Reviewer’s report

Title: Housing equity for health equity—A rights-based approach to the control of Lassa fever in post-war Sierra Leone

Version: 1 Date: 18 September 2012

Reviewer: David Jacobs

Reviewer’s report:

Review of “Housing equity for health equity—A rights-based approach to the control of Lassa fever in postwar Sierra Leone”

This is an important article that should be published, although there are major compulsory revisions required, as explained below. In addition to the detailed improvements explained below, the article might also incorporate the concept of Integrated Pest Management, which includes BOTH education and structural housing improvements. This article appears to place these two concepts in conflict with each other, when in fact they could be part of a comprehensive program. Integrated Pest Management information is reviewed at this website: http://www.epa.gov/opp00001/factsheets/ipm.htm

Also, the article needs to provide additional support for why improved housing should be cast as a human rights issue, instead of an economic development activity.

Abstract

The abstract provides some background on the issue, but does not include any methods or results from the article itself. These should be included in the abstract.

Why is the term “multimammate rat” used?

Article

p. 4 10 The methods used to support this statement should be described, i.e., how exactly was the assessment done: “out of the District’s 17 Chiefdoms were considered to have “poor or very poor” housing quality based on assessment of core housing components of material, roof, foundation, and repair needs [10].

p. 4. The quantitative data should be provided to support this statement: “Houses with mud brick or mud and wattle walls were also found to be more likely to have multimammate rat infestation than houses with cement walls.” Exactly how much more likely was this to be true?

p. 5. Again, please provide the quantitative data to support this statement: In fact, the number of reported cases of the disease in Kenema has increased every year since 2004 and there is evidence that the endemic area may be expanding
to other areas of Sierra Leone [15]. Exactly how much has it increased and how do we know it is true?

p. 6. “Ultimately, these [educational] measures fail to directly address the biggest underlying risk factor—poor quality housing. Any long-term solution to the problem of Lassa fever in Kenema District must address this root problem.” Is the root problem poor housing or poverty or war? Why is poor quality housing a root cause instead of an expression of other factors?

p. 6. Spell out UNDP

p. 8. One issue that should be addressed further involves an assessment of the costs of the disease compared to the cost of improved housing. A pilot program should examine not only health outcomes but also their financial impact.

**Level of interest:** An article of importance in its field

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I have no competing interests