous built-up area from the imagery. The border of the built-up area rarely overlaps with the administrative urban area, with the latter including sparsely populated rural areas that fall within the administrative unit of the urban centre. A random sample of 40% of neighbourhoods (cells) in each town was taken. Cell-level population data (based on the 2010 census) acted as a cross-check to the Africapolis population data and the site selection methodology. It is important to note that the population figures for the administrative urban unit as a whole are therefore often higher than the ground-truthed, actual built-up area where the survey was administered.

4.2 | Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis

The quantitative survey was developed by the project team and contains six sections: three household sections, (1) demographics, housing and property; (2) expenditures and assets; and (3) rural–urban linkages and social networks, as well as three individual sections, (1) socio-economic situation, (2) work situation and (3) local governance and voice. The questionnaire and the respondent sampling methods (see further below) were pre-tested in the town of Nazigo, where the survey was administered to 267 respondents. The dataset contains a total of 299 variables, and the subset for Uganda consists of 1789 cases collected across seven towns.

TABLE 1 | Study sites by population size and hypothesised drivers of urbanisation.

Town population based on urban built-up area (2010 data)		Descriptions
Nazigo (pretest)	8641	A growing town in Kayunga District along the Jinja–Kayunga road. It is the smallest town among the study sites. The town contains the Nazigo Teacher Training College.
Pallisa	13 855	Pallisa is a rural town that hosts the headquarters of the Pallisa District Local Government.
Iganga	48 444	Located along the Northern Corridor, ^a Iganga is one of the oldest municipalities in Uganda. Iganga's original growth was attributed to Asian traders and the railway station, a collection point for agricultural commodities. Today, its growth is associated with its central location in the surrounding agricultural Busoga region and the business class that dominates commerce in the municipality.
Bugiri	22 632	Also located on the Northern Corridor Bugiri is about 40 km from the Kenyan border. The municipality is referred to as a sleeping town and flourishes on long-distance truck driving. Historically, the city was associated with Arab traders.
Luweero	29 144	Luweero houses the headquarters of the Luweero district local government and is located about 70 km north of Kampala, within a rich agricultural area.
Mityana	39 611	About 70 km west of Kampala City, Mityana is located among hills, resulting in steep slopes within the town. The municipality is endowed with a number of wetlands, most of which have been reclaimed for settlement, as sand mining and farming are becoming degraded.
Masindi	36 703	Masindi Municipality is one of the main tourist sites in Uganda. With the discovery of oil in the Albertine Rift, visible signs of transformation include the establishment and extension of infrastructure and in-migration.
Mpigi	9805	Mpigi town is one of the oldest towns in Uganda but has experienced a relatively slow rate of urban growth. It is a transit town located approximately 40 km west of the Kampala Greater Metropolitan area.

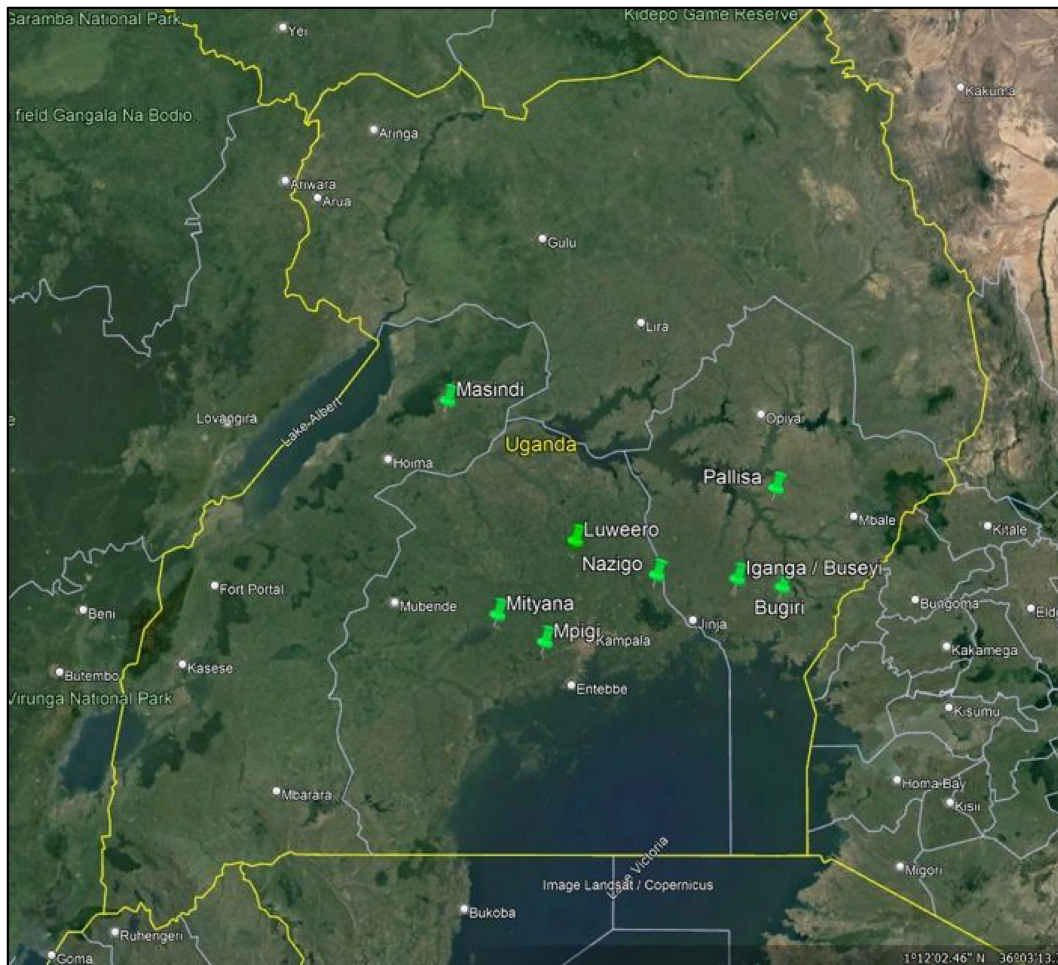
^aThe Northern Corridor is a multimodal trade route (2080 km long) linking the landlocked countries of the Great Lakes Region of East Africa (Uganda, Rwanda, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo and Burundi) with the Kenya maritime seaport of Mombasa. The corridor is one of the transit corridors in the East African region running from Mombasa to Bujumbura, and it is considered as part of the Trans-African Highway (Mombasa–Lagos).

Two household types dominate the sample: nuclear (59%) and extended (22%) households.⁵ In addition, 11% of the households were female headed (both de facto and de jure). The respondent was in 88% of the cases either the head of household or the spouse of the household head. Although questions on age and migrant status taken from one of the individual sections (socio-economic situation) of the survey have been used to define three groups of respondents (youth, elderly and migrants), the large overlap between respondents and household heads and spouses of household heads, respectively, suggests that the household level can be analysed in this way to shed light on the conditions for the household as a whole. Moreover, access to resources and networks is generally mediated through the household head. Data for the analysis has been used only from the household sections and primarily from the section on rural–urban linkages and social networks.

The team of enumerators was trained to ensure a shared understanding of the questionnaire, the software being used to collect the data and the sampling strategy. Enumerators were

directed to follow a certain approximate direction through the cell based on the town map and satellite imagery and its housing geography. Enumerators worked individually but were dropped in neighbourhoods in pairs or small groups to keep track of each other for safety reasons. A local community member known to the neighbourhood accompanied them and answered any questions from locals. This strengthened the legitimacy and quality of data collection. Enumerators were masters or PhD students or recent graduates of Makerere University. Surveys were conducted in a mix of English and Luganda, depending on the respondent's preferences. During training, the team agreed on a shared Lugandan translation of each question to enable this.

Every fourth household was sampled by counting buildings. A common protocol was used to sample additional households if the house was empty or the original respondent did not wish to participate in the study. The towns were surveyed between August and November 2022, with around 3 days spent in each town. On average, data collection lasted for 55 min. The data was



MAP 1 | Selected towns in Uganda.

uploaded daily and quality-checked for errors and inconsistencies and also checked against the map of the town, resulting in a robust and clean dataset with very few errors or missing cases.

Despite these quality controls, the data reflects biases for which it was impossible to control at the data collection stage. There is a strong overrepresentation of female respondents (77%), as men in general were either working or socialising outside their homes. Attempts to deal with this issue through interviewing in the evenings were abandoned as this raised local security concerns. To address the overrepresentation of female respondents, the econometric expert in the team calculated sampling weights using the 2010 boundaries and census data of the towns in question to enable comparisons across the study sites. Three sampling design issues were taken into account in calculating the weights: (1) the probability of sampling from a cell within the town, (2) the size of the cells (their population) relative to the size of our sample in those cells and (3) gender representation, captured using the female/male population in each town.

The data is analysed by comparing groups of the sample that are considered especially vulnerable with respect to their possibilities for accessing services and sustaining livelihoods. Groups such as the youth, elderly, migrants, people with disabilities or female-headed households are sometimes targeted through

specific policies and interventions but are more often ignored by decision-makers. The subsample groups are presented in Table 2 and include female-headed households, youth, elderly and recent migrants.⁶

While some of the groups are mutually exclusive, there is overlap between those that are based on age and those that are not. Table 3 outlines the extent of overlap (weighted) and shows that 33% of the sample did not belong to any of these groups and an additional 41% belonged to only one group. Slightly less than a quarter of the sampled population belonged to two subsamples.

Out of the households that belonged to two subsamples, the overlap between youth and recent migrants was the most common (see Table 4).

The analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to compare each subsample with the remainder of the sample, while the Pearson (two-tailed) correlation was used to test bivariate correlations. Weights were applied when calculating means and counts but were removed when testing for significance to avoid false positives. Hence, means are represented for the weighted sample, whereas the statistical tests (including bivariate correlations) were based on the unweighted data. When analysing the data, it has been necessary to handle the difference between the individual- and household-level-based questions, as the first sections

TABLE 2 | Subsample groups across the seven towns.

Subsample	<i>N</i>	<i>N</i> (weighted)	Share of total sample (%)
Female-headed household, de facto or de jure	200	19 224	9
Youth (aged 18–35 years)	986	121 944	54
Elderly (65 years and above)	91	11 072	5
Recent migrants	527	58 716	26

TABLE 3 | Overlap between the different subsamples.

Overlap between subsamples	<i>N</i> (weighted)	Share of total sample (%)
Household does not belong to any subsample group	74 914	33
Household belongs to one of the subsample groups	93 231	41
Household belongs to two of the subsample groups	55 090	24
Household belongs to three of the subsample groups	2514	1
Total	225 750	100

TABLE 4 | Cross-tabulation between the different samples for households that belong to two subsamples.

	Female-headed households	Youth	Elderly	Recent migrants
Female-headed households		7710	1466	1779
Youth	5524		0	45 087
Elderly	1466	0		1235
Recent migrants	1779	45 087	1235	

of the questionnaire have been answered by the respondent on behalf of the household as a whole, referring to household-based characteristics and indicators. In the analysis below, where groups of respondents (female-headed households, youth, migrants and the elderly) are referred to, attempts have been made to clarify whether the data refer to the household level or the individual level.

4.3 | Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data were collected to supplement the quantitative data in August and September of 2023. The overarching aims of this data collection were to shed light on the local drivers of urbanisation and to identify the challenges and opportunities faced by particular groups of urban residents and their perceptions of being included or excluded in opportunities or services arising from urban growth. Focus group discussions were carried out with eight types of residents: male, female, women heading their own households, migrants, youth, the elderly, people locally identified as among the ‘poorest’ in their community and people living with disabilities.⁷ In total, 58 focus groups, covering 297 respondents (165 women and 132 men), were organised.

Respondents for the focus groups were sampled through population registers by a contact person in each town. As such, possible

biases in the sampling need to be recognised; nonetheless, this approach was necessary under current political and socio-economic conditions. Around six to eight respondents participated in each focus group, and a common interview guide was used, although adapted slightly for the particular groups. Rural–urban linkages, food transfers and the relationship with rural relatives were a few of the topics covered. While the qualitative dataset is rich and varied, this article relies overwhelmingly on the quantitative data, with the former being used to shed light on the survey findings.

5 | Findings and Discussion: Translocal Livelihoods in Small Towns

The possibilities for balancing livelihoods spatially through seasonal or circular mobility and transfers of food and money could hypothetically contribute to more stable livelihoods in small urban centres compared with larger cities, but the socio-economic aspects of these processes are understudied. The status of migrants may also be more fluid and less stigmatised in smaller towns as rural–urban migration can be tied to agricultural seasonality (Andersson 2002; Potts 2010). Aspects of socio-economic segmentation may in this context revolve around the differentiated access to rural homes and other translocal networks that can ameliorate urban poverty and enhance livelihoods. In what follows, we analyse a set of

indicators of translocality and how they vary across different groups of the urban population, as captured through the quantitative data. The motivations for the engagement (or disengagement or decline) in translocal relationships with relatives and friends, as expressed in the focus group discussions, are used to elucidate such dynamics further. For statistical reasons, it is not possible to compare the findings for each group by town because the town samples are too small; moreover, the qualitative data suggests that there was very little variation across the towns, and thus, the data presented here aggregates across all study sites.

5.1 | General Dynamics

Livelihoods were overwhelmingly translocalised in the sense that 75% of the sampled households reported having a rural home. Rural homes may reflect a sense of belonging and identity rather than translocal livelihood possibilities, however. Indeed, only 52% of households who stated that they had a rural home had access to land, while only half of these in turn actually owned land. Less than a fifth of the households could in this sense be said to have an immediate fallback option in the rural areas, suggesting a structural difference in access to rural resources that can be mobilised by the household to complement or balance urban livelihoods. Engagement in agricultural production similarly was a possibility only for 35% of the respondents who stated that they had a rural home, corresponding to 26% of the total sample. The opportunities for directly counteracting urban food insecurity through rural food production were therefore an option only for around a quarter of the respondents, with three-quarters being dependent on the goodwill of rural relatives, urban agriculture or the market to secure food (see Table 5).

Transfers from rural areas are also an expression of translocality and include remittances of food and other items from rural areas, with 27% and 6% of all respondents, respectively, stating that they received food and other items (such as cash, school fees and medicine) from their rural relatives (Table 5). Transfers were an important source of urban food security for the recipients: Only 1% stated that they were not important at all, whereas 5% stated that they were critical to survival and 37% stated that they were very important.

To some extent, transfers appear to be reciprocal, with 32% of the respondents sending cash or in-kind remittances to relatives in their rural homes (Table 5). The literature suggests that the underpinning logic of remittances is tied to future expectations of reciprocity and ‘an insurance policy in the event that migrants need to return to their village’ (Cliggett 2003, 544; see also De Weerd and Dercon 2006). A similar argument is made in Ferguson’s (1999) case study of the Zambian Copperbelt, where miners paved the way for rural return migration through gifts, remittances and social engagement in their rural homes. Kuuire et al. (2013) document more mixed motives among remitters in the context of Ghana, showing the cultural, needs-based and insurance aspects of transfers. Data from the comparative rural project, Afrint, suggests that ‘food transfers represent relationships with family members, and also friends and neighbours, that provided practical, material and social support’ (Andersson Djurfeldt 2022, 25).

Similar motives were identified by the focus group participants, who stressed the importance of transfers to rural areas as an expression of cultural norms and obligations to relatives and family members in rural areas. Nonetheless, the participants also emphasised rural expectations of urban wealth and the notion

TABLE 5 | Indicators of translocality by group of respondents (share of sample).

	Entire sample	Female-headed households	Youth	Elderly	Migrants
Have place considered a rural home	75%	78%	78%	69%	85%
Households who have access to rural land	52%	34%	47%	54%	50%
Households who own rural land	50%	28%	47%	58%	50%
Households who participate in agricultural production in rural home	35%	26%	32%	54%	31%
Respondents who have a rural home who visit at least monthly	35%	26%	35%	30%	30%
Received rural food remittances	27%	24%	31%	25%	30%
Received other items from rural areas	6%	6%	6%	12%	7%
Sent food, medicine or other in-kind remittances to rural areas	32%	20%	34%	22%	40%
Received food, cash or other items from urban areas	8%	10%	6%	23%	6%
Sent food, cash or other items to other urban areas	17%	7%	17%	21%	18%

Note: In the text that follows, data for the different groups are compared with the remainder of the sample (excluding the group in question), whereas the figures for the entire sample reflect the sample as a whole.

that urban livelihoods were more established as reasons for food transfers flowing from urban to rural areas. The qualitative data suggested that rural relatives often had unrealistic perceptions of urban wealth, and expectations for food transfers sometimes were unmet as urban households could not afford to send remittances in cash or kind.

The urban precarity that was raised in the focus group discussions is, as shown above, reflected also in the segmented access to rural resources, such as land. Moreover, the different expressions of translocality appear to reinforce one another to some extent: Households' direct engagement in agricultural production is positively correlated to additional receipt of food from rural areas, even if the correlation is weak (0.190, significant at the 0.01% level). That is, there was a positive correlation between engaging in food production and, in addition to that, receiving food transfers from rural areas (aside from the food produced by the household itself). Similarly, participation in agricultural production is positively correlated (0.306, significant at the 0.01% level) with visiting the rural home at least monthly. This is not surprising, given that the respondents who participate in agriculture in rural areas are likely to do this in person to some extent, hence the need for travelling to the rural home. The receipt of food from rural areas, moreover, is positively correlated (0.197, significant at the 0.01% level) with the sending of food, cash, medicine or other in-kind remittances to rural relatives, pointing to some level of reciprocity in which urban products are exchanged for incoming transfers of food. This relationship was also highlighted in the focus group discussions, which mentioned salt and soap being sent to rural relatives. These findings point to the occurrence of livelihoods that tie together the household and its different units of production and reproduction over time and space, balancing rural and urban sources of income as well as consumption. Meanwhile, the receipt of food (any kind of foodstuffs) from rural relatives correlates positively but weakly (0.103 significant at the 0.01% level) with the receipt of food or other types of transfers also from other urban areas. Again, the receipt of remittances from urban areas was considered critical to survival for 8% of the recipients and very important for 39% of the recipients.

A positive correlation exists between receiving nonfood items or cash from rural areas and receiving remittances of food, cash, medicine or other items from urban areas (0.265, significant at the 0.01% level). This seems to suggest that receiving remittances—regardless of their source (rural or urban)—is even further concentrated to certain households. The material expressions of translocal livelihoods, such as access to rural resources and engagement in networks, therefore appear to be connected and, as such, concentrated to households that have access to assets and family members in multiple places. In turn, this suggests that enabling translocality is available only to a minority of households, even if small towns are in general more embedded in rural surroundings than large cities.

5.2 | Translocality Differentiated by Sex of Head of Household, Age and Migrant Status

Demographic trends suggest that young women are increasingly leaving rural areas in many parts of the Global South (Montgomery

et al. 2016). In sub-Saharan Africa, such patterns are related to land tenure systems that privilege men and generally lacking rural opportunities (Bank 2020; Ramisch 2016). In Uganda specifically, recent legal reforms have attempted to redress such disparities, but the gap between formal legal regimes and the norms underpinning local land tenure institutions means that patriarchal tenure practices prevail on the ground (Andersson Djurfeldt 2020). These structural dynamics spill over into the translocal relationships that emanate from the towns. In the comparison of female-headed households (both *de facto* and *de jure*) with other households, the gendered aspects of rural land access and control are reflected in the data. Although as many as 78% of female-headed households report having a place that they consider their rural home, female-headed households are much less embedded in rural areas in terms of livelihoods and asset ownership than the sample as a whole. Indeed, female-headed households have lower access to rural land (34% as opposed to 53%) and report much lower land ownership (28% compared with 51%, with both differences being statistically significant at the 0.001% level) for the remainder of the sample (Table 5). These structural conditions are also reflected in much lower participation rates in agricultural production and less frequent visits to rural areas, which overall suggests weaker linkages to translocal networks for these households and fewer fallback options in the context of urban hardship. Just over a quarter (26%) of the female-headed households who had access to a rural home were personally engaged in agricultural production, compared with 36% for the remainder of the sample (a difference that was significant at the 5% level). This corresponds directly with the shares of the samples who visited their rural homes at least monthly (a difference that was also significant at the 5% level). Differences were small with respect to receipt of food transfers though, with 24% of female-headed households receiving rural remittances of food, compared with 27% for the remainder of the sample (a difference that was significant at the 5% level), suggesting that access to rural resources is an important stratifier of translocal livelihoods.

The qualitative data also points to a generally declining role of food remittances, reaffirming the suggestion that direct access to rural land is becoming a more important source of stratification. Female focus group participants (a total of 16 focus groups that involved 93 women altogether) argued that rural food remittances, while important, were declining and related this to a combination of factors such as poorer crop yields in surrounding rural areas and higher costs of living in both rural and urban areas, but also to the commonly held belief that urban relatives are relatively well off and therefore do not need support. Rural visits are also decreasing, partly due to the rise in cell phone ownership with phone calls replacing physical mobility, with similar trends being documented in the literature (Ramisch 2016). Meanwhile, female-headed households may have difficulties maintaining rural relationships as being the female breadwinner requires juggling between highly informal and insecure paid work with heavier domestic responsibilities. Focus group discussions also highlighted that defaulting on daily payments to money lenders in town could be damaging to reputations and credit ratings, and therefore, respondents restricted their mobility and interaction with rural relations. Visits were made mostly as part of social obligations—to attend funerals or visit elderly parents and family members, for instance. In these cases, urban foodstuffs such as sugar and cooking oil were carried to the rural

areas. Overall, rising urban living costs appear to be limiting interactions with rural areas—with the rising cost of transport specifically mentioned as one aspect that reduces visits as well as food flows from rural to urban areas.

The literature documents poor rural opportunities for youth in the rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa in general. Indeed, Sumberg et al. (2024, 2) on the basis of comparative fieldwork across 22 rural sites in seven countries describe a ‘severely depleted opportunity landscape’ for youth in general ‘resulting from poor infrastructure, limited purchasing power, poor policy, and so on – as opposed to any generalised lack of ambition, skill or capital among young people’. While rural opportunities are severely limited for youth, few respondents in their study reported lacking land, however, suggesting that constraints to rural livelihoods lie elsewhere. Indeed, generational differences in translocal relations stemming from access to rural land are also much smaller in our dataset than those based on the sex of household heads. Youth in our survey reported living in households with access to rural land to a lesser extent (47%) compared with other age groups (57%), and consequently, these households were also engaged less in rural agriculture (32% compared with 39%) than the remainder of the sample. Both these differences were statistically significant at the 5% level. The focus groups with youth across the towns (a total of 40 young people with an average age of 26 years were interviewed) support this picture of a lower level of engagement in rural agriculture but primarily reflect an urban precarity that mirrors the lack of rural opportunities for youth captured in the literature. Indeed, a number of the young people interviewed were not well established in their own livelihoods, and some were still dependent to a degree upon their parents. This was especially true of those who were college or university students.

Translocal livelihood patterns are, however, biased towards elderly households. Although a slightly lower share (69%) of elderly respondents (aged 65 and above) reported that they lived in households with a rural home, compared with other age groups (76%, Table 5) (significant at the 1% level), elderly respondents engaged directly in agricultural production more frequently (54%) than other age groups (34%) (a difference that is statistically significant at the 5% level). This pattern is confirmed by the qualitative data: Of the 38 elderly people who took part in the focus group discussions across the seven towns (average age 67 years), 11 described farming as their only source of livelihood, compared with only one youth. This difference could be related to fewer time management conflicts with other pursuits in town, and farming was described in the focus group discussions as one of the few livelihood options in old age in the absence of pensions. In this sense, the ability to engage in translocal livelihoods may be made possible not only by access to material resources but also time and agricultural experience. The elderly, as expected, received remittances of food, cash, medicine and other items from other towns to a much higher extent (23%) than other age groups (8%) (a difference that is statistically significant at the 0.001% level) (see Table 5). Nonetheless, less than a quarter of the elderly respondents received transfers of this kind, and elderly interviewees in the focus group discussions often complained that unemployment and high costs of living mean that they cannot expect support from their younger relatives. Indeed, some of the elderly respondents still provided for their adult children.

In terms of social relations, both the youth and elderly interviewed in the focus groups reported receiving support from rural relatives in the form of foodstuffs that are mainly transported when relatives visit the towns to use urban services. Both groups noted a decline in physical visits, with these being replaced by phone calls and deliveries of items and mobile money transfers. Similar trends have been documented for Kenya, where male migrants increasingly exercise their headship role through phone calls and e-money transfers (Ramisch 2016). In the absence of physical visits, social obligations are therefore maintained through food transfers (albeit to a declining degree) and through mobile phone services.

Much literature on translocality concerns migrants as mobility of people, goods or capital underpin translocal networks (see, for instance, Naumann and Greiner 2017). Migrants are also often considered particularly vulnerable in urban contexts, as access to urban resources and opportunities presupposes access to financial, social and sometimes political capital (McGranahan, Schensul, and Singh 2016). Comparing households where the respondent was a recent migrant (people who have resided in the towns in question for 5 years or less) with other residents shows that these migrants, to a slightly higher extent (85%), report having rural homes compared with other respondents (72%) (Table 5), a difference that is statistically significant at the 0.001% level. Recent migrants visited their rural homes less often than other respondents, however; 30% stated that they visited their rural homes at least monthly compared with 37% among other respondents (a difference that is statistically significant at the 5% level). The lower frequency of visits was reflected in lower rates of participation in agriculture (31% among recent migrants compared with 37% for the rest of the sample, Table 5; a difference that is statistically significant at the 1% level), possibly suggesting that the rural homes of recent migrants are located farther away from the towns or that this group of migrants may be younger and occupied by tasks in town that prevent travel to rural areas. This was confirmed in many of the focus group discussions, which stressed that in-migration was occurring from across the country and sometimes also from abroad. Recent migrants appear therefore to be less able to mobilise translocal networks, especially to rural areas, than other respondents. Interviewees in the migrant focus groups reiterated that the rising cost of living in urban areas was one of the reasons for declining visits to rural homes, as noted also by other groups of respondents. Some migrants also mentioned a desire to focus their future-building on the town.

6 | Translocal Relations, Poverty and Vulnerability

The data presented so far point to stratification of translocal networks and linkages to rural agriculture in particular, being based on specific demographic factors, with gender-based segmentation being the most pronounced as female-headed households are less included in rural opportunities tied to agriculture and food transfers. Generational dynamics instead suggest that the elderly are disproportionately involved in rural agriculture, whereas youth appear to be subject to a double exclusion with respect to both rural and urban livelihood opportunities. Recent migrants similarly appear to be less able to mobilise rural networks than other respondents.

While these dynamics say something about the stratification of translocal relationships at the group level, socio-economic differentiation and its connection with translocality can be analysed in other ways, for instance, in terms of poverty and vulnerability. Several bivariate correlations between the translocality variables—transfers of food and other items, rural land access and ownership and participation in rural agriculture—and the Lived Poverty Index were carried out to elucidate the links between translocality and poverty.

The Lived Poverty Index has been constructed by Afrobarometer and runs from 0 to 4, with 0 constituting *no poverty* and 4 *constant poverty and deprivation*. It is based on six questions focused on basic needs related to sufficient food, clean water, medical treatment, electricity, fuel for cooking and access to cash income. The index has been used widely in the literature on African poverty (see, for instance, Jensen and Justesen 2014), and we use it here as a proxy for economic differentiation, given the well-known problems of using income and expenditure data to capture differences in wealth and income.

A low score (no poverty) would be expected to be correlated with relatively high access to key productive resources such as agricultural land—that is, a negative correlation. This correlation emerges most strongly for land ownership in rural areas with a correlation coefficient of -0.300 (significant at the 1% level) but shows only a weak association for participation in rural agriculture (-0.095 significant at the 1% level) and even more so for the frequency of visits to rural areas (monthly or more frequently) (-0.070 significant at the 5% level).

The receipt of items and food from rural or urban areas is positively correlated with LPI, but again, this relationship is very weak, with correlation coefficients of 0.099 (for rural transfers) and 0.063 (for urban remittances), respectively (both statistically significant at the 0.01% level). In turn, this suggests that such transfers do not compensate for differences in resource access. Motivations for transfers were discussed in the focus group discussions: Cultural expectations of support are forthcoming, but at the same time, the perceived need and wealth of both recipients and senders are used to explain why transfers occur or do not occur. The focus group interviews with the poorest community members in each town also highlight the exclusionary element of translocal relationships in the sense that these residents often had equal, or lower, socio-economic status than their rural relatives—as such, they can receive remittances but may not be able to reciprocate. Overall, therefore, the ability for the poor to engage in translocality is limited by their poverty.

While the possibilities for benefiting from urban growth could hypothetically be higher in lower level towns than metropolitan areas given better prospects for engaging in livelihoods that combine rural and urban sources of income, food and social and economic support, such opportunities are not open to all small-town residents. Indeed, access to rural resources and land in particular and the possibilities for the building of accumulative livelihoods based on translocality are segmented by poverty experience. Thus, there is an exclusionary pattern of development in the small towns based on varied access to resources in the urban area itself as well as linkages to their rural hinterlands.

7 | Conclusions

The conditions for, as well as distributional outcomes of, livelihood opportunities are likely to be different in small towns compared with large cities given that they are embedded in rural hinterlands that, theoretically at least, can enhance translocal livelihoods that balance rural and urban opportunities and provide welfare in the context of family-based systems of support (Mackay, Tusabe, and Mugagga 2022). Generalising from the experience of large cities therefore risks leading to a metro bias in policies as well as academic debate and the encouragement of urban development trajectories that do not benefit a majority of the population.

Theories of translocality make a distinction between accumulation-based translocality and survival-based translocality, with the possibilities of engaging in accumulation being related to using assets and opportunities in multiple localities that build livelihoods and welfare over time. In this sense, translocal relations and exchanges of cash, food and agricultural inputs and outputs offer possibilities for accumulation through straddling rural and urban areas. Again, the prospects for this may be better in smaller urban centres than in larger towns and for vulnerable groups, and the access to transfers of food and other kinds of support through translocal family-based networks could hypothetically be more forthcoming in small towns given easier access to rural homes. Nonetheless, we found that rising costs of transport expenditures in combination with visits being replaced by cell phone communication suggest that the relative translocal advantages of small towns for poorer households may be declining. Overall, the data presented in this paper suggests that the possibilities for engaging in translocal interactions that move beyond survival are poor. While access to land and participation in rural agriculture are segmented, access to rural transfers of food and resources does not in itself open transformative possibilities but enables survival.

Translocality has been conceptualised as a dual mechanism: that is, survival-based redistributive transfers from wealthier urban residents to poor rural relatives keep rural areas open in the event of urban misfortune and coexist with accumulative translocal processes among wealthier family members. The findings from our study suggest, however, that transfers and rural visits are increasingly being discontinued as urban households are squeezed by rising living costs and precarious livelihoods. While small towns are economically embedded in rural areas, the translocal relationships that underpin this relationship at the family level are threatened by increasing urban precarity and further exacerbated existing socio-economic differentiation. Policies that complement existing family-based support networks may enhance opportunities and stability of incomes for vulnerable urban groups to promote processes of accumulation that are transformative also for these groups. Social support, soft loans, cash transfers and child-care allowances are examples of such policies.

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Ethics Statement

Ethical approval has been received from The Aids Support Organization (TASO) Research and Ethics Committee (one of the recognised RECs in Uganda by the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology) as well as Etikprövningsmyndigheten (Dnr 2022-01014-01).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Endnotes

¹Urban population growth, by contrast, can occur without an overall increase in urbanisation, provided that rural population growth rises as fast or more rapidly.

²The countries were selected based on data from the World Development Indicators, compiled by the World Bank: <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators#>. The growth of the urban population was 4.88% for Tanzania and 5.09% for Uganda for the year 2023.

³Class 1 includes areas with change below 0.2 nW/cm²/sr (no change, decrease or small increase) and assigned the value of 1; Class 2 includes areas with change from 0.2 to 1 nW/cm²/sr (moderate increase) and assigned the value of 2; and finally, Class 3 includes areas with change above 1 nW/cm²/sr (large increase) and assigned the value of 3.

⁴Inspired by Brook and Dávila's (2000) work on defining the periurban zone of Hyderabad and Kumasi as 45 km.

⁵A nuclear household refers to a household consisting of a married or cohabiting couple and their children; an extended household refers to a multigenerational household and/or a household consisting of several nuclear households or family members who are related to each other in other ways.

⁶Migrants include both internal and international migrants, although the latter group is very small, with 1753 of the respondents in the sample being born in Uganda.

⁷In addition, in two towns where commercial sex work was a prominent source of local livelihoods, focus groups were organised with commercial sex workers.

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