



# Exploring the role of empowerment in urban humanitarian responses in Freetown

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In Sierra Leone, international and national humanitarian actors have been involved in a series of initiatives addressing humanitarian emergencies caused separately by the civil war, cholera outbreaks, the Ebola crisis, and the recent flooding in Freetown and elsewhere. In each case, there has been a variety of response approaches, from community-led, to top-down relocation. While there has been documentation of these processes, there has been little work attempting to bring studies and perspectives together to generate a reflection to the wider humanitarian community of practice.

This working paper looks at humanitarian responses in the Portee-Rokupa neighbourhood of Freetown. By focusing on the empowerment implication of humanitarian responses, it explores the extent to which approaches have been able to build the capacities of informal dwellers' groups, foster collaboration among different stakeholders, enable critical learning, and open up opportunities for the recognition of the diverse needs and aspirations of vulnerable groups within the wider policy and planning environment.

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# Acronyms

CBDMC	Community-based Disaster Management Committee
CBO	Community-based organisation
CDMC	Chiefdom Disaster Management Committee
DDMC	District Disaster Management Committee
DFID	Department for International Development, UK
DMC	Disaster Management Committee
DMD	Disaster Management Department
DRM	Disaster Risk Management
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EVD	Ebola viral disease
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FCC	Freetown City Council
FGD	Focus group discussion
HFA	Hyogo Framework Action
INGO	International non-governmental organisation
KII	Key informant interview
MDAs	Ministries, departments and agencies
MoHS	Ministry of Health and Sanitation
NASCI	National Security and Central Intelligence Act
NAYCOM	National Youth Commission
NERC	National Ebola Response Council
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ONS	Office of National Security
PERAV	Portee Ebola Response Alliance Volunteers
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLURC	Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
SOP	Standard operating procedure
UHR	Urban humanitarian response
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

# Executive summary

Actors from the humanitarian sector operating in urban areas are increasingly recognising the role of local community groups in responding to and mitigating risks affecting the urban poor. Current approaches and practices have analysed and emphasised the contributions that community participation can bring to the practices of urban humanitarian responses. This working paper contributes to this existing debate by exploring the opportunities that urban humanitarian responses generate to enhance the capacity of community groups to participate meaningfully in urban decision-making processes. The research draws on the case study of Freetown, Sierra Leone, to investigate the role that urban humanitarian responses play in empowering urban marginalised groups to affect urban change.

The urban poor in Freetown have been affected by the cumulative impacts of a series of humanitarian emergencies, which include civil war, cholera outbreaks, flooding and the recent Ebola crisis. International and national humanitarian actors, as well as community groups, have been involved in a variety of approaches to responses, from community-led to top-down relocation. This research focuses on the humanitarian responses in the Portee-Rokupa neighbourhood to explore the role of humanitarian responses in building capacities of informal dwellers' groups, foster collaboration among different stakeholders, enable critical learning, and open up opportunities for the recognition of the diverse needs and aspirations of vulnerable groups within the wider policy and planning environment.

The research methodology applies Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to facilitate the examination of the linkages between empowerment and humanitarian responses. This research approach sheds light on three main analytical domains: stakeholder's perceptions of the potential and actual empowerment outcomes generated by urban humanitarian responses; the role that humanitarian response has played in drawing, strengthening or weakening assets available to Portee Rokupa's community groups to pursue empowerment outcomes; and the ways within which policy and planning environment affects the relationship between humanitarian responses and the empowerment of urban poor groups in Freetown.

The research methods used in this study included literature review, policy document analysis, ten interviews with informants from different key government and civil society humanitarian institutions, interviews with eight different community-based organisations, involving 24 representatives from the eight different groups, and two focus group discussions, involving a total of 22 participants representing ten different community-based organisations from Portee-Rokupa. The analysis from the information generated through these activities can be summarised in the following three key findings:

First, this research reveals that community-based humanitarian practices have been the most substantial mechanism to enhance empowerment assets of residents of Portee-Rokupa. Community practices to respond to humanitarian crisis led to the strengthening of social networks within and among informal settlements, it enabled processes to share skills and build capacities, and it mobilised collective resources. These practices were mostly sustained by community efforts, but they also draw on the limited opportunities generated by humanitarian agencies to support and expand communities' access to empowerment assets. In the meantime, the study shows that humanitarian responses can hinder communities' access of empowerment assets, as was the case with the quarantines implemented by the national government in Portee-Rokupa, which restricted human rights and freedom of movement, fostered government mistrust, and fractured social cohesion within communities.

Second, while the current policy frameworks mention that humanitarian responses can create opportunities for community empowerment, in practice this is still far from becoming institutionalised. Community-based Disaster Management Committees are referred as a means to do this, however they are set up with the scope of information dissemination and at best to coordinate efforts locally, rather than creating meaningful spaces for dialogue and participation.

Third, this study reveals that NGOs' approach to urban humanitarian response in Freetown risks compromising the political empowerment of community groups. While NGOs claim to aim to support CBOs, they also argue that there is low capacity within communities to involve them in humanitarian responses. Meanwhile CBOs argue that the main challenge is not the lack of capacity, but lack of support. As a result, NGOs' narratives end up reproducing the lack of recognition of CBOs and potentially compromising the possibility of them being involved directly and meaningfully in other development or humanitarian initiatives.

Based on these findings, this research generated a series of recommendations for the national and international humanitarian sector, which fundamentally calls for a reframe of the role of community participation in urban humanitarian response. If crises are to be seen as moments of opportunities to renegotiate power imbalances, then community participation in humanitarian responses needs to be framed not merely as a mechanism of implementation of pre-defined initiatives, but as a process of supporting and strengthening community empowerment.



## 1

# Introduction

## 1.1 Background

There has been an increased attention on urban crisis response from the humanitarian sector. The current debate has emphasised how uneven urban development trends have led to a rapid increase of population in informal settlements of cities of the global South. As a result, the literature articulates the various risks and threats affecting the urban poor. Residents of informal settlements lack access to basic services, are under threat of floods and landslides (Dodman *et al.*, 2013), as well as health risks (Adelekan *et al.*, 2015; Lilford *et al.*, 2017), and are exposed to conflict-related crises and economic shocks, including the threat and experience of evictions (IASC, 2010).

The humanitarian sector operating in urban contexts calls for approaches that build partnerships and participation with community groups as a means to deal with the multifaceted experience of risks affecting the urban poor. As articulated by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee strategy to meet humanitarian challenges in urban areas:

*“The complexity of urban areas poses challenges in terms of varied partners but also presents an opportunity for productive partnerships for relief assistance delivery. This complexity, compared to rural settings, demands a deeper knowledge of the spatial and social structure of cities and the potential for stronger partnerships with municipal and national governments, civil society and communities. This calls for a paradigm shift in humanitarian assistance in urban areas based on a district or community-based, rather than individual beneficiary approach, so as to forge partnerships for assistance delivery*

*and recovery with actors on the ground in these communities” (IASC, 2010).*

The current literature in this field has taken on such recommendations by emphasising the role that partnerships and participation can have to respond to humanitarian crisis more responsively and effectively. Parker and Maynard (2015) have articulated participation as one of the key pillars of the emerging ‘area-based approach’ to urban humanitarian response. They argue that the sector is increasingly recognising the need for community participation in the identification, prioritisation and planning of responses to local hazards and vulnerabilities. Meaux and Osofisan (2016) argue that a context analysis for urban humanitarian response needs to be people-centred, capturing the perceptions of the people affected by urban crises so that responses meet community needs. Meanwhile, the *British Red Cross Urban Learning Project Scoping Study* has highlighted the importance of community participation as a means to mobilise local stakeholders, improve communication and dialogue with beneficiaries, involve residents in urban humanitarian responses, and enhance accountability. However, it also articulates the challenges of navigating the power imbalances within and among urban communities (Kyazze *et al.*, 2012).

The current debates on the relationship between community engagement and urban humanitarian response have been focusing on the ‘instrumental’ role of participation, exploring its use to improve responses by making them more accountable and responsive. This research project aims to contribute to these discussions by focusing on the ‘intrinsic’ role of participation in humanitarian responses. Therefore, instead of asking

what participation can do to urban humanitarian responses, this project explores what opportunities urban humanitarian response generate to enhance the capacity of community groups to participate meaningfully in urban decision-making processes. This research draws on the case study of Freetown, Sierra Leone, to investigate the role that urban humanitarian responses play in empowering urban marginalised groups to affect urban change.

In Sierra Leone, international and national humanitarian actors have been involved in a series of initiatives addressing humanitarian emergencies caused separately by the civil war, cholera outbreaks, the Ebola crisis, and the recent flooding in Freetown (and a few other places) caused by torrential rains. In each case, there has been a variety of response approaches, from community-led (such as the community-led Ebola response), to top-down relocation (such as the temporary site at the national stadium). While there has been documentation of these processes, there has been little work attempting to bring studies and perspectives together to generate a reflection to the wider humanitarian community of practice.

To explore these issues in more detail, this research narrowed down its focus to the humanitarian responses in the Portee-Rokupa neighbourhood of Freetown. This location was identified due to the variety of approaches to humanitarian responses, from community-led to state-driven approaches. Also, it is an area with which the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC)<sup>1</sup> has an ongoing relationship; working closely with local community groups and attempting to support their activities through action research projects.

By focusing on the empowerment implication of humanitarian responses, this research explores the extent to which approaches have been able to build the capacities of informal dwellers' groups, foster collaboration among different stakeholders, enable critical learning, and open up opportunities for the recognition of the diverse needs and aspirations of vulnerable groups within the wider policy and planning environment. Furthermore, we hope to elicit the conditions in the humanitarian sector that have enabled or compromised the achievement of empowerment outcomes revealed. As an output, the research has generated a specific set of recommendations to the humanitarian sector on how empowerment can be supported through urban humanitarian responses.

## 1.2 The importance of exploring the role of empowerment in urban humanitarian responses in Sierra Leone

As Sierra Leone has experienced various forms of disasters in recent years, and with the frequency expected to increase and the scale often exceeding the coping capacity of the government, it is reasoned that unless the different stakeholders (international, national, local, non-state, etc.) prepare in advance of the event by putting appropriate mechanisms in place, there is the risk of response failure. With disasters expected to extend to more new areas, especially in informal settlements, there is the danger that most slum dwellers living in at risk locations will be displaced if more suitable actions are not taken in advance. Porter (2003) identifies the main factors underlying humanitarian response failures to include the absence of a clear lead agency to drive the process, inadequate knowledge of the nature and scale of the humanitarian need, improper monitoring of response activities and the impacts, the lack of a clear strategy, and the fragmented approaches of the different actors involved in the response. To a large extent, the current approach to humanitarian response in Sierra Leone bears all these hallmarks, which makes it more prone to abuse. Thus, having an understanding of the existing procedures, identifying the different skills and capacities of the different actors, and empowering the role of actors at different levels, are all necessary for enabling responses now and in the future.

Moreover, exploring the role of empowerment in urban humanitarian response is critical in view of the seemingly increasing engagement of informal settlements by the humanitarian community in response to the drawbacks associated with urbanisation in Sierra Leone. Since the civil war, Freetown has continued to experience rapid urbanisation, owing largely to the increased movement of people from the provinces. According to the Freetown Structure Plan 2013-2029, estimates show that by 2028, over 1.9 million people will live in Freetown (GOPA-CES, 2014), accounting for 65 per cent of the total number of people currently living in urban areas of Sierra Leone (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2016). The

<sup>1</sup> The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) is a research institute set up by a partnership between The Bartlett Development Planning Unit of University College London and the Institute of Geography and Development Studies of Njala University. It conducts research and training activities with the objective of informing and contributing towards more equitable urban development in Sierra Leone. See <http://www.slurc.org/>

resultant unplanned development of the urban space to accommodate this population, while intensifying existing vulnerabilities, is causing fresh vulnerabilities, thereby increasing the scale of the exposure of poor urban households to disasters with implications for humanitarian response (McCallin and Scherer, 2015; Dickson *et al.*, 2012).

While humanitarian crises have always occurred in both urban and rural areas, it is clear that the nature and scale of the crisis have always differed, with urban areas in Sierra Leone experiencing more severe outcomes. As Mohiddin and Smith (2016) argue in their work, this is due largely to the high densities of the populations, which are mostly mobile, the prevalence of informal settlements, which are often in unstable locations, the diverse trades and lifestyles undertaken, all of which increase vulnerability to disasters. As the humanitarian community increasingly seeks to empower groups to respond to disasters in more effective ways, exploring the role of empowerment presents an unparalleled opportunity to understand not only the current state of preparedness of the country to respond to disasters, but also to understand the accountability mechanisms of the response in terms of responsibility. It will also allow the government to build more effective emergency preparedness and response mechanisms, as well as shape existing policies to fittingly support the response strategies.

### 1.3 Methodology

By the end of the 1990s, the development sector was being questioned about its project-based and palliative application of participatory development. Critiques argued that participation had become a technocratic solution, leaving power imbalances unchallenged. Participation was used as a means to make projects more efficient and responsive to local priorities, but not an end in itself (Cooke and Kothari, 2001).

The emergence of rights-based approaches since mid-1990s attempted to safeguard the practice of 'participatory development' from instrumental and technical applications. A series of initiatives and literature started to associate participation with notions of power, rights and citizenship. Rights-based approaches aimed to provide an opportunity to re-politicise development, and the concept and practice of **empowerment** was often proposed as a mechanism to deepen the longer-term democratic outcomes of participatory initiatives (Hickey and Mohan, 2006).

While there has been significant progress in the humanitarian sector to recognise the role of the participation of local communities in urban crisis responses, there has been little attempt to explore the role that responses can play in deepening democracy. Similarly to the literature in the field of development, this research attempts to investigate the relationship between urban humanitarian responses and empowerment in order to explore the possibilities of overcoming the technocratic and short-term application of participatory initiatives in the humanitarian sector.

### 1.4 Analytical framework

This research project elaborated on an analytical framework that unpacks the concept of empowerment and the ways that urban humanitarian responses might relate to it. To do this, the study built on the following assumptions outlined by existing literature on empowerment:

- 1) Empowerment **outcomes** are multidimensional (Page and Czuba, 1999). Rights-based approaches to empowerment have emphasised the need to focus on outcomes associated with the protection of human rights, thereby drawing on existing agreed principles and criteria. Others have argued for the identification of priorities and perspectives on empowerment by marginalised groups themselves, adapting to local contexts and struggles.
- 2) Empowerment is a **process** of gaining power over decisions and resources (Jupp *et al.*, 2010); it is often referred to as the expansion of the collective agency of marginalised groups. Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, this process involves breaking from a culture of silence and becoming aware of the social and political conditions which produce injustices.
- 3) Apart from agency, empowerment is also referred as the **opportunity** to exercise rights. By emphasising the changes in relations of power within and among state and society, Fox (2004) argues for a more equitable institutional environment.

Narayan's (2002) definition of empowerment brings together these three assumptions, by defining it as "the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives" (2002:14). Drawing on these definitions, this research project applies Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to examine the relationship between urban humanitarian responses and the empowerment capabilities of marginalised groups in Freetown.

According to Sen (1999), development should not be approached as an income maximisation process, but rather it should focus on the expansion of people's capabilities to achieve the things they value. For Sen, capabilities are defined as the real freedom people have to achieve certain goals. Such freedoms are composed of two elements: people's capacities and abilities, and opportunities to apply those abilities in light of their valued aspirations. The example of a bike is often used among the Capability Approach literature to illustrate these concepts: for a person to be able to use a bike to fulfil their mobility aspirations, they will need to have the skills and the physical condition (abilities and capacities), as well as the opportunity to do so through the provision of the necessary road infrastructure or social norms that will allow him or her to use the bike for that purpose (opportunities) (Robeyns, 2005).

We have applied these notions in this research by defining empowerment capabilities as the abilities and opportunities that marginalised groups have to pursue a set of empowerment outcomes. These empowerment outcomes are defined based on the aspirations of marginalised groups, as well as the concepts identified in policy documents and discourses.

In relation to empowerment outcomes, this research aimed to address the following issues: 1) reveal a comprehensive set of empowerment dimensions, unpacking the synergies and differences among perspectives of empowerment; 2) explore the extent to which humanitarian responses contribute towards the potential achievement of valued empowerment outcomes; 3) explore whether humanitarian responses have led to concrete successful empowerment outcomes; and 4) explore the extent to which humanitarian responses compromise the achievement of valued empowerment outcomes.

Figure 1 outlines the analytical framework used for this research. On the left side of the diagram, Box A refers to the practices and approaches to humanitarian responses that took place in the Portee-Rokupa area. On the far right, Box B outlines the empowerment outcomes associated with these humanitarian responses, unpacking the aspirations from community groups, as well as perspectives from policymakers and policy documents. The centre of the diagram shows the 'conversion factors' that are enabling or disabling the conditions for humanitarian responses that lead to empowerment outcomes. These conditions are identified as access to empowerment assets (Box C), as well as the policy and institutional environment (Box D).

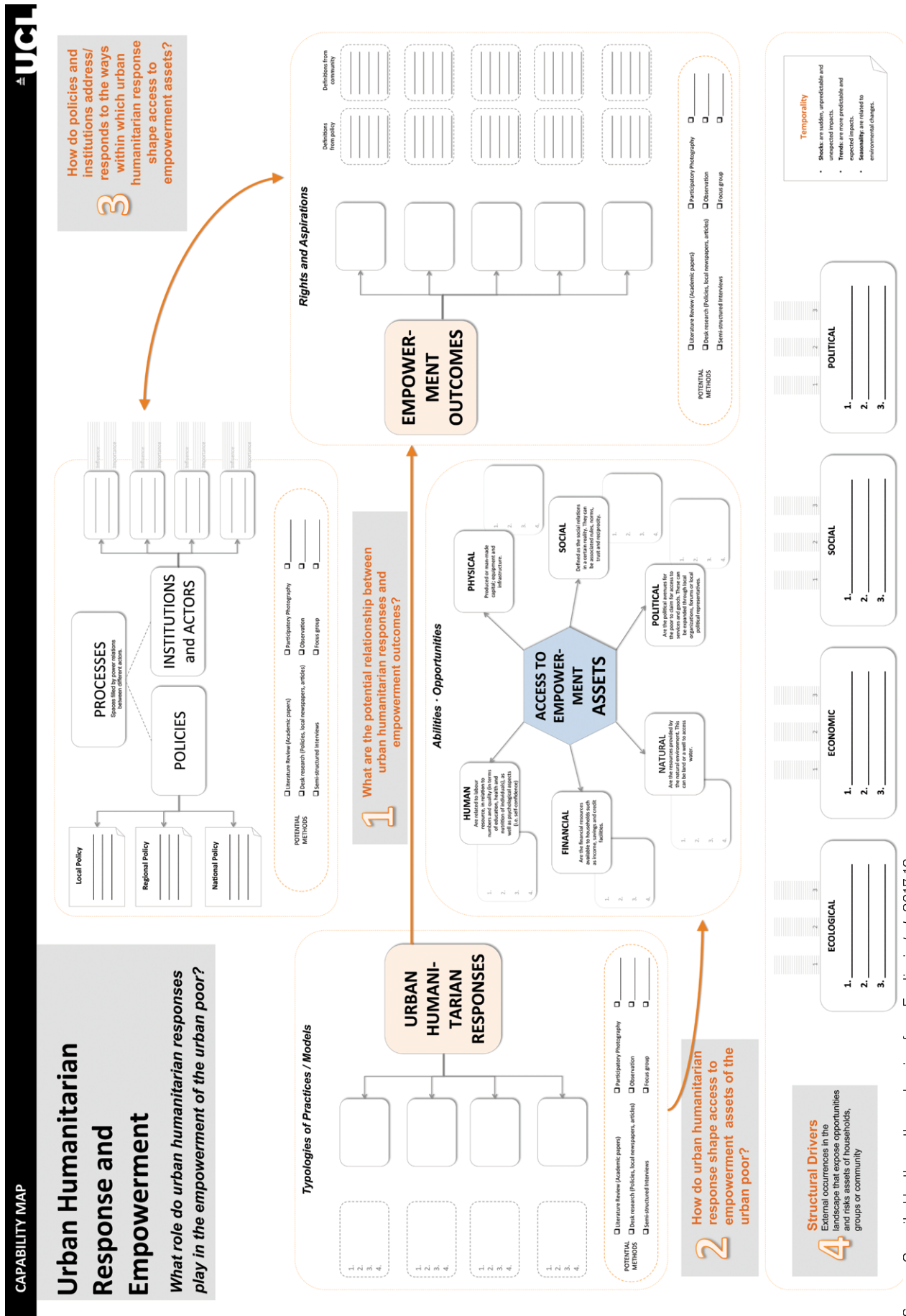
The empowerment capability framework starts by identifying the concrete **practices and approaches** that need to be analysed. In this research, the focus is on practices from humanitarian responses. The framework calls for the analysis and recognition of a diverse set of practices and approaches, such as individual and collective responses, as well as government and NGO-led responses.

**Empowerment outcomes** are associated with the dimensions of empowerment, ie the different aspects and notions that are associated with achieving empowerment. In this research, we have focused on empowerment outcomes associated with humanitarian responses. We did that by revealing outcomes defined by community groups themselves, based on their perception and aspirations of empowerment. We also identified dimensions of empowerment present in the discourse of policymakers and present in relevant humanitarian response policy documents. We then developed a list of empowerment outcomes that identified common concepts, while also articulating the particular definitions from these three different sources (representatives from community groups, policy makers, and policy documents).

The **empowerment assets** are the resources and relationships that marginalised groups have access to in order to pursue empowerment outcomes. In some cases, humanitarian responses might draw on such assets, and in others humanitarian responses might expand or hinder access to them. In Table 1, we draw from other asset-based frameworks (ie Moser, 1998; Carney, 1998) to outline the different types of assets that can have an implication for empowerment.

Assets can be described as the means of resistance against hardship. The way groups, households and individuals respond to crises is associated with their capacity to mobilise assets during shocks and stresses. Thus, vulnerability is linked to asset ownership; the more assets available to the urban poor the less vulnerable they are, and the more these are eroded, the less communities will be empowered to respond to crises (Moser, 1996).

Figure 1. Empowerment capability framework



Source: Compiled by the authors, drawing from Frediani et al., 2017:12.



Table 1. Descriptions of assets

ASSETS	DESCRIPTIONS
Human	Labour resource, in relation to numbers and quality (in terms of education, health and nutrition of individuals), as well as psychological aspects (such as self-confidence); knowledge and skills (ie training in disaster risk management).
Financial	Financial resources available to groups and households such as income, savings and credit from internal sources (ie saving groups) or external from state institutions or organisations (ie funds for advocacy campaigning).
Natural	Resources provided by the natural environment. This can be land or access to water bodies (ie rivers and the sea).
Political	Political avenues for marginalised groups to claim access to services and goods. These can be expanded through local organisations, forums or local political representatives; it also involves recognition from the state and other key stakeholders, as well as mechanisms and spaces for participation.
Physical	Produced or man-made capital including tools and equipment (ie for cleaning activities) and infrastructure (ie for flood mitigation), and services such as access to improved drinking water sources.
Social	Social relations in a certain reality. These can be associated rules, norms, trust and reciprocity. They also include relations of trust and mutual support, community networks, mechanisms for communication between stakeholders and collective representation.

The **policy and institutional environment** relates to the norms, regulations and relationships among institutions that affect empowerment opportunities. Humanitarian responses are shaped and conditioned by a series of formal rules, regulations and practices associated with the humanitarian sector, as well as wider development initiatives. In the urban sector, a series of urban planning and governance frameworks plays a significant role in affecting the possibility of responses that lead to the empowerment opportunities of marginalised groups. Furthermore, there is also a series of informal norms, relationships and practices that can support as well as constrain the possibility of humanitarian responses to empower particular marginalised groups. Therefore, policies, processes and institutions need to be analysed so as to assess how governance arrangements shape power relations and the recognition and distribution of resources among different groups.

Empowerment capabilities are also shaped by the **structural drivers**, composed of wider societal and environmental processes. These are external occurrences in the landscape that expose risks and opportunities, obstacles and leverages for change. These occurrences have different temporalities, some are short-term, sudden and unpredictable shocks while others are predictable and expected trends. In the context of the relationship between humanitarian responses and empowerment, there are relevant

ecological drivers (related to, for example, environmental risks, threats, and trends); economic drivers (related to, for example, the urban and national economy); social drivers (related to, for example, issues of migration as well as gender norms, culture and ideology); spatial drivers (related to, for example, urban growth and property values); and political drivers (related to, for example, party politics and governance trends). These structural drivers relate to empowerment capabilities in a variety of ways, shaping empowerment aspirations, conditioning access to assets and to the policy and institutional environment, and affecting the practice of humanitarian responses.

## 1.5 Research methods

The first step in this research was to define the **practices and approaches** to humanitarian responses on which we will be focusing. This research draws on the experience of humanitarian responses to four different crises in Sierra Leone: the civil war (1991-2002), the cholera outbreak (2012), the Ebola viral disease (2014-2015), and flooding (2015). These crises are explained in more detail in the paper, and the research explores the implication of humanitarian responses to the empowerment of community groups involved in them, looking at the Portee-Rokupa area in particular. The information on the characteristics of humanitarian responses was gathered through

the analysis of grey literature and interviews with key informants from government, NGOs, and community groups.

Community groups' perceptions in relation to **empowerment outcomes** were explored through eight semi-structured interviews (group interviews), with three representatives each from eight local groups that were involved in humanitarian responses in Portee-Rokupa. Our survey asked questions such as: What are your organisational aims? What is your group aiming to achieve? (see Annex 1 for further details of the focus group discussion (FGD) guide). Eight semi-structured interviews were also carried out with relevant policy makers and key stakeholders in the field of humanitarian responses (see Annex 2 for further details of those interviewed). Similar questions were posed in relation to humanitarian responses: What were humanitarian responses aiming to achieve? What were the goals and objectives of the humanitarian responses? In interviews with community representatives and policy makers, interviewees prompted reflections on the role of communities, as respondents were asked what they thought should be the role of communities in humanitarian responses. These were complemented with policy analysis, identifying how current policies related to the role of communities in humanitarian responses.

The eight semi-structured interviews with community group representatives also explored the relationship between humanitarian responses and **empowerment assets**. These were complemented by two FGDs, each involving two key representatives from ten local community groups in Portee-Rokupa, one community activist, and the resident local councillor. Groups were identified based on their role in humanitarian response, together with local councillor, Ausine Conrad Conteh. The selection also aimed to involve people of different ages, as well as gender. Overall, between eight and ten community groups are represented in this research, some more formally recognised and registered with the relevant governmental department, others informally established. The following is a list of the groups involved in this research:

1. Portee Millennium Youth Development Organisation
2. Portee Development Organisation
3. Project Tumara
4. United Sisters
5. Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association
6. Conscious Youth Development Association
7. Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation
8. Portee Environmental Youth Association

The semi-structured interviews and FGDs with community groups had the following objectives: i) to document the nature, size and key activities of the community groups; ii) to understand how the community groups have been involved in humanitarian responses; and iii) to reveal how group members perceive the benefits of humanitarian response to achieve their groups' aims and objectives. The responses from the interviews and focus groups were analysed to: i) reveal the potential and actual empowerment outcomes associated with humanitarian responses from the perspectives of the community groups; and ii) to assess how the groups' empowerment assets were affected by the humanitarian responses.

Furthermore, these activities also aimed to reveal the diverse set of experiences within, as well as among, the groups. Particular attention was given to understanding how spatial inequalities within Portee-Rokupa affected the existence and practices of groups. Interviews were complemented with a transect walk within the neighbourhood. Groups' activities were georeferenced so that we could explore the areas within the neighbourhood where groups circulated and acted. Also, inequalities associated with gender and age were relevant themes during interviews and focus group activities; the interviewee and facilitator asked explicit questions on the role of young people and women in humanitarian responses.

This research aimed to analyse the **policy and institutional environment** related to groups directly involved in humanitarian responses in Portee-Rokupa, and explore power relations affecting a wider urban context in term of distribution, recognition, and representation in Freetown. To do this, we analysed policies associated to humanitarian as well as urban governance frameworks for Freetown. We also conducted ten semi-structured interviews with key informants from government agencies, NGOs, FAO, and local representatives. Through these activities, the research identified the key stakeholders in these sectors, revealed their perceptions on the role of community groups in humanitarian response, and assessed the extent to which humanitarian response might have or could open up opportunities for empowerment of groups from informal settlements.

The **structural drivers** were analysed through the review of relevant literature in this field. After identifying some key relevant issues (such as migration, the stigmatisation of the urban poor, the criminalisation of informal settlements, among others), we analysed the semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions so as to explore the extent to which these issues were mentioned or addressed as relevant processes in this context.

Finally, the **ethics** of our research was informed by the principles of a collaborative community-university partnership. Our research is **embedded** in a wider partnership established between community groups and the SLURC. In this sense, it feeds into other research activities, and aims to contribute to wider goals associated with the recognition of the rights of people living in informal settlements in Freetown. Our research triggers **collaborative forms of learning**, as the research process opened up spaces to facilitate conversations and the exchange of experiences of people from different backgrounds and sectors through workshops at the SLURC office. Our research design was informed by principles of equality and inclusion, as methods and activities have been particularly attentive to create spaces for the representation of diverse needs and experiences; Our research is **impact oriented**, aimed at generating evidence that can strengthen the activities of civil society and inform the development of more inclusive and empowering policies.

## 1.6 Case study

The study area is Portee-Rokupa (see Figure 2), a community located in the eastern part of Freetown. Portee-Rokupa shares boundaries with Kuntolor to the south, Congo water to the east and Grassfield to the west. To the north is the mouth of the Rokel river where it empties into the Atlantic Ocean. Situated politically within two separate wards (Portee in Ward 355 and

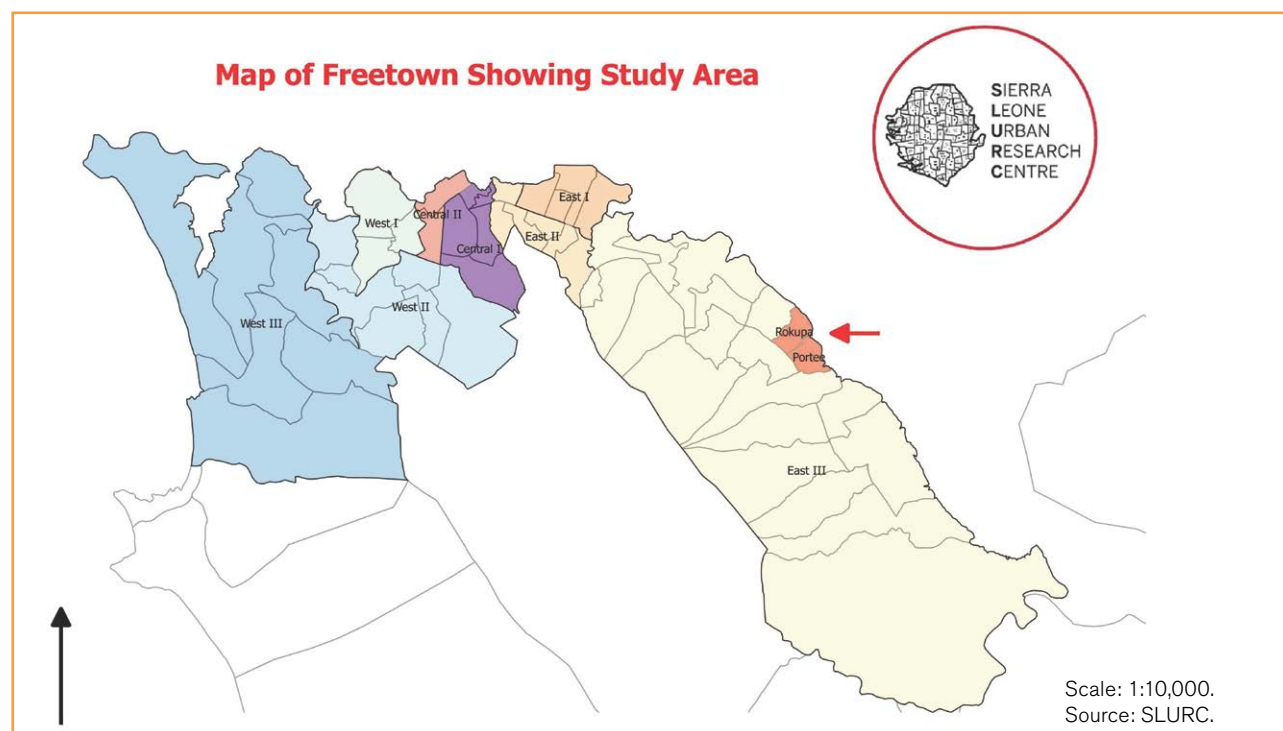
Rokupa in Ward 354) in Constituency 99, Portee-Rokupa has been affected by all the major humanitarian crises Freetown has experienced in recent times. These include the flooding in 2015, cholera in 2012, and the Ebola viral disease (EVD) in 2014-2015. Politically, the community is run by a parliamentarian, a councillor, and various tribal chiefs. There is also the ward development committee set up by the FCC.

### 1.6.1 History of the settlement

According to the local tribal chiefs that participated in the FGDs, Portee-Rokupa was first settled in the early 1940s. The first known settlers were *Pa Rokupa* and *Pa Kapr*.<sup>2</sup> They named the community '*Ro-Poti*' – same as the name of the village they came from in Port Loko district in northern Sierra Leone. Owing largely to the growth and boom in the economy of Freetown in the 1950s, many residents from Port Loko district came by sea to trade in *Ro-Poti*. Since then, the settlement has grown into a vibrant fishing community.

After Sierra Leone gained independence in 1961, the inhabitants of Portee-Rokupa increased significantly, but people initially resided only in the area known today as Portee. At the time, the area known as Rokupa was merely a forest which was later acquired by the Sierra Leone Prisons Department for use as a cemetery to bury condemned prisoners. The relocation of the cemetery in the mid-1970s witnessed the overall transformation of Rokupa, as private individuals started invading and converting the land into a human settlement.

Figure 2. Location of Portee-Rokupa in Freetown



<sup>2</sup> *Pa Kapr* means a chief in the Temne language, which is one of the most widely spoken languages in Sierra Leone.



Up until 2004, when decentralisation and local governance were reintroduced into Sierra Leone, Portee-Rokupa existed as a single settlement. However, the boundary delimitation for the first local elections in 2004 caused the settlement to be officially divided into two. Thus, whereas the entire area known today as the wharf was previously part of Portee, the new boundary created (the drainage running through to the wharf) divided the wharf into two halves, with one half situated in Portee and the other in Rokupa (Kargbo, 2014). For that reason, the wharf settlement is now commonly referred to as Portee-Rokupa. Over the years, this wharf has developed to become one of the largest fishing communities in the east of Freetown with the two settlements (Portee and Rokupa) currently named after it.

A key feature of Portee-Rokupa is its high population density. While the community previously drew much of its population from Port Loko district, a major turning point was during the civil war when a significant proportion of displaced persons from conflict-ridden areas in the provinces were forced to move into Freetown. With nowhere else to go, Portee-Rokupa became one of the main areas where people chose to settle, mainly because of its relatively cheap housing rents. The projected populations for 2012 by Statistics Sierra Leone showed that Rokupa (Ward 354) and Portee (Ward 355) had populations of 18,763 and 24,855 respectively (Statistic Sierra Leone, 2012). Among these, a recent study by the YMCA and CODOHSAPA (2015) found that in 2015, 6,059

people lived in the poorest part of the area, in a locality frequently described as 'informal'. Figure 3 shows a current satellite picture of Portee-Rokupa outlining the overall physical density of the area.

### 1.6.2 Inequality in Portee-Rokupa

Two distinct settlements can be identified in Portee-Rokupa: the formal and the informal. The informal settlement, which comprises much of the lower area by the seafront, is characterised by poverty, with unemployment, illiteracy, poor hygiene, inadequate skills, and low political participation being major challenges. From our observations, inequality can be shown in the differences in the standard of living for different places or categories of people. This can also be seen in the varying levels of access to certain essential services for the residents in various parts of the community. Whereas essential services like electricity and water are easily accessible to residents of places widely described as 'formal settlements', there is limited or rarely any access to those same services for residents in the 'informal settlement'. Service provision is limited because residents generally lack formal land titles to allow for formal provision. This unequal access to services suggests the degree of spatial inequality to which residents in the informal settlement are often subjected. Coupled with the acute lack of infrastructural protection, residents here are disproportionately affected whenever there is disaster, with many either sustaining injuries or losing relatives, their dwellings, and other possessions to flooding.

Figure 3. Satellite picture of Portee-Rokupa area



Source: Google maps 2016, modified by the authors.

Figure 4. Photo from the higher area of Portee-Rokupa (which has better infrastructural conditions) towards the lower, seafront area, where the most vulnerable families live



Source: Alexandre Apsan Frediani.

Kilroy (2007) defines spatial inequality as a geographical or physical manifestation of social differences and disparities in the provision of opportunities for achieving welfare. It is related to the different distribution of income and other factors of welfare in different places. Spatial inequality in Freetown reduces social and economic interactions between various income groups of the city, restricting economic mobility and the creation of social networks in many places. In Portee-Rokupa, its high density and lack of space create substantial challenges for local residents to pursue their livelihood strategies. They have little or no space for social infrastructure facilities like schools, health centres, and markets. However, even within the formal and informal settlements, our observations and interviews with local residents show that social inequalities among households and people from different social categories (sex, age, and ethnic groups) mean unequal access to available social goods such as education, health care, electricity and water standpoints. Nonetheless, local residents argued that social and spatial inequality are more prominent in the informal settlement part of the neighbourhood, where most residents do not have easy access to essential services, and they often have to walk long distances or climb steep slopes in order to access them (see Figure 4).

### 1.6.3 Socioeconomic conditions in Portee-Rokupa

Apart from the areas referred to as informal settlement by the seafront, the general living conditions in Portee-Rokupa are not entirely appalling, owing to the growing informal economy activities in the community, due partly to its strategic location along the main transport route linking the east end of Freetown to the central business district and in part, to its proximity to the sea where different kinds of trade (eg fishing and fuelwood), and activities (eg transport and boat making) are carried

out. These different trades and activities have allowed residents in informal areas, particularly those living along the shoreline, to benefit from the fishing trade and the growing boat transport trade, while those along the main transport route (formal areas) benefit from the thriving petty trade and the associated support services. Over the years, these advantages have not only improved the wellbeing of residents, but have also attracted rural-urban migration into the community (Government of Sierra Leone, 1996). However, when the new residents arrive, they usually have nowhere to reside in the already overpopulated formal settlement. Coupled with the marked poverty and the shortage of land for settlement expansion, most new arrivals are forced to live in the depressed and overcrowded informal settlement area by the seafront, where they reclaim land by making sea defences to put up their dwelling shacks. The poor living conditions, the high population density, and the lack of improvement in services and infrastructure, have coalesced into a worsening socioeconomic condition in the community.

As Portee-Rokupa is primarily a fishing community, the various informal economy activities carried out (especially petty trading) support and sustain the fishing industry. This is necessary since the fishing trade does not only ensure the constant supply of fresh fish to nearby markets, but it also serves as a vital source of income for a number of households in the community. Portee-Rokupa has excellent business relations with Port Loko district, including the riverine communities situated along the Rokel river. The community serves as the first port of entry for fresh vegetables, fruits, and woodfuel from the nearby villages in Port Loko district to Freetown. However, the importance of the wharf is slowly declining because there is no access road from the main highway leading to the wharf, and this makes it difficult to transport goods elsewhere. In addition, there are no cold storage facilities to preserve the daily catch of fish by the residents. The economic conditions



of those engaged in the fishing industry are further challenged with competition from a few Chinese fishing companies in Freetown, and this has often resulted in declining fish prices.

### 1.6.4 Humanitarian crises in Sierra Leone and Portee-Rokupa

Portee-Rokupa has been affected by most of the humanitarian crises that have affected Freetown since independence. The most common of these crises in the recent past are the civil war (1991-2002), cholera (2012), Ebola (2014-2016) and the flooding that occurs annually.

#### i. The civil war (1991-2002)

The civil war which lasted for nearly 11 years and ravaged much of Sierra Leone triggered the most severe humanitarian crisis ever in the country. Reports show that by January 2002 when the war ended, nearly two-thirds (2.6 million) of the country's population was displaced, with almost 70,000 fatalities. Portee-Rokupa was among the areas that a significant proportion of the displaced population from the rural areas moved to. Even though relatively safe, these areas were already heavily congested, causing the concentration of more underprivileged people in depressed and unstable locations which are increasing.

#### ii. Cholera outbreak (2012)

The 2012 Cholera outbreak was perhaps the ugliest cholera epidemic in Sierra Leone that caused extensive death to many of the people living in informal settlements. By December 2012, when the outbreak was nearly over, the total reported cases were 22,973 with 299 deaths countrywide (Oxfam, 2013). Urban poor areas have always suffered disproportionately whenever there is a cholera crisis in the country. Portee-Rokupa is no exception and is exposed to cholera due to poor sanitation, contaminated water sources, limited access to clean and safe drinking water, and high population density. Added to that, the difficult economic situation residents are faced with also creates a situation wherein the activities they are engaged in makes them prone to a more unhygienic situation, which increases the likelihood of cholera. There is no sewage system in Portee-Rokupa, and all sewage from the upper and better planned areas in the east end of Freetown empties nearby the cliff situated in the informal settlement. Figure 5 shows some of the water and sanitation facilities located at the bottom part of the neighbourhood. There is also a high rate of coastal pollution due to solid waste. The residents interact with this in their daily activities when fishing, with children swimming, or when carrying out domestic and economic activities along the coast.

Figure 5. Water and sanitation facilities in the informal areas of Portee-Rokupa



Source: Alexandre Apsan Frediani.

Flooding has now become a regular feature in Portee-Rokupa during the rainy season. Torrential rains, poor drainage, indiscriminate dumping of waste in drains which reduces the surface flow of water, stone mining, deforestation of the peninsular forest, clearing of the mangroves and poor planning are largely responsible for flooding in Freetown. According to ReliefWeb (2015), the September 2015 flooding, for instance, was one of the worst flooding crisis Freetown had seen with over 3,000 people displaced. According to the councillor of Ward 355, the community is affected every rainy season when there is a heavy downpour. In the September 2015 flooding, Portee-Rokupa's unpaved roads turned into streams of fast flowing water. The houses along the roads and drainage could not withstand the pressure of the water, and it flowed into many houses. About 27 houses were affected, including nine that were extensively damaged and three that were completely demolished. There were two recorded deaths and some minor injuries and fractures. One notable fatality was a child who was swept away and drowned. Affected households had major economic setbacks, and it impacted on the timely return of their children back to school after the summer holidays. Community groups, volunteers, and relatives were the first respondents, and they provided shelter and warm clothing, while others sought refuge in the mosque. The councillor and various community groups helped in the search and rescue, diversion of the waterways, and protection of residents' properties from looters.

### iii. Ebola viral disease (2014-2016)

The first cases of Ebola were detected in Sierra Leone on 28 March 2014 and remained until 17 March 2016, before the country was declared Ebola-free. This Ebola outbreak, which reached a few countries in West Africa, was the largest outbreak in the world and was the first Sierra Leone had experienced. The country registered 14,122 confirmed cases (World Health Organisation, 2016). The first confirmed case of Ebola in Freetown was reported on 23 June 2014; the victim came from Port Loko district and the virus entered through the wharfs of one of the informal settlements in Freetown. The Ebola virus thrived mainly in the informal settlements, partly because of overcrowding, poor hygiene, and no access to essential services. Portee-Rokupa is one of the most densely populated communities in the east of Freetown and was also amongst the worst hit by Ebola. The squalor, mainly in the informal side of the settlement, outstripped sanitation, and that created the unfortunate situation for the easy spread of the virus. According to a tribal chief, many residents of the informal settlement were propagating the rumour that the spread of the virus was a ploy by the government to solicit foreign donor money and to regulate birth control. The consensus from some of the community-based organisations interviewed was that Portee-Rokupa recorded more Ebola confirmed cases than neighbouring communities. According to the community records available with the councillor there were 23 deaths: 18 from the informal settlement, and five from the formal side of the settlement. The informal side of the settlement had 25 quarantined houses, and the formal side had nine quarantined houses.

## 2

# Context and policy analysis

## 2.1 Background on key urban humanitarian crises and responses in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone is still recovering from various disaster events that have occurred in the last three decades, with each having implications for humanitarian response. Whenever they occurred, the disasters, whether man-made or natural, tended to be very intense. These crises affect marginalised people the most, especially those who are already experiencing hardship and deprivation. Disasters tend to plunge this category of people into further levels of vulnerability. During the disasters which struck Sierra Leone, the government had to seek international and/or regional assistance to address both the disaster and the humanitarian challenge, since the scale of the event far exceeded national coping capacities. Given the frequency and scale of the humanitarian challenge, especially in urban settlements, there is a need for the range of actors at different levels to be prepared to respond by putting in place the needed mechanisms (legal, policy and institutional structures).

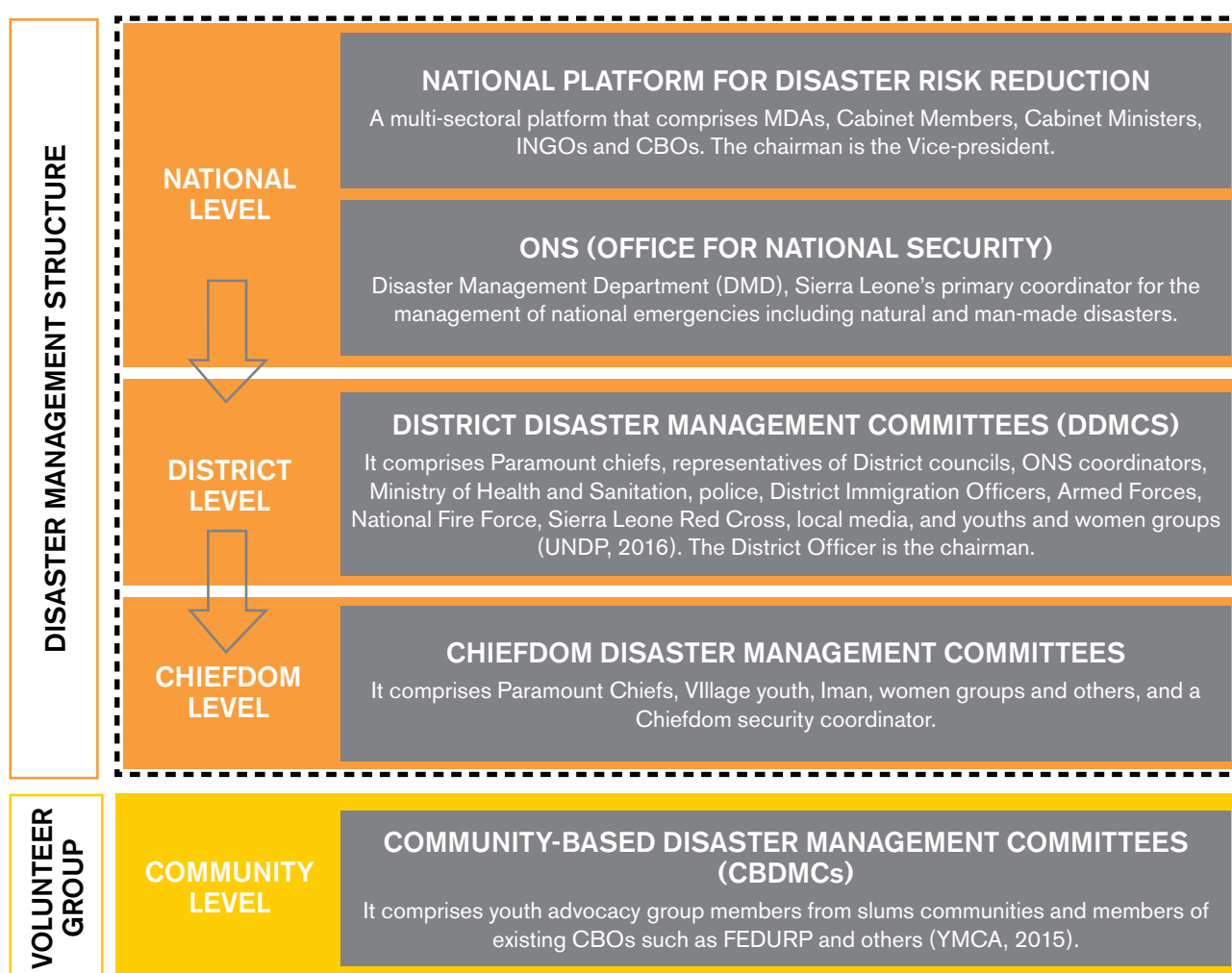
Sierra Leone still does not have a comprehensive disaster response law to facilitate and guide international humanitarian response operations in the country. The main legal instrument dealing with disaster management is the National Security and Central Intelligence Act No. 10 (2002) (Government of Sierra Leone, 2002), which has established the Office of National Security (ONS) as the central body for the coordination of all security and intelligence issues of the state at policy level. The Act has also declared the Disaster Management Department (DMD) as one of the eleven departments within the ONS (Morgado, 2016). This department has responsibility for the coordination of all issues relating to disaster by bringing together all stakeholders (public, private, civil society, etc.) which have disaster risk reduction (DRR) as their mandate or as part of their mandate. The department also has responsibility for monitoring all the different actors involved in humanitarian response to ensure that they comply with the existing rules and policies and reduce fraud and the misappropriation of relief supplies.

The DMD's response to disaster and the kinds of stakeholders it involves is usually determined by the type of disaster event, with the relevant sectoral ministry taking lead in the response. To ensure its nationwide representation, the ONS has offices in all

of the 14 administrative districts in Sierra Leone. The Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) in all these districts constitute the national platform for DRR which is led by the office of the vice president. The platform brings together stakeholders, not only from the central and local government but also from civil society and the private sector, to work collectively on humanitarian crises. In addition, Sierra Leone has several other legal provisions on humanitarian crises which are scattered among a variety of general laws in the country. Some of these isolated legal instruments, while not dealing directly with disaster, have clauses that influence the role and activities of international humanitarian actors (relating specifically to customs clearance and taxation procedures).

Whereas the DMD has Chiefdom Disaster Management Communities (CDMCs) as the lowest tier of its management structure in the districts, in Freetown, the lowest level of the DMD are the Community Based Disaster Management Committees (CBDMCs). Apart from being the first responders of response since they are already resident in the community, CBDMCs serve as the main points of contact for the DMD in the respective communities. However, since the CBDMC is comprised mostly of volunteer groups drawn mainly from the communities, it is usually not recognised in national decisions on DRR. Therefore, only Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) in all the 14 districts constitute the national platform for DRR which is led by the office of the vice president. Figure 6 outlines the key levels of the disaster risk management structure.

Figure 6. Disaster risk management structure of Sierra Leone



Source: Morgado, 2016.



Moreover, Sierra Leone is signatory to several international agreements bearing relevance to DRR upon which the DMD is required to deliver. These include the Hyogo Framework of Action (HFA), the African Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Sendai Framework and the Cameroon Agreement. Other major regional instruments include the ECOWAS Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution Peace-Keeping and Security (1999) and, the ECOWAS Disaster Risk Reduction Policy (2006). However, several of these legal instruments do not deal directly with humanitarian crisis issues, and many seem to be very scattered across the sub-region.

While humanitarian crisis in Sierra Leone is guided by various documents, the central policy document used by the DMD to address all DRR and humanitarian response issues is the Sierra Leone Disaster Management Policy (ONS, 2006), developed in 2006. The policy addresses itself to three main phases of disaster; ie the pre-disaster, the disaster, and the post-disaster phases. It also defines what is expected from the different stakeholders operating during each of these phases. However, although the DRR policy recognises community participation as a good practice, the research interviews suggest that it is not clearly seen as a core requirement for international humanitarian actors who frequently choose to disregard them.

The DRR policy is supported by a number of standard operating procedures (SOPs), contingency plans and a resettlement manual. Notable among these are the SOPs for the safe disposal of outdated food items (this explains how to do away with such food items), and for population movement during disaster events (how to manage populations during disaster and move them to safer grounds), as well as the contingency plans on flooding and on the Ebola virus disease. This is in addition to the National Disaster Preparedness and Response Plan (DMD and ONS, n.d.), which not only identifies the roles and responsibilities of the different stakeholders, but also gives directions on how they should take on the roles. Because the DRR policy was not authorised by parliament, many international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) supplement it with their own guidelines. Nevertheless, because of the recurrent humanitarian crises experienced in Sierra Leone, the applicable disaster management laws and the DRR policy are currently being reviewed to bring them up to scale and up to date.

In spite of the varied instruments on DRR, international response to nearly all the major disasters in Sierra Leone has often been delayed until the crisis reaches breaking point. This is usually the time when the capacity of government has been exceeded, with international response coming several months later, since it takes time for many donor agencies and INGOs to draw down funds. Thus, while the policy requires NGOs to provide humanitarian assistance during emergencies, only a few have stand-by emergency funds to do so. Moreover, because the UN agencies only have the mandate to provide support through relevant central government ministries and agencies rather than deliver directly through NGOs or local community groups, quite a few local NGOs and CBOs take part in humanitarian emergencies long after the response has begun.

Although the Local Government Act (2004) requires all organisations (including humanitarian NGOs) to register with local councils and to inform them before intervening in their communities or wards, the power of the Freetown City Council (FCC) in enforcing this role seems to be broadly undermined by a few government ministries who sometimes outwit them by giving some NGOs authorisation letters that restrain the FCC from preventing their intervention. For that reason, a few NGOs do not recognise or work with some of the local community structures (eg the FCC's Ward Development Committees and the ONS' CBDMCs) set up separately by the FCC and ONS. Besides, while the FCC most times feels it has a major role to play in disaster preparedness and response, the extent to which it is given a role is usually dependent on the sectoral ministry or agency that is leading the response at that time.

While the costs of response to emergencies are usually high, international funding has remained modest, and often delayed. As in the case of the civil war and the Ebola outbreak, funding only increased when there was a strong commitment from the international community to fight the crisis. In nearly all cases, shortage of funding usually contributed to the generally low level of humanitarian support to the people.

## 2.2 Effects of key humanitarian crises on informal settlements in Sierra Leone

In the last three decades, informal settlements in Sierra Leone's capital, Freetown have been negatively impacted by nearly all the humanitarian crises faced in Sierra Leone, from the civil conflict to health emergencies (Ebola, cholera, etc.) and natural disasters (flooding, landslides, rockfalls, etc.). The scale and severity of the humanitarian crises have often overwhelmed the capacity of the central government to deal with it. As some of the latter events (especially natural disasters) are happening at unprecedented rates in the past few years with major consequences on some of the informal settlements in urban areas, there is the danger that most slum residents living in at risk locations will be displaced if more suitable actions are not taken (Macarthy, 2012). This is particularly in view of the fact that there is a widening gap between resources provided when crisis occurs and the actual resources needed to prevent and respond to crisis (Darcy and Hofmann, 2003:10). While Sierra Leone has experienced humanitarian crises since the 1970s, the four main crises outlined earlier have had more negative effects on informal settlements.

A major characteristic of all the four humanitarian crises is that they were each only declared as a 'public emergency' when the initial actions by government to constrain the disaster had been overwhelmed. This is usually due to the limited funding and the low technical capacity of the government to respond. Therefore, the government has always had to rely on international assistance during many of the humanitarian crises in the country.

## 2.3 Some key responses to urban humanitarian crisis in Sierra Leone

Our analysis of the **practices and approaches of humanitarian responses** as well as the **policy and institutional environment** shows that the humanitarian response in Sierra Leone has come in many forms involving the active role of national, regional, international and multinational actors. Even though the response is mostly coordinated by the DMD of the ONS, the actual activities are usually led by the appropriate central government ministry or agency. In urban areas, this takes place at different levels (national, community, etc.) involving a variety of actors

(usually organisations). Moreover, the participation of the different actors may differ based on whether the mandate allows the organisation to take part in the type of disaster. The involvement of a variety of actors is required because the ONS does not have a specific budget allocated for humanitarian response. However, while they have generally tended to act in harmony, there have been occurrences of tensions and dispute in their relationships. A predominant focus of urban humanitarian response in Sierra Leone is on meeting the immediate needs of crisis-affected populations.

Whenever there is a crisis, it is the ONS that activates the response. This usually involves a formal request for humanitarian supplies by the ONS to the UN country team in Sierra Leone. This is however preceded by an assessment to determine the area coverage of the disaster, the population affected, and the level of needs of the victims. Often, assessments are carried out by a range of actors involving the ONS, UN agencies, government ministries, and NGOs. While it was difficult to establish the exact sets of principles and standards used by organisations to gauge the severity of the crisis, it was found that assessments are often carried out based on the needs of the implementing organisation – usually to justify funding requests. For that reason, it was difficult to determine whether humanitarian responses were designed by organisations to clearly reflect the key priorities, needs and concerns of the affected persons and communities.

Each time a formal request is made, UN agencies give out humanitarian supplies in accordance with their specific mandate (eg WHO for health supplies), with the relevant government ministry specified for the response being the main target for the supply. However, it was not clear exactly what existing national or international standards the UN agencies require the ministries they are supporting to apply.

Our semi-structured interviews with key humanitarian actors in Freetown and Morgado's research (2016) reveal that in nearly all the humanitarian crisis situations in Sierra Leone, the greater majority of response at the community level was provided by international NGOs, with some working with a few local NGOs. What seemed missing in much of the response, however, was the failure to actively and sustainably involve the affected communities and their local leaders in the response. During the cholera crisis and the Ebola outbreak, NGOs carried out a range of responses involving training, awareness raising, psychosocial counselling, microcredit, and advocacy. However, the most common response is the provision of immediate food supplies and sometimes, clothing to ensure that the victims are kept alive. More generally, NGOs that are more directly engaged in development work were observed to be more involved with interventions beyond the mere provision of relief supplies.



In Freetown, a major challenge to NGO response during emergencies (as well as more generally) is the restraint by the FCC which forbids them to put up physical structures (eg community halls, toilets, water wells, markets, etc.) in the informal settlements. This is largely in view of the government's desire to prevent the extension of slums and also to force residents to move out of the locations. This view was highlighted in an interview by the coordinator of disaster management at YMCA:

*"When it comes to the slums, we are not allowed to give people zinc or rebuild their damaged buildings anymore. The FCC always clamps down on any NGO that engages in that. We are strictly warned against doing any hardware intervention. We only do software interventions (eg sensitisation, etc.) since the government perceives these people to be living in disaster prone zones and hence, would need to be either relocated or evicted" (YMCA interviewee, 2016).*

On the one hand, DMD policy recognises the role of community residents as the first responders to humanitarian crisis since they live closest to the disaster incident and are also more familiar with the situation on the ground. On the other hand, community actors and their work seem to be ignored by NGOs, which feel they have to prioritise to meet tight funding deadlines, as well as adhere to rigorous sets of organisational principles and standards. This is in spite of the large presence of CBOs and the valued works they are doing in the community. By ignoring community residents and their groups, NGOs tended to miss out getting a better understanding of the local context within which they intervene. Moreover, according to the representatives of CBOs interviewed in our research, several CBOs did not feel that NGO interventions were in the best interests of the affected communities, since their views were rarely sought in the design of the response. Even with this, not much pressure seemed to be exerted on NGOs by the ONS in ensuring that they actively engage community structures when they respond to humanitarian crisis. It seems that the only community structures that NGOs frequently recognise are the CBDMCs which were set up by the ONS.

While the FCC is a central participant to the ONS coordination meetings, owing to its role as the main local authority responsible for dealing with problems in the municipality, it does not play an active role during humanitarian crises. This is partly because of its limited resources, and in part, because several of its staff lack the desired skills. Even when the FCC sometimes intervenes, it is merely reactive to the challenge, rather than taking initiatives in advance. According to the FCC, its main activities during both the cholera and

Ebola crisis involved working within communities to deliver training, DRR sensitisation, support youth groups to clean their communities, and deal with the socioeconomic livelihood needs of the residents. One important observation was the unwillingness of the FCC to involve the CBDMCs in their work, since the ONS did not involve them at the time of their formation. For the most part, the FCC only works through its own local structures – the local councillor and the WDCs in the community. This has often tended to put them in sharp conflict with the CBDMCs which were set up by the ONS as the focal point for all DRR activities at the community level.

On the whole, partly because of the many humanitarian actors involved in the response at any given time, and in part because of the lack of active community involvement, it was observed that several of the responses were diluted with very little impact on the residents.

## 2.4 The main stakeholders involved in humanitarian response in Sierra Leone

Several stakeholders are involved in humanitarian response in Sierra Leone. These stakeholders exist at different levels (international, national, subnational, local, etc.), involving a variety of organisations drawn usually from government ministries, the local government, NGOs, UN agencies and CBOs, with international humanitarian agencies (usually INGOs) often playing a dominant role. Stakeholder involvement is, however, mostly issue based. For example, during both the cholera and Ebola crisis, most stakeholders were drawn from the health sector, even though a few were also involved from other sectors to address the non-health related needs (eg psychosocial support) of the affected population. Moreover, because these two emergencies were mainly public health concerns, the Ministry of Health and Sanitation was the selected lead agency for the response, with the ONS playing a coordinating role by bringing together all the relevant stakeholder institutions (local, national and international) to bear upon the disasters. Stakeholder coordination is usually promoted by the ONS through quarterly meetings of the 'national platform for DRR', where ideas are shared, resources pulled, and joint decisions made regarding current or pending humanitarian crises.

While at the national level, humanitarian relief is usually provided by UN agencies through the appropriate sectoral ministry, the delivery is often based on a partnership involving a variety of other government

ministries, agencies and NGOs. Partnership is required because no individual organisation has the resources to deal with all the challenges caused by a crisis.

However, while different spaces/structures exist at the community level, only a few local actors (in particular CBOs) are recognised in the response. For the most part, humanitarian agencies prefer to work separately, because to them, the CBOs do not seem to be properly registered with the government, and hence with no clear 'legal entity' and capacity. Therefore, the efforts of many CBOs which had hitherto intervened in the community are easily overwhelmed by the emergent international humanitarian agencies, especially when they do not have a reliable source of funding. Only the CBDMCs and a few parallel community structures set up by some INGOs are actively involved. Nevertheless, CBOs were observed to be very active in humanitarian response in the community. To a large extent, the active role of CBOs at this level is suggestive of the fact that only a few crisis-affected people benefit from international

humanitarian interventions, with the vast majority of people left to either cope with or recover from the crisis all by themselves.

Although the resident councillor is the political head of the ward, he is often not recognised in humanitarian response. During the Ebola crisis, in particular, the lack of an active and sustained involvement of communities and their structures did not only lead to the feeling of rejection in the work of NGOs but often led to fear and distrust in their interventions by the communities (Marais *et al.*, 2015). A similar case was pointed out by the FCC, which even though broadly recognised as a major stakeholder in humanitarian crises, was only involved in the Ebola response mid-way into the implementation process, thereby missing out on the design and planning phases. Therefore, from the perspective of the councillor and FCC representative, communities, as well as municipal authorities, are undermined by NGO responses.

## 3

# Empowerment outcomes

## 3.1 Empowerment claims associated with urban humanitarian response

This chapter explores the variety of empowerment claims that were made by the different stakeholders involved in urban humanitarian response in Freetown. While this research did not have the scope to verify whether these claims had actually taken place, it is interesting to analyse the perspectives of these stakeholders, revealing their interests, assumptions, and understanding of the role that humanitarian responses can play in empowerment.

### i. CBOs

CBO's claims of empowerment outcomes were generally rights based. These include the increased recognition they got from the community, other CBOs and state institutions, and the cohesion and unity they built in the community. It was also about driving community transformation; building partnership with the state and other institutions, and enabling the development of networks with other NGOs and community groups. Other empowerment claims by CBOs regarding the expansion of assets and capabilities to marginalised groups involved the impacts they made on community development processes, as well as improving leadership in the local community structures. These different sets of empowerment

outcomes were ensured either separately through the different interventions by CBOs, or jointly with other actors (mostly NGOs), involving providing relief supplies, knowledge building, sensitisation, and advocacy. For many residents, these actions were critical in building community confidence to make demands and to hold the powers to account. As a result of these actions, during the focus group discussions, the CBOs claimed to have gained more recognition and trust from people in the community.

*"For us, the fact that we are highly regarded and recognised in this community is also an achievement"*  
(CBO member, interview, 2016).

However, because much of the funds used by many CBOs in their response are mostly contributed by community members, they do not consider that they have been sufficiently empowered, since they lack a guaranteed source of funding for emergency response and have to draw on their own personal earnings to take part in the response.

### ii. NGOs

NGOs similarly claim to have contributed solidly in empowering communities and groups in their different urban humanitarian response engagements. Even though NGO responses were mostly observed to be restorative (eg relief supplies), some were critical in helping communities bounce back to where they were before the disaster. The non-relief interventions involved building capacity by providing residents with the

requisite skills and tools they needed to improve their communities. According to the NGO representatives interviewed, a number of NGOs were also involved in awareness raising, training, advocacy, counselling and micro credit, all of which not only increased people's knowledge about the nature and type of risks they face, but also helped them to become self-actualising, thus boosting their self-confidence and restoring their dignity. This view was highlighted by the coordinator of disaster management at YMCA:

*"Previously when disaster occurred, people will just sit by with folded arms expecting the government to step in and do all what it takes but this has now changed entirely. In terms of their mind-set and attitudes towards disaster, there is now a remarkable change. As a result of our empowerment drive, their dignity as humans has not only been restored but many now have a voice in the affairs of their family and in their communities. Moreover, many people now feel safe living in their communities as well as in meeting their livelihood needs" (YMCA interviewee, 2016).*

Moreover, the NGOs revealed that by carrying out the response, some of their membership have equally felt empowered, especially from the experience gained by working with communities to understand their needs. However, several CBOs claimed that by establishing parallel structures when they intervene in communities, NGOs have tended to undermine the value of more established community structures who have always led community concerns. The statement from the coordinator of disaster management at YMCA also reveals certain biases towards the passivity of community actors, which seems to contradict the statements from community groups who portrayed the attitude of community actors as much more proactive and responsive to disasters.

### iii. ONS

Empowerment claims by the ONS are equally the result of their different humanitarian activities involving the media and outreach engagement of communities about DRR and the desired responses. This is similarly the case with the FCC, which aligns a number of its activities towards empowering communities and their groups. According to the ONS, the awareness-raising messages they send out are very effective. The empowering effect of these is the observed decrease in requests from communities for help. This is partly because damage from disasters seems to be declining in most communities, with many people already, well informed about the actions to take to reduce their

own risk. To confirm this view, the director of DMD commented as follows:

*"When you have a community that has ownership, that is empowered, that has responsibility, they will always take action by themselves rather than wait for you for support. Perhaps the only thing you will now do based on your vast knowledge and experience in other parts of the world is to maybe, say no, this is not how you do it, this should be the way" (ONS, interview, 2016).*

### iv. FCC

The FCC similarly claims to have empowerment as a critical component of its work in humanitarian response, and knowledge building is always emphasised as part of its community engagement plans. However, whereas during our interview the FCC claimed to have carried out several hygiene trainings sufficient to enable community groups to carry out cleaning exercises on their own (during disaster events), it was observed that unless they are prompted, most community groups do not take action. More often, the youth groups that undertake the cleaning exercises have to be urged by outside organisations either by giving them 'money or food for work'. While the FCC uses the money and food to inspire the youths into action, a culture of dependence seem to have slowly emerged on the part of the youth.

## 3.2 Themes associated with claims of empowerment outcomes

The analysis of the perspectives of different stakeholders reveals that there are themes associated with the **claims** of human, social, physical, political and financial empowerment outcomes of urban humanitarian responses. This section analyses the perspective from key informants (from government and civil society) on the extent to which these potential outcomes have been achieved. Section 3.3 outlines some of the implications of the differences and synergies of stakeholders' perspectives on empowerment outcomes associated with humanitarian responses.

### 3.2.1 Human empowerment outcomes

The foregoing discussion shows that several of the empowerment claims by the different humanitarian actors correspond with outcomes related to the human dimension, improving human capacities through training

programmes and learning generated by responses. A large part of these claims is made by CBOs who maintain that during the crisis, some of their members benefited from different kinds of training involving the acquisition of a variety of knowledge and skills. For many, this training was critical in strengthening their ability to identify common problems and proffer solutions. With an improved knowledge of disaster issues, CBOs can make an impact and contribute to the well-being of their communities. During the Ebola crisis, in particular, a few groups felt sufficiently empowered to either take action or activate an emergency response, rather than wait for the consequences of inaction. Some CBOs claimed also that as a result of the training, they felt very confident to engage city authorities and to make demands. This has not only opened up spaces for dialogue, but also created a healthy and enlightened population. With their improved knowledge about disasters, coupled with their familiarity with the community, most CBOs have been able to initiate and lead a variety of small-scale community adaptation activities.

As pointed out earlier, a few CBOs also identified empowerment outcomes in terms of aspirations, regarding, for instance, the recognition they now have from residents for driving transformation and change in their community. For some CBOs, the main empowerment outcome has been the improved leadership of their organisations. This has allowed them to build collaborative networks with other CBOs both within and outside the community. A few CBOs considered, however, that they and other local community actors could have been further empowered, but because the international humanitarian actors often ignored them in their response, it was only the new local groups they set up and the few local NGOs they collaborated with that ended up becoming more empowered. In effect, the act of leaving out the recognised local structures (especially in terms of the acknowledgement and respect they deserve) tended to weaken not only their self-esteem, but also their participation in urban humanitarian response. In spite of this, it was found that both the CBOs and the community leaders were widely respected and recognised by the community residents.

### 3.2.2 Social empowerment outcomes

The discussion showed further that communities were additionally empowered with regard to their social attributes, having an impact on social networks and relationships of reciprocity and mutual support. Apart

from providing the affected population with immediate relief and support, most humanitarian organisations worked with local actors to provide other forms of help to the crisis victims, their relatives, friends and neighbours. This enabled the social cohesion they needed to pursue activities geared towards building and sustaining local capacity to act in dealing with emergencies. Moreover, the savings which CBOs generated from local contributions by their members provided a basis for collective mobilisation and action. Apart from repositioning themselves to carry out essential tasks previously undertaken by central government ministries and/or agencies, CBOs have created local networks both within and outside of Portee-Rokupa.

One major social empowerment outcome during the cholera outbreak was the improved participation of community groups in decision making at both the local and national level. Since many CBOs benefited from a variety of training, they used the skills to build the confidence and trust of the community. While working directly within the community, a few CBOs and NGOs encouraged social change among the residents by promoting new attitudes and behaviours in such areas as gender-based violence, sexually transmitted infections (STI), and conflict resolution.

### 3.2.3 Physical empowerment outcomes

The discussion showed limited outcomes in terms of the physical empowerment of the community. While there is a huge need for physical improvement in the community, the only areas where some NGOs and donors (eg DFID) have focused is the rehabilitation of toilets and drainage systems, some of which were constructed by community groups themselves. This is in addition to the setting-up of water points and solar lights by some government agencies. While these facilities are not evenly accessible, these interventions have made improvements in creating the physical conditions that allow communities to lead lives of dignity and fulfilment. They have also played a role in making the community environment cleaner and safer. However, in spite of the large presence of CBOs in the community, only a few claimed that they have been empowered to benefit from physical interventions. This is partly owing to the limited priority given by the humanitarian community to work with community groups in promoting improvements in infrastructure and services in the community and, in part, to the limited capacity of community groups to bid for funding to carry out community development initiatives as part of their humanitarian response.



### 3.2.4 Political empowerment outcomes

The perspectives on empowerment claims also reveal the relationship between humanitarian responses and the opening up of new spaces of representation and dialogue between local representatives and other urban stakeholders, such as government authorities (local and national), as well as NGOs. Largely as a result of their participation in national activities (eg health campaigns) and decisions, most community residents now consider that local community stakeholders are recognised by some state actors (eg ONS, FCC) and NGOs as a major stakeholder in developing the city. Moreover, the leadership provided by the resident councillor during the Ebola crisis was very empowering, as it encouraged the creation of an alliance, the Portee Ebola Response Alliance Volunteers (PERAV) (see Box 1 for more information), which brought together different CBOs into a network of volunteers to deal with the crisis. The collaboration fostered among CBOs by this initiative still remains alive in much of the community. However, because PERAV was a loose alliance with no sustainable source of funding, it did not endure after the Ebola crisis. To many residents, losing such an opportunity which has the potential to pull the community and their voices together was disempowering.

#### BOX 1. PORTEE EBOLA RESPONSE ALLIANCE VOLUNTEERS (PERAV)

Portee Ebola Response Alliance Volunteers (PERAV) was formed in September 2014. It was the idea of the ward councillor who is also a resident of the community. The alliance was created to bring credible, hardworking and respected community groups together to accomplish a specific goal, which was to fight the spread and stop the Ebola viral disease, which would not only benefit the individuals in the groups, but the community and the country as a whole. The alliance was mainly involved in social mobilisation and awareness-raising campaigns and environmental and sanitation activities, such as community cleaning, clearing of drains, and house-to-house garbage collection. They also provided support to INGOs and MDAs, such as the MoHS, SLP, and WHO, with contact tracing, quarantine processes and distribution of relief items.

### 3.2.5 Financial empowerment outcomes

Most community groups considered that they were not adequately empowered to take on financial roles for all the different humanitarian activities in their community. The only response that focuses specifically on improving the financial standing of residents is the microcredit facility that is operated by a few NGOs. Other activities which have implications for empowerment are the trainings attended by communities and their groups for knowledge and skill building. Whereas the microcredit facility increased the chances of residents attracting funds and engaging in investment, thereby creating employment opportunities, new knowledge and skills enabled a ready labour force for potential employers in the city.

## 3.3 How perceptions from the different stakeholders relate to each other on empowerment outcomes

Owing to the variety of claims made by stakeholders, this section will now appraise how the different views on empowerment outcomes relate to each other. The review confirms that in general, community groups are very active in their respective communities. Apart from living and working in the communities, making them more knowledgeable about the context including the risks faced, community groups also play an enabling role which is very critical to the empowerment of residents. Often, the local actors work together with a number of NGOs or state-led interventions on the ground whilst creating and managing volunteer networks for the interventions. However, rather than empowering them, some of these interventions seem to be too dependent on volunteers, to whom they merely give a stipend for their contributions.

While most NGOs claim to put community groups at the forefront of their development efforts, this view was challenged by most CBOs, who claimed that, despite making several requests to partner with NGOs in their humanitarian relief programmes, their requests were rarely approved. Rather, NGOs tend to prefer setting up parallel structures to work with in the community. A few NGOs claimed that because CBOs are frequently faced with serious leadership challenges, it can be difficult to work with them. This view was supported by the FCC which considered the community and their groups to lack both the initiatives and commitments to solve their own problems.

*“The challenge has been the people themselves not realising that they need to take action on the various problems they face within their communities. Most of them rely on external support...but for them to take the responsibility themselves, that has been a very serious challenge. They think they should only be there at the receiving end” (FCC, interview 2016).*

Moreover, whereas most NGOs claimed that local capacity in the community is low which explains their limited involvement in humanitarian response, several of the CBOs maintained that capacity is high in the community. They argued that apart from the different development work that CBOs and other community groups do in the community, community members already have a sound understanding of the key challenges, including the main issues to prioritise for action. With such considerable knowledge of the community, the local actors considered themselves to be very useful assets for the different humanitarian organisations. Even though the local actors agreed that the international humanitarian actors come with a wealth of technical expertise, there is a general feeling that the input of community actors is equally required, especially when these actors are usually the ones left to deal with the challenge long after the international actors have withdrawn. Other difficulties faced by the local actors include the lack of recognition by international humanitarian actors, the lack of motivation by the FCC and other government agencies, and the problems of funding. Since membership contribution is the main source of funding for most CBOs involved in humanitarian response, this has tended to weaken their capacity to act. This view was articulated by one CBO representative:

*“Our greatest problem here is the lack of funds. Owing largely to the widespread poverty, we find it difficult to raise funds to do our work. Even to get tools to clean the community is a big challenge. As a result of this our involvement in humanitarian response is proving increasingly difficult” (CBO, interview 2016).*

CBOs additionally rejected the FCC's claim that it had usually empowered communities to become self-reliant by not only providing them with food relief, but also by building their capacity, including providing support to youth groups to clean their community. According to the CBOs, the FCC rarely intervenes during emergencies and that even if it did, the community groups (including the CBDMCs) were not involved apart from the WDCs. The only FCC influence in the community is the leadership role provided by the local councillor, who is always supportive of local community initiatives. However, it was found that the ONS and several NGOs do not usually recognise the local councillor and other traditional leaders when delivering humanitarian response in communities. The only ONS structure that has links with the local councillor is the CBDMC, even though the councillor is not considered for membership.

The ONS claimed that it usually empowers communities through the delivery of humanitarian relief when there is a crisis; however nearly all the community groups did not confirm this claim. What was confirmed though was the coordinating role which the ONS plays, as well as public awareness raising through the media. It was additionally claimed by a few NGOs that while several stakeholders take part in the coordination meetings organised by the ONS, the invitation of community groups (excluding the CBDMCs) are often more about being represented, rather than inputting into decision making.

## 4

# Empowerment assets

## 4.1 Humanitarian responses and empowerment assets

Empowerment assets are related to access to resources and the capacity of households and groups to achieve empowerment outcomes, as discussed in previous chapters. The research revealed that urban humanitarian responses in Freetown relate to six empowerment assets (human, social, physical, political, financial, natural) of groups and households in three different ways: i) at times it draws from existing access to assets and capacity to respond to shocks and stresses; ii) at times it creates and/or expands existing assets, strengthening the capacity of individuals, households and groups to respond to crises; and iii) at times it hinders access to assets, weakening the capacity of households and groups to achieve empowerment outcomes.

## 4.2 Human assets

### 4.2.1 Humanitarian responses drawing on human assets

Labour is one of the most important assets of the urban poor, generating income either directly, through wage employment, or indirectly in the form of goods and services sold in the informal sector (Moser, 1998). In the context of humanitarian response in Sierra

Leone, existing labour available inside communities like Portee-Rokupa become volunteers to government-led or NGO-led responses, or lead their own community initiatives, filling the gaps left by the action or inaction of the state during recent humanitarian responses (See Section 3.2).

During the Ebola outbreak in 2014-16, CBO members from Conscious Youth Development Association<sup>3</sup> supported the *Zero Ebola Campaign* led by President Koroma by carrying out community awareness-raising campaigns; others volunteered with INGOs in outreach, food and sanitary items provision programmes. Other CBOs supported the MoHS and the SLP in contact tracing,<sup>4</sup> community policing and running the temperature checkpoint.

Examples of CBO-led responses during crises were described by several members. CBO Portee Millennium and Portee Environmental Youth Association responded to the flooding in 2015 with search and rescue activities mobilising their own members as the “police came very late”, explaining that most of their members were affected so they had to act “to save lives and property” (CBO member, interview, 2016). This not only shows the human assets available to CBOs, but also highlights the weak socioeconomic infrastructure provision that hampers human capital development.

Within the community, there are also groups open only for women, providing a platform to voice their concerns and aspirations. During the Ebola outbreak, they played a pivotal role in CBO-led activities fighting against the spread of the disease through awareness-raising campaigns and providing psychosocial support,

<sup>3</sup> Conscious Youth Development Association, an advocacy and awareness raising CBO, has 50 members, most of them enrolled in university and higher education.

<sup>4</sup> Tracing people who might have been in contact with someone who was ill and who might also have the disease.



consoling those infected with the disease or those that had lost friends and family members.

#### 4.2.2 Humanitarian responses strengthening or creating human assets

The humanitarian response during the Ebola outbreak in 2014 strengthened the capacity of CBOs to attract volunteers and increase their membership. Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association went from 24 to 32 members, they also recruited 50 volunteers during the Ebola crisis, 30 of whom were sent to be part of PERAV, helping with the distribution of food aid items to quarantined homes.

External organisations played a crucial role in building the knowledge and providing training for community groups during humanitarian responses. As part of the approaches adopted during the Ebola outbreak, community organisations were asked to be part of the emergency response, receiving training in contact tracing, social mobilisation, detection of symptoms and others. Members of Portee-Rokupa CBO stated:

*“Well, our capacities have been built a lot in some areas, like social mobilisation, community sensitisation and some hygiene and sanitation concepts. During the Ebola, we had first-hand experience in all these and now I can say we are better at them” (CBO member, interview, 2016).*

Humanitarian approaches that placed communities at the forefront of Ebola campaigns have also led to the increased self-confidence of community members, enhancing their ability to solve problems, deal with challenges and accumulate experiences. This was reflected in testimonies provided by Portee-Rokupa CBOs when asked about the outcomes of participating in urban responses: “For us the fact that we are highly regarded and recognised in this community that is also an achievement”. As well as in their recognition of ‘self-confidence’ as an empowerment asset, “This is one of our strongest assets. The faith, trust and belief our people have in us. We are the largest and most popular group in the community. I am sure the reason for that is the trust and confidence”.

The photos in Figure 7 are records from the local councillor of the capacity-building activities targeting local groups, which have had a positive impact on self-confidence and the ability to respond.

Figure 7. Photos of local groups attending capacity-building activities



Source: Alexandre Apsan Frediani.

### 4.2.3 Humanitarian responses hindering human assets

The limitation of certain rights and freedoms (eg freedom of movement) in the name of public health to deal with a serious threat to the health of individuals or populations, is prescribed by the Siracusa Principles when they aim at preventing the spreading of a disease (UN Commission on Human Rights, 1984). Nonetheless, it is argued that these principles must be accompanied by the principle of reciprocity (balancing of the benefits and burdens), through which individuals subjected to the limitation of their rights and freedoms are compensated by the state for his or her loss (Silva and Smith, 2015).

Portee-Rokupa was subjected to quarantine measures, having 25 quarantined homes on its informal side and 9 homes on the formal side during the crisis (See Section 2.3). Reciprocity to legitimise restrictive measures like quarantine requires the state to provide basic necessities such as food and water (*ibid*). CBOs from Portee Rokupa explained that during quarantines “authorities use to fail in the people by bringing food very late” (CBO member, interview, 2016), thus exemplifying the hindering of Portee-Rokupa residents’ human assets.

Restricting people’s freedom of movement affects their access to basic necessities and livelihoods (Campbell, 2017; Oxfam, 2014). In Portee-Rokupa, “most people had their livelihood activities disrupted like people in the fishing industry because of all the restrictions and also people who could not afford food” (Portee Millenium Youth Development, interview, 2016). CBOs had to provide quarantined households with food aid provision without the support of other stakeholders, mobilising the resources available to the community.

## 4.3 Social assets

### 4.3.1 Humanitarian responses drawing from social assets

In Portee-Rokupa there are several CBOs with dynamic and resilient social support networks. Representatives from each of the eight local CBOs interviewed shared in their individual vision and mission the aim of fostering the spirit, openness and unity of the community, ultimately creating lively spaces and a peaceful community for all. Some of the regular activities conducted by the CBOs include social mobilisation, attitudinal change campaigns to foster a positive mindset in youth groups, awareness raising on women’s and children’s rights, dealing with drug abuse, and the promotion of environmental protection activities.

Collaborations between CBOs are usually formed to bring development to Portee-Rokupa specifically through collective regular cleaning exercises. Project Tumara runs their community cleaning activities together with Portee Environment Youth Association. Tumara’s secretary, Mohamed, explained that during the flooding of 2015, they joined other CBOs to clean drains, motivated by the possibilities of interacting and working with other CBOs.

These existing relationships and supporting attitudes were crucial to enable humanitarian responses to be implemented on the ground effectively. The importance of these support networks was emphasised by all CBOs interviewed. During the flooding of 2015, members of Conscious Youth Development Association used tools own by other groups for the cleaning of drains to help ease the flooding in Portee-Rokupa, which they later returned. Without the reciprocal relations and the CBO network, the group would not have been able to run the activity.

### 4.3.2 Humanitarian responses strengthening or creating social assets

Humanitarian crises have triggered social mobilisation and the formation of new community groups in Portee-Rokupa. During the Ebola outbreak, the CBO Conscious Youth Development Organisation was founded to contribute to the response: “*Our organisation was formed on 20 January 2015. This group is quite new and was formed during the peak of the Ebola outbreak*” (CBO member, interview, 2016).

Meanwhile, humanitarian responses that included the participation of community groups, as well as community-led responses, helped local residents to recognise the impact of CBO-led activities and the leadership of the groups in Portee-Rokupa. A CBO representative described that after participating in the emergency responses to EVD in 2014-16, the 2015 flooding, and the cholera outbreak in 2012 they now have: “*...a bigger voice now in the community, I think we are considered a big stakeholder now. We are always given the chance to share our opinion on whatever in the community*”. Replacing in some cases the role of state institutions at the local level, as described by a CBO member, “*...whenever the government fails the people look up to us*”.

Humanitarian responses also fostered relations of trust and mutual support between stakeholders and CBOs. Portee Environmental Youth Association “got the support from Forum Syd from Sweden<sup>5</sup>” to deliver food aid to quarantined households during the EVD humanitarian response. CBO collaborations also extended to state institutions: “During our community

<sup>5</sup> www.forumsyd.org/int

policing exercise we were able to reach out to the Sierra Leone Police and the armed forces to give us some cover support” (Portee Millennium Youth Development Organisation, interview, 2016).

The setting-up of PERAV by the different community groups was a key example of an institutional arrangement facilitating the coordination of response at the community scale. At the height of the Ebola crisis in September 2014, PERAV worked with the resident councillor and brought together all the CBOs to join forces to contain the spread of the virus. By carrying out a variety of activities, including social mobilisation, awareness-raising campaigns, garbage collection, drainage clearance and other community improvement work, the twelve CBOs that formed this partnership successfully harness community knowledge on how to limit the spread of the EVD, building on each other's practical skills and experiences.

### 4.3.3 Humanitarian responses hindering social assets

The initial stages of the Ebola response led by the government in 2014 lacked organisation and interaction with communities, which affected social cohesion and trust. At the community level, fear and stigma with a loss of trust in health services and workers caused disruptions in communities' interactions, fracturing social cohesion (Van Bortel *et al.*, 2016; UNDP *et al.*, 2015). CBOs from Portee-Rokupa experienced this stigma and exclusion with a CBO member stating: “We got some lashing from the community because that was the time the people did not trust the government. So, when we help them get contacts who have skipped quarantine they were not happy”.

Communities can in themselves be a social asset, however they are not static, and circumstances can consolidate or erode them (Moser, 1998). A CBO member explained that after participating in contact tracing they “became weaker a little...They were saying bad things about us”, exemplifying the ‘erosion’ of CBO’s self-confidence and relationship with their community.

## 4.4 Political assets

### 4.4.1 Humanitarian responses drawing on political assets

Guided by the Sierra Leone Disaster Management Policy, existing political assets that have been used for different humanitarian responses include partnerships between organisations (such as NGOs and INGOs) and state institutions involved in DRR.

These collaborations have resulted in the production of contingency plans and early warning committees (See Section 2.1).

Contingency plans are developed by the ONS with the help of experts and are usually based on experience gained in the wake of a crisis (eg the cholera contingency plan). A plan for the EVD was developed after the Ebola outbreak of 2014-16 and tested during a flare-up:

*“When the bigger outbreak of the Ebola came to an end we had a flare up in the northern province in Tonkolili district and that flare up could have embarrassed government for the second time but because we had that particular document at hand, we made sure that every individual, every institution that had responsibility were quickly deployed and they were able to play their own part and that was why that thing did not go out of hand” (ONS, interview, 2017).*

At the local level in Portee-Rokupa, CBOs' relationship with the local councillor has been a key political asset. During the Ebola outbreak, the CBO Conscious Youth was invited to participate in community awareness-raising campaigns along with other CBOs, resulting in them receiving: “some level of recognition in our community and also recognition from other CBOs”.

Furthermore, through the formal registration of their organisations with FCC and the Ministry of Youth Affairs (NAYCOM), CBOs were invited to take part in responses: “they recognised us and invited us to the nationwide Zero Ebola Campaign”, defining the status of the relationship as “very strong”. Nonetheless, this political asset does not translate into the equal recognition and inclusion of all registered CBOs. Nearly all CBOs interviewed are registered with the FCC and/or NAYCOM, with most of them describing their relationship with the institutions as “poor” or “weak”. A CBO member noted: “Our only interaction has been to register our CBO with them”, reflecting a dichotomy with the recognition of CBOs as community organisations by state institutions, and their role within the DRR structure in Sierra Leone (See Section 2.1).

### 4.4.2 Humanitarian responses strengthening or creating political assets

As a result of the civil war and reconstruction processes, the ONS was created as decreed in the 2002 National Security and Central Intelligence Act (NASCIA). NASCIA created a political avenue for local groups to claim rights, and aimed to decentralise humanitarian response through the creation of disaster management committees at the district (DDDMCs) and community level (CBDDMCs) (See Section 2.1).



The participation of these community groups in the Ebola humanitarian response demonstrated their local leadership capacity to state institutions, NGOs and INGOS:

*"Our achievement so far was to partner with Freetown City Council and the National Youth Commission in the Zero Ebola Campaign. That was a big cap to our feather because the municipality and the youth commission recognised and invited us to play a pivotal role in that campaign"* (Conscious Youth, interview, 2016).

This recognition impacted positively on their self-confidence, as described by a one member of Portee Millennium Youth: *"We felt stronger because a lot of big offices wanted to work with us. They valued our organisation more now"*.

These instances also can open opportunities for potential partnerships with other key stakeholders as expressed by Portee-Rokupa's CBO representative after conducting health campaigns with the support of INGO Forum Syd during the cholera response in 2012: *"For us again this was like a platform to sell ourselves and to open the door for potential partnership"*.

Humanitarian responses have also contributed to the development of institutional capacity in disaster response. Contingency plans, are being updated, including the country's 'hazard profile' to incorporate new health hazards such as EVD: *"...We never knew Ebola in Sierra Leone as far back in 2005. It's only in the past two years that Ebola came to the forefront of our health hazards. So, we are now trying to review that particular document"* (ONS, interview, 2016).

#### 4.4.3 Humanitarian responses hindering political assets

At the beginning of the Ebola response, the president of Sierra Leone declared a national state of emergency, enforcing quarantines and jail sentences for up to two years to those hiding patients. Quarantines were imposed generally on individual houses, neighbourhoods and even entire districts in the cases of Kenema and Kailahun, normally lasting 21 days, the period of incubation for Ebola infections (WHO, 2015; Oxfam, 2014).

At this stage, CBOs in Freetown and local leaders were excluded from participating in the implementation of the response. Quarantine operations were streamlined by the NERC across the country to be implemented by international humanitarian actors (Oxfam, 2014). The lack of effective communication between governments and citizens and enforced measures led to the failure of the initial response in halting the spread of EVD (UNDP et al., 2015). In response, the government launched a massive 'Operation Western Area Surge' to regain

citizen's confidences and cooperation, turning to a community-led approach (WHO, 2015).

Although institutions recognised the instrumental role CBOs have played in Portee-Rokupa during the humanitarian responses, a member of the ONS noted: *"there is no way we are going to do it if we cannot have them fixed into the equation...volunteers were considered to be very critical"* (ONS, interview, 2016). It is less clear whether this recognition by the state could contemplate CBOs role to be more than volunteers, and see them as key stakeholders with influence in the decision-making process during responses. None of the CBOs interviewed indicated a long-term strategic partnership with state institutions that could advance CBOs political empowerment.

## 4.5 Physical assets

### 4.5.1 Humanitarian responses drawing on physical assets

Since 2012, Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association usually builds wooden temporary bridges in Portee-Rokupa annually when it floods, creating access and fostering the mobility of the community. A big gutter divides Abdulai Lane, the community where the CBO is located, from the main highway, thus Portee-Rokupa dwellers rely on the wooden bridges to be built. Last year the community provided wooden planks

Although tools and equipment for the retrofit of bridges are often provided by state institutions and INGOS to CBOs, these resources are also drawn from the community's physical assets, exposing the linkages and trust within the community as described by an Abdulai Lane Youth CBO member: *"We go house to house and ask residents to lend us tools to do our work with and after we have to return them. We don't have our own tools"*.

This local organisation has owned two bakeries in Portee-Rokupa since 2006, the latest was built in 2014, when they joined PERAV to help fight Ebola. Through that group, they provided food aid daily – mainly bread, sugar and milk – throughout the quarantined period, covering the gaps and long delays in the provision of food to quarantined homes by the authorities. Food aid during the Ebola outbreak expanded to other communities such as Kuntolor, a hillside community where the CBO provided bread to quarantined households.

Other community facilities include the community clinic, used by NGOs to deploy response activities during public health emergencies in Portee-Rokupa. The clinic was also part of a refurbishment project and a new screening centre was erected to treat suspected cases of Ebola (see photos of the clinic in Figure 8).

Figure 8. Community clinic



Source: Alexandre Apsan Frediani.

### 4.5.2 Humanitarian responses strengthening or creating physical assets

Physical assets that have become available to the community for the implementation of disaster risk prevention and mitigation activities include the provision of tools and equipment (eg rain boots) by state institutions and INGOs, and the use of 'food for work' as a form of payment for the cleaning of drains and gutters. This approach is used by state institutions such as the FCC and the ONS, as stated by an ONS representative:

*"We only told them that organise yourselves and ask us to do something for you if we can – either you ask us for money or for food-for-work and they said food-for-work" ... "It has some means because we believe when we give 'food for work', they are cleaning their communities themselves and you put money in their pocket" (ONS, interview, 2016).*

Furthermore, Portee Development Organisation participated in the 'Street Tap Project', which aimed at improving the community's access to water sanitation services. It started during the flooding in 2015. The representative from the Portee Development Organisation said that the project laid "almost one km of water pipes" to connect Portee to the main connection point, and that these pipes were later connected to a "big water tank provided by UNICEF during the Ebola crisis", strengthening the availability of WASH assets.

Resources can also come from diverse stakeholders, including private companies. The CBO Project Tumara, after leading responses in Portee-Rokupa during both the Ebola outbreak and the 2015 flooding, was able

to attract resources from a smart mobile technology company, receiving computers and internet modems to equip their workspaces.

Through participating and collaborating with state institutions in humanitarian responses, CBOs have been able to attract resources for the continuity of their activities beyond the response, such as in cases of recurrent floods and rain. Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation explained:

*"We have attracted a lot of resources from the ONS and FCC. They have supplied us with tools and equipment to clean during the rains. They also provide us food when we have a massive cleaning exercise" (CBO member, interview, 2016).*

### 4.5.3 Humanitarian responses hindering physical assets

As part of the the state-led approach adopted by during the Ebola outbreak, movement restrictions on individual, households and even entire communities led to reduced access to physical assets by CBOs for community activities and for everyday life by local residents. Failure by the state to provide these assets motivated CBOs in Portee-Rokupa to lead their own responses: *"We just wanted to help and provide food for our friends and family" (CBO member, interview, 2016).*

Although sometimes supported by NGOs (WFP, YMCA), Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association distributed food aid to quarantined homes without any support. The group described their baking activities as "their main source of income" for their 32 members;

as explained in Section 1.4.2, Portee-Rokupa is characterised by poverty and unemployment, thus when communities have to respond with their already scarce physical assets (and scarce financial assets), this puts pressure on their livelihoods, as they devote resources which could otherwise be used for the continuous growth of their business. Sanitary relief items were also distributed by CBOs with the support of Portee-Rokupa residents who donated these items.

## 4.6 Financial assets

### 4.6.1 Humanitarian responses drawing on financial assets

Existing livelihoods in Portee-Rokupa have been a key financial asset for CBO-led humanitarian responses. Funding for humanitarian response activities led by CBOs comes from their own members and residents. CBO United Sister explained, *“we have been able to mobilise resources from members. Members give donations to help fund particular projects”*. During a major flooding that hit the community in 2013, the group *“[Fenced] the power house. We use the money from our own savings. We sell membership cards at le 5,000 and we pay monthly contribution of le 10,000”*. Although this demonstrates their capacity to mobilise resources they explained that their main challenge as a CBO was *“...of course financial. We are doing little because we have little in our coffers so if we have more we can do a lot more for this community”*.

During the Ebola outbreak, The US-based NGO Project Tumara worked with local community groups to fund the provision of sanitary relief items to quarantined homes in Portee-Rokupa. For the social mobilisation and community awareness-raising activities, funding was drawn from community resources, *“some money raised amongst themselves”*. The group raises money for their works through: *“...monthly contribution of le 20,000 for members and le 1,000 for volunteers every month. These are the monies we have been using of our works”* (Project Tumara member, interview, 2016).

### 4.6.2 Humanitarian responses strengthening or creating financial assets

Humanitarian responses provide sources of funding to the community to carry out activities. In the case of community-led responses, internal sources include donations from CBO members and community dwellers.

CBOs such as Portee Millennium Youth Development Organisation described that by mobilising their own resources and through *“a campaign [driven] in the group to raise some funds to help”* during the Ebola

outbreak, they provided food aid to quarantined homes, in addition to financial and moral support to the most affected. In some cases donations came from other CBOs, which also shows the connections between social assets, especially in terms of social networks as channels to access financial assets.

External financial assets have come in the form of cash transfers for communities' collaboration in state-led responses or NGO-led responses, such as awareness-raising campaigns. INGOs and state institutions also give Microloans and stipends. The creation of these assets played an instrumental role in empowering communities with the financial capacity to fight EVD in their communities. Portee Development Organisation received *“...[a] stipend for [antimalarial] drug distribution”* from the Ministry of Health; Conscious Youth Development Association received their initial funding from the payment each member received from the *Zero Ebola Campaign*: *“We brought all the money together to start our work”*.

These instances also build the accountability capacity of communities, thereby attracting and gaining the trust of other stakeholders and securing future funding sources. As described by a Portee Environmental Youth Association member: *“We have attracted a lot of resources be it financial or what have you”*. This was determined by and carried out in collaboration with its umbrella organisation, Forum Syd, with whom they worked during the cholera epidemic in 2012 and the Ebola outbreak in 2014.

### 4.6.3 Humanitarian responses hindering financial assets

The state-led quarantine approach employed during the Ebola response severely disrupted the livelihoods of the urban poor, therefore financial empowerment assets were hindered. Sierra Leone structural factors include youth unemployment and widespread poverty. With 75 per cent of the population under the age of 35, these engage mainly in part-time activities related to agriculture due to the low levels of formal employment (World Bank, 2014).

Enforced quarantines entailed restrictions of movement which were applied on internal travel, market closures, and other measures to reduce public gatherings (World Bank, 2014). Lock-down of communities were enforced for up to 21 days, preventing the cultivation of land and the exchange of crafts and agricultural products (UNDP, 2014; World Bank, 2014). In Portee-Rokupa *“Most people had their livelihood activities disrupted like people in the fishing industry because of all the restrictions”* (CBO member, interview, 2016).

For community organisations, the socioeconomic impact of the response translated into fewer opportunities for receiving credit facilities or funding of activities,



as described by a CBO member when asked about available opportunities: “...It’s like Ebola took all the money”. For Portee Environmental Youth Association, who led their own social mobilisation during the outbreak without financial support: “...[it] made us financially weaker as we spent most of money in the process and we could not get any support”.

## 4.7 Natural assets

### 4.7.1 Humanitarian responses drawing on natural assets

For the Portee-Rokupa community, their proximity to the ocean provides them with a natural asset. They have been able to transform this into social assets, a source of livelihoods, employment for community members, and a source of funding for CBO activities.

The fishing industry is the main economic activity of the community, which includes boat making and fish smoking. This has fostered relations of reciprocity between CBOs and thus they have been able to transform it into social assets. Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation, a fishing organisation, where most men are either fishers, boat makers and/or net repairers, explained this:

*“We repair the boats and nets. So they are always here. When we have a big cleaning exercise we call them to come help and they have always been present. We also try to do the same in return”* (CBO member, interview, 2016).

All CBOs interviewed described a collaborative relationship with other CBOs, as well as a desire to collaborate with other local groups, and acknowledged the need of collectivism: *“We have built a lot of relationships and alliances within the community. The fact that we partnered with a lot of CBOs for PERAV is one”* (CBO member, interview, 2016). Figure 9 shows a photo of the Portee-Rokupa wharf.

Access to land has also been a key resource for community groups. Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association, who provided break, sugar and milk to quarantined homes during the Ebola outbreak, secured the land for their first bakery with the help of the councillor; more recently they bought a plot of land and they have built a new bakery as part of the organisation’s main activities.

Table 2 summarises the main findings associated with the relationship between humanitarian responses and empowerment assets.

Figure 9. Portee-Rokupa wharf



Source: Authors.

Table 2. Summary of factors associated with the humanitarian response and their impact on assets

	DRAWING	STRENGTHENING/ CREATING	HINDERING
Human assets	<p>Community-led approaches and humanitarian responses that employ community volunteers utilise the wide range of skills and capacities developed by community groups.</p> <p>Existing labour inside Portee-Rokupa became volunteers and leaders of their own humanitarian responses.</p>	<p>External organisations provide training for communities and volunteers for the implementation of responses.</p> <p>Humanitarian responses have strengthened the capacity of CBOs to attract volunteers and new members to work in community-led responses and CBO-led activities.</p>	<p>Humanitarian responses that restrict the human rights and freedom of movement of urban dwellers need to adhere to the Syracuse Principles and a balancing of benefits and burdens to ensure that human assets of vulnerable communities are not hindered.</p>
Social assets	<p>Strong social networks within communities are employed by humanitarians during emergency responses since they provide a point of entry to the wider community.</p> <p>CBOs' networks are an effective way of joining efforts at the community level during humanitarian responses and long-term developmental activities.</p>	<p>Responses can trigger social mobilisation among community members through the implementation of responses locally.</p> <p>Approaches that place community groups at the forefront of the response triggered recognition from residents to the CBOs leadership in the community, as well as collaboration and partnerships between CBOs.</p> <p>Humanitarian responses can also trigger new forms of institutional arrangements at the community level with groups like PERAV.</p>	<p>Humanitarian responses that do not involve communities from the start will fail in their approach and will affect trust on implementers such as humanitarians, state institutions and volunteers, fracturing the social cohesion of communities.</p>
Political assets	<p>Existing partnerships between INGOs and state institutions result in plans and strategic frameworks for DRM and provide guidelines which humanitarians can access and use as guidelines during emergency responses.</p> <p>Registration of CBOs as organisations with institutional organisations such as FCC and NAYCOM do not translate into the recognition of community leaders as political figures at the city or country level.</p>	<p>Responses also offer a platform for community groups to display the array of capabilities they have, gaining visibility of their leadership within communities, as well as raising awareness of their needs and aspirations.</p> <p>Experiencing new crises have led institutions to improve their capacity to respond to new threats. They have updated tools such as the country's hazard profile to include the EVD experience.</p>	<p>Weak relations between the state and citizens can worsen during crises. Approaches that exclude local leaderships and community groups jeopardise the opportunities to solve issues at the local level.</p> <p>Reducing community leaders and CBOs leadership to 'just volunteers' will reduce their effectiveness to respond during future humanitarian crises and in turn any response deployed at the community level.</p>



Table 2. Continued

	DRAWING	STRENGTHENING/ CREATING	HINDERING
Physical assets	<p>Existing facilities in communities can be sources of physical assets during emergencies, such as bakeries providing bread for food aid and bridges for the rainy season and flooding episodes.</p> <p>Some facilities are also employed by humanitarians as a channel to enter the community and deploy programmes.</p>	<p>Some communities' facilities can be a starting point for the continuation of existing programmes or the opening of new projects aligned with the needs of the community.</p> <p>Community groups are also equipped with tools and equipment for the implementation of responses during emergencies, special programmes and preparation for the rainy season, increasing their physical assets.</p>	<p>Restrictions on movements curtail the social dynamics of communities, thus reducing their sources of support and their livelihoods. They also restrict their access to food, public sanitation services, medicines and other basic needs.</p>
Financial assets	<p>CBO membership fees and community saving groups provide a source of funding to conduct their activities.</p>	<p>Humanitarian responses provide external sources of funding for the implementation of community programmes and projects, allowing CBOs to manage the funds to carry out activities.</p> <p>Existing social networks among CBOs provide channels to access financial assets within the community.</p>	<p>The application of quarantine as a response to the Ebola outbreak led to the disruption of communities' livelihoods with much of the population working in the informal sector and fishing industry.</p> <p>The massive scale of the Ebola response resulted in CBOs having fewer financial opportunities to continue their long-term developmental aims and activities.</p>
Natural assets	<p>The proximity to the ocean provides a natural asset to Portee-Rokupa, this also translates into social assets, through the provision of their services to other CBOs with boat making, fish smoking and fishing.</p>		

Source: Compiled by the authors.

# 5

## Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of key findings

The review of the humanitarian crisis and responses in Portee-Rokupa reveals that there are interventions and activities led by different stakeholders which have different types of impact on the empowerment assets of community groups:

1. Government-led (national): One of the national interventions reviewed by this research was the implementation of quarantines. These were tools used in the Ebola response, and quite particular to the public health emergency facing the country. Nevertheless, they had a substantial amount of negative impact on the empowerment assets of local residents and groups (especially social and financial).
2. Government-led (council): Registration and support of relief activities had some positive impact on the recognition of local groups and their capacity to act locally. But this is limited, without substantial implication for the enhancement of political empowerment assets.
3. NGO-led: Relief activities and targeted infrastructural projects, have been successful in working with CBOs and strengthening some empowerment assets. But limited resources and lack of coordination has compromised a more substantial impact of NGO efforts.
4. CBO-led: this has been the most substantial mechanism to enhance the empowerment assets of local communities. The research reveals several

community-led activities that have been sustained mainly by community efforts and with limited support from external actors.

In terms of policy and planning, the research reveals the following:

1. There are productive entry points in current policy frameworks for community participation and the recognition of approaching humanitarian crises as an opportunity for empowering communities.
2. However, in practice there are several limitations towards addressing this:
  - a. Stakeholders have an instrumental perception of community actors, at times blaming local residents for risks and recognising them as a labour force for implementing mitigation and response activities.
  - b. This leads to a substantial institutional gap between the CBDMC and other DRR structures.
3. Nevertheless, new platforms, such as PERAV, have been identified as key initiatives with the potential to address these limitations.

With regard to empowerment assets and outcomes, the exploration of the stakeholders' claims of empowerment outcomes from humanitarian responses revealed two main tensions: the first tension has emerged in the relationship between NGOs and CBOs. While NGOs claim to aim to support CBOs, they also argue that there is low capacity within communities to involve them in humanitarian responses. Meanwhile CBOs argue that the main challenge is not the lack of capacity, but lack of support. As a result, NGOs' narratives end up reproducing the lack of recognition of CBOs and

potentially compromising the possibility of them being involved in other development or humanitarian initiatives.

The second tension has emerged regarding the empowerment claims between government authorities (FCC and ONS) and CBOs. While FCC and the ONS claim to have empowered communities to become self-reliant, CBOs argue that FCC rarely intervened during emergencies and that ONS did not usually recognise local leaders when delivering humanitarian responses in communities.

This research reveals that humanitarian responses studied have drawn on and strengthened, but also hindered empowerment assets. Community groups' skills and existing community facilities, strong social networks, existing partnerships between INGOs and government institutions, as well as informal livelihoods by local residents, were key empowerment assets **drawn** from various humanitarian responses. Humanitarian responses have also **strengthened** empowerment assets by building the capacities of local leaders and groups to work on risk prevention, triggering social mobilisation, fostering collaboration among different city stakeholders, providing a platform for communities to display their capacities to implement projects on the ground, and generating funds for the implementation of initiatives which allowed CBOs to manage and carry out activities.

However, humanitarian responses have also hindered **empowerment assets**, by occasionally restricting human rights and freedom of movement and hampering livelihood opportunities. Lack of coordination has fostered communities' mistrust of government and NGOs in the humanitarian sector and fractured the social cohesion of communities.

## 5.2 Lessons learnt

This study has explored how humanitarian organisations seize the spaces offered by emergencies as an opening to build the capacity of communities and their groups to meaningfully take part in urban decision-making processes. It is shown that while the complexity of cities exposes the urban poor to a variety of risks and threats given their vulnerability, it also presents opportunities, not only for a shared understanding of the existing problems, but also for collective action. As a result, there is the potential to change the perception of different actors of each other's capacities to respond and mitigate risks. Placing the needs of the residents at the heart of this process and getting them actively involved in the identification, prioritisation, planning and delivery of the responses offers great prospects for building empowerment assets with implications for community empowerment outcomes. Despite the challenge of dealing with the eminent power imbalances, this study offers a few useful lessons which

can inform future humanitarian response activities either in Sierra Leone or elsewhere. These are presented as follows:

- When the existing national policy on humanitarian response does not explicitly recognise community participation as a core requirement for international/national humanitarian actors, the possibility to include community actors in the response will be low, despite their recognition as the first responders to the crisis. This is particularly the case when the process of monitoring response activities and impacts is inadequate and, particularly when the approaches of the different actors involved in the response are fragmented.
- The existence of a clear lead agency to drive humanitarian response in the country (in this case, the DMD) and a governance framework (in this case, the national platform for DRR) is an effective means to bring together the different stakeholders (from central and local government, civil society, the private sector, NGOs, community actors and international organisations) to bear collectively on humanitarian crises. However, the existence of the lead agency (DMD) within a superstructure (ONS) sometimes limits the timeliness of its decisions and actions.
- While community actors and local NGOs can make significant contributions to humanitarian responses during emergencies, the lack of funding (stand-by emergency funds) sometimes prevents them from doing so. Therefore, it is INGOs that are more likely to be active at the start of the crisis. Furthermore, in contexts where UN agencies only have mandate to provide support through relevant central government ministries and agencies, local NGOs and CBOs are only able to take part in humanitarian emergencies long after the response has begun. Therefore, the efforts of many CBOs that are more active in the community can easily be overwhelmed by the emergent international humanitarian agencies.
- The dominant approach by most international humanitarian organisations is the provision of immediate food relief. As the study shows, organisations that provide responses beyond the mere provision of relief supplies (with implications for empowerment outcomes) are mostly NGOs and CBOs that are more directly engaged in community development work and therefore may have pre-existing relationships with community stakeholders.
- Different sets of empowerment outcomes were ensured by humanitarian organisations acting either separately or through partnerships with other organisations (including CBOs). Several of the empowerment outcomes relate to the human and social dimensions, with fewer in terms of the physical dimension owing to the limited priority given

by the humanitarian community to improvements in community infrastructure and services. For most community actors, empowerment outcomes are low because the majority of the funds they used in their response were contributed by the members, thereby depriving themselves from meeting their own needs.

- The range of humanitarian responses over the years has enabled the building of a diverse set of assets (human, physical, social, political, etc.) available to the Portee-Rokupa community. This has helped the implementation of humanitarian responses within the community. Humanitarian responses also enabled state institutions and other humanitarian organisations to build their capacities, knowledge and skills for the implementation of responses.

## 5.3 Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Sierra Leone still does not have a comprehensive law to facilitate and guide international humanitarian response operations in the country, ie International Disaster Response Law (IDRL) guidelines for foreign humanitarian organisations assisting governments with limited capacity to deal with disasters. It is important that urgent steps are taken by the ONS to put this in place. While in 2009, a legal preparedness study was undertaken in Sierra Leone by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with the hope of strengthening the country's legal and policy frameworks for international disaster response, it is still not clear exactly what national or international standards the government of Sierra Leone require international humanitarian organisations to apply. Moreover, because the laws governing disaster management are scattered among a range of documents, the government would need to bring together all the applicable laws (local laws, regional and international instruments) under one comprehensive law. Alternatively, the government would need to amend all the existing DRR laws to make them more robust and sound.
- ii. DRR policy should be reviewed to recognise community participation as a core requirement for international humanitarian response. The policy will also need to be submitted for parliamentary approval even though it is already accredited by the National Security Council of the ONS. This will tend to reduce distortions in humanitarian response practices by discouraging humanitarian organisations from using their own set guidelines to supplement the country's current laws and principles governing humanitarian response. It will also ease the process of monitoring by the ONS of the activities of the different stakeholder organisations against the mandate they have with the government.
- iii. The complexity of the urban environments where disasters often occur demands a better understanding of communities, with the evidence co-produced by humanitarian organisations and local community actors to inform the design of the response. It should also involve building on evidence and documenting the experiences and perceptions of a variety of stakeholders – in particular the local community actors living within the community. Having a clear contextual understanding of communities in terms of what the residents believe to be the problem should be prioritised since they are well positioned to be more knowledgeable about their own communities. In effect, the input of communities in humanitarian response decisions is critical especially if the interventions are to be designed to clearly reflect community realities. This will however, require creating spaces for the local community actors to process and articulate the acquired knowledge and to contribute in the design of the response. The ONS would however need to establish and make clear the specific principles and standards to be used by the different stakeholders in assessing the needs of the affected population and to ensure that they tailor their responses to clearly reflect the needs and priorities of the affected persons and the community.
- iv. Empowering communities and their groups is a core component of sustainability in humanitarian response. For it to be empowering, capacity building should be factored into the design of the response. The research outlines the existence of different spaces (at different levels) for action in urban humanitarian response (UHR). Central to this is the large presence of local community actors and the active role that their organisations (mainly CBOs) play at the community level whenever there is a crisis. Given the limited technical capacity within many of these organisations, there is a need for the humanitarian sector to initiate more effective ways to support and strengthen the role of the local actors, including improving on their capacity to deal with some of the immediate challenges imposed by emergencies. Largely because of their weak capacity, the great majority of humanitarian responses within communities are both provided and led by international NGOs, with limited roles for the local NGOs and the affected communities and their groups.
- v. To successfully put communities at the centre of humanitarian response, the ONS and other agencies should take active action to ensure that the local structures have more representation within the national platform for DRR, the highest decision-

making level for DRR and humanitarian response in Sierra Leone. The humanitarian community would additionally need to reorient its current response approach from relying primarily on international humanitarian agencies to one that is driven jointly by the local NGOs and the community groups. To ensure this, it will be important for the humanitarian community to place communities and their groups at the heart of the humanitarian response whereby community-led initiatives and priorities take primacy. Strengthening the role of municipal governments will be critical since they will need to cascade the efforts of the local organisations (NGOs, CBOs, the affected communities, and the private sector) with those of the international humanitarian organisations and the ONS.

- vi. The government should put in place, as well as enforce, appropriate accountability systems for the assisting actors. To do this, it would need to institute effective mechanisms to monitor humanitarian organisations in ways that will ensure the speedy delivery of high quality humanitarian aid. It is recommended that as part of its effort to improve the effectiveness of the response, the ONS should work, through its monitoring activities, to ensure that the existing coordination mechanisms between the local and international actors are improved upon.
- vii. It is important to strengthen the governance framework for UHR in Freetown by not only making the process inclusive and participatory, but also by recognising the role and capabilities of the different stakeholders in contributing to the response. Building structures within this framework to ensure that empowerment outcomes and the building of community empowerment assets are prioritised in terms of the specific activities carried out by the different humanitarian actors will also be very critical to the response. A way of doing this would be by making it explicit in the humanitarian policy that humanitarian actors should prioritise the empowerment of communities (both in terms of the assets and outcomes) in the works they do and in their engagement with communities throughout the response process.
- viii. Owing to the huge level of deprivation in the slums, deliberate efforts should be made by the humanitarian community to work in partnership with development actors to improve living conditions in informal settlements, specifically dealing with existing vulnerability factors. Such partnerships are required because nearly all the emergencies in Freetown have been more severe in the slums where water, accommodation, drainage and sanitation remain key challenge, with the torrents of water from floods either causing harm or intensifying existing vulnerabilities. While these settlements were severely affected by the Ebola crisis, the aftermath of which the government now prioritises, not much has been done to improve the very conditions that aggravated the crisis. To enable NGOs should prioritise community improvement as part of their humanitarian response and the ONS will need to engage the FCC in ensuring that the restraint on NGOs in putting up physical structures in the slums is reversed.
- ix. Given that inadequate funding generally leads to a low level of humanitarian support to the people, with the local NGOs and community actors often ignored by UN agencies in terms of relief support, it is recommended that the Sierra Leone government works with donors to put in place a 'stand-by' fund as a guaranteed source of funding, which the local humanitarian actors can draw on whenever there is a crisis. Funders will also need to transform their approach by providing funds directly to community organisations, which are more familiar with community concerns, rather than limit funding just to international organisations which are less familiar with the issues and where the funds are sure to close once the crisis is over. In order to extend funding opportunities to the local community actors, funders will need to establish flexible requirements, simpler application procedures, and shorter funding approval time. Moreover, a variety of funding options can be set up to help the local actors access money to be able to respond to the different humanitarian needs. Such funding streams can be planned to support local initiatives with a clear focus on multisector needs. The key challenge to this, however, is that because many community groups may not have previously made humanitarian funding applications, they may not have the ability to do so easily. This suggests the need to build the capacity of the local actors with strong mechanisms for monitoring activities.<sup>6</sup>
- x. While some CBO members have benefited from a few humanitarian response-related trainings organised by the ONS and other stakeholders, more action is still needed to improve the capacity of many of these groups. Moreover, capacity building programmes should be designed to clearly reflect the needs of the different actors and their groups. To ensure this, it will vital to engage the local community more directly on their capacity-building needs rather than on the needs of the

<sup>6</sup> The START network and START fund – managed by INGOs – is an example of an initiative that aims to address some of the issues mentioned in this recommendation. <https://startnetwork.org/start-fund>



organisation offering to build the capacity. Indeed, several studies have emphasised the importance of participation to build capacity more effectively. While community participation cannot by itself guarantee the effectiveness of capacity building initiatives, it is a necessary condition for improving understanding about affected communities and in ensuring that the range of capacity building opportunities reflects community challenges and priorities. Drawing largely from experiences in Portee-Rokupa, capacity-building programmes will need to focus not only on increasing the awareness of community members about their role in the development of their communities, but more specifically about becoming drivers of change in such places.

- xi. Largely because of the fragmented approach of the different humanitarian actors, including the unwillingness of some (such as the FCC) to work with others (such as the CBDMCs), the ONS, as the lead agency for disaster management, should initiate effective action to build a sound interorganisational relationship (with conflict resolution mechanisms) among the actors.
- xii. Furthermore, the government, through the ONS, should increase public awareness (particularly in the local communities) about the key provisions of the disaster response laws and policies, including their right to hold humanitarian organisations accountable for their interventions.

## 5.4 Further research

Drawing largely from the research findings, including the discussions held with some key informants, the following knowledge gaps have been identified for purposes of further research:

- i. The socioeconomic impact on local community actors of self-financing humanitarian response activities by CBOs.
- ii. The opportunities and challenges of the existing governance framework for urban humanitarian response in Freetown.

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# Annex 1: Interview guide

## Interview guide used for KII with NGOs, government (local and national) and UN agencies

- i. Organisation name and designation of interviewee
- ii. Humanitarian response responsibilities/tasks
- iii. Types of humanitarian responses being part of and where
- iv. Specific activities/tasks done, where and how
- v. Main achievements
- vi. Whose assets were improved/compromised?
- vii. Which assets helped empower the capabilities of communities and their groups and how?
- viii. Name of organisations you partnered with (if any), why and how?
- ix. Did working with other organisations shift the focus of your work?
- x. Any participation of/ role for/ partnership with communities and their groups?
- xi. Are community roles recognised in DRR and HR policies and laws?
- xii. How is the recognition reflected in practice?
- xiii. Suggestion of appropriate ways by which UHR can effectively contribute to the empowerment of communities and their groups.



## Part 1: Introduction

NAME OF RESPONDENTS:
NAME OF ORGANISATION:
ROLES IN ORGANISATION:
HOW MANY MEMBERS:
WHERE ARE YOUR MEMBERS LOCATED IN THE COMMUNITY?
COMPOSITION:
WHEN WAS THE ORGANISATION FORMED?
HOW OFTEN DO THEY MEET? WHEN WAS THE LAST MEETING?
WHAT ARE YOUR ORGNISATION'S MAIN ACTIVITIES?
WHAT IS THE MAIN FOCUS OF THE CBO? WHAT IS THE VISION AND MISSION OF THE CBO?
WHAT ARE THE CBO'S MAIN ACHIEVEMENTS?
WHAT ARE THE CBO'S MAIN CHALLENGES?

## Part 2: Relationships

WITH WHICH CBO DOES YOUR ORGANISATION RELATE TO?			
Name	Where are they based?	Nature of relationship	Quality of relationship (weak, medium, strong, very strong)
WITH WHICH NGOS DOES YOUR ORGANISATION RELATE TO?			
Name	Where are they based?	Nature of relationship	Quality of relationship (weak, medium, strong, very strong)
WITH WHICH INGOS DOES YOUR ORGANISATION RELATE TO?			
Name	Where are they based?	Nature of relationship	Quality of relationship (weak, medium, strong, very strong)
WITH WHICH GOVERNMENT ACTORS DOES YOUR ORGANISATION RELATE TO?			
Name	Where are they based?	Nature of relationship	Quality of relationship (weak, medium, strong, very strong)

## Part 3: Humanitarian Responses

### WHAT ARE THE URBAN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES THAT YOUR CBO OR OTHER ORGANISATIONS HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN?

Which crisis?	Response	When?	Who was involved?	Support	What did your CBO aimed to achieve with this response?	In which ways have your organisation become stronger as a result of this response?	Has this response made your organisation weaker in any way?

## Part 4: Empowerment outcomes

### HAVE THE HUMANITARIAN RESPONSES IMPACTED ON ANY OF THESE DIMENSIONS OF EMPOWERMENT?

Making your voice heard outside the community/ advocacy?

Being able to have a voice and express concerns?

Attracting resources and equipment

Build relationships within, among communities and with other stakeholders

Build relationships among communities

Build relationships with NGOs and Authorities

Building capacities

New opportunities?

Confidence and trust?

Recognition of communities' role to work with other groups

## Part 5: Other issues

- Awareness about the recognition of community roles in DRR and HR policies and laws
- How is the recognition reflected in practice?
- Main challenges faced
- Suggestion of appropriate ways by which UHR can effectively contribute to the empowerment of communities and their groups

## Part 6: Transect walk

HEADQUARTERS	RESPONSE	GPS COORDINATES	PICTURE	BASIC DETAILS

# Annex 2: Interviewees and focus group discussion participants

## KI interviewees

NO.	NAME	ORGANISATION	DESIGNATION
1	John Rogers	Disaster Management Department, Office of National Security (ONS)	Director
2	Francis Kabia	Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA)	Director of social welfare
3	Dr Alphajoh Charm	Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment (MLCP&E)	Director of policy and planning
4	His Worship, Gibson	Freetown City Council	Mayor of Freetown
5	Alusine Conrad Conteh	Freetown City Council	Councillor, ward
6	Abdul Marah	Freetown City Council	Development planning officer
7	Abdulai Kamara	YMCA	DRR coordinator
8	Samuel Sesay	Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA)	Programme manager
9	Yirah O Conteh	Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP)	Chairman and leader
10	Nyabenyi Tipo	Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO)	Country director

## Non-consenting organisations for interview

1	Oxfam	Letter addressed to country director
2	International Red Cross & Red Crescent	Letter addressed to the country director
3	Sierra Leone Red Cross Society	Letter addressed to the country director

## CBO semi-structured interviewees

S/N	NAME	ORGANISATION	DESIGNATION
1	Idrissa Sesay	Portee Environmental Youth Organisation	President
2	Abdulai F Bangura	Portee Environmental Youth Organisation	Organising sectary
3	Esther Sesay	Portee Environmental Youth Organisation	Secretary general
4	Abu S Bangura	Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association	Organising secretary
5	Jane Kamara	Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association	PRO
6	Sarah Sesay	Abdulai Lane Youth Development Association	Secretary
7	Foday S Kamara	Portee Development Organisation	Secretary general
8	Abdulai Conteh	Portee Development Organisation	Treasurer
9	Jestina Jalloh	Portee Development Organisation	Secretary
10	Isata Kamara	Portee Millenium Youth Organisation	Chairman
11	Ibrahim Kuyateh	Portee Millenium Youth Organisation	Treasurer
12	Ibrahim Thullah	Portee Millenium Youth Organisation	Secretary
13	Austina Sesay	United Sisters	Group leader
14	Isata Sillah	United Sisters	Secretary
15	Mariama Jalloh	United Sisters	Ordinary member
16	Kolleh Mansaray	Conscious Youth Development Association	Secretary
17	Abdulai Kanu	Conscious Youth Development Association	Secretary general
18	Cecelia Tucker	Conscious Youth Development Association	Financial secretary
19	Ibrahim Turay	Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation	Ordinary member
20	Kabba Mansaray	Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation	Queen mother
21	Isata Sillah	Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation	PRO
22	Lansana Koroma	Project Tumara	Advocacy officer
23	Kadiatu Kamara	Project Tumara	PRO
24	James Kamara	Project Tumara	Project officer

## Community FGD 1 attendees

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COMMUNITY
1	Alusine Conrad Conteh	Ward Councillor	Portee-Rokupa
2	Idrissa Sesay	Portee Environmental Youth Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
3	Abdulai F Bangura	Portee Environmental Youth Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
4	Theresa Sesay	Sierra Leone Mothers' Development Association	Portee-Rokupa
5	Rugiatu Kamara	Sierra Leone Mothers' Development Association	Portee-Rokupa
6	Kolleh Mansaray	Conscious Youth Development Association	Portee-Rokupa
7	Abdulai Kanu	Conscious Youth Development Association	Portee-Rokupa
8	Foday Kamara	Portee Development Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
9	Haja Kabba	Portee development Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
10	Ibrahim Kuyateh	Portee Millenium Youth Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
11	Ibrahim Thullah	Portee Millenium Youth Organisation	Portee-Rokupa

## Community FGD2 attendees

NO	NAME	ORGANISATION	COMMUNITY
1	Abu S Bangura	Abdulai Lane Youth Development Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
2	Daniel Sesay	Abdulai Lane Youth Development Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
3	Lansana Koroma	Project Tumara	Portee-Rokupa
4	Matilda Nguessan	Project Tumara	Portee-Rokupa
5	Abu Bakarr Koroma	Portee Progressive Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
6	Mohamed A Sesay	Portee Progressive Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
7	Ibrahim Turay	Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
8	Kabba Mansaray	Portee-Rokupa Wharf Youth Organisation	Portee-Rokupa
9	Isata Kamara	United Sisters	Portee-Rokupa
10	Abibatu Kamara	United Sisters	Portee-Rokupa
11	Abdulai F Bangura	Community activist/Ward development committee member	Portee



In Sierra Leone, international and national humanitarian actors have been involved in a series of initiatives addressing humanitarian emergencies caused separately by the civil war, cholera outbreaks, the Ebola crisis, and the recent flooding in Freetown and elsewhere. In each case, there has been a variety of response approaches, from community-led, to top-down relocation. While there has been documentation of these processes, there has been little work attempting to bring studies and perspectives together to generate a reflection to the wider humanitarian community of practice.

This working paper looks at humanitarian responses in the Portee-Rokupa neighbourhood of Freetown. By focusing on the empowerment implication of humanitarian responses, it explores the extent to which approaches have been able to build the capacities of informal dwellers' groups, foster collaboration among different stakeholders, enable critical learning, and open up opportunities for the recognition of the diverse needs and aspirations of vulnerable groups within the wider policy and planning environment.

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