

SLURC

Report on the role of Community Action Area Planning in
expanding the participatory capabilities of the urban poor



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List of Acronyms

ASF-UK	Architecture San Frontieres-UK
AAP	Action Area Plan
CAAP	Community Action Area Plan
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDMC	Community Disaster Management Committees
CODOHSAPA	Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
FCC	Freetown City Council
FEDURP	Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor
FIAR	Freetown Improvement Act and Rules
FSP	Freetown Structure Plan
GoSL	Government of Sierra Leone
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PHC	Peripheral Health Centre
SLURC	Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
TCPA	Town and Country Planning Act
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association

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Executive Summary

Action Area Plans are recognised by the Freetown Structure Plan (FSP) for 2013-2028 as a mechanism that can enable planning processes that improve neighbourhoods in Freetown. The FSP assumes this planning instrument can synchronise local developments with citywide planning principles and processes, but does not indicate how these will be implemented and by whom. This limits space for local participation.

This report covers an action research project, involving the elaboration, implementation and reflection of Community Action Area Plans (CAAPs) in the informal settlements of Dwarzack and Cockle Bay. The CAAP processes were designed through a collaboration between Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC), The Bartlett Development Planning Unit of University College London (DPU), Architecture Sans Frontières-UK (ASF-UK) and the Federation of Urban and Rural Poor of Sierra Leone (FEDURP-SL). They aimed to complement current planning procedures, implementing Action Area Plans through a localised, participatory approach. The research argues that the CAAP process proposed has the potential to become a key instrument and procedure to create a participatory mechanism to prepare and implement local plans as outlined in the FSP as well as Local Government Act (2004). The CAAP methodology drew on the ASF-UK Change by Design Methodology and it was divided into four stages: diagnosis, dreaming, developing and defining. These stages were used to facilitate activities associated to design at home, community and city scales.

The work aims to contribute to current urban debates – on communicative planning, the role of everyday practices, social identities, bridging scales, grassroots action as social innovation, and governance – by focusing on the documentation of the experience of participatory planning taking place in informal settlements in Freetown. It draws on the Capability Approach literature, to assess the CAAP process in relation to its impacts on capabilities of the urban poor to meaningfully participate in city-making processes in Freetown.

Stakeholders expressed a range of participatory expectations and aspirations from the CAAP process. NGO workers consider that the CAAP process ensured the active participation of the residents, thereby creating feelings of ownership. Those from government agencies deem the wide range of participants in the process to bring a broader range of perspectives and ideas. All stakeholders agreed that the process built trust between SLURC and the communities. The CAAP process met community members' aspirations by allowing them to acquire knowledge and skills; expanding their knowledge on the risks and opportunities of the places where they live; enabling the formation and strengthening of social bonds among residents; facilitating the mapping and identification of areas of interest for further research; and providing key principles that can continue being applied beyond the timeframe of the CAAP process.

However, the research also revealed important shortcomings in relation to the ability of the CAAP process to meet some valued participatory aspirations. Respondents from communities argued that the final outputs need to be more accessible to community groups. This would allow the plans to be used more effectively as a lobby instrument with government and development actors, as well as becoming more relevant in sharing knowledge gathered within communities.

During the CAAP process, different participatory spaces were provided spanning from the home stage to the community, city and into the portfolio of options stages. The research reveals that an important aspect of the entire process was giving a voice to the people, and involved listening to their diverse concerns, aspirations and priorities which were fed back into discussions at the subsequent stage. The CAAP process used a variety of instruments which recognized the diverse needs and aspiration of participants.

Furthermore, the research shows that the CAAP process drew on or expanded on a series of community assets, enhancing local residents' capacities to participate in future participatory processes. Here are some of the main 'participatory assets' expanded by CAAP process:

- Human assets – participants argued that they gained new research and planning skills as well as knowledge about their communities;
- Political assets – participants said the CAAP process increased trust and mutual understanding between stakeholders by opening up spaces for interaction and dialogue and for the views and aspirations of each person to be respected and recognised by the others.
- Social assets - participants were motivated by the spaces created for people to share ideas, interact and build relationships with their peers.
- Physical assets – participants emphasised the role of the CAAP process in deepening residents' interests in planning, and increasing their awareness about the merits of living in well-planned areas.

It is important to position the CAAP process within wider action research and learning initiatives led by SLURC in Freetown. The openness and local capacities that allowed this initiative to take place has been a direct fruition of the variety of projects led by SLURC in these two communities and Freetown more widely. The report concludes by arguing that the CAAP has the potential to play a crucial role in expanding the participatory capabilities of Freetown's urban poor, as well as in democratising urban governance more widely in Sierra Leone. The existence of community mobilisation structures as well as support of various government stakeholders to the CAAP process are key opportunities to actualise these potential roles. Nevertheless, further work is needed to make this planning instrument more responsive to local needs in ways that ensure the process as well as the product are more accessible to wider set of stakeholders.

1. Introduction

The Freetown Structure Plan for 2013-2028 recognises the role of Action Area Plans as a mechanism to enable planning processes that bring about improvements to neighbourhoods in Freetown. A key aspect of these plans is that they should “indicate the precise private and public use of all land and parcels within the ‘action planning area’ and indicate areas reserved for utility services, roads and transport system, parcel numbers, eventual reservation or protection lines, as well as development and building regulations to be followed when using the parcels included in the plan” (2014:16). The underlying assumption of the Freetown Structure Plan is that this planning instrument can be used as a mechanism to synchronise local developments with citywide planning principles and processes. However, in the current policy, it does not indicate the processes through which these plans are supposed to be implemented and by whom.

In the meantime, the Federation of the Urban Poor in Sierra Leone together with their support NGOs (CODOHSAPA and YMCA) have been developing their own informal settlement profiles to gain visibility of the needs and aspirations of the urban poor. For them, such settlement profiles are not means to implement city-wide visions, but to advocate their rights to a more just and inclusive city. While representing important achievements of the urban poor and their support network to gather information about urban dwellers, these profiles have had limited recognition and impact on policy and planning processes.

These two contexts present a typical condition of the dichotomy between potential invited spaces of participation in the city led by governmental authorities with the objective to implement programmes and projects and the claimed spaces led by grassroots actors attempting contest and influence planning processes from the bottom up. In this research SLURC investigates the potentials of an in-between space of participation in the city, where socially just agendas can be advanced through localised plans, drawing on the initiatives of grassroots actors, while at the same time aiming to achieve the recognition from key urban stakeholders to unlock opportunities for the production of a more equitable city.

This report draws on findings from an action research project, which involve the elaboration,



Figure 1: Community mapping in Cockle Bay

implementation and reflection about Community Action Area Plans (CAAP) in the informal settlements of Dwarzack and Cockle Bay. The CAAP processes were designed as a method to complement current planning procedures, supporting the implementation of Action Area Plans through a participatory and localised approach. The CAAP methodology was developed and implemented in partnership with Architecture Sans Frontières-UK, by drawing on their Change by Design methodology (Frediani et al. 2011, 2014 and 2015; Frediani 2016 and Bainbridge et al. 2016). The main focus of this report is to examine the role of this CAAP process in expanding the capabilities of informal settlement dwellers in participating in city-making processes. To respond to this focus, the research addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges and opportunities within current policy and planning context in Sierra Leone for participatory forms of city-making? How does the CAAP process respond to these policy and planning conditions?
2. How does the CAAP process recognise the diverse needs and aspirations of city-making in Freetown?
3. In which ways can informal settlement dwellers involved in the process enhance their agency, ability and opportunity to affect decision making processes towards more equitable city-making?

This report outlines the methodology used in this research project, and then unpacks its findings in the following four sections. Firstly, the policy and planning context is examined, particularly by analysing policies relevant to setting the context for participation in government-led processes affecting city-making. Then, the report unpacks the aspirations and motivations of different stakeholders that participated in the CAAP process, revealing some synergies as well as differences in relation to the role of participation in city-making processes. Thirdly, the report delves into more detail on the participatory practices implemented by the CAAP process, exploring its methods and instruments. This section elaborates on the power relations shaping the practice of participation and compares it with previous participatory engagements that local informal settlement dwellers have engaged in the past. Fourthly, the report reflects on how the CAAP process drew from, expanded or compromised participants assets to participate in decision making processes. In its concluding section, key lessons learned are outlined, particularly in relation to how the CAAP process can be applied in the future to build pathways for equitable city-making.

2. Methodology

2.1 Debates on participatory planning

This research project dialogues a series of ongoing debates exploring the role of participatory processes in urban planning and design. Firstly, this research relates to urban planning debates, critiquing **communicative planning** processes due to their inability to renegotiate power imbalances between the urban poor and dominant urban stakeholders in the planning process. This literature has called for alternative planning thinking, critiquing consensus building approaches, and drawing on experiences of insurgency (Miraftab, 2009) and conflict (Gualini, 2015). Apart from critiquing planning processes, this literature has called for a re-thinking on where planning takes place, therefore recognising the **role of everyday practices** as a site of production of regulations, frameworks and procedures that shape city-making.

Meanwhile, the literature exploring participatory processes more generally uses the language of invited and claimed spaces of participation to unpack the different conditions within which participation has been practiced (Cornwall, 2002). Among other points, this literature calls for a critical engagement with the **social identities** being represented, raising questions around mis- as well as mal-recognition reproduced through participatory processes (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). When applied to contexts of informal settlement upgrading, these concerns have raised questions around how participatory processes can approach heterogeneity within communities and their inner power asymmetries (i.e. Rigon, 2017; and Walker and Butcher, 2016).

Also relevant to our research are the concerns brought by critical urban theorists of localised actions not being able to have impact at the **city scale**. Authors have pointed out the risks of local-traps, where local actions prioritise localised demands over wider structural challenges. Similarly, this literature has pointed out how such efforts to local approaches to urban development conform to wide neoliberal strategic planning paradigms, devolving the responsibility of planning to a local set of actors that are often not equitably prepared to deal with these responsibilities (i.e. Lemanski, 2011; and Purcell, 2006). As a consequence, well-resourced and mobilised areas would end up bringing about more and better development outcomes, contributing towards widening urban spatial inequalities.

Another set of relevant literature is the existing research that has explored **grassroots action as social innovation**. Particularly relevant is the work of Moulaert et al. (2010), which explores the role of socially innovative neighbourhood initiatives in bringing about meaningful urban change. In their work, socially innovative neighbourhood initiatives need to: 1) contribute to the satisfaction of human needs; 2) enable access rights, enhancing human capabilities and empowering particular social groups; 3) contribute to changing social relations and power structures within communities, local groups and external actors “to change the modalities of governance in the direction of more inclusive and democratic practices and the pursuit of multiscalar political participation systems” (Swyngedouw and Moulaert, 2010: 220). While the cases analysed by Moulaert et al. (2010) are all based in European cities, therefore with limited relevance to experiences and governance arrangements in Freetown, these are useful criteria that can be used to inform this research’s analytical framework. Furthermore, this work brings to the forefront the need to explore **governance dynamics**, analysing the context of political-economic transformations and the changing relationships between state, market economy and civil society.

Finally, this research is informed by the ongoing research activities of the research group Lugar Comum from the Faculty of Architecture of Universidade Federal da Bahia (Salvador, Brazil), conducting similar action research on the role of neighbourhood plans to advance the right to the city in Salvador. In their research, they have found that in the context of Brazil and its governance dynamics, Neighbourhood Plans developed through participatory processes are instruments to advance **democratic urban governance**. For them, Neighbourhood Plans are approached as “an instrument for making the State more accountable” and that developing such Plans “challenges the neoliberal logic, reinstating government bodies’ role in providing the social welfare policies and services they have responsibility

over” (Mazi et al., 2018: 15).

This work aims to contribute to these debates by focusing on the documentation of the experience of participatory planning taking place in informal settlements in Freetown. The research applies the ‘participatory capabilities’ lens (Frediani, 2015), to examine how the process of ‘Community Action Area Planning’ in Freetown has impacted on informal settlement dwellers’ ability and opportunity to influence decision making processes. By doing this, the research hopes to explore the role of CAAPs in expanding the participatory capabilities of the urban poor to influence and shape pathways towards more equitable city-making.

2.2 Debates on participatory planning

This research draws on the literature on the Capability Approach, to define ‘participatory capabilities’ towards equitable city-making as the freedom people have to meaningfully participate in city-making processes. From a capability perspective, freedom is defined as people’s choices, abilities and opportunities to achieve the things they have reason to value. When applied in the context of participatory capabilities, the analytical framework shed light firstly on what the values associated to meaningful participation are. What are the desired aspirations, or democratic ideals associated to participatory processes? Then, a capability analysis requires examination of people’s freedom to achieve their valued participatory aspirations by exploring the options, abilities and opportunities to actually attain these aspirations. The table below (figure 1) explains how each of these concepts were defined. Figure 2 represents how these elements relate to one another, which guided the research design and analysis.

2.2 Analytical framework

This research draws on the literature on the Capability Approach, to define ‘participatory capabilities’ towards equitable city-making as the freedom people have to meaningfully participate in city-making processes. From a capability perspective, freedom is defined as people’s choices, abilities and opportunities to achieve the things they have reason to value. When applied in the context of participatory capabilities, the analytical framework shed light firstly on what the values associated to meaningful participation are. What are the desired aspirations, or democratic ideals associated to participatory processes? Then, a capability analysis requires examination of people’s freedom to achieve their valued participatory aspirations by exploring the options, abilities and opportunities to actually attain these aspirations. The table below (figure 1) explains how each of these concepts were defined. Figure 2 represents how these elements relate to one another, which guided the research design and analysis.

Table 1: Analytical Elements of the Participatory Capabilities framework

Analytical Element	Description
Participatory Aspirations	These are the values associated to meaningful participation, or democratic ideas, articulated by different stakeholders relevant to the Community Action Area Planning processes. The investigation of participatory aspirations requires an analysis and comparison of such values present in relevant policy documents, as well as in the discourses from policy makers and government officials, NGOs, community representatives and residents of informal settlements involved in the CAAP process.

Participatory Practices	These are the participatory spaces as well as methodologies relevant to community area planning in informal settlements in Freetown. This requires not only the documentation of participatory practices implemented by the CAAP process, but also contrasting and understanding their relationship with other relevant participatory practices. By exploring participatory practices, this research aims to reveal the power relations within spaces of participation, and explore how participatory methodologies relate to them.
Participatory Assets	These relate to the relationship between the CAAP process and people's access and control over assets that enable them to participate meaningfully in city-making processes. There are six different types of assets that can be considered: human, financial, physical, natural, financial and political assets. The research examines the extent to which the CAAP draws on these assets, expands them or hinders them, in ways that affect informal settlement dwellers' participatory capabilities.
Participatory Institutional Arrangements	These relate to the procedures, norms and frameworks shaping participatory processes associated to city-making. The research of institutional arrangements involves interrogating formal as well as informal institutional landscapes affecting participatory processes.
Structural Drivers	The participatory capabilities framework also highlights the importance of structural drivers that condition participatory process. In the case of CAAP in Freetown, this would relate to wider trends associated to governance approaches as well as economic and political interests associated to Freetown urban planning tendencies and decisions.

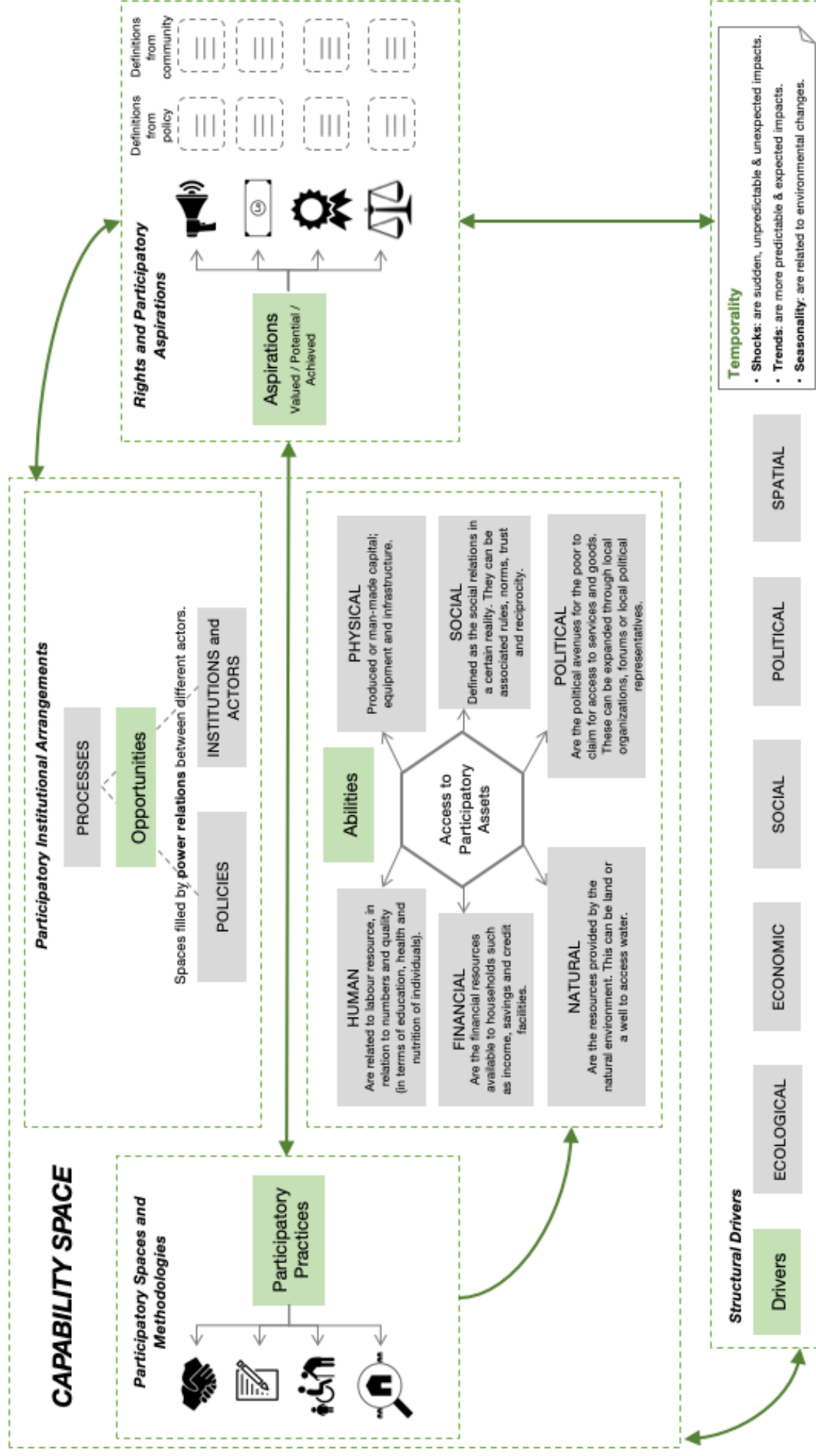


Figure 2: Participatory Capabilities Analytical Framework

2.3 Research Approach and Activities

This research has an action oriented character, as it enables a process of designing and implementing a 'Community Action Area Plan' in two informal settlements (Dwarzack and Cockle Bay), and it conducts a series of research activities to explore people's experiences of participating in this process. These two settlements were prioritised for this study because of the following reasons: 1) they are localities where SLURC has been building a long term collaboration; 2) the CAAP process would be a helpful exercise to bring together findings from different past studies to inform planning processes; 3) they would allow the study to explore the role of CAAP in two settlements of very different sizes and topographies (Dwarzack being a larger, hillside settlement; Cockle Bay a smaller settlement by the coast) (see table 3).

Table 2: Basic profile of case study settlements

	Cockle Bay	Dwarzack
Location	Located on the shore of Aberdeen Creek in western Freetown	A hillside settlement located not far away from the city centre
Size	Has an estimated 520 structures and is home to 1,350 households living in an area of 45 acres (FEDURP, 2018). Most of the settlement was previously designated as an environmentally protected area. Some dwellings are on land reclaimed through banking of the sea water. Most houses are made of zinc.	Has 2,003 structures with 5,236 households living in an area size of about 313 acres (FEDURP, 2018). Nearly half of the land is claimed to be privately owned. Most houses are made of mud especially up the hills.
Topography	The low altitude, poor drainage and weak infrastructure renders several areas and developments at risk of flooding associated with heavy rains, tidal waves and sea level rise.	The landscape is generally undulating with some areas composed of large rocks/boulders overhanging dwellings.
Population Characteristics	High rates of illiteracy, poverty, inequality and unemployment.	High rates of illiteracy, poverty, inequality and unemployment.
Amenities	Characterised by poor and inadequate roads. Has no PHC, but has a community centre, a police post and a community field. Is well served with water from nearby water taps, spring water and bore holes. Most houses use shared toilets which are connected directly to the sea. There are a few primary schools, mosques and churches.	Characterised by poor and inadequate roads. Has one PHC, primary schools, market centre, community centre, mosques, churches, bore holes and a few water taps, with some areas connected to the main electricity grid. Most houses use shared toilets. There is also a police post and a community field.

The CAAP process was facilitated by Architecture Sans Frontières-UK and it involved conducting participatory design activities divided in four different stages: diagnosis, dreaming, developing and defining. These stages were used to facilitate activities that were associated to different scales of design: home, community and city. In its developing stage, the methodology involved conducting an

exercise in each settlement entitled ‘portfolio of options’, which interrogates the different principles for community action area planning and development options that came up from previous participatory design activities. In the defining stage, main findings of this process were systematised in the Community Action Area Plans.

The research component of this initiative focused on documenting the experience of those that took part in this process. To allow the CAAP process to take place as well as its monitoring, the research set up a city-wide advisory group, which involved key urban stakeholders including representatives from government, NGOs and community groups. In each settlement, the research set up a community steering committee, which were also consulted throughout the process. The meetings with the advisory group and the community steering committees were key to defining the purpose and methodological aspects of the CAAP, as well as to monitor its progress and achievements. At the settlement level, activities were run in three to four days’ workshop formats, associated to scales of design (home, community and city), and then culminating in the ‘portfolio of options’ exercises. In the beginning and in the end, focus group discussions and interviews with a selective number of participants captured their expectations and experiences of the process. Finally, interviews with key informants aimed to understand the wider role that the CAAP could have in democratising urban governance in Freetown. There was a total of 154 people who participated in the CAAP processes from both settlements, and 145 people participated in the research activities that led to this report through 21 focus group activities and 83 semi-structured interviews.

All interviews and focus group discussions were translated when necessary and then transcribed. These transcriptions were then analysed through the ‘participatory capabilities’ framework. The following sections outline the main findings of this analysis.



Figure 3: Dwarzack community field

3. Policy and Planning Analysis

3.1 Current laws and policies associated to spatial planning and participation

Unplanned growth and the lack of adequate access to secure land for housing are among the main challenges faced in Freetown, especially among the urban poor. While the city is continually challenged by rapid population increases, and with it congestion and overcrowding, to date the city authorities have still been unable to properly manage these growth processes. The main spatial planning law in Sierra Leone is the 1946 Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) which is generally regarded as being too old-fashioned, despite still having some relevant aspects that can be used to guide the orderly use of land and to ensure control over the way it is developed. This Act is applied concurrently with a range of other laws and policies that have implications for the spatial growth of urban settlements in the country. A case is the Local Government Act (2004) which empowers local councils to undertake productive activities leading to improvements in their localities. This includes activities relating to social development, services provision, infrastructure development, environmental management, and the preparation of local development plans to improve the wellbeing of residents. As highlighted in Part XI subsection 85 (4), the Act clearly recognises the participation of residents not only in the preparation of the local plan but also in its implementation:

A local council shall, before approving or reviewing a development plan, consult residents of the locality, agencies of Government and non-governmental and international organisations that have interest in working in the locality (GoSL 2004:43).

For Freetown, other important spatial planning tools are the Freetown Improvement Act and Rules (FIAR), Cap 66 of 1960 which provides the technical rules guiding housing development in Freetown and the 2014 Freetown Structure Plan (FSP). In particular, the FSP proposes a range of actions to enable Freetown to adequately deal with its rapid and uncontrolled growth process. One of these propositions involves actions to ensure the better distribution of the population within the Freetown City Council (FCC) area, with intensified urban development to be promoted in some specific places. A Spatial Development Strategy which was developed alongside the FSP also seeks to generate discussions around the spatial transformation of Sierra Leone, including agreeing on a national spatial development plan.

A supplementary document to the FSP which provide guidelines to “Strengthening Land-Use Planning in Local Councils” requires all local councils to produce Action Area Plans (AAP) for neighbourhoods following consultation with the local residents and other relevant key stakeholders. Accordingly, the AAP should set out the strategic vision for a place and should seek to provide the framework for actions to address the local challenges and priorities of people relating mainly to their current and future development aspirations. In the design of the plan, city authorities are required to collaborate actively with a wide range of stakeholders and agencies that help to shape and as well, bring about transformations in local areas. Moreover, AAPs should be designed in line not only with the neighbourhood and city plans, but also with the national priorities set out in the national policies and plans. Arguably, the current Community Action Area Plan (CAAP) has been conceptualised within the framework of AAP. This work favours CAAP because in Freetown, it is often difficult to define an area exactly, given the varied nature of places including differences in their physical and social make up. Since most people identify themselves with ‘bounded communities’, the concept of CAAP has been preferred here.

Largely as result of the chaos characterising Freetown’s development processes and the pressures for land owing to rising populations, urbanisation and the resulting growth of informal settlements especially in at risk areas, the government in 2015 introduced a new National Land Policy. The Policy seeks among other things, to improve on the current systems for land administration in the country, strengthen the related laws, ensure the recognition of the differentiated tenure practices and enhance capacities of the different organisations working in the land sector. More specifically, the policy highlights access to land,

rights to tenure, land use planning, land administration and improvements in land regulations and laws as the key issues to be prioritised by the government. The policy provides a framework for safeguarding tenure and rights for land users including streamlining and modernizing their delivery and sustainable use. To showcase its commitment, the government has developed a policy implementation plan for attaining the land reform objectives. Whereas the policy provides the wider framework and causes of action in reforming the land sector, the plan is intended “to identify the critical path of inclusive decision-making and people-centred activities that will be required to translate the policy into action” (GoSL, 2016). The NLP has already been approved by the cabinet and a draft of the NLPIP prepared.

While Sierra Leone has no specific legislation on housing yet, the country’s approach to housing focuses on pro-market enablement by the state as outlined in the 2006 National Housing Policy. This policy removes government from being an active provider/deliverer of housing to that of a facilitator with individuals, house owners, private sector developers and community residents taking on the provider/delivery role. The policy however assigns to government the responsibility for providing essential utilities and services within communities and for setting up the finance mechanisms for housing in Sierra Leone. A major advance of this policy is the recognition it gives to the use of local building materials to make housing more affordable in the country (Madanat and Njai 2006). In 2009, the government also introduced the Home Mortgage Finance Act in 2009 as part of its effort to attract private investment in Sierra Leone’s property market and to allow the government to invest funds in home financing through setting up a new mortgage bank for that purpose (Rogers 2016). Some important ideas in the National Housing Policy are also outlined in the 2014 Municipal Housing Policy for Freetown (another key output of the Freetown Structure Plan preparation process) which describes the FCC’s role in housing “as a policymaker, promoter, and facilitator of urban renewal and housing provision”. The FCC is to also reinforce urban development control to ensure that settlements only take place on adequate and permitted land as set out in the plan. Nevertheless, the policy is yet to be approved for implementation.

Another leading policy is the national disaster management policy which has been variously applied to address some of the negative challenges associated with Freetown’s chaotic growth. Because the policy views disasters generally as threats to human security, disaster management has involved a collective approach that focuses on enhancing capacity as well as drawing from the existing skills and resources of stakeholder institutions. The policy illustrates government’s commitment to disaster risk management and therefore urges government agencies to take the lead, with support from non-governmental organisations.

3.2 Gaps and challenges in making the policy and planning process more participatory

While the range of policies are intended to shape the growth of settlements including addressing the widespread problems of inequities and deprivation, a few are sufficient which limits the space for action to many. For example, while the Local Government Act (2004) provides for the devolution of functions to local councils with clear timelines for doing so, to date not all functions have been devolved. Since the functions are still held at the national level, the inclusion of local residents in their execution is rarely seen as a priority. Unsurprisingly, in Freetown, a number of urban investments are undertaken by the national government without any thoughtful engagement with people about the use of space relating specifically to the provision of services and utilities, resulting often in chaotic development, diseconomies and

negative externalities. Moreover, while the application of the Freetown Structure Plan and its ancillary documents were expected to have started since 2014 especially to transform the growth and spatial trajectory of the city, they have still not attained parliamentary assent thereby limiting the prospect of the FCC to work jointly with the local communities to improve their existing situations. Furthermore, even though Sierra Leone's National Housing Policy (2006) explicitly recognises individuals, house owners, and community residents as providers of housing, the national land policy (2015) does not yet recognise informal means of holding land which is the dominant tenure practice among the urban poor. Besides, even with the setting up of the mortgage bank, rarely is any support given to poor local residents in informal settlements who seldom have collateral for the loans. This is similarly the case with the implementation of DRR policies where, in spite of the level of community organising, local residents are frequently left out in decisions about the response.

4. Participatory Aspirations

4.1 Analysis of the varied aspirations/motivations/expectations among the different stakeholders

Stakeholders expressed a range of expectations and aspirations from the CAAP process. As was understood throughout, expectations are ‘desirables, motivating factors or gains from the process’ which would help shape stakeholder (community, civil society, state etc.) aspirations within the timeframe of the project. Aspirations, on the other hand, were understood as what stakeholders hope to achieve as a result of the CAAP process and what the process may lead to in the long term. For ease of comprehension, the different aspirations are summarised into nine main types. These include desire for:

- i a sense of community and citizenship
- ii a sense of identity and voice by local residents
- iii a sense of inclusivity/connectivity with citywide processes
- iv recognition of community agency and role
- v relevant planning skills to make participants employable and independent
- vi relevant skills as an important means for changing lives in the community.
- vii building confidence of local residents and trust
- viii building/strengthening relationship between the community and government (local and national)/ NGOs/donors
- ix networking and relationship building with other residents and community groups involved in development activities in the community.

The associated explanation of each of the aspirations, and the community where these were expressed, are shown in table 4.

Table 3: Aspirations associated to the CAAP

Aspiration type		Meaning	Place where expressed
Desire for:			
1.	A sense of community and citizenship	To work with other local residents involved in the CAAP process to improve their community. The CAAP output to ensure the recognition of their right to the city.	Cockle Bay & Dwarzack
2.	A sense of identity and voice by local residents	To work jointly on the CAAP to showcase to the government/NGOs about the uniqueness of problems in informal settlements including advocating for the issues to be mirrored in the city's development agenda	Cockle Bay & Dwarzack
3.	A sense of inclusiveness/ connectivity with citywide processes	Planning through the CAAP process to improve links/ flows (especially goods) between the community and the city centre	Dwarzack
4.	Recognition of community agency and role	The CAAP output to highlight to government/NGOs the central role residents play in transforming their own communities; to guide government/NGOs in the design of plans to develop their (residents') community	Cockle Bay & Dwarzack
5.	Relevant planning skills to make participants employable and independent	CAAP output to include a physical plan of the community that can be used to guide its current and future growth processes; to be given a certificate of participation which can be used to a secure job.	Dwarzack
6.	Relevant skills as an important means for changing lives in the community	CAAP process to empower community residents by providing them with innovative skills, knowledge and practices to inspire local community actions.	Cockle Bay & Dwarzack

7.	Building confidence of local residents and trust	The CAAP to ensure the active participation of community residents, foster relationships and trust amongst community residents	Cockle Bay & Dwarzack
8.	Building/strengthening relationship between the community and government (local and national)/ NGOs /donors	The CAAP to build unique collaboration/ alliances between the local residents, NGOs and the government in dealing with community problems.	Cockle Bay & Dwarzack
9.	Networking and relationship building with other residents and community groups involved in development activities in the community	The CAAP to create a platform for collective engagement of local residents and their groups in dealing with common concerns in the community.	Cockle Bay & Dwarzack

As observed in table 3, whereas the aspirations are broadly similar in the two study communities only two (i.e. iii and v) out of nine were restricted to Dwarzack. This is probably because of the difficulties in accessing many parts of the community owing to its rugged landscape as well as the high level of unemployment in the area despite its close proximity to the city centre. Moreover, while stakeholder expectations and aspirations were observed to be largely similar in the two communities, a few variances were noted as well. For example, at the level of the state, there were expectations for the process to provide improved understanding about the scale of risks associated with living in disaster prone areas in informal settlements. An advisory committee member explained:

I expect the CAAP output to help identify areas that are disaster prone, areas where the local residents would want to have access routes and roads as well as provide guidance on how to make the city function properly.

Other expectations from state actors were for the process to help identify the range of livelihood options in the communities and the available vacant lands and open spaces (if any), including areas in the community where residents would wish to have access routes and roads. There were further expectations for the CAAP to prioritise building the capacity of community residents through their direct involvement in the process. The associated aspirations were for the evidences to help shape the approaches of government agencies in not only dealing with disaster risk issues but on how best to work with residents to improve their communities, with clear guidance from them on where to locate potential development interventions. To confirm this view, the planning officer at the FCC commented as follows:

We want to understand the current situation in the communities and to identify what changes and improvements are really needed in such places. We will be interested to also know how the services/ facilities/infrastructure provided at the city level can be extended/created/improved in the different localities. To me, these are the main concerns.

There were also aspirations for the CAAP to guide government agencies in the development of their own plans for responding to disaster and in the design of policies and rules on land, housing and settlement upgrading for transforming Freetown. In particular, Freetown City Council (FCC) would wish the CAAP to contribute to their ongoing assessment of what development issues to prioritise for Freetown and where.

Alternatively, the civil society organisations expressed more aspirations than expectations in the CAAP process. The main expectation by the NGOs was for the CAAP to ensure the active participation of the community residents by putting them at the forefront of their own development. To them (NGOs),

the main aspiration is to not only showcase to city authorities the central role which residents play in transforming their own communities, but to trigger them (city authorities) into adopting such practices since working with residents can be empowering, especially in allowing them to embrace innovative skills, knowledge and practices which are vital for inspiring local community actions. These same capabilities were considered to be valuable in enabling residents to continue with the CAAP process long after the project ends. NGOs also hope that the CAAP will draw attention to the huge development deficits in informal settlements and thereby highlight the importance of bringing the needs of such areas onto the city's development agenda to make Freetown more inclusive.

While a range of expectations were revealed at the community level, the foremost ones were for residents to be actively involved in the CAAP in ways that will allow them to own the process; to have a sound understanding of 'planning' as both a concept and practice; acquire practical skills to be used in the redesign of their community according to a set plan; and to understand how poor planning exacerbates disaster risks. Other expectations by community residents and their groups (e.g. CBOs) were for them to gain more knowledge about disaster risks in the community as well as more practical and innovative approaches in dealing with it. In effect, residents are motivated by the opportunity to acquire new skills, knowledge and experience on how to plan their community now, while thinking into the future. As pointed out by a representative in Cockle Bay:

We expect that by implementing the CAAP, our community will become well-planned and when this happens, there will be more spaces for people to live.

Through the CAAP process, community residents hope to have a physical plan of the community that can be used to guide its current and future growth processes. Other uses of the plan are to lobby for recognition from the government to allow them to continue staying in the communities without any threat of eviction while they work with other actors (especially from civil society and the government) to promote in situ development in the locations; advocate for improvements in their community through drawing the attention of decision makers to the issues affecting residents in precarious informal settlements; attract development partners' interest in providing services to the communities; and lobby for funds to undertake other development activities in the communities. A FEDURP member in Dwarzack noted:



Figure 4: Community member presenting ideas

We expect the CAAP process to connect us (our community) with the day-to-day activities of government and hence, help to secure for us a guarantee to continue living here without any further threat of eviction.

Most residents are motivated by the new skills they will acquire which, together with the certificate they expect to have from their participation in the training, will help them to either secure jobs in the city or gain recognition among their peers in the community. Drawing from their experience working with SLURC, which has largely showcased community roles, residents are of the hope that the CAAP process will lead to the emergence of unique collaboration/alliances between them, NGOs and the government, thereby creating a platform for collective engagement on the problems. There is also the hope that residents will comply with the CAAP recommendations, thereby reducing chaos in the community's growth processes. It is hoped that by carefully implementing the plan, the prospect to improve the connectivity of the communities with the city centre will be enhanced thereby increasing the flow of trade and hence, the reduction of commodity prices and other associated benefits.

4.2 How stakeholders feel that their aspirations/motivations were met by the CAAP process and output

The aspirations of stakeholders were met in different ways by the CAAP process and output. For example, the NGO workers consider that the CAAP process ensured the active participation of the residents, thereby creating feelings of ownership. They consider that the skills learned by the residents may go well beyond the CAAP process and may help to improve the community over the long term. Participants from government agencies also consider that by bringing a wide range of participants to the process, the CAAP provided access to a broader range of perspectives and ideas, creating space for often-disenfranchised groups to be heard. It additionally helped to build strong relationships amongst community residents. All stakeholders agreed that the process built trust between SLURC and the communities with the participants exposed to such new skills as the design of community plans, photography, community mapping, and interview and presentation skills including procedures to run meetings.

On the other hand, community residents gave different impressions about how the CAAP process matched their aspirations. According to the residents, the CAAP process met their aspirations in five main ways: it allowed them to acquire knowledge and skills in community mapping and planning practices and to learn how their locality is connected to citywide activities; it expanded their knowledge about the risks of living in chaotic settings and the skills to work creatively with others to identify ways to transform the community; it exposed residents to an updated map of the community which was used to identify places and other areas of interest to the research; it enabled the formation of new friendships especially with others they have not known or worked with before; and they felt able to continue to apply some CAAP key principles in their usual work as a way to ensure its sustainability. This view was highlighted by a community representative in Dwarzack:

The process has helped us to understand some of the disaster risks faced in our community and how planning can help us deal with it. It also helped us to identify the shared spaces in our community, define their current uses (and categories) and agree on ways to preserve them.

A few aspirations were, however, identified to have not quite been met. These include the hope to be provided with learning materials with sufficient capacity and a certificate to allow them to secure planning jobs; and to be provided with copies of a plan of the community to use for lobbying the government and other development actors. Most residents are still hopeful of attaining these aspirations.

5. Participatory Practices

5.1 The nature of participatory spaces created in the CAAP process

The CAAP process brought together people from all sections of each community to discuss and plan for the future development of the community. The process drew from a range of other participatory approaches previously applied by some NGOs in the two communities. These procedures were adjusted to ensure that the CAAP is more participatory. For example in Dwarzack, participants reported that prior to the CAAP, they took part in different kinds of projects aimed at improving their neighbourhood. These included the creation of the drainage way along the main road leading to the field, as well as the construction of the main health centre, market and community centre. Much of the activities were undertaken by NGOs, notable among which are the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Another participatory activity was the construction of the community centre with funding from the FCC. The key participants were community youths, the chiefs and the resident Councillor, with different roles performed by each grouping. As described by a youth representative in Dwarzack:

The councillor was there to mobilise the youths to come for work, the chief was there to supervise the work so that it goes well, the youths were there to help with labour like mixing the concrete and making of the blocks and to pass the concrete to the workers so that the work will go faster.

In Cockle Bay, NGOs such as Oxfam, YMCA and CODOHSAPA have also worked variously to provide footbridges and support the clearing of drainage ways, including the construction of community toilets.

While participatory approaches by NGOs in the two communities have usually involved the community residents either providing free manual labour, making financial contributions or self-mobilising to address a common community concern, a few NGOs such as YMCA and CRS adopted approaches similar to those used by SLURC. This involved working through community structures, as well as empowering local residents through prioritising capacity building (specifically by delivering training). However, unlike SLURC, the two NGOs frequently provided the local residents with tools/materials to take part in the project while at the same time providing them with cash for work, based often on community volunteerism – usually involving the payment of a small stipend to the volunteers. To confirm this view, a community representative in Cockle Bay commented as follows:

I was also part of the team that worked with YMCA to improve the drainage way in my community (Cockle Bay). I volunteered as the store keeper responsible for securing all materials relating to the work. Other youths, especially those from my mosque, took part in the construction work which was mainly in the form of 'self-help'.

During the CAAP process, different participatory spaces were provided spanning from the home stage to the community, city and into the portfolio of options stages. Since the process involved working mostly with community people, messages were delivered using Krio (a broadly spoken local language) throughout the facilitation process. This was to ensure clarity and a better understanding of the ideas and procedures. Each stage involved such activities as dreaming, mapping, discussing and determining the options that should be prioritised for action in each of the communities. Most participants were excited by the mapping process which involved pinpointing their houses and other important structures on an aerial photograph taken of their community. For many participants, the mapping exercise was certainly their first experience. Throughout the process, participants were able to socially connect with others, make new friends and also, exchange their thoughts. This inspired everyone to continue working together on the project. The process also involved a continual shaping of community expectations about the project from an initial prioritisation of jobs, services and infrastructure, to a focus on community planning and research.

At the home stage, participants were led into group discussions after taking part in a mapping exercise.

The exercise allowed each participant to locate their dwellings on the map and to identify some of the common challenges faced by residents. Several participants also contributed to the discussions, including asking and sometimes responding to questions. This way, the participants were able to have a clear sense of the project including other aspects of the community which they never knew about. Since discussions were generally geared towards meeting a specific set of goals, the facilitators would always adopt styles and techniques that suited the purpose. This range of techniques allowed all the participants to connect with the process with some form of cordiality also forged between the facilitators and the participants. To confirm this view, a CBO member in Cockle Bay expressed as follows:

We argued a lot and also disagreed a lot but at the end of the day we were able to come up with solid solutions...that brought out the best in us and also helped those who initially lagged behind.

Similarly, the CAAP process at the community scale combined community mapping with walking and talking which allowed the participants to learn more about their community. Through this understanding, most people felt more confident in taking part in discussions which worked to motivate others to learn more about their community. A few participants were also tasked to hold interviews with their colleagues which helped them to identify community problems and to proffer solutions to them. More specifically, respondents were led through question and answer sessions which allowed them to specify the good and bad aspects within their community. Through the process, they were also led to draw a dream map of their community.

Regarding the city level, most participants also claimed that they took part in exercises and group discussions about shared spaces in the city and explored the connections between their community and the city. A few participants also reported that they were involved in conducting interviews with people in the shared spaces, which involved asking pertinent questions about people's thoughts on

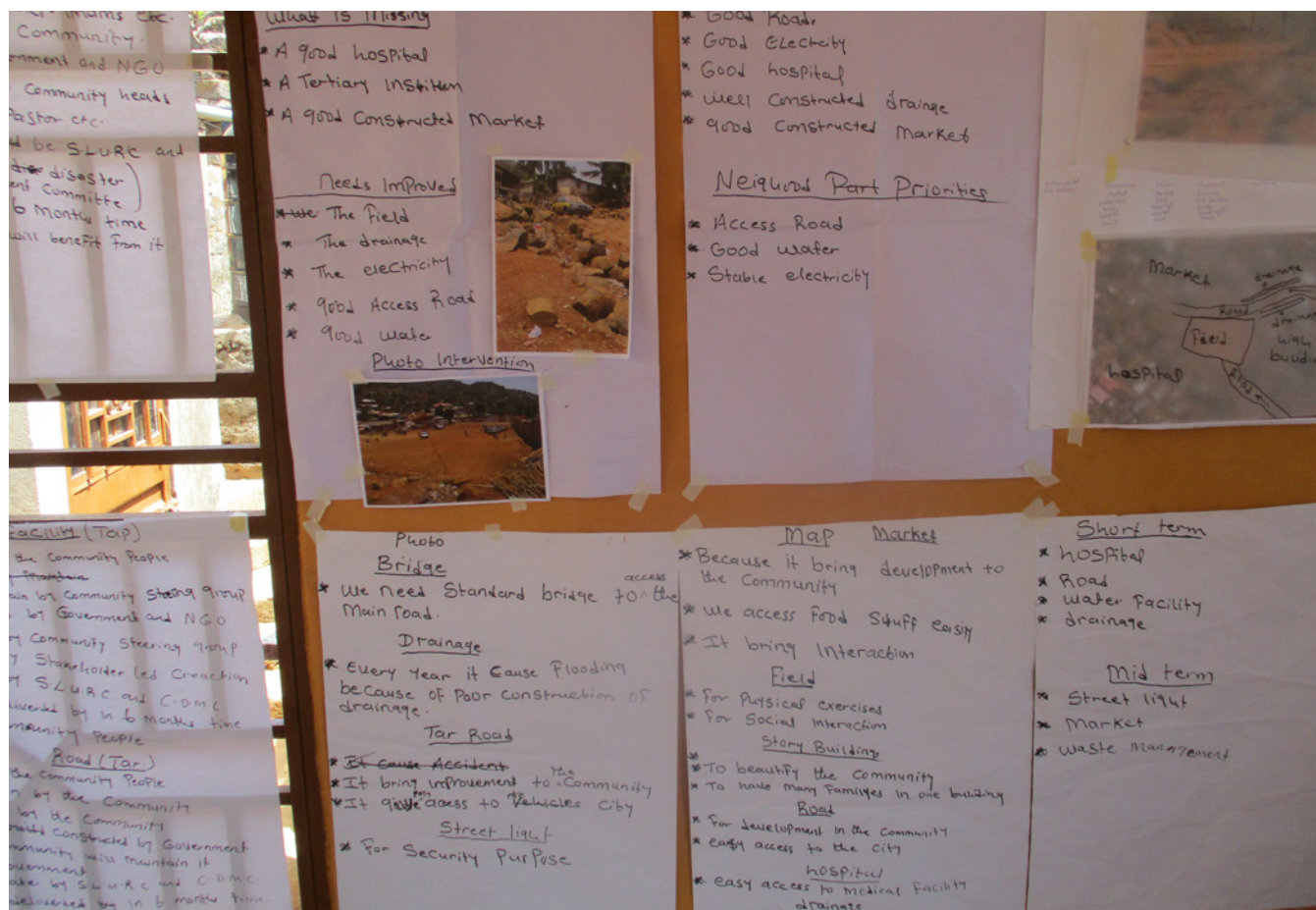


Figure 5: Community outputs

the shared spaces and the kinds of response actions to priorities. Participants were also involved in a dreaming exercise of how they want to see the shared spaces in the future.

An important aspect of the entire process was giving a voice to the people, and involved listening to their concerns, aspirations and priorities which were fed back into discussions at the subsequent stage. As described by a Steering Committee member in Dwarzack:

The CAAP process was always about hanging heads together, sharing ideas and testing the prospect of the different development options suggested for our community. I really like it.

The process was mainly bottom-up, with many of the ideas sought from the residents reflecting their main concerns, experiences and priorities. The process not only drew from community knowledge and experiences, but also worked to build their existing capabilities. Most participants cherished the opportunity to take part in putting together a document which will be used to guide the development of their community. A major highlight of the CAAP was the notable role of the steering committee members who not only guided the research process, but also worked to organise the community participants. Also notable was the role of the citywide advisory group who, apart from helping to set the wider research agenda, were also supportive of the CAAP process. Nevertheless, when the steering committee of Cockle Bay reviewed the final Community Action Area Plan produced out of this process, they argued that the document was good to help them advocate for benefits in their settlement with other stakeholders, but difficult for local residents to fully understand its content.

The CAAP report in itself can be something we can show case to the authorities, about the how far the community has gone with ideas and the community's willingness to transform (...). We just want a version of the output that we can relate to better (...) Once we have other outputs that are easy to read and use we can easily align our community laws with them, as we are going to make rules and regulations that will help put the work or the output into practise (...) We recommend that the Freetown City Council makes the CAAP mandatory for all settlements. (...) A CAAP should be done in all settlements across Freetown, this can be done by either the FCC or any other donor or NGOs and this should now be the development bible for every community. So when people come and want to work in the community they should go by the CAAP.

5.2 Recognising the diverse needs and aspirations of local communities

The facilitators created an enabling space for everyone to participate in the CAAP process and to ensure that the diverse needs and aspirations of the local residents are recognised. To do this, the participants were allowed to work together but were sometimes grouped into various and distinct clusters so that everyone has the chance to participate. The CAAP participants were drawn mainly from among residents in the community. Participants were either 'steering committee members' selected from the different community structures (CBOs, chiefs, religious leaders, women's groups etc) or 'ordinary members' selected by the former to represent the different sections of the community, based on a set criteria. While the CAAP process was open to everyone living in the community, in reality it was difficult to include everybody owing to some logistical constraints. However, nearly all the community organisations were represented even though the process involved fewer professionals, elderly persons, persons with disability and the unemployed. The CAAP process adopted the 'change by design' methodology which was based on the use of a variety of instruments in its delivery. Three cluster instruments were used (see table 5) to facilitate the process and to allow participants to take part in the activities and discussions.

Table 4: CAAP instrument clusters

Group and Team Dynamics	Interviews and Dialogues	Data and Visualization
Team reviews and discussion. Energizers. Group presentation. Personal diaries. Home visits.	Direct observation. Semi-structured interviews. Focus groups. Key Informants. Oral histories. Local stories	Mapping and drawing. Modeling. Photography. Timelines. Flow-diagrams / Pie-diagrams

The varied instruments recognized the diverse needs and aspiration of participants. While instruments in the ‘group and team dynamics’ and ‘interviews and dialogues’ clusters were intended to build the interpersonal skills and relationships among residents with little formal education, the ‘data and visualization’ instruments focused on building the skills and capacity of participants beyond the CAAP process. This involved building participants’ capabilities for lobbying, relationship building with the city authorities, and developing community initiatives. Since the CAAP process was divided into four main phases (Home, Community, City Scale, and Portfolio of Options), each phase was preceded by a week-long workshop in each community. Workshops included a series of activities based on the three CAAP instrument clusters outlined earlier.

The participatory process was shaped by some power relationship issues. For example, the few participants that were better educated than others seemed to be more outspoken when pushing for what they believed in, while the less educated would tend to yield unless prompted. Similarly, participants from more established community groups like the Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) and the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP) appeared to be very assertive because they



Figure 6: Group presentation

were more knowledgeable about their communities. Some sessions lasted longer than was scheduled, to allow the facilitators to revisit the concepts/ideas a few more times, and allow for more discussions to enable less educated participants to catch up more quickly on the issues.

Some sessions took too long because there were a few people whose level of education could not allow them to understand easily. On the positive side, this was good because we kept going over the same concepts/ideas several times and that created really good arguments. It brought out the best in us and also helped our less literate counterparts to catch up quickly on the issues discussed.

Other power relationship issues relate to age, since older participants were often less likely to be challenged out of respect. However, older persons occasionally abstained from heated discussions to avoid being disrespected. This was more so in the case with Dwarzack where, unlike Cockle Bay, participants were less diverse (especially in terms of age and sex), consisting more of younger people with the males forming the majority. Nevertheless, these power differences did not have a significant effect on the CAAP process. Moreover, because the discussion points were largely less sensitive, it was difficult to notice some of the nuances in the discussions.

Some key successes attributed to the CAAP process were that it did not only ensure the broad and active participation of residents, but that it created feelings of ownership of the process with strong community ties built among the residents. In Cockle Bay, the FEDURP leader noted as follows:

We have never had a session in this community that has gone to the level of depth like this and there has never been this level of community participation.

In particular, bringing a wide range of participants to the CAAP process allowed for a broader range of perspectives/ideas to be shared, while also creating space for often-disenfranchised groups to be heard. The challenge however, was that the sessions were usually long - often requiring the CAAP team (facilitators and participants) to spend all day in the field in order to collect the desired information and to meet deadlines. This recurrently exerted a lot of pressure on the team who had to continue to keep a few sessions longer since the short timeline for the project did not allow sufficient time to be allocated to the data collection process. Moreover, because some people were usually urged to speak, it was sometimes difficult to conclude on some issues. It was also difficult to maintain the commitment of some participants for the entire duration of the CAAP process. Additionally, activity plans were occasionally difficult to understand by a few participants. Often, extra time was needed to explain the ideas in ways that allowed participants to more clearly understand the concepts. This tended to consume more time thereby limiting the amount of information gathered.

5.3 How the CAAP participatory spaces compare with other participatory spaces

Several participants claimed that they have participated before in other forms of community development work, which were either community-led initiatives or initiatives led and funded by NGOs. These initiatives consisted of different types involving the construction of a football pitch, community centre, water wells, health centre and market etc. Whereas participatory practices concerning community-led initiatives involve the community people taking greater control (e.g. financing, self-help labour etc.), in the implementation of actions in their community, participatory practices by NGOs often involve limited participation of the people in identifying their needs/priorities, and in working with them to proffer solutions to the problem. When they work with the local residents, their role is sometimes limited to the provision of manual labour, often with meagre incentives (money, food etc.) given in return (e.g. food

for work). During one of the evaluation sessions, the chairwoman of Dwarzack commented as follows:

We have had some NGOs that have intervened in this community. Their approach is more about telling us what they have come to do so, they actually impose everything on us...we are rarely allowed to make inputs.

According to the participants, the participatory practices created by the CAAP process were different however, since they involved the active role of community residents as agents rather than clients. The CAAP not only allowed participants to take more control over the process, but also created a space for participants to interact with others, thereby enriching their knowledge and capabilities. The shared space allowed for pertinent issues to be discussed about the communities with some action points identified and scrutinised by participants along with some feedback/reflections on the issues provided by the SLURC team.

In effect, the participatory practices of the CAAP were largely bottom-up, with much of the ideas coming from the community people themselves. While the process was led by SLURC, the ideas and practices were shaped by participants to reflect their shared visions and aspirations.

6. Participatory Assets

This section examines how the CAAP drew on or expanded the communities' assets to help them to participate in decision making processes. This is explored in relation to four main assets that were identified from the analysis of the interviews with those who participated in the CAAP processes.

6.1 Human assets

The CAAP process focused on developing the human capabilities of participants through providing them with the requisite knowledge, as well as exposing them to a variety of skills. According to participants, the different approaches used to deliver the sessions allowed them to learn new ideas, skills and experiences, and to also interpret basic features on the map. Participants also learnt to do group presentations and to ask questions. Most participants were particularly delighted at the opportunity to discuss the issues affecting their community, including suggesting options on how to deal with them. Participants were allowed to share their own knowledge and experience with others while respecting the differing perspectives. This allowed a shared understanding of the community problems and a joint commitment to plan and work together to improve their communities. As a result, participants now feel more confident to take the CAAP process further and also take actions to actualise the CAAP output (final document) when it is completed. Through working in teams, participants got to know each other better and mutually understand the planning challenges faced. Therefore, most participants now feel confident to organise, initiate and take actions, as well as speak out against persistent eviction threats to their communities.

Most participants also consider that unlike previous projects which occasionally required them to contribute to the process with their human (usually free labour) or financial assets (through making individual financial payments), the CAAP process, similarly to other SLURC led initiative, was more argued to be more empowering. In addition to building the capability of participants, including using a bottom-up approach, it provided them with food (since some sessions were long) without requiring them to make any contribution. However, the often long duration of sessions deprived participants of the opportunity to carry out their normal livelihood activities, which also reduced their daily income and hence the security and wellbeing of their households. Nevertheless, many consider that the process has worked to change the mindset of residents from being clients to agents of change in their communities. This view was pointed out by a youth representative in Cockle Bay as follows:

This process has brought us all together not only to discuss but to learn more about our community. To me that is one big change... it has changed my life forever.

Many participants claim that they are now well positioned to become champions of change in their communities. Even if it was often difficult to separate the CAAP process from other SLURC led action research and learning initiatives, many participants consider that the CAAP contributed to them earning more respect and trust from other residents. Some even feel that they stand to be accorded more recognition in the community when certified. Apart from using the certificate to acquire jobs elsewhere, they also hope to use the knowledge as 'champions' for driving change in their community.

6.2 Political assets

Participants also consider that the relationships they formed with other stakeholders (NGOs, government workers etc.) during the CAAP process has increased trust and mutual understanding among the group,

since it has opened up spaces for interaction and dialogue and for the views and aspirations of each person to be respected and recognised by the others. In particular, the process has created avenues whereby community representatives are now involved in making decisions about the city, and can now freely discuss their communities with Freetown City Council. As explained by a CBO member in Dwarzack:

The CAAP process has created opportunities for us to build relationship[s] with the city authorities. It has helped us to be included in the city's decision making processes. We now have the opportunity to talk about the issues affecting our community.

Participants additionally feel that the CAAP process has successfully built a trusted relationship between the communities and SLURC. Many describe this as a major asset given the incessant effort by SLURC to broker relationships through its varied activities and to work with them to draw the attention of policy makers to the realities of informal settlements. Participants further claim that they have built on the relationships formed during the CAAP process to create networks around specific issues about their community and to lobby the government for recognition. Moreover, with the knowledge gained from the CAAP, participants are now well placed to advocate for support and to engage government and other development actors in improving their communities, since they already know the core community priorities. With the skills learnt, several residents consider that they are now change agents, leading the transformation of their communities. This will involve creating links with NGOs, funding agencies and relevant government ministries to explore funding possibilities. With regards to this, a few participants indicated that the CAAP process has made them more aware of the importance of exploring funding and attracting development partners to the community. It has also helped them to build social connections with Freetown City Council (FCC) and other government ministries.

6.3 Social assets

Most participants were motivated by the spaces created by the CAAP process for people to share ideas, interact and build relationships with their peers. In particular, participants interacted with people from other parts of the community that they have never met. Undoubtedly, many used this opportunity to form new friendships. The CAAP process also created a platform for participants to work as a team and with one voice. Most participants consider that they can now identify and solve community problems co-operatively. Several participants also felt that they were given a voice with which to identify and discuss issues that impact their lives. They were also made to recognise and acknowledge their own powers. To many, this demonstrates respect for their self-esteem including their local knowledge, capacities and potential in taking active roles to deal with community problems. The process also empowered participants to take leadership roles regardless of gender differences, and allowed them to envision a shared vision for their community through working together. Participants were particularly delighted at the opportunity to sit together and talk about common community problems and to mobilise around the issues. This was especially the case in Cackle Bay where residents organised themselves around particular community concerns to win a majority of seats in the recently held local government elections.

6.4 Physical assets

The CAAP process not only deepened residents' interests in planning, it also increased their awareness about the merits of living in well-planned areas. Therefore, most participants are eager to have plans



Figure 7: Community-led survey

for their own communities. Participants were particularly excited by the knowledge from the mapping exercises, which allowed them to identify the different shared spaces in the community and assess their usefulness. The exercise allowed them to imagine the kind of future they wish for their community. As explained by a Steering Committee member in an evaluation session in Cockle Bay:

The discussions and activities/tasks have greatly improved our knowledge and skills in community planning. We were trained to do community mapping, identify points on a map, draw plans and a lot of other basics things. We will use these ideas and skills to make our community a better place to be.

Since the CAAP process was carried out in places that are generally considered to be ‘illegal’, the participants consider that they now have a better understanding of their communities especially the problem issues, the response actions to take and how, and the potential for the CAAP final output to guide the reorganisation of future growth in their communities. This will include decisions on where best to locate water points, markets and health centres, or to pass access roads. In this regard, participants want a well-structured physical plan of their communities, with a clear layout of where to pass the roads, drainages, and water lines including sites for water points, waste disposal and health centres. Some participants consider that the CAAP offers the prospect of addressing the service deficits in their communities, and challenges related to flooding. It has also made people appreciate their communities, rather than lament over the conditions. Most people can now identify proudly with their localities.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Key messages from the report findings

Sierra Leone has a number of laws and policies that can be used to shape urban development and thereby improve the wellbeing of urban residents. However, some are either obsolete, yet to be devolved to local council, or have still not been accepted for application, thus limiting the space for local participation.

It is important to position the CAAP process within wider action research and learning initiatives led by SLURC. The openness and local capacities that allowed this initiative to take place has been a direct fruition of the variety of projects led by SLURC in these two communities, such as the researches on urban livelihoods (Koroma et al, 2018) and urban risk (Urban ARK, 2018) as well as the international student field trip implemented by the DPU MSc in Environment and Sustainable Development. Drawing on these experiences, a variety of expectations and aspirations were expressed by stakeholders. However, the most common expectation was for the CAAP process to ensure active participation of local residents in ways that will not only increase their understanding of challenges associated with the unplanned growth of their community, but also provide them with the practical skills needed to respond to the challenge. Similarly, the shared aspiration among stakeholders was for the CAAP process to highlight the gains to communities of putting local residents at the heart of their own development and to show case this to state/development agencies as an innovative practice, including guiding them on how to promote participatory practices at the community level.

Most stakeholders felt that their aspirations were met by the CAAP process in diverse ways. These include the active involvement of residents who introduced a range of pioneering ideas thereby aiding the learning of new skills and the feelings of ownership. To many community residents, the CAAP process allowed them to learn more about their locality and how it is connected to citywide activities. It also allowed them to work creatively with others to identify ways to transform living conditions in the community.

The CAAP process provided diverse participatory spaces, ranging from the home to the community, city and into the portfolio of options stages, with each stage involving a range of activities with the participants. The process was mainly bottom-up, with many of the ideas sought from the residents.

The CAAP process not only focused on developing the human capabilities of participants, but opened up spaces to make new bonds, interact and enter into dialogue with other stakeholders (NGOs, government workers etc.). This has created prospects for the views and aspirations of the local residents to be considered in decision making processes about the city.

7.2 How the CAAP process expanded the participatory capabilities of marginalised groups

7.2.1 How participants in the CAAP process enhanced agency and the ability to affect decision making

Most participants reported that the participatory spaces created by the CAAP process and the skills they acquired have created in them a feeling of ownership which will extend well beyond the time span of the CAAP project. They consider that apart from learning more about their community, they were led to identify the concrete challenges faced and the priority areas for intervention. The learnings from this process and the support received from others was viewed to have enhanced the ability of

often marginalised groups to be heard. Participants claimed additionally that they learned how to creatively engage city authorities and other stakeholders to ensure that development takes place in their community in more sustainable and integrated ways. With regards to this, most participants claim that they are now well placed to advocate for support and to engage with FCC and other development actors involved with the Freetown transformation plan. A few participants however consider that their ability to act would have been further advanced if they were provided with learning materials, a copy of the community plan and a certificate to demonstrate their participation in the training.

7.2.2 How the relationships built through the CAAP process opened up/closed possibilities for empowering participants

Several participants consider that they did not only learn new ideas and experiences from other participants, but that they succeeded in making new bonds and strong ties with other residents in the community. The process allowed participants to better understand the challenges faced by their community, and to work cooperatively to develop a shared vision for its future development. It also allowed participants to connect activities in their communities with citywide processes and to appreciate how opening up spaces in their community for services/infrastructure provision can enable the transformation of the area. Through the CAAP process, many local residents have now become more aware of the merits of living in well-planned areas and to appreciate rather than lament over the conditions in their communities. However, while the CAAP process did not require participants to make any contribution (financial or otherwise) to the process, the often long duration of some sessions was considered to be somewhat unfair since it deprived participants the time to run their normal chores and make money to meet the livelihood needs of their own households.

7.3 How the CAAP can be organised to better expand the participatory capabilities of the urban poor in the future

To improve the participatory capabilities of poor and marginalised participants in the CAAP process, it is critical to not only limit representations to recognised community groups in the community, but to also seek representations from other sociodemographic categories (gender, age, marital status, literacy status etc.). This is to ensure an adequate mix of participants. Moreover, because a large proportion of residents in informal settlements are illiterate, facilitators need to devote greater attention to them in order to ensure they are not left behind their literate counterparts.

The CAAP process would also need to prioritise the provision of community champions with additional skillsets (e.g. in modelling, mapping etc.) to better equip them to support facilitators in carrying out the exercises and to continue the process after the close of the project. Linking community actors with relevant development/government agencies as well as setting up an implementation strategy of the plan should also be part of this process.

This report concludes by arguing that the CAAP has the potential to play a crucial role in expanding the participatory capabilities of the urban poor in Freetown, as well as in democratising urban governance more widely in Sierra Leone. For this potential to be realised, further work is needed to make this planning instrument more responsive to local needs in ways that ensure the process as well as the product are more accessible to wider set of stakeholders.

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ABOUT UCL/DPU

The Development Planning Unit, University College London, is an international centre specialising in academic teaching, research, training and consultancy in the field of urban and regional development, with a focus on policy, planning management and design. It is concerned with understanding the multi-faceted and uneven process of contemporary urbanisation, and strengthening more socially just and innovative approaches to policy, planning management and design, especially in the contexts of Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East as well as countries in transition. The central purpose of the DPU is to strengthen the professional and institutional capacity of governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to deal with the wide range of development issues that are emerging at local, national and global levels. In London, the DPU runs postgraduate programmes of study, including a research degree (MPhil/PhD) programme, six one-year Masters Degree courses and specialist short courses in a range of fields addressing urban and rural development policy, planning, management and design. Overseas, the DPU Training and Advisory Service (TAS) provides training and advisory services to government departments, aid agencies, NGOs and academic institutions. These activities range from short missions to substantial programmes of staff development and institutional capacity building. The academic staff of the DPU are a multi-disciplinary and multi-national group with extensive and on-going research and professional experience in various fields of urban and international development throughout the world. DPU Associates are a body of professionals who work closely with the Unit both in London and overseas. Every year the student body embraces more than 45 different nationalities.

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ABOUT IGDS/NU

The Institute of Geography and Development Studies (IGDS) represents one of the four innovative academic structures of the School of Environmental Sciences at Njala University (NU). The Institute runs both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes as well as provides opportunities for professional development and research. Its main concern is about promoting sustainable forms of development in Sierra Leone. The IGDS has a remarkable experience in the delivery of world leading research and teaching in Geography and development (urban and rural) issues. Its staff have engaged with practitioners, organizations and UN agencies through consultancies and other community outreach activities. It was as a result of the initiative of the IGDS to establish an urban planning unit to further their work on issues affecting people living in informal settlements that the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) was formed.

ABOUT SLURC

The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC), based in Freetown, is a globally connected research centre created through a partnership between the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (University College London) and the Institute of Geography and Development Studies (Njala University) with funding by Comic Relief. SLURC aims to strengthen the research and analysis capacities of urban stakeholders in Sierra Leone; make urban knowledge available and accessible to those who need it, prioritizing residents of informal settlements; and, deliver world-leading research in order to influence urban policy and practice. However, SLURC was established as a financially independent centre within Njala University with a view of further integration in future. It was also thought that the SLURC could become a model of good practices that other part of the university could adopt.

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