# SLURC

## SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE NEWSLETTER

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10 YEARS SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE

## Contents



## SLURC Marks a Decade of Driving Urban Knowledge in Sierra Leone

The Editorial Team

The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year, 2025. It began as a partnership between the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London (UCL), and Njala University's Institute of Geography and Development Studies in 2015, with core funding from Comic Relief. Ten years on, the organisation is reflecting on its remarkable journey of growth, resilience, and impact on urban development in Sierra Leone.

Through this funding SLURC experienced driving rapid growth and progress. This growth is reflected in SLURC's participatory and community engagement approach. The organisation started work with 4 urban communities in Freetown. "The 4 initial communities helped to provide a more detailed understanding... as a proxy for the other communities", the Executive Director, Joseph Marcarthy, noted. SLURC's work has now expanded to 15 informal settlements. He further explained that SLURC research helped to understand the East, West, and Central Freetown informal settlements' dynamics of the residents. The effort was to ensure that the unique challenges often overlooked in the past, especially in central Freetown, are brought to the table of the urban development agenda.

SLURC team at staff retreat Photo Credit: SLURC

## Grown from four Communities to a Nationwide Network

SLURC is a key player in urban research, providing actionable data, capturing real-time voices of urban residents, and influencing urban policies. The organisation has grown tremendously from a single project at its inception to a total of 48 studies, projects, and partnerships, expanding its reach nationwide. The growth from a single funding stream to a diversified, project-based financing model marked a pivotal moment in its trajectory, not just in financial terms but also in range of themes and impacts. The multiple projects with various partners have helped SLURC amplify its voices through research, advocacy, capacity building, and collaborative partnership. The organisation's work has been responsive to a wide array of urban challenges, increasing its scope and influence.

Through this model, SLURC has built a strong network with academic and research institutions, donors, and NGOs. The collaborations fostered growth, enhanced credibility, and developed valuable expertise. The organisation has extended its impact by working directly with communities, organisations, and stakeholders.

This integration is reflected in its expansion, working in over 15 communities across Freetown and 8 secondary cities of Port Loko, Bo, Kenema, Bonthe municipality, Makeni, Koidu New Sembehun, Lungi, and Waterloo. SLURC has broadened its scope, now working to address data gaps in the research areas of: Land & Housing; Urban Health & Well-being; Urban Infrastructure & Services; Livelihoods & the City Economy; Urban Vulnerability, Resilience & Climate; Urban Mobility & Transportation; Youth Engagement & Civic Education; Urban Agriculture & Food Security; and Fragility, Violence & Safety. This expansion is building an inclusive, socially and environmentally just urban Sierra Leone.

## Deepening Expertise to Inform Urban Policy

SLURC's greatest asset is its people. The expansion and broadening in scope are encouraging specialisation. The organisation is investing in its staff to increase its in-house expertise to tackle complex issues like transport & mobility, public health, and climate resilience, allowing for a deeper impact. This has transformed the organisation into one of the top urban research institutions in West Africa. SLURC has become a trusted advisor to multinational organisations like the World Bank, African Development Bank, and UN-Habitat by providing professional services in critical urban development fields such as urban planning, flood risk management and housing.

INGOs and the governments are also turning SLURC research findings into actionable strategies for the development of Sierra Leone.

Recently SLURC facilitated a constructive stakeholder dialogue on innovative housing solutions in a workshop led by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning. Feasibility study for the on-going CBD regeneration project implemented by the FCC was also done by SLURC in partnership with Helvetas &EBP. With funding from the AfDB, the organisation is also at an advanced stage of preparing a Spatial Development Framework (SDF) for Lungi, which is proposed to be Sierra Leone's administrative city. Together with the World Bank, UNEP, and EPA, SLURC is undertaking a new research project on sand mining in the Western Area and Lungi to assess the scale and impact of sand mining on selected tourism and coastal communities in Sierra Leone.

## The Future: A Legacy of Learning

As SLURC looks to the next decade, its vision is even more ambitious. The groundwork has been laid for SLURC to design & deliver a degree-awarding programme, to nurture the next generation of urban professionals & other urban experts through high-quality sustainable academic programmes that align with its existing research strength. "In the long term, we envision transforming into an institution where SLURC will award degrees, certificates, and diplomas," shared the Executive Director.

This vision points towards a future where SLURC cements its legacy as a centre of learning. A place where knowledge is created, shared, and certified, ensuring that Sierra Leone has a continuous stream of experts equipped to build more equitable and sustainable cities.

From its humble beginnings to its current status as a national leader in urban research, SLURC's first decade is a testament to the power of evidence-based action and collaborative partnership. Here's to ten years of impact, and to many more years of shaping the future of urban Sierra Leone. Happy 10th Anniversary, SLURC!

10 YEARS
SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE

## SLURC Strategic Plan 2024 - 2029: Towards a Sustainable Future

Braima Koroma & Umar Buckus

The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) has unveiled its Strategic Plan for 2024–2029, a focused agenda to strengthen evidence-based urban policy, improve service delivery pathways, and advance climate resilience across cities. Anchored in a vision of an inclusive, socially and environmentally just urban Sierra Leone, the plan prioritizes collaboration with communities, their organizations, and diverse urban stakeholders to build capacity and generate actionable knowledge that informs planning and practice

Drawing on a decade of institutional learning, the strategy formalizes SLURC's shift from core to project-based funding, expands its reach beyond Freetown, and reinforces its role in city planning and capacity development. It also codifies the resilience demonstrated during COVID-19 and funding volatility, emphasizing the importance of accessible outputs, equitable engagement, and structured pathways for policy uptake. As Executive Director Dr. Joseph Macarthy reflects: "This strategy articulates a clear vision and concrete priorities through 2029. It guides our organizational choices, provides benchmarks to track progress, and anticipates shifts in the research and funding landscape so we can sustain impact through crises and opportunities alike." This commitment places equity, social justice, and participatory governance at the centre—processes that elevate marginalized voices in urban decision-making and ensure that evidence translates into fair outcomes.

The plan is organized around six strategic objectives, each paired with tangible outcomes. First, SLURC seeks to enhance research excellence across nine priority themes to address urban inequities and resilience gaps, aiming for high-quality, locally grounded evidence that informs policy and practice. Second, the centre intends to influence urban policy through evidence translation and strategic partnerships, producing policy-relevant briefs and ensuring formal uptake of findings into planning processes. Third, SLURC aims to empower communities via co-produced knowledge and advocacy, strengthening community capacity, leadership, and representation in decision forums. Fourth, it calls for stronger knowledge dissemination through dynamic resource hubs and GIS tools, creating accessible platforms for data, maps, and analytics used by policymakers and practitioners. Fifth, the plan emphasizes diversification of funding and consultancy services to ensure sustainability, seeking a broader portfolio that supports core activities and expands impact across regions.

Sixth, SLURC commits to investing in organizational systems and governance to secure long-term effects, promoting transparent governance, robust risk management, and adaptive management capacity.

This strategic direction aligns with national priorities such as the Big Five Game Changers and PI-CREF (Presidential Initiative on Climate Change, Renewable Energy and Food Security), and leverages advances in mobile data collection, GIS, and remote sensing to improve urban wellbeing. SLURC's research priorities —urban livelihoods, climate resilience, health, housing, mobility, infrastructure, youth engagement, and urban safety—are tied to concrete outputs including academic publications, policy briefs, community pilots, training programs, and shared data platforms.

Operational principles underpin the plan: ethical data practices, expanded digital capabilities, and proactive engagement with policymakers through targeted briefs, workshops, and a biennial conference. Impact pathways are clearly defined – co-produced knowledge informs planning, community leadership is amplified, and service delivery improves through evidence-based management. Dashboards and metrics will track progress on policy uptake, project diversification, climate resilience, and inclusivity.

The implementation timeline is directional. Years 1–2 will establish knowledge hubs, expand GIS capabilities, and pilot community-engaged initiatives. Years 3–4 will scale evidence uptake, deepen community leadership programs, and broaden regional collaborations. By Year 5, the plan envisions public dashboards, milestone-driven policy uptake, and demonstrable improvements in urban services and climate resilience.

SLURC invites partners to co-create and co-finance initiatives, share methodologies, and engage in capacity-building. Stakeholders are encouraged to subscribe to SLURC's newsletter and participate in upcoming workshops and conferences to translate evidence into action.

By connecting rigorous research with inclusive governance and practical delivery, SLURC Strategic Plan envisions safer, more livable, and climate-resilient cities – where data drives decisions and no one is left behind.

SLURC Strategic Plan 2024-2029

## SLURC and Partners Complete Flood Risk Assessment and Management Plan for Sierra Leone's Secondary Cities

Joseph M. Macarthy

In the past fifty years, Sierra Leone has witnessed significant urban population growth, with over 40% of its population now residing in towns and cities – a figure projected to exceed 50% by 2040. This rapid urbanization presents numerous challenges, among which flooding in secondary cities has become a notably urgent concern. Unregulated urban expansion, compounded by inadequate enforcement of planning regulations, has exacerbated flood risks. These challenges include increased surface runoff, encroachment onto vital wetlands, and the blockage of drainage channels due to accumulation of solid waste and sedimentation. Together, these factors contribute to frequent and severe flooding events that displace hundreds of households, destroy livelihoods, and pose substantial public health threats.

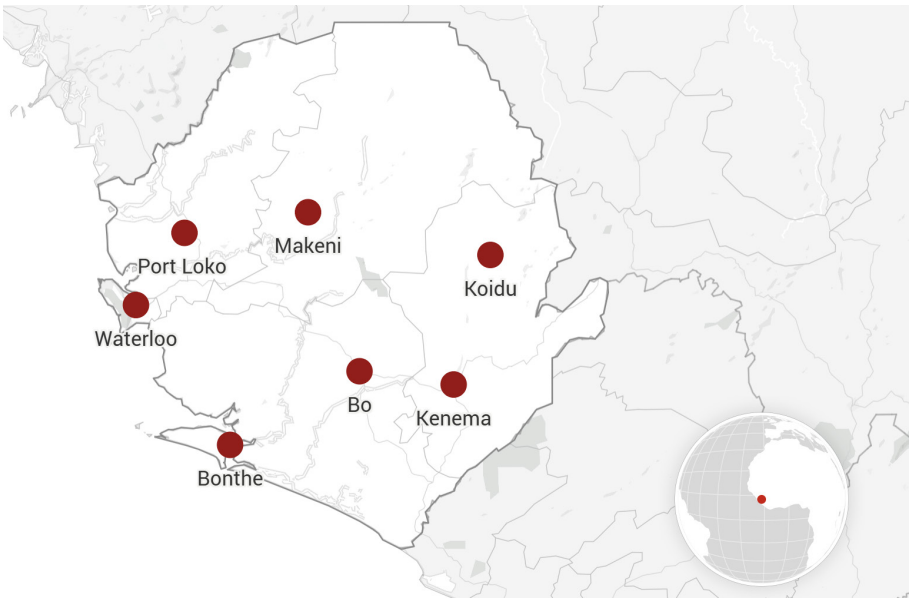
In response to these emerging challenges, the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC), in partnership with ARS Progetti S.P.A. and SWS Consulting Engineering, has officially completed the development of a comprehensive Strategic Flood Risk Assessment and Management Plan for eight secondary cities: Bo, Makeni, Koidu, Kenema, Port Loko, Bonthe, Waterloo, and Lungi. This work forms part of the broader Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project (RUSLP), funded by the World Bank, which aims to strengthen urban resilience across the country.

The assignment involved an in-depth analysis of flood hazards specific to each city, including identifying flood-prone zones, developing detailed hazard maps, and proposing actionable strategies designed to reduce flood risks and enhance urban resilience. The study leveraged and built upon previous vulnerability assessments conducted in Freetown, Bo, and Makeni, providing tailored, city-specific data and recommendations to address localized flood challenges.

Key activities during the project included comprehensive data collection on environmental and infrastructural conditions, hydrological modelling using locally sourced rainfall and flow data, and the mapping of flood hotspots. Importantly, the project emphasized stakeholder engagement, involving local authorities and communities to incorporate experiential knowledge and ensure that the plans were contextually relevant and politically feasible. Prioritization of interventions was guided by assessments of risk levels and implementation feasibility, thereby focusing resources on the most critical areas.

The Strategic Flood Risk Management Plans produced through this initiative offer tailored recommendations for each city, addressing land use planning, drainage infrastructure enhancement, and nature-based solutions such as wetland conservation and green infrastructure to mitigate flooding impacts effectively. Furthermore, the project included capacity-building components aimed at empowering local governments to implement and sustain flood risk management practices autonomously.

With the successful completion of this assignment, SLURC and its partners have provided Sierra Leone secondary cities with essential data, analytical tools, and strategic frameworks that will inform future urban development and disaster management efforts. The project's outputs – including detailed reports and hazard maps – are valuable resources for policymakers, urban planners, and key stakeholders committed to building safer, more resilient urban environments throughout Sierra Leone's rapidly growing secondary cities.




Bo, Makeni, Bonthe, Kenema, Koidu New Sembehun, Port Loko and Waterloo Credit: Umar Buckus

# Building Climate-Resilient Cities: A Landmark Step Forward in Bo, Kenema, and Makeni

Joseph M. Macarthy

In June this year, Ricardo (UK), in partnership with SLURC, successfully concluded a comprehensive consultancy project funded by the World Bank. The assignment focused on preparing Climate Action Plans (CAPs) for the three cities of Bo, Kenema, and Makeni, representing a significant step forward in promoting sustainable urban development and enhancing climate resilience in Sierra Leone's rapidly urbanizing landscape.

Urbanization in Sierra Leone has been characterized by unplanned growth, expansion of informal settlements, inadequate housing provision, and environmental degradation. These factors have intensified the vulnerabilities of urban populations – particularly the urban poor - to climate change impacts such as flooding, landslides, coastal erosion, and sea level rise. Although Sierra Leone's cities contribute minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, they face increasing methane emissions driven by land use changes, deforestation, and unsustainable energy usage, including reliance on wood and charcoal burning.

In response, Sierra Leone has developed national strategies to address climate change. However, translating these policies into actionable urban frameworks has been hampered by capacity constraints at the local government level. While Freetown possesses an existing Climate Action Plan, other major cities such as Bo, Kenema, and Makeni have lacked tailored strategic frameworks to guide climate action.

The recently concluded CAPs project, supported by the World Bank's City Climate Finance Gap Fund and the Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project (RUSLP), sought to fill this critical gap. Its primary objective was to assist the city councils of Bo, Kenema, and Makeni in developing city-level Climate Action Plans that reflect their unique urban contexts and challenges. The approach adopted was participatory and evidence-based, involving extensive engagement with local stakeholders, comprehensive data collection, and rigorous technical assessments to ensure practical and contextually relevant plans.

CAP validation workshop Photo credit: Umar Buckus

Central to the project was the conduct of city-wide climate readiness assessments, which evaluated the resilience of infrastructure, urban land use planning, urban management practices, financial environments, and governance frameworks. These assessments provided a detailed understanding of each city's capacity to implement climate actions, forming the foundation for the development of greenhouse gas inventories, climate risk analysis, and scenario planning exercises. These exercises enabled projections of emission pathways and anticipated climate impacts under various development trajectories.

Engagement with local stakeholders through workshops and consultations, and validations sessions was pivotal in fostering ownership and consensus on key challenges and opportunities. This participatory process culminated into the formulation of prioritized and actionable climate strategies. The resulting CAPs are comprehensive, including financing strategies, investment prioritisation, and monitoring and evaluation frameworks designed to track progress and impact over time.

The CAPs aim not only to mitigate emissions but also to build urban resilience by incorporating targeted adaptation measures. They outline short-term priorities for 2026, medium-term objectives spanning 2030-2040, and long-term visions extending to 2050. By integrating climate actions with local development agendas, the plans are positioned to catalyse climate-smart investments and support sustainable urban growth trajectories.

Plans for dissemination - including community awareness campaigns and stakeholder forums - are in place to ensure broad-based support and understanding of the CAPs. This inclusive approach seeks to embed climate action firmly within urban governance structures, empowering local authorities and communities alike to take ownership of their climate adaptation and mitigation agendas.

This landmark project has thus established a robust foundation upon which the cities of Bo, Kenema, and Makeni can build resilient, sustainable futures. Through strategic planning, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and focused investments, these urban centres are better equipped to navigate the complexities of climate change into opportunities for sustainable development and prosperity.

# Climate Change Adaptation in Marginalised Urban Settlements: Why Local Knowledge Matters

Abu Conteh & Ishmail Conteh

## Informal settlement context

Informal settlements experience frequent vulnerabilities including flooding, heatwaves, landslides and disease outbreaks. These exposures are often reinforced by the lack of housing, sanitation and healthcare infrastructures, coupled with the growing threats of climate change. In Freetown, informal settlements are among the most vulnerable to climate hazards, due to stigma and exclusionary processes that often label them illegal. Perceptions of illegality have therefore affected dialogue on settlement upgrade, risk mitigation and service delivery.

## The Scope of SLURC's Climate Change Projects

Amidst these challenges, informal settlement residents continually innovate ways of coping with gaps in service delivery and adapting to environmental hazards and livelihood challenges. Our ongoing engagements with informal settlement residents illustrate high levels of knowledge in dealing with diverse challenges intersecting with climate change hazards. Since April this year, SLURC has engaged residents from diverse social identities in participatory dialogues through four climate change projects: **Urban SHADE** (Strengthening Responsiveness of Healthcare Provision for Urban Marginalised People); **Urban Futures** (Towards Health Equity, Inclusive Governance and Climate Adaptation in African Informal Settlements): **KISS** (Spatializing Climate Impacts on Health: Focus on Vulnerable Settlements in Mega Cities of the Global South); and **Urban TRACS** (Transformative Research for Adaptation to Climate Change in Informal Settlements). Communities that we have engaged so far include Moyiba, Colbot, Cockle Bay, Pamoronko, Thompson Bay, Susan's Bay and CKG (Cockle Bay, Kolleh town and Greybush).

## Local knowledge in action

The depth of local knowledge of informal settlement residents on climate change adaptation provides a critical opportunity for improving response to climate-related risks, as summarised:

Early warning systems: In Colbot and Pamoronko, community residents said that they work with the Freetown City Council and the National Disaster Management Agency to monitor surface water level and report their observations. Information from such observations is useful in declaring flooding alerts and evacuation of residents at greater risk.

Flood mitigation: Across the seaside settlements, residents demonstrated their mastery of flood mitigation through the clearing of drainages, construction of retaining walls and the use of old tires as terraces to prevent water from entering their homes. Some people convert their houses into a elavated buildings, using corrugated iron sheets and sticks to allow the flow of water through the basement.

Response to heat: People's responses to heat vary based on knowledge and individual situations. Residents of Cockle Bay engage in the planting of mangrove trees to improve ventilation, while those in Pamoronko prevent the destruction of mangroves by having a tree protection committee in place. Residents of Colbot and Moyiba mentioned strategies such as staying outdoors or taking late night showers.

Livelihood adaptation: Livelihood adaptation strategies were influenced by harsh and unpredictable weather patterns. In Thompson Bay, women urban farmers switch to small businesses during the dry season when there is a limited supply of water to keep their crops. Women selling raw fish also switch to dried fish to prevent their raw fish stock from going bad due to extreme heat. In Colbot, women selling cooked rice (Cookery) closely observe weather patterns before preparing food to prevent food spoilage due to intense rainfalls and flooding.

## Why local knowledge matters

Strengthening local knowledge towards climate change adaptation is critical. Knowledge systems that are rooted in social, cultural, and environmental awareness are vital in helping individuals, households, and communities adapt to climate change vulnerabilities. Such knowledge can support existing climate interventions, strengthen policies, and promote inclusive community-led risk mitigation. Finally, shared understanding of local adaptation measures can help support community initiatives and address ongoing maladaptation that may amplify existing risks.

Seasonal drying in Pamoronko, Credit: Fasalie S Kamara

## CLARE Strengthens Cross-Country Collaboration to Amplify Climate Resilience Voices of Marginalised Urban Residents

Ibrahim Juldeh Sesay

Photo Credit: Kalichi Pictures

CLARE organised a conference, in Lusaka, Zambia, between 5 - 9 May 2025, joined by climate researchers, policymakers, and practitioners from across low and middle-income countries (LMICs), including Africa and the Asia-Pacific. The aim of the conference was to discuss strategies towards the developement of an inclusive climate action plan for Climate Adaptation and Resilience (CLARE) programme. This year's conference theme, "Co-Creating Narratives for Climate Resilience", underscored the need for knowledge exchange and southern-led leadership in shaping climate adaptation strategies.

The Sierra Leone Urban Research Center (SLURC), together with its local partners, the Institute for Gender and Children's Health Research (IGCHR) and Centre of Dialogue for Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA), took part in the conference. SLURC was represented by Ibrahim Juldeh Sesay, Research Officer for the URBAN TRACS (Transformative Research for Adaptation to Climate Change in Informal Settlements) project. In his presentation, Ibrahim emphasised the critical importance of Participatory Action Research (PAR) approaches, which seek to integrate community knowledge, ensuring that climate adaptation measures are contextually relevant.

He noted that Public health vulnerabilities linked to climate change have increased in the last decade, with severe impacts on people living in informal settlements. Due to urban inequality and the lack of adequate infrastructure, the impacts of climate change are often concentrated and severe in urban informal settlements. These underlying challenges negatively impact the adaptive capacity of informal settlement residents, which makes them vulnerable to extreme weather events. He notes that in Sierra Leone, many marginalised communities face frequent extreme weather events, such as flooding, landslides, and health hazards, yet their voices are often absent in formal adaptation planning strategies. Addressing these challenges requires not only local solutions, but multisectoral and multi-country collaborations through the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and strategies that enable inclusive & innovative climate adaptation.

### Cross-country (south-south) collaboration in action

During the plenary sessions, participants discussed South-South collaboration to strengthen climate research and action. Partners shared approaches for engaging marginalised communities, including participatory mapping of flood-prone settlements, and youth-led campaigns on climate preparedness. The sharing of approaches revealed a common thread that collaboration across borders enriches local solutions. The engagement emphasised the value of inclusive actions in LMICs and the need to develop climate resilience and adaptation models rooted in Southern experiences.

Key learnings were that climate vulnerabilities in urban informal settlements in LMICs are similar and require urgent action. Building climate resilience in fragile contexts, therefore, demands inclusive approaches that intentionally centre the voices and knowledge of marginalised communities. Through the Urban TRACS project, SLURC and its partners have begun putting these lessons into practice by working alongside residents in Freetown's informal settlements to design climate adaptation plans that bridge community knowledge with policy action, ensuring that those most at risk are active co-creators of a more resilient urban future.

Community Visit to Kanyama, one of Lusaka's biggest informal settlements Photo Credit: Kalichi Pictures

*CLARE is a flagship research programme on climate adaptation and resilience, funded mostly (about 90%) by UK Aid through the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and co-funded by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada. CLARE is bridging critical gaps between science and action by championing Southern leadership to enable socially inclusive and sustainable action to build resilience to climate change and natural hazards.*

## Community-Driven Research is Revealing the Truth about Climate Change and Its Impact on Health

Sullaiman Fullah & Fasalie Sulaiman Kamara

We have seen pictures of raging wildfires in North America, drought in the Horn of Africa, and melting glaciers in Antarctica as a result of climate change. The stories of communities about climate change and it's impact on health are often told through the filters of external experts residing outside the communities. But what happens when we hand the camera to the community to share their lived experience?

In Freetown's urban informal settlements, SLURC is placing cameras into the hands of community members to document their realities of climate change impacts on their health and well-being. With the Urban SHADE project, community residents are capturing images that visually articulate their daily challenges. This approach is called 'Photovoice', ensuring that the stories of urban informal residents are not just heard, but seen and driven by the communities themselves.

Residents at the hillside community of Moyiba were trained in photography to capture images of the climate impacts on health and well-being. The results are not just data; they are empowering visual evidence. The photographs reveal a multifaceted vulnerability, where climate change exacerbates existing pressures on livelihoods, housing, and gender-specific safeguarding issues.

In a follow up workshop, SLURC engaged with the communities to validate the pictures that captured their community challenges in the imagery. The local women's leader (Mammy Queen) highlighted a picture of severe flooding. She explained that some families are making adjustments to their homes, occasionally extending them into at risk areas, but this is all they can do to find shelter. The workshop participants explained the significance of each image, ensuring the narrative depicted their challenges and lived experiences. The images further showed the effect of poor housing conditions on thier health. Makeshift zinc (pan bodi) houses offer little protection, exposing residents to cold during the rainy season and extreme heat in the dry season.

Amidst these challenges, the Photovoice session also documented a narrative of resilience. The community is actively developing coping mechanisms. The images reveal innovative adaptations. They are planting trees on hillsides that provide more stability to the soil and reduce the risk of flooding and mudslides. The Senior Research Officer of SLURC, Abu Conteh, commends their innovation, noting, "It is critical to consider methods for adapting to climate change that also reduce impacts on health." This statement underscores the project's goal of bridging community knowledge with actionable strategies.

The study is being carried out in two other informal settlements, Crab Town, Kolleh Town, Gray Bush (CKG), and Susan's Bay within Freetown by our local partners CODOHSAPA and IGCHR. Globally, the study is conducted in ten selected informal settlements across India, Sierra Leone, and Kenya, with the overall leadership provided by the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM, UK) and The George Institute for Global Health, India. The project is funded by the UK's National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) as part of the Research and Innovation for Global Health Transformation funding stream.

Credit: Fasalie S Kamara

## SLURC embarks on a new Learning Alliance with Imperial College London

Andrea Klingel

In March, SLURC was approached by Dr Jessica Thorn, an Assistant Professor in Global Food Security and Environmental Change at the Centre for Environmental Policy of Imperial College London. The purpose was to explore the possibility of collaborating with and hosting four MSc Environmental Technology students, alongside a PhD student under her supervision from Imperial College London.

Jessica Thorn and her students spent four weeks in Sierra Leone as part of a project called 'Future Landscape Optimisation for peri urban Resilience and ecosystem health in Africa (FLOURISH)'. Funded by the University of Namibia, the project aims to evaluate the effectiveness

Photo credit: Umar Buckus

of green infrastructure innovations in informal and peri urban areas, addressing both current and future challenges. Activities included primary data collection in the field and facilitation of workshops.

SLURC supported this initiative by partnering the students with local interns who contributed vital local knowledge, translation services, and logistical support throughout their stay. This partnership was mutually beneficial, enhancing the capacity of the interns via direct involvement in cutting-edge field research. Additionally, SLURC directors offered guidance on identifying key stakeholders, selecting relevant informal settlements for different thematic areas, and provided contextual background essential for the success of the project.

Despite limited time for planning, the fieldwork and subsequent outputs were significant. Key research activities encompassed transect walks through various informal settlements, household surveys in three settlements focusing on vulnerability and adaptation, participatory scenario workshops, focus groups, key informant interviews, and two community feedback workshops. The team produced community posters to communicate the research findings effectively.

This visit also enabled the sole PhD student, Rebeca Biancardi to travel beyond Freetown to the Scarcies River Estuary where she co-facilitated a participatory climate risk assessment workshop. This was conducted with Jessica Thorn and colleagues from the Conservation Society of Sierra Leone (CSSL). Rebeca's doctoral research centers on "Understanding the role of mangroves as drivers for socio-ecological resilience in Freetown's informal settlements", aligning closely with the project's thematic focus.

Looking ahead, Imperial College London and SLURC plan to formalize and deepen this collaborative partnership. The goal is to enhance the benefits for both institutions, their staff, and especially for local interns who gain invaluable experiential learning opportunities.

The students' research tackled diverse themes, including:

-Environmental justice in reforestation schemes in Freetown (Maxwell Ryding, supported by intern Andrew Saffa). The corresponding thesis is titled: Rooted in inequality? An Environmental Justice Assessment of Freetown's Urban Reforestation Campaign. (Ryding, 2025. MSc Thesis, Centre for Environmental Policy, Imperial College London).

-Autonomous adaptation and climate financing (Lizzie Russle, supported by intern Tamba Braima)

-Governance and financing mechanisms for restoration in the Freetown the Treetown Campaign (Eoin Lacy, supported by intern Musa Wullari)

-Solar mini-grid energy access in informal settlements (Jack Waugh, supported by intern John Tarawalie)

SLURC intends to publish these theses on its website upon finalization to ensure wider dissemination and access to this vital research.

This collaboration exemplifies a meaningful academic and practical partnership that leverages international expertise and local knowledge to address pressing environmental challenges within Sierra Leone's rapidly evolving urban landscapes.

Photo credit: Umar Buckus

[Read more about the Learning Alliance and view outputs on slurc.org]

## A Warm Welcome to Our New KMCI Officer

The Editoral Team

SLURC is thrilled to announce Fasalie Sulaiman Kamara as our new Knowledge Management, Communication, and Information (KMCI) officer. He assumed his position in August.

A seasoned media and communications professional, Fasalie brings nearly a decade of experience in international development work within Sierra Leone.

Most recently, Fasalie was a Senior Program Officer with the Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs, providing technical assistance to the One Health Platform at the National Public Health Agency (NPHA). Some of his accomplishments there include providing technical assistance in:

- Reviewing the National One Health Governance Manual, which has improved coordination among multisectoral Ministries, Departments, and Agencies.

- Developing Sierra Leone's Infodemic Management Standard Operating Guidelines to enhance the efficiency of managing rumors and misinformation during disease outbreaks.

- Publishing the One Health Newsletter, which enhances information sharing.

-Creating communication strategies for zoonotic diseases, including anthrax and brucellosis.

Mr. Kamara has previously held other roles as a Communications Manager at BRAC, Brand and Communications Coordinator at SOS Children's Villages, and Public Health Promotion Officer at Oxfam.

He has also served as a part-time lecturer in the Development Communication Unit at the Department of Public Relations and Communication at Fourah Bay College, and has a background in journalism.

Fasalie holds a master's degree and a bachelor's degree in Mass Communication from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

We are confident that his expertise will be invaluable in driving SLURC's knowledge management and communication goals. With our extensive research resource in urban planning, urban health, and inclusion, we expect him to significantly increase SLURC research uptake.

Fasalie Sulaiman Kamara, Knowledge Management, Communication, and Information (KMCI) Officer at SLURC
Photo credit: Umar Buckus

This newsletter is also available on our website: **slurc.org**

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