

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) has quickly moved to establish itself as a credible and leading expert on the urban development challenges facing Freetown since its creation in 2015. Through the partnership between University College London (UCL) and Njala University, and drawing on the personal connections of SLURC staff, it has been able to successfully engage key stakeholders at local, national and international levels.

SLURC is providing leadership on the implementation of key areas of the Transform Freetown agenda, has provided input into the drafting of the National Land Policy and is well positioned to be consulted on a number of other policy developments, including the formulation of the National Development Plan. It has successfully established partnerships with respected research organisations and academic institutions such as the Institute for Development Studies and International Institute for Environment and Development, presenting its work at events in global fora. Finally, and most critically, SLURC has rooted its research in processes that are community driven. Working in partnership with the Federation of Urban and Rural Poor has been crucial in achieving this outcome.

But SLURC has not just worked in silos with these different partners. One of its biggest impacts to date has been its role in acting as a facilitator of dialogue. Both between national and local government policymakers, civil society organisations and residents of informal settlements and cross-nationally, by bringing key urban stakeholders on knowledge-exchange visits to other African contexts. Already this approach has seen a shift in some government departments and local authorities thinking about informal settlements, with slum upgrading specifically mentioned ahead of forced evictions in the Mayor's Transform Freetown agenda.

However the impact of SLURC in changing attitudes has been limited to key stakeholders and partners. Moving forward greater emphasis should be placed on developing and implementing a communications strategy that thinks creatively about the ways in which SLURCs research outputs can be formulated in more engaging and relevant ways to reach a much wider national audience. Greater emphasis should also be given to the development of internal processes that will support institutional learning; to ensure measures are put in place to support staff development and retention; and to continuously improve communication internally and with key partner organisations.

In just three years SLURC has emerged and developed into a leading urban stakeholder in Sierra Leone that is recognised for producing high quality, community driven research and analysis. The setting up of a research centre has not been without challenges and there remain areas for further improvements if it is to become a permanent, and sustainable, fixture in the Sierra Leone urban landscape. However foundations have been laid that should allow SLURC to find the resources needed to sustain and grow not only within Sierra Leone, but also regionally and internationally.