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SLUMS OF DESPAIR, GLOBAL DISASTERS AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Statement of the Problem: The complex interrelationships among disasters (due to wars, violent conflicts, and natural hazards such as droughts, landslides, earthquakes and floods, among others), people's vulnerabilities to disasters (social, economic and physical), the ubiquity of slums and the resilience of their dwellers globally, and public health (environmental, community, behavioral, public policy, and others) are yet to be closely examined. The United Nations has estimated that about one billion people currently live in urban slums worldwide and this will increase to two billion by 2030.

Methodology & Theoretical Orientation: A combination of library-based study and careful observations during in-country assessments is used. A social vulnerability approach to disasters informs the theoretical slant. The study starts with a review of the dimensions of slums of despair in developing countries and the effects of disasters on them. It investigates the reasons why conditions in slums persist and are exacerbated by global disasters. It then looks at what we can do to address the public health implications of the relentless growth of slums.

Findings, Conclusion & Significance: In spite of the various actions that have been taken by key stakeholders to reduce the risk of disasters and their social, economic and environmental impacts, more far-reaching work still needs to be done. This is critical in view of the fact that Task Force 8 - the Task Force on Improving the Lives of Slum Dwellers—was specifically charged by the United Nations with developing plans to improve the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020 within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Recommendations: Disaster reduction and hazards mitigation strategies are offered. Moreover, local and national policies to address environmental degradation of cities and improve the quality of lives and health of slum dwellers are proposed.

Biography

Adenrele Awotona, Professor of Urban Planning and Community Studies, is the founder and Director of the Center for Rebuilding Sustainable Communities after Disasters, and a former Dean of the College of Public and Community Service at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, USA. He was previously a Director of Studies for the British Council International Seminars ("Reconstruction after disasters") in the UK where he has also served at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne as a Director of Graduate Studies in architecture and urban design. Through research, consultancy and teaching, he has professional experience in several countries in five continents. Similarly, he has been a principal investigator on major research projects funded by various agencies in the USA and UK. A stream of publications has, therefore, emanated from his research and consultancy services. Professor Awotona earned his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge, UK, and a Certificate from Harvard University's Institute of Management and Leadership in Education.

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