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# Introduction

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Over the past thirty years, disaster research has exploded into focus, highlighting its relationship to climate, political, and social change and its global impact on economic development and sustainability. This research has brought into sharp contrast, the question of climate justice and the widening gap between those who are able to engage in risk mitigation and adaptation to greener infrastructure via just transitions for the sake of a healthier world and others who want to do so but simply cannot. In his *Theory of Justice*, John Rawls (1971) sought to extend the idea of fairness to international law for the purpose of judging the aims and limits of a just war as it applies to international communities of human beings. He referred to the latter as well-ordered peoples, many of whom are left out of consideration, because they are denied a meaningful role in political decision-making (Rawls 1999: 23–43). According to Rawls, the most important way to think about justice is to determine what principles would be chosen by people who came together behind a “veil of ignorance” that temporarily deprived them of any knowledge of where they would find themselves in society. The point is that justice is only likely to be achieved when there are no differences in bargaining power or knowledge. This seems to represent well the imbalance currently observed in actions of the international community on issues such as climate justice.

In 2019, Greta Thunberg, a teenage Swedish environmental activist, in her address to the United Nations Climate Action Summit, drilled home the lack of fairness across the international community by deriding world leaders for focusing on the potential costs of climate change in the face of industrial advancement and challenging leaders to take immediate action to mitigate its risks rather than seeking to increase their economic growth without identifying and sharing ways to balance global development equitably. The single most critical point of her argument was the lack of knowledge of so many leaders and publics of the efforts necessary to preserve

our world in the face of accelerating climate crisis or the lack of will among those who know what is needed but fail to take meaningful action. Without equitable access to knowledge or a seat at decision-making tables, vulnerable communities may not ever experience an equitable balance in global development.

This volume is intended to contribute to the conversation on the growing gap in awareness of the world's peoples to the concept of disaster by investigating the nature of disaster, the impact of disaster, and the role of knowledge production and knowledge sharing in mitigating losses that occur as a result of inaction on the part of a global community either too crippled to act fairly or lacking the knowledge to do so. Especially in underdeveloped spaces, which include Africa and its diaspora, there is need to devise a model of regenerative development that grows from the bottom up rather than applying the top-down extractive methods they have been cajoled into accepting as the only developmental pathway forward. Because the Global South has experienced more than its fair share of disaster and less than its fair share of the world's wealth, we will highlight areas of disaster and the resilience with which impacted communities have survived and have the capacity to prevail sustainably.

## Organization of the Book

Contributors to this book have engaged in extensive research on various aspects of climate and other disasters, with an eye to chronicling post-disaster experiences that may be helpful to less developed countries that have not been included in decision-making forums at the global level; nor have they been able to garner adequate support from global agencies engaged in research on disaster mitigation. With about twenty-five years of combined research as educators and students, the authors have identified the location of knowledge capital, the application of knowledge production, and the innovative patterns of knowledge sharing as a model designed to achieve disaster resilience and economic development as a viable pathway for managing post-disaster trauma in disadvantaged spaces of the Global South.

Chapter 1 explores the underlying propositions of this book. It focuses on the knowledge base required to identify the capacities of Africans in the diaspora, the location of indigenous knowledge, and ways in which knowledge capital may be produced to create a just transition to disaster recovery, economic development, and environmental sustainability. It stresses the belief that without an adequate model for development, emerging nations and especially those of the African diaspora, a com-

munity of people exploited for centuries and deliberately omitted from the lexicons of most databases and archives recounting the disastrous episodes of their lives, there can be no achievable growth. Thus, identifying new ways of knowing, building on the indigenous knowledge of their past, and converting native knowledge capital into knowledge economies, a sustainable future may be designed—a future that transports the past into the present and prepares to forge a resilient path forward.

Chapter 2 offers a conceptual framework of how knowledge capital may yield development and sustainability once the capacity of communities is identified and produced. It is aimed at presenting a theoretical overview of the problems for development in pre- and post-disaster communities and explores the philosophy that when communities draw on their indigenous cultural experiences, they are more likely to reclaim perspectives of self-determination and development rather than continue to flounder under pressure to imitate the West in a linear, exogenous path to development. When lock-step political behaviors fail to yield economic advancement in a globalized world and dependency on the nurture of colonial masters does not work, national self-interest requires disadvantaged regimes to find strength and direction in proven cultural traditions through the exploration of strategic intellectual capital.

Engaging systems theory (Easton 1965), this chapter demonstrates the role of knowledge capital at its source in disadvantaged communities where disaster has forced communities to address alternative, indigenous sources of resilience to rebuild a nation. In Easton's work, he defines the political system as a set of interactions, abstracted from the social behavior, through which values are authoritatively allocated for society. This rendering of the political system places the government at the center, receiving inputs/demands from the public and responding to those demands with decisions and actions that will regulate outputs for the society. Thus, this earlier model needs to be retired in order to empower community building, reliant not on individual government actions but on an ecosystem of networks in which justice and solidarity create a better framework for growth.

Chapter 3 is a case study that examines collaborative energies and post-disaster solutions for development in Louisiana. The chapter highlights the inherent value in developing solidarity networks to fight for a world in which dignity, self-determination, and a sustainable future becomes a reality. Emerging post-disaster societies in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea have found community capital a meaningful way to progress in pursuit of new trajectories for growth and sustainability. The Gulf South is a region where water, oil, gas, coal, and nuclear energy are key segments of the economy. Louisiana communities, particularly the

black, brown, and indigenous people, are becoming increasingly vulnerable to the subsequent land loss, rising seas, natural disasters, crumbling infrastructure, and polluting energies weakening an already fragile ecosystem. The climate crisis has compounded vulnerabilities and become a turning point for solidarity, urging local communities to act, connect their struggles, and overcome the systemic inequalities that divide them. Movements and coalitions are united to create a resilient and sustainable future for all, and their fight is anchored in the knowledge capital, histories, realities, and power of the Gulf region. By advancing grassroots policy and practices that center laborers, farmers, fisher-folk, tribal nations, and frontline communities in a just transition away from extractive economies, sustainable development can be attained.

Chapter 4 reflects on Haiti and its capacity for building social capital for sustainable growth via media connectivity. Although Haiti's recovery efforts have been stymied by continuing issues of governance and the costs of development, there is a grit among Haitians that can be awakened to a new search for development. This chapter pinpoints the fact that the public sphere is central to the collective shaping of local ways of knowing. Through citizen engagement in dialogue, debates, advocacy, and even creative forms of expression, societies propose and refine notions of ways of life and uphold commonly shared values of humanity and dignity. Media platforms, both traditional and digital, offer forms of public spheres that transmit public knowledge, stimulate debates on the status quo, and serve as a rallying call for action in the face of persistent political and social stalemates.

In Haiti, traditional media, both commercial and community radio, played an important role during the 2010 earthquake and the decade since. In its quest for a more equitable recovery and sustainable way of life for ordinary Haitians, digital platforms have bolstered local and global conversations that aim to hold those in power accountable for unsustainable forms of governance that continue to increase hardships for Haitians. Similarly, the creative genius of Haitians, overseas and at home, have relayed stories of the past and the will of ordinary citizens to devise ways of overcoming insecurities in pursuit of survival and a better life. To help Haiti take its best shot in designing a happier future than it has experienced in the face of recent political, social, natural, and man-made disaster, the awareness must be shared that the success of their lives lies in the resilience of their spirits and the knowledge capacity they own. Capitalizing on these will craft a mosaic of achievement for the future.

Chapter 5 addresses socio-cultural practices for resilience and recovery in post-disaster Rwanda. The genocide in Rwanda (1994) was a catastrophe of enormous proportion. It left in its wake a huge loss of human life,

unparalleled socio-cultural distrust among communities, and a chasm in political legitimacy that has only, during the last decade, begun to show promising signs of closure and a clear track toward sustainable development. The Rwandan people have been hailed by the media and economic reviewers for their resilience throughout the twenty-eight-year period of rebuilding. Although the strides made have been supported by collaboration with European and other counterparts, the methodologies employed to aid recovery in Rwanda were generated by local communities working to sustain development from the community level upward. To heal the nation and return to a semblance of harmony among groups formerly hostile to each other, integrative psychotherapeutic approaches have been adopted to reflect traditional Rwandan culture, assert respect for personal loss within communities, and dispose of victims in a traditional, dignified, and respectful manner. In these and other ways, Rwanda has been a lighthouse for managing trauma and restoring justice in their post-disaster period. The post-disaster experience of Rwanda may empower states in the African diaspora to seek new and innovative ways to overcome decades of trauma they have collectively endured.

Chapter 6 presents a model of Sankofa beliefs for tackling sustainable development goals in the African diaspora. Sankofa is a bird in African mythology with its head turned backward and its feet planted firmly forward. Descendants of the Akan people of Ghana, many trans-shipped to the Americas and Caribbean, understand this as a metaphor for employing knowledge of the past as a motivation for bringing wisdoms of the past into the future, for growth and development. In the context of climate change and environmental disaster, the greatest global challenge of the twenty-first century, one recognizes the symbolism of Sankofa as conceptualizing knowledge production. The diaspora's wisdoms lie in its intellectual past, which may be honed to produce an innovative, empowered present, capable of creating a viable and sustainable future.

Finally, the Epilogue of this volume, reiterates the view that adaptation is at the heart of disaster mitigation in the three diasporic sites highlighted in these case studies. Insights that contribute to a favorable outcome for the societies in this study may be applied to pre-disaster conditions as well as to post-disaster strategies to seek a trajectory of development. This emanates from the identification of intellectual capital resident in these societies and capable of producing innovative methodologies for potential sustainability. As knowledge capital is produced, the achievement of goals will empower communities to generate conversations that will contribute to a feedback loop that energizes even more innovative ideas for tackling economic insecurity, gender inequality, and environmental injustice. This volume will ultimately evaluate the impact of a secure economy, gender

equity, and climate justice on sustainable development. Reflecting on the past may remind Haiti and Louisiana of commonalities in their relationship and probable reasons for reconnecting to shared history and potentially investing in shared strategies for building a resilient future.

## Conclusion

It is expected that academic institutions, especially historically black colleges and universities (HBCU), will not only find this volume instructive for students and faculty but will also use it to arouse student interest in innovative projects that may be shared with the diaspora in pursuit of sustainable and developed communities to empower and advocate for them in the management of sustainable post-disaster societies. Publication of innovative work conducted by faculty and students in response to the discussion in this text will further advance our attempt to awaken a spirit of awareness and solidarity among diasporic peoples and a will to build an edifice of knowledge in which access to collaborative knowledge sharing may be forthcoming. In the spirit of Wangari Maathai (2003), a Kenyan social, environmental, and political activist and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (2004), the diaspora must mobilize as a unified indigenous diasporic grassroots organization that empowers its communities to address imperatives for post-disaster sustainability. Only in such collaboration is there a realistic chance of environmental survival in Africa and its scattered diaspora.

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