Building Healthy Urban Environments.

Calling for a Health-Centric Approach to Urban Planning

Author

Sebastiana A. Etzo, PhD
Independent Researcher and Global Health Consultant; co-funder of SAGAPS

Sebastianaetzo@gmail.com

Affiliations

SAGAPS
Scintille Association for Gender and Peace Security

Introduction

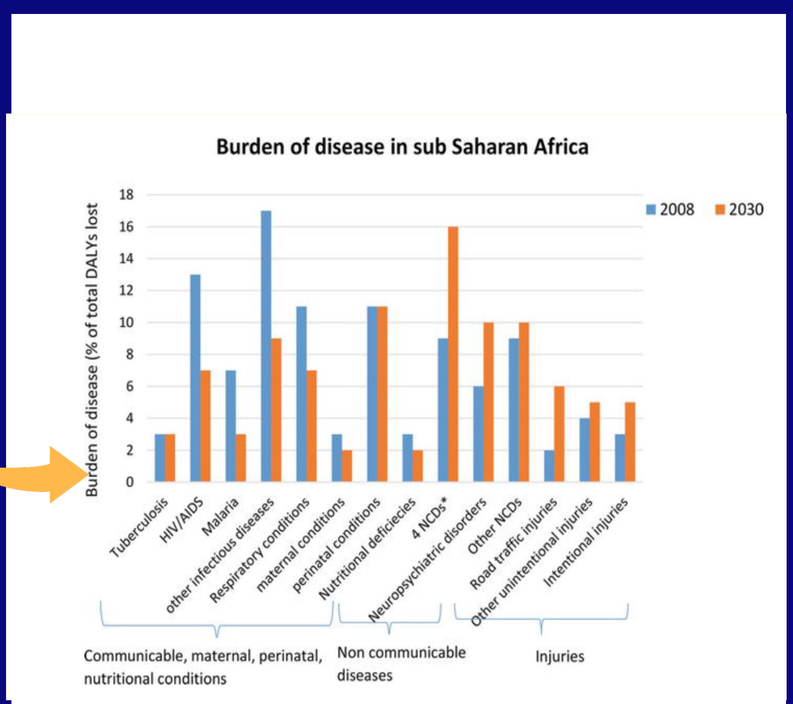
- Urbanisation is rapidly increasing in African countries, outpacing the available healthcare services and infrastructure. As a result, access to healthcare diminishes, sanitation remains inadequate, and the transmission of infectious diseases increases, exacerbating health inequalities.
- Health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change-induced disasters further underscore the vulnerabilities of urban health.
- Recognising the urban environment as a key determinant of health, urban planning emerges as a crucial tool to shape the built environment and foster the development of healthy cities.

Methodology

- Scientific and grey literature review;
- Walking & observation.

Health risk factors

- Growing global evidence highlights the correlation between the urban environment and various health conditions;
- Urban dwellers in Sub-Saharan Africa face the "triple threat" of of infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, and increased incidents of accidents, violence, and criminal activities.
- In 2019, the African region ranked third globally in non-communicable disease(NCD) mortality, with cardiovascular diseases as the leading cause, predominantly in Central and West Africa.



Source: Juma, K. et al 2019

Case study: Air quality

39 vs 31

PM2.5 in Sub-Saharan Africa is above the global mean level

1.1 million deaths

Air pollution was responsible for 1.1 million deaths across Africa in 2019

1.96 billion lost intelligence quotient

PM2.5 was estimated to be responsible for 1.96 billion lost intelligence quotient points in African children in 2019

Economic loss

Air pollution-related health impacts cost Ethiopia $3.02 billion (1.16% GDP), Ghana $1.63 billion (0.95% GDP), and Rwanda $349 million (1.19% GDP) in 2019.

Sources: WHO, Atlas of African Health Statistics 2022; The Lancet Planetary Health 2021.

Urban planning as a health tool

Cities can avoid **20%** of premature deaths with better urban and transport planning.

up to a 40% reduction in NO2 levels has been reported on car free days

Exposure to **green space** has been associated with beneficial health outcomes in a large and growing number of epidemiological studies and meta-analyses conducted around the world.

Leveraging on citizens to collect environmental data contributes to valuable data that can inform advocacy efforts and policy-making, while also creating a sense of ownership and responsibility among citizens towards environmental and health issues.

Examples of Initiatives

Initiatives such as Open Streets in Cape Town, South Africa, reclaim the streets for a day, showcasing the potential of safe and walkable urban environments. (https://openstreets.org.za/)

Leveraging on Urban Master Plans and Strategic Plans can contribute to greener, healthier cities for all, e.g. Addis Ababa's Sheger River regeneration (https://arcg.is/80y1G)

Citizen science initiatives, such as those focusing on air quality in Lagos, Nigeria (https://shorturl.at/cwB68), or the MapKibera project in Kenya (https://www.mapkibera.org/), provide valuable insights into environmental vectors or access to services.

Conclusion

- Promoting collaboration between urban planning, health expertise, and private stakeholders has the potential to effectively address global health challenges by integrating efforts across sectors;
- Health-centred urban planning not only supports Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Universal Health Coverage (UHC) but also enhances resilience against climate change impacts;.
- To effectively address urbanisation challenges in Low- and Middle-Income Countries (LMICs), increased investment in local research and knowledge is crucial, as much urban health evidence originates from the Global North.

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