CAN WE FORGET RURAL AREAS?

Impacts of a new classification methodology of urban areas on many countries in Africa and Asia

Stuttgart, 11/05/2020

A new methodology was developed to define urban and rural areas

- The World Bank claims "Everything You Heard About Urbanization Is Wrong"[1]

- Applying the new methodology results in an estimated rural population share of 24% in 2015 which is considerably lower than the former value of 46% based on national definitions.

- In its 51st session, the United Nations Statistical Commission endorsed the methodology for delineation of cities and urban and rural areas for international and regional statistical comparison purposes.
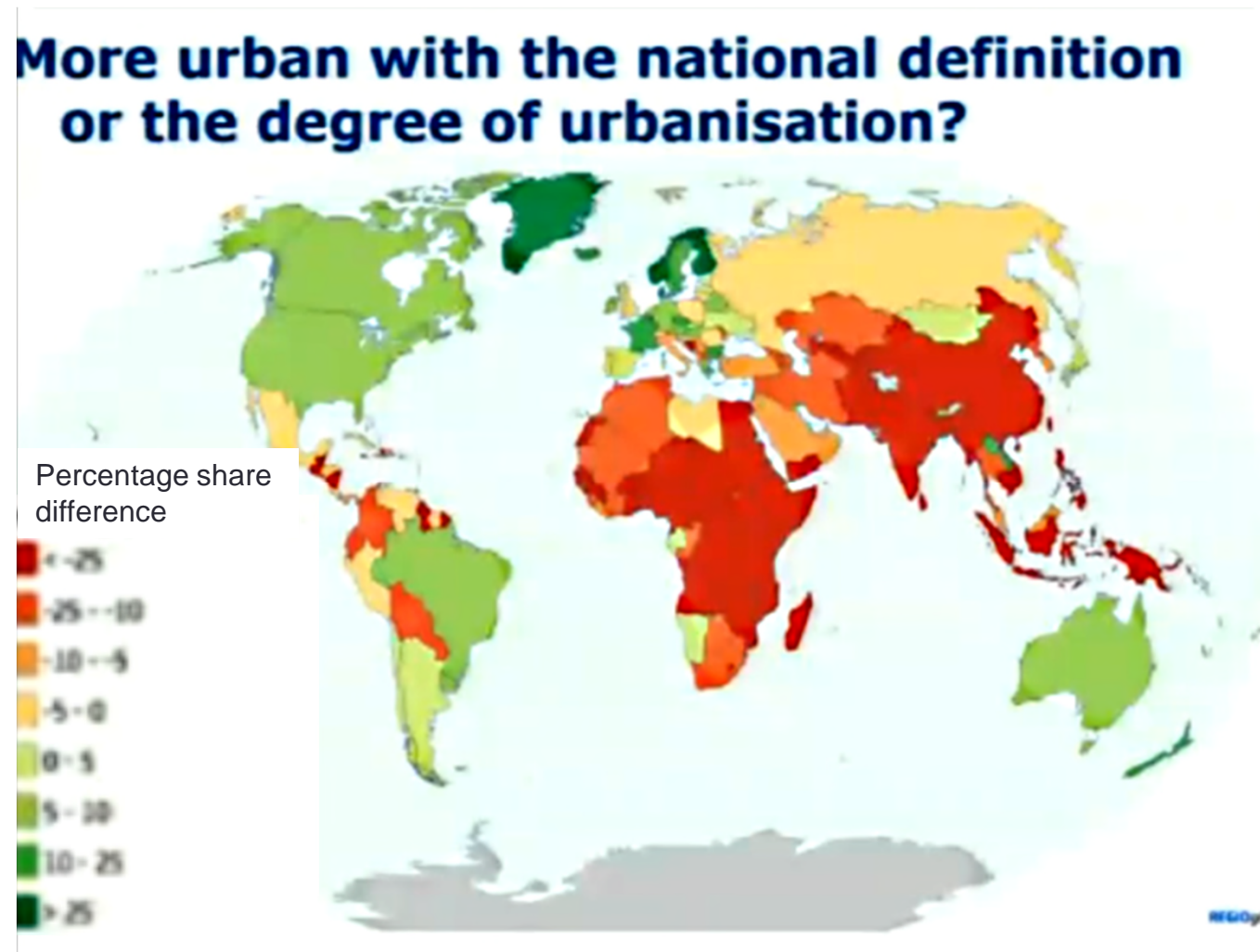
1) https://olc.worldbank.org/content/everything-you-heard-about-urbanization-wrong

A new methodology based on GIS analysis of grid cells (1x1km)

The new methodology identifies three types of settlements:

- Cities which have a population of at least 50,000 inhabitants in contiguous dense grid cells (>1,500 inhabitants per km^2).

- Urban clusters which have a population of at least 5,000 inhabitants in contiguous grid cells with a density of at least 300 inhabitants per km^2.

- Rural areas which consist mostly of low-density grid cells.

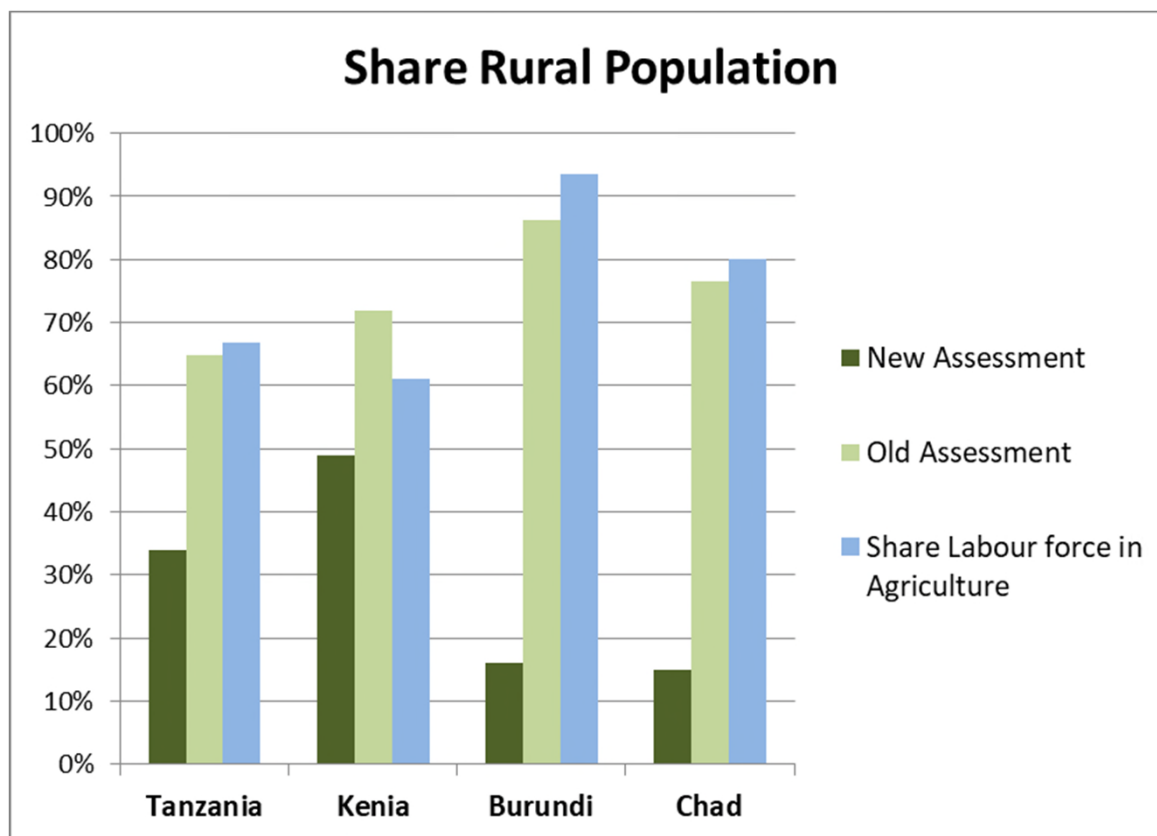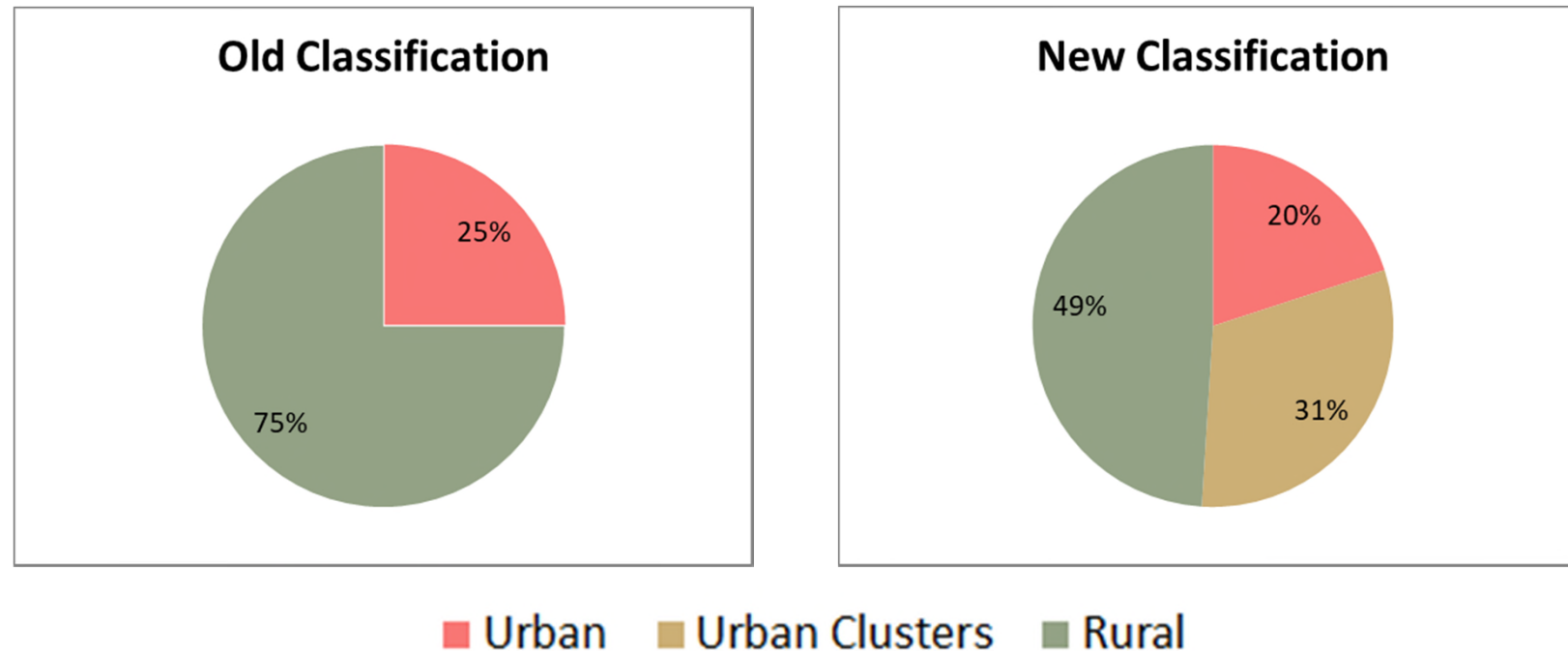# The share of urban areas increases when applying the new methodology

More urban with the national definition or the degree of urbanisation?

Percentage share difference

Strong decrease in share of rural areas in many countries of SSAfrica

Share Rural Population
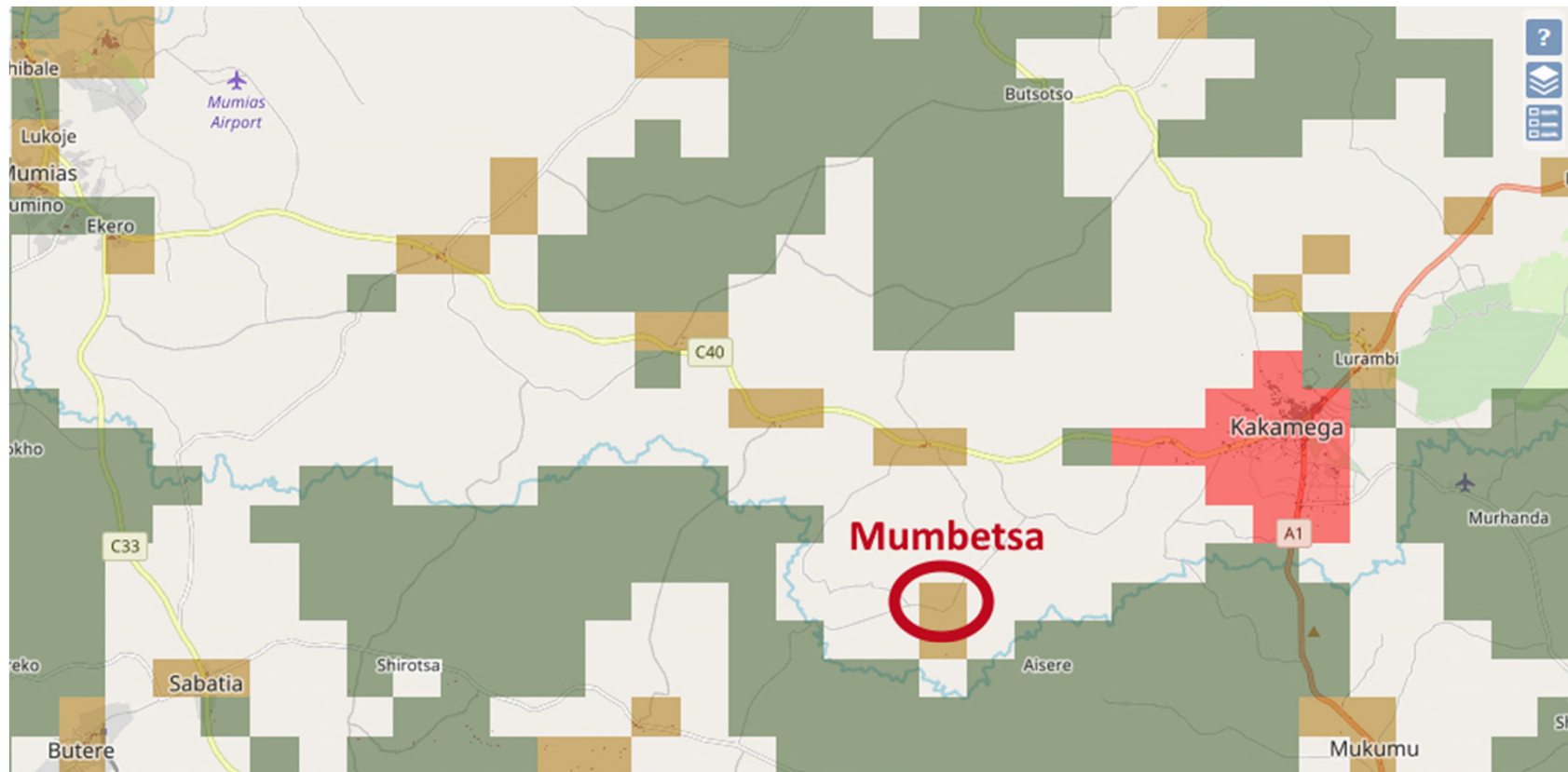

Consistency of the new approach may be challenged:

Share of labour force in agriculture correlates strongly with old assessment

Example: Rural population in Kenya

The new category of „Urban Clusters" reduces the share of rural population.

Many „Urban Clusters" in Western Kenya

New Classification: 🟥 Urban   🟨 Urban Clusters   🟩 Rural

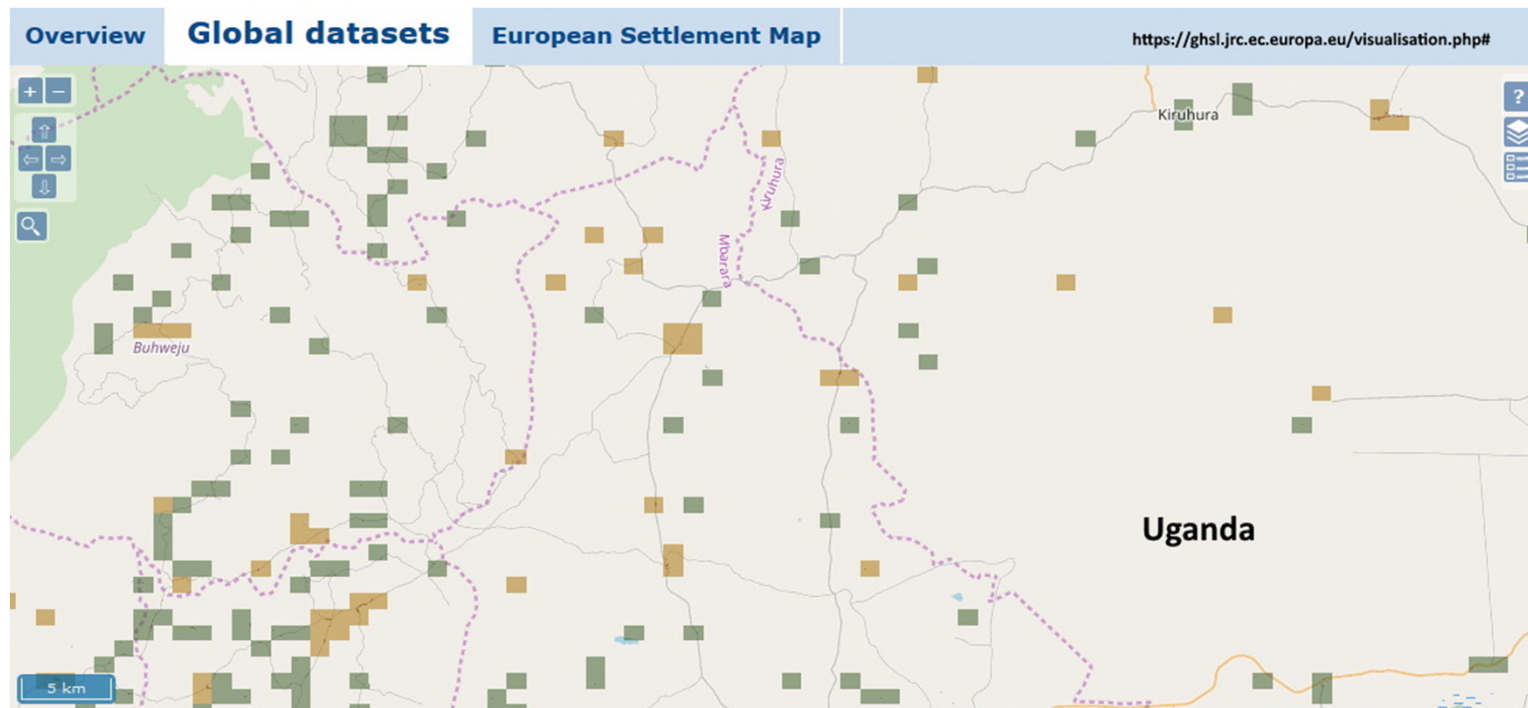Source: https://ghsl.jrc.ec.europa.eu/visualisation.php#

Mumbetsa is not an Urban Cluster

Mumbetsa has the typical structure of a small rural town or village with a dominating agricultural economy.

Effects in other countries

- Burundi: Strong increase in urban areas. Some have typical rural characteristics (e.g. Mutoyi 3°12'57.79"S, 29°58'51.62"E)

- Uganda: Large share of "Urban Clusters" that look like villages on Google Earth.

Explanation

- The classification is undertaken using a one-size-fits-all approach with worldwide similar thresholds for population densities. This does not take into account the specific geographical features of many countries in Africa and Asia.

- Regions with high rural densities are often classified as „Urban Clusters". However, these regions have fertile soils allowing for intensive agricultural activities. Services only comprise a small share of the economy in the "Urban Cluster".

- Western Kenya is a good example. The high fertility allows for intensive agricultural production and high population densities. However, the main source of income remains agriculture and the „Urban Clusters" are rather rural than urban.

- This is as well an explanation for the huge reduction of rural areas generated by the new classification in Burundi.

Challenges for rural areas

- Rural areas have been neglected. A further concentration on urban issues will increase rural-urban disparities.

- International comparisons are distorted for many (low-income) countries in Africa and Asia. Funds needed for rural development might be deviated to other sectors.

- Poverty is more dominant in rural than in urban areas. Misdirected investments might endanger the success of many SDGs.

Opportunities for Urban Clusters

- The newly identified "Urban Clusters" might function as future rural growth centres or nodes of development.

- Rural development strategies may be adapted by combining "Urban Clusters" with the theories of Central Locations and growth poles.

- Practical guidelines for rural development may be developed on this basis, including
  - endowment with public and private services,
  - transport & communication infrastructures, and
  - rural development programmes.

Research needs to be done!

- In order to criticise the new methodology, the above findings need to be scrutinised using a consistent scientific approach.

- More country examples and involvement of local knowledge is required.

- Pitfalls, such as the impact of vegetation coverage on the GIS assessment of rural densities need to be assessed.

- Rural development strategies may be adapted for the identified "Urban Clusters" (see slide above).

- The findings need to be disseminated amongst stakeholders.

Thank you for your attention

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