Foreword

I am delighted to write a Foreword for this book on Population Growth and Rapid Urbanization in the Developing World. It is a timely contribution because consideration of this subject matter is steadily increasing and gaining in critical significance as the world becomes rapidly more urban, a worldwide phenomenon that is more stark in developing regions. Although just over half of the population of the developing world currently lives in rural areas, the vast majority will be living in urban areas by 2050.

This impressive collection of innovative and insightful chapters explore the varied and complex dimensions of population growth and urbanization in the developing countries where the growth process directly impacts the economic relations and the social structure. The African Development Bank Group has estimated that more than 90% of future population growth will take place in the large cities in the developing countries with major implications for their economy, for the quality of their environment, for their overall wellbeing, for social justice, and for the kinds of lives that their population will lead. The vast majority of the population in cities in developing countries are the poor and vulnerable whose livelihood and wellbeing depend on safe and sustainable urban planning systems, on sustained urban leadership, on the promoting of active and strategic communication among stakeholders, on participatory engagement and well-managed urban infrastructure, as well as on institutions that are responsive to their needs. Urbanization can only be sustainable in developing countries if there is the political will to empower the urban poor to solve their own problems in partnership with local authorities and to participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives.

By emphasizing urbanization, urban growth and related challenges of sustainable development, this book reminds us that in order to efficiently manage growth and change arising from rapidly increasing population and urbanization trends, developing countries would need to employ appropriate tools to analyze the key issues involved. They would also need to carry out suitable structural and practical reforms and marshal their human, financial and technological resources to deal with pertinent infrastructure concerns in sustainable ways.

I was first introduced to Umar G. Benna’s work and his thoughts in 1968 when he demonstrated his deep understanding for how planning and urban design could be instruments for transforming ordinary people’s lives for the better in his holistic proposal for the development of Old Zaria City in Nigeria. Since then, I have developed a deep sense of reverence for his mastery of the questions that this book addresses, through his extensive research and professional practice, and which has resulted in the American Institute of Architects (Rhode Island Chapter) bestowing upon him an Honor Award under Planning and Urban Design Category for his “Sokoto Master Plan 1983-2003”. The Citation of the Award is a testament to his accomplishments. It reads as follows: “Given urbanistic dilemmas of Third World society, the relevance of grand plan to establish urban form is intriguing and merits recommendation.” Thus, for
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nearly five decades, as Umar Benna has achieved international recognition as a leader in the theory and practice of architecture, urban and regional planning, we can discern an ever-increasing respect for his spatial design work which addresses the everyday needs of people that shape our urban environment.

I find in this book a prospective source of great inspiration in my own work in sustainable community architecture and planning, housing, international development and global post-disaster reconstruction. For example, natural and human-made disasters are generally exacerbated by a number of complex dynamics. These include the poor and ineffectual management of urban growth and development as well as the inappropriate implementation and disposition of urban technologies for urban development. Another dynamic is a weak understanding of the numerous factors which drive urban-ward migration and the physical enlargement of urban settlements through the appropriation and the alteration of rural villages into small urban settlements and the impact of these factors on urban social and economic activities and productivity. Keenly aware of the need for successfully addressing these challenges, the chapters in this volume offer a thorough exploration of the field from multiple perspectives. They draw on research, fieldwork and case studies from Africa (including Ghana, Nigeria, Zimbabwe), China, the Middle East and Turkey, to present a framework for investigating some basic facts about the structural change that urbanization and growth precipitate. Indeed, Umar Benna, his co-editor Shaibu Bala Garba and their contributors have achieved the lofty objective of creating a powerful source of concepts, principles and actions for dealing with broad population and urbanization issues. They have also taken an enormous step toward formulating an effective urban development guidance system appropriate for use in developing countries.

Consequently, I am confident that this volume will propel policy makers, scholars, urban planning practitioners, public and private sector officials, to name but a few, to further investigation and applied action in the field of urbanization. Also, I anticipate that they will find it valuable and relevant to their research and everyday practice.

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