CONTENTS

Njala University (Nu) And University College London (UCL) Formally Launches The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) – Connecting Urban Data, Policy And Practice

Hitting The Road Running: The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) Coordinates Implementation Of The Pull Slum Pan Pipul (Pspp) Collaboration Plan

Plastic Accumulation In Freetown

Training In Research Methods For Urban Development: ‘Co-Learning The City Through The Lens Of Risk’

Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre Team In Freetown – Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre Team In The Uk

Upcoming Events And Activities

NJALA UNIVERSITY (NU) AND UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON (UCL) FORMALLY LAUNCHES THE SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE (SLURC) – CONNECTING URBAN DATA, POLICY AND PRACTICE

The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) is a globally connected Research Centre established through a partnership between the Institute of Geography and Development Studies (IGDS) of Njala University and The Barlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) of University College London. It was formally launched on Wednesday 27th January 2016 in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The Launch took place at the Centre’s offices located on the 2nd floor of 63 Upper Brook Street Freetown.

With a vision to improve the wellbeing of urban informal settlement dwellers, the Centre aims to build research and analytical capacity of urban stakeholders in Sierra Leone through the development of a comprehensive information bank on the urban environment, which reflects a diverse set of attributes, from socio-economic heterogeneity and geographic variability, to socio-cultural conditions.
Furthermore, the Centre’s work is also about sharing and communicating this knowledge to policy makers and practitioners working to improve urban living conditions.

The launch brought together Global Urban Experts, Professionals, Academics, Government authorities, NGOs and CBOs working operating in slums in Freetown, Media agencies and the private sector to exchange and share experiences of inclusive and sustainable urban development with emphases on knowledge management and the value of partnership and collaboration with people and organizations already working in the sector.

The launch also included an inaugural session of the Centre’s International Advisory Board composed of distinguished academics from Africa and the United Kingdom. Those with personal attendance included Dr. Michael Walls representing UCL, Dr. Ibidun Adelekan of Ibadan University Nigeria, a Regional expert in urban planning, and Professor Alpha Lakoh of NU. Also in attendance via international conferencing were Dr. Nancy Odendaal of University of Cape Town in South Africa and the African Centre for Cities (ACC) and the Association of African Planning Schools (AAPS), and Professor Jo Beal of the British Council in London, an international expert on urban challenges. As part of its management, Dr. Alex Frediani and Dr. Andrea Rigon, both of DPU UCL were also in attendance. Moreover, these distinguished urban researchers are the co-investigators of the Centre.

The event also highlighted the importance of advocacy and people centered knowledge production and the strong desire for SLURC to become a platform to facilitate collaboration between NGOs, Private sector, City authorities, Government, and Universities. Community groups also saw SLURC as an opportunity to coordinate activities of the various urban actors. It is hoped that through SLURC, a culture of collaboration and knowledge co-production will be achieved.

As in many parts of Africa, Sierra Leone faces a significant challenge in advancing the ‘urban’ in the country’s development agenda, owing mainly to the lack of relevant, evidence-based knowledge on the processes and trends influencing urban development. There is, therefore, a real need for the development of a policy framework to support urban centres in becoming engines of growth and providers of economic opportunities for inclusive development.

While there have been some initiatives to collect data at the local level with the involvement of residents — (examining living conditions, identifying needs, and evaluating interventions) — the scope of data collection and analysis systems as well as reporting mechanisms are limited to a few communities. Moreover, much of the data collected is fragmented, with a need for greater disaggregation to allow for a deeper understanding of the different factors shaping the urban environment.

In the absence of a city wide and comparative framework for data collection and analysis — and without clearly defined stakeholders responsible for analysis, synthesis, and reporting — the data that exist remains under-utilized. To bridge this gap, and in response to the need for evidence based research and policy development, the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) was established. This new initiative has started and will continue to work with different urban stakeholders and community groups in implementing research, producing knowledge and providing training to contribute towards Sierra Leone’s urban development policies and practices.

Our research priorities include; urban health, land and housing, urban livelihoods and city economy, and urban vulnerability and resilience. Please follow our work at #SLURC @dpu_ucl @nusierraleone
HITTING THE ROAD RUNNING: THE SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE (SLURC) COORDINATES IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PULL SLUM PAN PIPUL (PSPP) COLLABORATION PLAN

The PULL SLUM PAN PIPUL Partnership is derived from a desire to strengthen collaboration of the six Comic Relief Grantees/Organizations in their efforts to improve the living conditions of slum dwellers in Freetown. This city level learning and Collaboration partnership was started in May 2013 with the aim to be a permanent feature of urban development actors in Freetown and the country as a whole.

At inception, the partnership includes the Young Men’s Christians Association (YMCA), the Youth Development Movement (YDM), Restless Development (RD), the Centre Of Dialogue On Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA) and the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC); all with country head offices in Freetown. Since its inception, the PSPP partners have been holding regular coordination meetings, undertaking joint baseline studies, sharing of technical expertise and coordinating their efforts to engage the Freetown City Council and other state authorities around a city level advocacy forum. The collaboration of this partnership in response to the Ebola Viral Disease was a case in point that is worthy of note.

Under normal circumstances, the PSPP partnership utilizes a programmatic approach to develop an evidence base that will improve learning on livelihoods of informal settlement dwellers, capacity development of Civil Society Organizations, empowerment, mobilization and advocacy activities of the partnership and the target communities.

As an institution aimed at research, capacity development and knowledge management for urban stakeholders, the establishment of the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) in January 2016 was regarded by the PSPP partners as an opportunity to centralize the coordination function of the partnership. Moreover, the Centre will also provide a centralized resource that will store and disseminate knowledge produced by all partners and other urban stakeholders.

Recognising the importance of collaboration, Comic Relief, which provides specific project funding for all the partners, facilitated a process through which the partnership started to jointly develop and implement a collaboration plan beginning 2016. This initiative was aimed at strengthening the collaboration of the PSPP partners. Consequently, SLURC was formally admitted to the Partnership as the sixth partner and assigned the role of coordination.

As the partner assigned to coordinate the collaboration, SLURC is responsible to monitor implementation of the collaboration plan and periodically report to Comic Relief on progress. Furthermore, SLURC will also be responsible to facilitate an annual meeting to share experiences of lead organizations responsible for implementation of specific activities. The outcome of these annual reviews will be a revised collaboration plan.
Plastics offer considerable benefits to mankind. Over the years, its production and use has increased considerably as the convenience of carrying stuffs in plastic bag has intensified. Just as plastics have transformed our everyday life, it has also transformed our environment. In Freetown, plastic is almost everywhere. Many places are overwhelmed with accumulations of empty plastics that adversely affect humans and their surroundings. As the use of plastic continues to increase, it is becoming inevitable, that the quantity of plastic debris in the environment will continue to increase unless we all change our practices. Even with such changes, plastic debris that is already in the environment will persist for a considerable time to come.

Plastics are mostly durable products which could potentially be used for long periods. Yet, many people only use this inexpensive material once and then dispose of it which later ends up as accumulations in the surrounding or in garbage dump where it will persist for decades. Plastics are generally slow to degrade. When abandoned in the neighbourhood or are taken as wastes to landfill sites, they can unfavourably obstruct drainage ways in addition to affecting the beauty of the landscape. In the Samba Gutta drainage way for example, there are nearly in all places, debris of plastic containers, bags, compact discs,nylons, and other forms of plastic remains. When these plastics are washed into the sea by rainwater, many remain floating on the surface of the coast line (especially along the beaches) which may be mistaken for food by some marine species. Even where buried, plastics can be a major source of future problems since the chemicals often sink into nearby land, contaminating groundwater sources. The different chemicals that are used in the manufacture of plastics are known to be toxic and are therefore, harmful to human health when absorbed by humans. Potentially, a number of these chemicals may already be present in some of Freetown’s human population.

Even though it is still not clearly known what percentage of the daily generated wastes in Freetown is plastic, it can be conjectured from the current plastic accumulations in the city that only a lesser amount is landfilled. Considerable immediate actions are required to ensure reductions in the quantity of waste generated into our environment including those ending on landfills. The use and accumulation of plastic can be reduced through various ways including material reduction, increased recycling, and strategies to reduce littering. One way to reduce the use of plastics through material reduction and hence, save the environment is to not request for it especially when buying goods. Another way is to treat plastic as a reusable material (whereby it can be reused or recycled) rather than as a disposable commodity which is quickly discarded after use. Littering is a major behavioral problem in Freetown and its practice has tended to increase in parallel with our use and disposal of plastics. Enhancing capacity to recycle is likely to help reduce the buildup of plastics such that we start to regard used plastics as materials for alternative uses rather than waste. The need to reduce, reuse and recycle (R’s) has frequently being identified to be very urgent in dealing with the quantities of plastic wastes we generate. Arguably, the three R’s should be applied in combination. Added to all these measures is the pressing need for a more targeted and appropriate education to reduce littering at source. All these solutions can only be achieved if we all (consumers businesses, governments etc.) work collectively.
Late in July (25-30) this year, the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) conducted a 6-day training workshop in Freetown on the topic ‘Research Methods for Urban Development: Co-Learning through the Lens of Risk’. The training was jointly facilitated by Prof. Adriana Allen, Dr. Andrea Rigon, Dr. Emmanuel Osuteye (from University College London, UK), and Dr Joseph Macarthy, Mr. Braima Koroma (from Njala University, Sierra Leone) and Mr. Abu-Bakar S. Massaquoi (a PhD researcher from University of Reading).

The training focused on an assessment of urban risk and risk accumulation cycles affecting the most disadvantaged groups in informal settlements in Freetown. It brought together participants with various backgrounds and disciplines including academics, researchers, government officials, NGOs and development practitioners, and residents of informal settlements around Freetown. In-depth discussions were held with leaders and residents in the two field locations (Cockle Bay and Dworzack) as well as transect walks.

The training enabled participants to translate research questions into research activities, choosing appropriate methods and approaches to understand urban risk and vulnerability, enable participant to apply fieldwork methods including transect walks, settlements timelines and settlements geo-referenced profiling, and also to create strategic learning partnerships.

Using the concept of ‘co-learning for action processes’, the workshop featured interactive group sessions of participants discussing substantive issues of urban risk and vulnerability in the city. Participants were able to outline the main everyday risks/small scale disasters affecting informal settlements in Freetown. They (risks) were outlined as; Child and maternal health, water-related diseases, car/accidents, fire outbreak, building collapse, deforestation and erosion, rock falls, mudflow, landslides, floods and epidemics.

Furthermore, participants prepared presentations which showcased their knowledge and experiences as well as highlighting the avenues for further research. The training has created necessary capacities to inform the development of strategic actions and evidence-based tools to target policy and interventions in informal settlements.

Some aspects of the workshop will be scaled up as part of the ‘Urban African Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) Project’ which SLURC will implement in Freetown beginning 2017. The project which is a three year research initiative (2015 to 2018) looks at risk in 12 cities in 8 African countries (www.urbanark.org). Sierra Leone is a recent addition with Freetown being one of the selected cities.

Key highlights of the training were the identification of key research findings which were outlined as follows:

1. Depending on location (topography) and type and speed of change- informal settlement in Freetown face different combination of hazards and vulnerabilities
2. Demographic growth (as reflected by the different socioeconomic profile), unmet job expectation and unequal access to affordable land and housing are driving the expansion of the city under high risk condition.
3. Pull and push factors explain why people are forced to either settle in overcrowded and unsafe areas along the coast or ever-expanding hillsides
4. Women and men in informal settlements are open and ready to engage in Disaster Risk Reduction.
5. Regular exposure to multiple-hazards has significant health impacts (who is most affected). But, this depends on the prospects for urban upgrading rather than eviction.
6. Looking at the poverty and risk traps from a new perspective and position might open new opportunities to strive towards a sustainable and just Freetown.
7. For many the risk of eviction is a paradox: ‘The solution to risk for some becomes the most serious risk threat to the women and men, girls and boys, the aged and young living in informal settlements.
8. A mismatch between risk exposure, perceptions and experience reproduces risk internalisation and displacement. For displacement, lots of investment come from tenants – builds tension between landlords and tenants... across locations. In terms of internalisation of risk, this will affect the capacity of local communities to work collectively.
9. There is a highly unequal distribution of benefits and burden within and across settlements and this impairs collective and coordinated multi-stakeholder action.
Dr. Joseph Mustapha Macarthy is an urban planner with specialty in urban development planning and climate change adaptation. He is a lecturer at the Institute of Geography and Development Studies of Njala University. Dr. Macarthy has a PhD in Urban Planning and Management from Newcastle University and MSc. in Urban Development Planning from the University College London. His research interest is centered on urban planning and climate change. Apart from once serving as a local consultant (urban planner) to the EU-funded Urban Planning Project for Freetown (in 2013), he also provides volunteer service to the UNDP as a member of the National Steering Committee (NSC) of the Global Environment Facility's (GEF) Small Grants Program (SGP) in Sierra Leone. He is also a Project Steering Group (PSG) member of the YMCA's ‘Pull Slum Pan Pipul Project’ which it jointly implements with Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Reduction – Sierra Leone (CODOHSPA) and Y Care International (UK). Dr. Macarthy is part of the management of SLURC that provides for the strategic direction of the Centre.

Mr. Braima Koroma is a sustainable development planner. He holds a BSc (Hons) in Environment and Development (First Class) and two MSc degrees in Development Studies (University of Sierra Leone) and Environment, Management and Sustainable Development with Distinction (Manchester Metropolitan University, UK). Mr. Koroma has a special interest in urban livelihoods, environmental management, climate change and development impact evaluation. He is currently a lecturer in the Institute of Geography and Development Studies, School of Environmental Sciences, Njala University. He has over 10 years’ experience of teaching, research, training and facilitation, and consultancy on a broad spectrum of interdisciplinary research to examine complex development problems. Braima is part of the management of SLURC that provides for the strategic direction of the Centre.

Dr. Ibrahim Bun Kamara is a Strategic Planner and Development Economist with extensive experience in international development, project planning and management and economic policy advisory services. Dr. Bun Kamara has a PhD with Distinction in economics from the University of Cape Town in South Africa, MA in economics from the University of Botswana and a BSc with Honours in economics from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. Dr. Bun Kamara plays the strategic role of coordinating the implementation of the SLURC project; linking “The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) – University College London (UCL) with the Institute of Geography and Development Studies (IGDS) – Njala University (NU) for the establishment and management of this pioneering new Centre in Freetown, bringing together academic researchers, civil society, communities, development practitioners and local and central government to find innovative solutions to urban challenges.

Ms. Christocia Kawaley is the Centre Administrator for the research Centre (SLURC). She serves as focal point for administrative coordination of project implementation activities. She holds a Master's degree in Business Administration (MBA) from Chongqing University in China and a BA Hons in Political Science from Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. She has served both corporate and humanitarian/development organizations in different capacities; spanning from general operational system to specialized areas of logistical support to emergency response programs and human resource administration.

Mr. Akopon J. Bertin is the Research and Communication Officer at the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC). He graduated from the School of Social Sciences, Njala University with Honours Degree in Economics. He has years of progressively responsible professional experience in research, monitoring and evaluation from BRAC Sierra Leone and Liberia. His significant experience in these areas have provided him with an excellent practical understanding of processes associated with real-time monitoring for the purposes of generating quality data for identifying and addressing bottlenecks in the delivery of services in health, education, agriculture, gender and livelihood. He is currently a researcher and the Centre’s focal point for communication and institutional urban stakeholders.
Mr. Sulaiman F Kamara is the Research and Community Officer for the Research Centre. He studied at Monash University, Melbourne Australia with a Bachelor's degree, Double major in Geography & international studies.

He has worked as a Data mapping consultant and a Data and communication officer with UNICEF. He was part of the team that implemented an Urban Planning Project that developed the Freetown Structure Plan. His present role at SLURC is to undertake research and act as a focal point for informal communities and related groups.

Mr. Max P Boima is the office assistant for the Research Centre. He is a support staff that assists the Centre Administrator. He monitors and upkeeps the office environment and ensures maximum security on Assets and office properties.

Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre Team in London – Uk

Dr. Andrea Rigon is a Lecturer at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit of University College London with a background in development studies and research, consultancy and project management experience in several countries. He is particularly interested in the upgrading of informal settlements in the context of pre-existing social conflict. He also has a research interest in the ethnographic study of the practices of development organizations and social movements, particularly in terms of internal power relations and knowledge production. Andrea is a member of the SLURC project management team with strategic direction, capacity development and financial accountability responsibilities.

Dr. Alexandre Aspan Frediani is a Lecturer at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit of University College London. He is a Development planner specializing in squatter settlement upgrading policies and participatory approaches to development. Areas of expertise include human development, housing, urban development, participation and Amartya Sen's Capability Approach. Alex is a member of the SLURC project management team responsible for strategic direction and development of partnership for the Centre.

Dr. Giovanna Astolfo is presently a Teaching Fellow at the Bartlett DPU, where she teaches in the Urban Intervention Studios, focusing on urban transformations and community driven processes in the Global South. She has always combined teaching, research and practice, working in architectural offices in Venice and São Paulo, on international projects and competitions for the re-appropriation of vacant buildings and marginal areas. She is currently responsible for providing general administrative support to the Co-Investigators and Project Manager including financial reporting and information technology design.
UPCOMING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

1. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

SLURC is in the process of developing its website and resource centre that will host available knowledge on urban issues and make it easily accessible to all stakeholders online and physically at the Centre. The website and physical resource centre are expected to be operational within the next few months.

2. RESEARCH

The Comic Relief project of the Centre includes two major research components for the second and third years. For the first of these, SLURC will be engaging selected stakeholders in order to define the scope and methodology of the research which will focus on the livelihoods of urban informal settlement dwellers.

SLURC has secured funding for a research project on public health and humanitarian response system in urban areas from partnership with Future Health Systems of John Hopkins University and the international Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) respectively. Relevant partners and stakeholders will be engaged to commence this project in the near future.

3. IDENTIFICATION OF SLURC AFFILIATES

a. SLURC Members:
Key institutional partners of SLURC will be encouraged to become a SLURC Member. Once a year, SLURC will convene a meeting among all of its members to present their work and get feedback on the strategic direction of the centre. Furthermore, members will receive periodic updates through the SLURC newsletter. Potential members include other organisations funded by Comic Relief working in informal settlements in Freetown as well as other relevant NGOs or governmental authorities.

b. SLURC Champions:
The SLURC team will identify key people in Sierra Leone to become champions of the centre within their organization. Appointments will be made particularly among relevant government authorities. The objective of this appointment is to enhance the visibility of the centre and facilitate key institutional support in carrying out SLURC core activities. SLURC Champions will be invited to the same meeting with SLURC Members, where progress of SLURC activities will be presented, and feedback provided.

c. SLURC Associates:
During the implementation of the project, SLURC welcomes researchers that are doing work in areas related to the centre’s vision and mission. SLURC can provide them a base to carry out their activities and recognise them as SLURC Associates. For this to take place, researchers will need to send a letter of motivation to the Management Committee to consider their interest.