

Nwaka, Geoffrey, Abia State University, Nigeria

Poverty and the Challenge of Urban Health in Nigeria

Poverty and rapid urbanization are two of the greatest challenges facing Africa today. UN-Habitat estimates that Sub-Saharan Africa has over 166 million slum dwellers, and these slums are a physical manifestation of urban poverty and inequality. More than half-way to the 2015 date for achieving the Millennium development goals, it looks very unlikely that the targets in health, education, environmental sustainability, and the reduction of poverty and hunger will be met. In the poor areas of most Nigerian and other African cities, inadequate sanitation and waste management, and the poor state of public health infrastructure have led to the spread of a wide variety of water-borne and other communicable disease. The paper considers ways to forestall the growth and spread of slums in the future, and ensure that the existing ones are upgraded and progressively integrated into the urban mainstream; how poverty which leads to slum conditions can be alleviated in order to reduce the worsening disparities in access to health care. The central argument is that human development ought to be at the centre of the concern for sustainable urbanization in Africa. To achieve this, the paper considers how best to promote the growth of more inclusive and humane cities by reviewing discriminatory laws and codes which tend to inhibit the access of the poor to affordable land, healthcare and housing security. The concluding section cautions that the mere presence of health facilities in the cities should not be confused with these facilities being accessible to and affordable by the poor. It stresses the need for appropriate and well targeted interventions for urban health and other social services by state and local authorities, the international development community, private and civil society organizations, and the urban poor themselves in a collaborative effort to build safer, healthier and more equitable cities