Author’s response to reviews

Title: Urban Health in Africa: A critical global public health priority

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Version: 1 Date: 17 Oct 2018

Author’s response to reviews:

11 Oct 2018

Urban Health in Africa: A critical global health priority

Thank you for considering for publication this debate in your journal.

We have now addressed the reviewer’s comments as set out below and re-submit our revised manuscript.

All authors have agreed to the submission to the journal and the manuscript is not currently under submission in any other journal.

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

Regards
Technical Comments:

Please confirm in the cover letter that all authors have agreed to the submission to the journal and that the manuscript is not currently under submission in any other journal.

RESPONSE: This has now been confirmed above.

Please provide all authors’ email addresses within the title page of the manuscript.

RESPONSE: This has now been addressed. Please note in addition, the contact details and affiliation of the corresponding author have been updated due to changes since initial submission.

Editor Comments: Thank you for submitting your manuscript to the Journal. Our understanding is that this is more of a commentary or a reflection piece that highlights an important public health issue. Much of the manuscript is in narrative form and yet it could have benefited some number-quantitative data. If this were attended to, it would strengthen the manuscript.

RESPONSE: Thank you for the comment. As you indicate, this is a manuscript for the Debate section of the journal and has been written with this style in mind. To this end, we have addressed the reviewer’s comments based on the aim of a Debate piece.

Reviewer reports: DERICK AKOMPAB AKOKU, PhD (Reviewer 1) This paper seeks to highlight areas for research that will help advance urban health and enable the African continent achieve global public health targets. I appreciate the authors for taking time to review some published material and use their ideas and thoughts to draft this paper. Nevertheless, I think the authors could consider the following comments to improve the quality of the paper.
RESPONSE: Many thanks for your comment. As indicated above, this manuscript is a Debate article and we hope we have adequately addressed your comments below in line with the aims of a Debate article.

Abstract Line 31: The authors are arguing that: "…a focus on urban health in Africa is urgently required". Comment: Is there any contrary view which contend that urban health should not be advanced in Africa? If so, please provide evidence in the body of the manuscript.

RESPONSE: Thank you for the comment. We have attempted to address this in relation to this being a Debate article – including in reworking the abstract and background.

Background Line:13-20 The authors stated: "The Research Initiative for Cities Health and Equity in Africa (RICHE Africa) Network aims to support improvements in urban health across the continent. The RICHE Africa Network is made up of both early career and established researchers working to support evidence-informed urban public health policy and planning processes in Africa. Comment: As this is background of your paper, it is the reviewer's view that you should introduce your paper talking about "Urban Health" in Africa which is the subject matter rather than the organization, RICHE Africa.

RESPONSE: Thank you for the comment. This has now been addressed by changing the order of the paragraphs in both the abstract and the background section of the manuscript.

The importance of Africa for global public health Line 38-41 "highlighting the importance of addressing population health on this continent for improving global public health. Comment: The authors should explain to their readers how addressing population health does not improve global public health. In your introductory background, it may be interesting to cite some specific examples of cities in Africa and their projected population. Otherwise, these are generalized statements.

RESPONSE: Thank you for the comment. We have revised the text in the introductory background section. As this is a Debate article, some generalised statements are inevitable. We have not cited specific examples. Rather, we have referenced to key literature that provides this information for readers who are interested to know more.
A focus on urban health in Africa Line 22-28 Comment: This sentence should be made clear and concise to your readers. The use of the phrase "as a result" twice in the same sentence makes it difficult to understand the message the authors are communicating. Please rephrase and simplify this sentence.

RESPONSE: This sentence has now been rephrased as: Based on the numbers and demographics of people living in African cities – both now and in the future – action on urban health in Africa will support progress towards global health targets, including the SDGs, UHC, and NUA.

Line 55

Comment: It would be helpful if the authors could provide to their readers how these four areas of research were identified. Was it through a review of the literature? Or a Delphi technique etc? Please provide details to your readers.

RESPONSE: Thank you for this comment. A sentence to explain this has now been added: These were identified in Xiamen through presentations and group discussions that drew on the experience of the authors and reflected on the state of research, knowledge and action on urban health across the continent.

Line 38/39 .....need for research into the knowledge and attitudes of key stakeholders"

Comment: The authors should provide details on which area, knowledge and attitudes of stakeholders should be examined. Please explain how such findings will improve urban health in Africa as sometimes knowledge alone does not necessarily translate into action.

RESPONSE: The sentence explains that research into knowledge and attitudes will inform the development of appropriate strategies, in recognition of the fact that knowledge doesn’t automatically lead to action: “There is therefore a need for research into the knowledge and attitudes of key stakeholders across these sectors, in order to inform the development of appropriate strategies to improve health and SDUH literacy.”

1. Increase intersectoral urban health literacy Line 24-33 "The complexity of African cities needs to be understood, by citizens and policymakers alike, from a Social Determinants of Urban Health (SDUH) (12) perspective, that will allow for investigation and identification of the interlinked multi-level and multi-sectoral determinants of urban health (exposures) and the pathways that connect them to health outcomes (systems), with the objective of improving equity in urban health (8,10).” Comment: This sentence is too long. I suggest that the authors should rephrase the sentence, make it short or divide it into two sentences.
RESPONSE: Thank you. We have revised this to: The complexity of African cities needs to be understood by both citizens and policymakers; we consider a Social Determinants of Urban Health (SDUH) (12) lens critical to achieving this. Developed to identify ways to improve equity in urban health, the SDUH framework allows for exploration of the interlinked, multi-level, and multi-sectoral determinants of urban health and the pathways that connect them to health outcomes (8,10).

2. Apply a healthy urban governance and systems approach Line 56-57 Comment: It is not clear to your readers what reactive and proactive city planning mean. Could the authors provide more information/details to their readers?

RESPONSE: Thank you. We have revised this to: The rapid growth rate of many African cities results in existing urban governance systems struggling to meet demand, often due to the challenges associated with accessing and using population projections to inform appropriate urban planning.

Line 16-20 The authors stated that: "Governance is about the ways in which multiple actors work together: the state; civil society; academia; the private sector; and, community-based organisations." Comment: The authors did not explain why it is important for these actors to work together? Could you explain the purpose? Is it to achieve a goal, enact and implement public policies or societal benefit etc? Please clarify and provide relevant information and details.

RESPONSE: Thank you; we have revised to: Governance is about the ways in which multiple actors work together: the state; civil society; academia; the private sector; and, community-based organisations. Effective urban governance that brings these sectors, which are interdependent, together to identify, understand, and respond to the SDUH is critical: evidence indicates that this is required to inform sustainable and healthy urban planning (14).

Line 37-40 The author's stated: "....requires research to explore and understand the relationships between exposure(s) and the distribution(s) of health outcome(s)." Comment: The authors did not justify why such research is needed in Africa. Is there a research gap in this area in Africa? What types of exposures are the authors referring to? Please provide specific examples. Are they environmental exposures? Without concrete details and justification, it is my view that these are just mere statements.
RESPONSE: Thank you for this. In line with the aim of the manuscript as a Debate article, we have revised this to: Unpacking and understanding the complexity of health in African cities, and the ways in which governance structures affect equity in health, requires research to explore and understand the relationships between exposure(s) and the distribution(s) of health outcome(s) as well as the inter-relationships between city, provincial, and national governments. Whilst there is a growing body of research exploring these issues, without centring urban health in Africa within global public health responses, the opportunities for improving population health and achieving global health targets will be missed.

3. Develop a participatory and collaborative urban health planning process Line 16-19 The authors stated that "…performance management systems at the local government level across health and non-health sectors." Comment: I think it would be interesting for the authors to further discuss/explain why such plans should be incorporated in the performance management (PM) system. What is the benefit of incorporating such plans in the PM systems?

RESPONSE: Thank you; this has been reworded: Ideally, these plans and the associated activities and outcomes should be integrated into existing performance management systems at the local government level across health and non-health sectors. This will operationalize action on urban health, requiring local government actors to develop and implement responses as part of their core mandate.

Ameel Al Shawi (Reviewer 2): The manuscript produces important and critical subject for the public health aspect of Africa... but there are certain point need to revise 1. In the abstract, the aims should be more elaborated and specified

RESPONSE: Thank you, this has been revised – considering the word limit.

2. The aims in the background section, it is better to rewrite with to be more elaborated and should be according to that of abstract.

RESPONSE: We have revised the abstract and background to address this comment.
3. I suppose the main body of the manuscript needs tables or figures that explain the demographical characteristics and urgent needs of Africa, these tables and figures give a better impression about what the authors talk and are easier for readers.

RESPONSE: Thank you for the comment. As indicated above, this is a manuscript for the Debate section of the journal and has been written with this style in mind. To this end, some generalised statements are inevitable. We have not cited specific examples. Rather, we have referenced key literature that provides this information for readers who are interested to know more.

4. Many references and citation are missed, i.e., last paragraph of increase intersectional urban health literacy, last paragraph of develop a participatory and collaborative urban health planning, without references. The section: 4. produce a new generation of urban health scholars needs a reference.

RESPONSE: Thank you for this comment. Linked to the above comment, the manuscript is for a Debate article which requires presentation of statements based on our discussions, i.e. there are no existing references for these points.

5. Conclusion needs to rewrite in similar way to that of the abstract.

RESPONSE: Thank you. The conclusion has now been revised to: We call on the global public health community, and especially African governments, to address the African urban health agenda. We suggest that acting on the four key urban health priorities we have identified in Africa is critical for achieving global public health targets. Such action will contribute to improving health for all and ensuring that we ‘leave no-one behind’ when working to achieve regional and global agendas to improve health and wellbeing.