

SLURC

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Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre Enters a New Era

Andrea Klingel

SLURC's journey started just over 3 years ago. The aim was to set up an urban research centre that creates much needed knowledge on informal settlements and urban issues in Freetown and Sierra Leone as well as capacity building to support evidence-based policy and decision making and to empower slum communities to advocate for their own rights and needs. Ultimately, the goal was to improve the lives and wellbeing of residents in informal settlements.

An external evaluation was commissioned by SLURC at the end of 2018, to review its current position and gain a better understanding of areas for improvement to make SLURC's work even more impactful. It found that SLURC had itself established as a 'credible and leading expert on the urban development challenges facing Freetown', 'recognised for producing high quality, community driven research and analysis, ... providing leadership on the implementation of key areas of the Transform Freetown agenda' and 'acting as a facilitator of dialogue, both between national and local government policymakers, civil society organisations and residents of informal settlements and cross-nationally' by bringing key urban stakeholders together for example on training sessions, research projects and knowledge exchange visits to other African contexts and beyond. The full external evaluation report is available at www.slurc.org/reports

SLURC has been an integral participant at three recent international meetings - in Nairobi on urban health (see page 2), in Havana on urban equity (page 3) and in London on sustainable urban mobility (page 5); alongside important stakeholders from around the globe.



Looking for office space in Freetown during the very early days of SLURC. Image: Andrea Rigon

While SLURC has benefitted in its infancy from core funding, valuable support and advice from Comic Relief and DFID, the next phase requires SLURC to secure all its funding through multiple projects. This will not be without challenges - juggling different donor requirements and increased workloads, and striking a fine balance between expansion and sustainability; as well as continuously working on improvements, such as following the helpful recommendations of the external evaluation and learning from working in an ever-changing urban landscape.

To better face these challenges, SLURC has updated its management structure: Dr Joseph Macarthy's role is now Executive Director of SLURC, Braima Koroma is the Director for Research and Training and Andrea Klingel has taken on the new role of Director of Operations. With a great team behind them, funding secured for 2018/19, and reputable organisations continuing to approach SLURC for collaborations, SLURC is excited about the future.

ARISE: Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity

Abu Conteh and Thomas Doughty



ARISE partners gathering in Nairobi for the inception meeting. Image: Kate Hawkins

Lack of accountability emerged as a significant barrier to people in Freetown's informal settlements accessing their right to healthcare, during SLURC's Future Health Systems research. SLURC is excited to be part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI)'s ARISE: Accountability for Informal Urban Equity Hub, an interdisciplinary global research Hub funded through the UK Global Challenges Research Fund (GCRF), focussing on health. ARISE brings together 10 partners to support marginalised, precarious people in informal settlements across Sierra Leone, Kenya, Bangladesh and India to claim their right to health.

This partnership aligns directly with SLURC's work in knowledge co-production, aiming to build the research and analysis capacity of urban stakeholders in Freetown, prompting evidence-based dialogue with stakeholders at different levels and sectors to increase accountability for informal settlement dwellers.

Through collaboration and sharing of experiences across four countries, ARISE seeks to shape national and global policy and best practice around urban health – a key SLURC research program areas. ARISE offers a significant opportunity to learn both from and with each other across borders, and between the global south and north.

The benefits of international collaboration have already started to materialise during the ARISE inception meeting in Nairobi during February 2019, attended by SLURC's Dr Joseph Macarthy and Abu Conteh. ARISE partners from around the world discussed a range of issues including ways of promoting governance and social accountability for people in informal communities with intended outcomes of promoting health and wellbeing. Partners in the ARISE hub renewed their commitment to improving the lives of vulnerable groups through research, evidence and engagements with stakeholders internationally. This was done through redefining partner roles in the research process in accordance with the four work packages already outlined.

Partner organisations presented their countries' contexts and the various roles they have occupied over time, to address specific gaps related to health service provision, social inequity and urban planning. Dr Macarthy outlined SLURC's work to close gaps between policy and practice through research in informal settlements. A key point of the meeting was the launch of the ARISE hub with communities, government representatives and international organisations present.

Informal Settlement Profiling for Urban Equity in Freetown

Thomas Doughty

An extensive data collection exercise is currently underway in the Freetown informal settlements of Dworzark and Cockle Bay, led by SLURC and Architecture Sans Frontières UK (ASF-UK) and undertaken by community members. Following on from the development of Community Action Area Plans (CAAPs) in the two settlements, using ASF-UK's participatory Change by Design methodology – both of which are available on our website – the current data collection is building informal settlement profiles that will form evidence in support of the principles of the Plans.

The whole process forms part of the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) project in Freetown, seeking to deliver transformative research, and build research capacity to address urban equality. KNOW is a 4-year research and capacity building programme to promote urban equality in selected cities across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

This stage of the programme commenced in January with a five day workshop in Freetown for over 30 community members, community leaders, students and representatives from local NGOs and CBOs. It introduced participatory spatial research methods and explored how they can be used in Freetown to develop Informal Settlement Profiles, within an ethical framework.

A range of participatory tools were introduced, including transect walks, mapping, timelines, photo diary and ranking/prioritising. The tools combine manual and digital techniques to reveal the diverse needs and aspirations of the communities in which they are used. These were further developed and tested by participants in the field. Participants also developed a code of conduct, and considered effective methods for data management.



Developing and testing the tools. Image: SLURC

Twelve participants were then selected to receive further training before embarking on the current data collection – and have produced some fantastic outputs so far. The first stage of the data collection are transect walks across every zone in each settlement, in which a community member leads a group of data collectors on a walk through their zone, noting points of interest such as shared spaces.

Following the data collection, next steps will involve further developing ways to visualise and utilise the data to support the implementation of the CAAPs developed by each community. SLURC and ASF-UK will be convening an international workshop in July, bringing together local and international participants to spearhead this.

Meanwhile, SLURC joined other international KNOW partners in Havana, Cuba at the end of February for the second international dialogues in urban equality meeting, discussing the translation of knowledge into action.



Data collection in Cockle Bay. Image: SLURC.

Mary Sirah Kamara and Annie Wilkinson

Exercises on day 1 explored concepts and meanings of contagion and infectious disease, and existing efforts to control disease. It concluded with the identification of goals and priorities. Day 2 focused on how to achieve those priorities resulting in a description of 'impact pathways' including feasible activities, outcomes and impacts, and the relationships required to achieve them.

Initial discussions centred on participants' understanding of disease transmission – in Krio, how disease 'scatters'. Residents linked disease spread to a range of environmental factors in each community and revealed the everyday nature of infectious threats, as well as the seasonal burdens of cholera and malaria. Malaria is attributed to improper waste management creating a breeding ground for mosquitoes, for example, whereas diarrhoea and cholera are understood to be linked to the proximity of toilets and drinking water sources, leading to contaminated water supplies.

1 Crab town, Kolleh town and Grey bush communities are adjacent communities in the centre of Freetown, while Moyiba is located on the hills in the far east of the city



Network map in CKG. Image: Abu Conteh

By mapping these both spatially and temporally, participants identified hotspot areas and developed timelines and patterns of disease outbreaks. Based on these activities and discussions, both Moyiba and CKG prioritised safe drinking water as targets for community-led action because of their broad preventative impacts. Plans covered stakeholder engagement, resource mobilisation and potential funders to drive such improvements.

Ultimately the research aims to strengthen infection control and community health systems, therefore contributing to epidemic preparedness in urban areas. The programme is based on the belief that in order to implement infectious disease control programmes which are relevant to local contexts and are based on meaningful community participation, it is necessary to take local logics and concepts of disease into account and to identify and build on existing preventive practice.



Community mapping of disease hotspots in Moyiba. Image: Annie Wilkinson

SLURC Begins a Project on Sustainable and Inclusive Transport in Sub-Saharan Africa

Braima Koroma and Thomas Doughty



T-SUM international partners at the first international meeting in London. Image: David Heymann

As cities in the global south - and especially sub Saharan Africa - grow, an important challenge they face is ensuring that growth pathways support the implementation of sustainable mobility, as opposed to rising motorization and its associated social and spatial inequalities.

Freetown, Sierra Leone and Maputo, Mozambique are both relevant examples of growing urban economies facing this challenge, and are the focus of an interdisciplinary, cross-sector, collaborative project entitled T-SUM (Transition to Sustainable Urban Mobility).

SLURC is one of several Sierra Leone and Mozambique based institutions contributing to this DFID funded project alongside international development agencies such as the World Bank, and led by UCL's Department of Civil, Environmental and Geomatic Engineering and Development Planning Unit. The project is part of SLURC's

new and growing urban mobility research program area.

March 2019 sees the first international meeting of T-SUM in London, bringing together participants from both focus cities - including Mayor of Freetown Yvonne Aki-Sawyers, FCC, GoSL and SLRA – and the UK. The event is an opportunity to initiate debates on sustainable mobility in African cities, share preliminary outputs and plan the rest of the project.

In Freetown, the T-SUM team will be led by SLURC's Dr. Joseph M Macarthy (Co-Investigator), Braima Koroma (Project Manager), Sudie Austina Sellu and Mary Sirah Kamara. A database repository on mobility in Freetown has been established with the support of the World Bank, and is now being completed by SLURC. The team is also establishing a network of relevant Freetown stakeholders and to collate relevant data for the T-SUM inventory.

Publication of Findings: Health and Living Conditions in Freetown's Informal Settlements

Thomas Doughty

There has long been a significant research gap in the understanding of social and environmental determinants of health in Freetown's informal settlements. Findings from SLURC's two year research study in partnership with Future Health Systems (FHS), investigating how living conditions in informal settlements relate to communities' health concerns are now available to fill this gap.

The research draws on focus group discussions and individual interviews with policy makers, community and civic leaders, traditional birth attendants, traditional healers and health facility providers, as well as an investigation into of service utilization at local Freetown health facilities.

Participants from across the different stakeholder groups came together for a validation workshop in November, to discuss and corroborate the research findings. Findings and recommendations were also taken out into the four communities studied (Cockle Bay, Dworzark, Moyiba and Portee-Rokupa) in order to obtain as wide a range of feedback as possible.

As well as reports and a policy brief, SLURC worked with FHS to create shorter 'issue briefs' on three of the key issues that emerged from the research – water and sanitation, waste management and healthcare accessibility. Findings and recommendations were presented to community members, health workers and policy makers at January's launch event, where copies of the publications were also distributed. Everyone was given the opportunity to respond to the findings, and representatives of the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP), Freetown City Council (FCC) and the Ministry of Water Resources all discussed opportunities for creating synergies between what each is doing to improve environmental conditions.

SLURC has also trialled dissemination of reduced versions of the outputs via Whatsapp for this project. Freetonians are heavy Whatsapp users, for sharing and disseminating of all kinds of content through their multiple networks. This is an important channel that we will seek to utilise more in the dissemination of SLURC outputs.

‘The Road to Transform Freetown has Begun’

Thomas Doughty

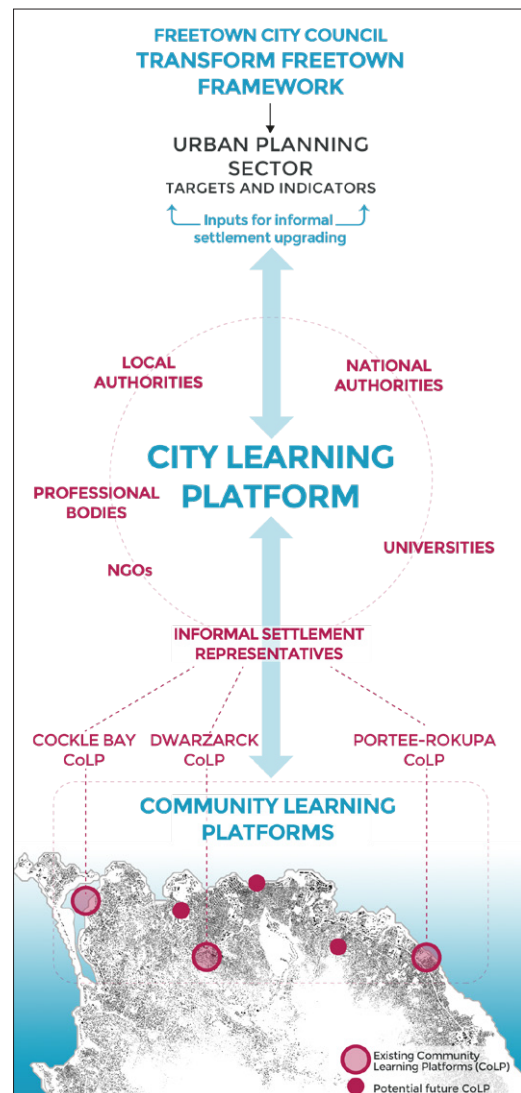
In January the Mayor of Freetown and Freetown City Council launched the ‘Transform Freetown Framework’ at the Transform Freetown Forum.

SLURC directors Dr Joseph Macarthy and Mr Braima Koroma represented SLURC at the forum, where the mayor and Sierra Leone’s president came together to demonstrate bipartisan support for this ambitious plan for the city. The collaborative, interdisciplinary and partnership based nature of the framework was reflected in the diversity of attendees at the forum – including ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), international NGOs, local CBOs, Freetown’s public and private institutions and other organisations.

Both the mayor and president specifically referred to Freetown’s informal settlements during the launch, an important and promising development in Freetown’s urban development discourse.

SLURC is leading the Framework’s Environmental Management Initiatives, targeting multi-stakeholder collaboration and strengthening environmental governance, as well as sitting on two other working groups. Through a City Learning Platform, SLURC aims to provide space to facilitate coordination and knowledge sharing across different stakeholders involved in activities aimed to improve the quality of life of those living in precarious informal settlements in Freetown.

The Transform Freetown overview is available on our resource unit. Go to slurc.org and select ‘Resource Unit’.



Transform Freetown and the City Learning Platform. Image: Urban KNOW

SLURC’s Open Online Course Receives UCL Faculty Education Award

Thomas Doughty

In support of SLURC’s key principles of knowledge sharing and communication with different audiences, in 2018 we launched a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) entitled Development and Planning in African Cities.

The course has received a UCL Faculty Education Award, one of four award winners. The award recognises Dr Andrea Rigon, Dr Joseph Macarthy, Alexander Stone and Joanna Stroud, for their contribution to a very successful open online course and open education resource (OER) produced through an international collaboration between University College London (UCL) and Njala University. This will be presented by UCL on 30 May 2019.

We launched the second edition of this free course in early 2019. At the time of writing, the course had over 600 participants from nearly 90 different countries. Of particular note is that 1 in 10 participants are Sierra Leonean, and of the ten countries with the highest number of participants, half are in sub-Saharan Africa. The quality of dialogue on the online forums has been exceptional, with high levels

of engagement between participants from right across the world, and different backgrounds - from policymakers and NGO workers, to students and community members in developing cities.

Once again we have been able to offer non-OECD participants the opportunity to upgrade for free. And to widen access to those in Freetown who wish to take the course but are hindered by lack of internet access, we have made the full course available on USB flash drives which can be collected from our office for free – as well as offering those without a computer the option of using a SLURC laptop to do the course.

If you have missed out on the MOOC this time around, you’ll be pleased to hear that we are making the entirety of the course content available as open educational resources (OER) in case you wish to use or adapt the material for delivery in your local context. These materials can be found on the UCL Open Education OER Repository. Go to slurc.org and select ‘Training & Workshops’.

Take a Fresh Look at SLURC's Website and Resource Unit

Thomas Doughty

The SLURC Resource Unit has reached a significant milestone, now containing a repository of over 1,000 items. These range from Sierra Leonean census data, to reports and papers on a wide range of urban thematic areas – predominantly concerning the global south and with a particular focus on African cities. The resource unit is fully searchable and filterable.

We also maintain a physical resource unit at the SLURC office – 63 Upper Brook Street, Freetown – which is available for anyone to come and visit during office hours. If you have published, or know of any open access publications, relating to urban development (especially in Africa) that could be added to our resource unit, please let us know.

In addition to the resource unit, the SLURC website has undergone a refresh and update. It features background

information on all of SLURC's five research programs – urban health, urban livelihoods and the city economy, urban vulnerability and resilience, land and housing, and the newly established programme of urban mobility – along with an overview of each of our projects. All of SLURC's publications are available to download, as are a wide range of SLURC's training and workshop materials.

Recent additions to the website include reports, policy briefs and issue briefs - on health and living conditions in informal settlements, urban livelihoods, and Community Action Area Planning - reports on workshops and training events such as the mobilising resources workshop, and SLURC's external evaluation.

We encourage the use and dissemination of all of our outputs, with appropriate credit given to the published authors.

Some Personal News...

SLURC is delighted to share some personal news from two of our directors. Just before Christmas, Dr Joseph Macarthy and Mrs Aminata Macarthy welcomed baby Joel into their family. And in February, the SLURC team all donned our ashobe to attend the wedding of Braima Koroma to his wife Anita.



Some of the SLURC team in their wedding ashobe. Image: SLURC.



Community members linking diseases and other factors in Moyiba informal settlement. Image: Annie Wilkinson

UPCOMING EVENTS

3 - 4 April 2019

AT-2030 inception meeting. Planning research into new approaches to life changing assistive technology for all, especially those with disabilities.

25 April - 8 May 2019

SLURC-DPU learning alliance: SLURC will be hosting the second set of the UCL's MSc Environment and Sustainable Development students, consisting of 53 students and seven academics. They will be working in seven informal settlements in the city, exploring the relationship between risk, environmental justice and urban development.

April 2019

Commencement of the Ebola community response project, learning for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. SLURC will be recruiting 4 graduates or undergraduates at some point soon, for six months full-time internship gathering lessons from the community response in Freetown that can be transferred to urban areas in the DRC.

15 - 26 July 2019

ASF-UK international workshop in Freetown – bringing together participants from around the world and Sierra Leone to develop data analysis and visualisation for informal settlement profiling. Keep an eye on the SLURC website for a call for participants.

Week commencing 17 June 2019

High-level delegation visit to Freetown from University College London (UCL), to strengthen relationships with Njala University and explore future research collaboration opportunities.

19 June 2019

SLURC conference 'Urban Transformations in Sierra Leone: Lessons from SLURC's research in Freetown', will take place at the British Council in Freetown. This one-day conference will facilitate dialogues on how research about urban development can influence policy and planning for the transformation of informal settlements in Sierra Leone.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter for further announcements on all of the events listed above and more.

