

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

of the

SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE



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The views expressed in this report are not necessarily those of SLURC.

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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.

Rationale

With funding from Comic Relief and the Department for International Development (DFID), the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) at University College London (UCL), in partnership with Njala University established the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) in 2015. The overall goal was to create a centre that had the capacities and knowledge to improve the lives and well-being of residents in informal settlements. Five key outcomes were identified at the inception of the project, which drew on a detailed scoping study of the key issues and stakeholders in 2014.

1. Increased urban research capacity in Sierra Leone
2. Significantly improved quality and quantity of available knowledge on the informal settlements in Freetown and Sierra Leone
3. Increased stakeholder access, understanding and use of quality research and data
4. The centre is in a position to influence policies towards informal settlements
5. Independent and sustainable urban research centre established

The scoping mission highlighted the dearth of credible and up-to-date information about informal settlements in Freetown; from how many there were, how many people they contained, to how they contributed to the city's economy. The information that was available was hard to access and rarely used by governance institutions to drive policy development. In fact, the government was unwilling and uninterested in engaging or understanding the intricacies of life in informal settlements, seeing them as eyesores that had emerged as a result of poor planning and which, generally, could be disposed off through forced evictions.

The report also noted that non-government (NGOs) and community-based organisations (CBOs) working in informal settlements were poorly connected with each others work, limiting their capacity to lobby for change. Residents of informal settlements could provide illustrative examples of the challenges they faced but rigorous research into these issues, or the capacity to do this research, was lacking. In establishing SLURC, DPU and Njala University, sought to address the information shortage, empower residents of informal settlements and networks of like-minded individuals and engage the government to change its approach.

This evaluation offers some insights into the progress that SLURC has made in improving the engagement of national and city authorities on urban issues. It seeks to explore the contribution that research carried out by SLURC, nearly always in collaboration with either civil society, academic experts or communities themselves, has made in improving the quality of information and knowledge about the city. Partnerships are a fundamental part of how SLURC operates and the ways in which these have been maximised to advance the goals of the centre will also be a key focus. In providing a comprehensive overview of SLURCs operation since its inception the evaluation will aim to reflect on its sustainability and offer some recommendations for how the centre can learn from its start-up period to develop in the future.

Analytical Framework

The aim of this evaluation was not to look at how, and to what extent, the initial outputs and outcomes of the Comic Relief grant were met but to offer a more holistic view of the challenges and lessons learned in the process of establishing and running an urban research centre in Sierra Leone. Through regular internal monitoring and in the production of annual reports reflecting on progress to Comic Relief, SLURC and the DPU have already provided detailed information about the multitude of activities undertaken as part of the project in the first two years. These were used by the evaluator in the formulation of the semi-structured interview questions, as they highlighted areas of success and of difficulty, but the primary focus was on wider, cross-cutting learnings.

How learning, and in particular mutual learning, contributed to the overall success of the project was one of the key focus areas. Mutual learning, a process of strengthening relationships among project stakeholders and building institutional capacity - in the case of SLURC between local authorities, civil society groups, community members and academics - is critical in ensuring that an array of key stakeholders are part of forging an agreed way forward. In the urban context in Africa, where space is at a premium, the inclusion of different voices and perspectives is vital if a more inclusive approach to urban development is to be achieved. To capture this the evaluator sought to explore four key areas with respondents:

- Types of learning generated by SLURC and its activities
- Who has learnt what and what impact that has created
- What were the most effective strategies to generate learning
- How learning contributed to SLURC achieving its overall goals and objectives

The aim was to produce a report that will serve as a further learning tool of the project by offering reflections on these key themes. It will seek to highlight strategies that proved to be particularly effective and offer some explanations as to why they worked. The evaluation looked to understand when learning was less effective, why that was the case and, in those instances, offers some recommendations for how approaches could be improved in the future. These learnings can be used internally by SLURC to strengthen its urban development work moving forward but also have application for other nascent or yet to be established urban centres across the sub-region. As such the report focuses not only on success and challenges, but also in understanding why certain initiatives or approaches worked or did not. Where possible it offers practical ways forward: solutions that were suggested by, or discussed with, participants in this research.

Methodology

The evaluator used a qualitative approach to capture learnings from the project. In addition to an extensive review of internal monitoring and project reports, policy briefs and case studies documented by SLURC, the evaluator spent five days in Freetown - 26-30 November 2018 - to engage with key project stakeholders. Interviews were conducted with officials from central government ministries, Freetown City Council (FCC), SLURC and its board members, civil society groups, CBOs, development partners, Njala University staff and representatives of slum dweller federations. In most instances interviews were conducted in person but where individuals had travelled during the evaluators visit to towns outside of Freetown, they were conducted by telephone. A further round of interviews, conducted both before and after the visit to Freetown, were undertaken by phone with DPU staff, international research partners and urban experts. A full list of the individuals interviewed, along with their affiliation, is provided in Annex 1.

In addition the evaluator held two discussions, each with four residents of Freetown's informal settlements - the coastal Portee-Rokupa and mountainous Dwarzack - in an effort to capture their perspectives. According to the Federation of Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP), Freetown is home to 72 informal settlements (43 hillside and 29 coastal). SLURC has primarily worked in four informal settlements to date - Dwarzack, Portee-Rokupa, Kroo Bay and Cackle Bay. Due to time constraints the meetings were held at the SLURC office in central Freetown but in order to better appreciate the context being discussed the evaluator took some time to visit Dwarzack, in the company of the FEDURP representative.

In conducting the interviews efforts were made to ensure that an environment was created in which interviewees felt comfortable in sharing their views. The evaluator, whilst relying on SLURC to identify individuals and facilitate the requested meetings, ensured that SLURC staff were not present during interviews. Interviews were not recorded and specific attributions, other than the list of individuals interviewed will not be given to quotes and recommendations put forward in this report.

Limitations of this evaluation include the failure to interview some key stakeholders - the representative of CODOHSAPA and SLURC's former project manager - due to their lack of availability during the field visit; the lack of female perspectives captured (perhaps a broader reflection of the male-dominated nature of the urban space in Sierra Leone); and the inability of the evaluator to conduct discussions in a language other than English. This may have been exclusionary when it came to the community-level interactions.

Key Findings

The evaluation was designed to draw out learnings from the three years that SLURC has been operational in order to drive its internal learning and continued engagement in the urban space in Sierra Leone. With the recent election of a Mayor in Freetown who appears receptive and progressive to addressing Freetown's urban challenges, and in a global environment where the importance of urban development is increasingly discussed and recognised, this comes at an opportune time. Since its creation in 2015 SLURC has quickly established itself as a leading thinker, not just in Sierra Leone, but in the sub-region on urban issues. This evaluation is focused on reflecting how it has been able to do this and offers some thoughts on how initial progress can be sustained and improved. It focuses on five key areas: internal processes, policymaker engagement, community interaction and learning, creating and sharing knowledge and building institutional sustainability.

A. Internal processes

SLURC's creation and evolution has been an iterative and constantly evolving process. It took almost a year to put in place all the elements of the tiered management structure that supports the strategic direction of the centre. The initial structure - two principal investigators to manage the Comic Relief project on behalf of UCL in London and two co-directors, based in Freetown - was driven by the fact that Njala University lacked the financial controls and management to be accepted as a grant manager by Comic Relief. UCL, through the DPU, initially took on the financial management, and associated risks - gradually supporting the transfer of financial management capacity to SLURC - but to do so they needed to find a governance structure that ensured the risks were accounted for. This included a management board and an international advisory committee.

The management board and advisory committee have offered a "fresh look" at particular challenges, especially the advisory committee with its "distance from internal organisational dynamics". In interviews the international advisory committee was widely seen as having offered value in terms of sharing perspectives from other parts of the continent as to how urban challenges were being tackled or researched. However there was recognition that the "advisory board was quite university heavy" and given the predominance of academics in the day to day running of the centre, ensuring a great diversity of sectors were represented was suggested by respondents. This included further civil society representation, an individual with policymaking experience in an African context and the inclusion of a business or financial sector expert. Gender too, in both the board structures, but also within SLURC is an area where more can be done. This is not just in terms of appointments, though one respondent noted the "predominance of men" employed by SLURC, but in working to better mainstream gender into all of the centre's research work.

SLURC's approach to gender

Currently only one permanent member of the SLURC research team and one short term contractor are female. In future recruitment processes, ensuring that 50% of individuals interviewed are female is one way that women can be given a greater chance to be appointed on merit. A further suggestion offered by one respondent was that a certain number of internship positions be reserved for female students in order to give them increased opportunities. Beyond ensuring a greater female presence within the organisation, SLURC may also wish to consider holding a training, to be done by either a UCL or external expert, for staff to discuss the importance of gender mainstreaming into research and ways that it can be achieved. Very few respondents, in reflecting on the internal processes of SLURC noted gender as an area in need of improvement, but those who did regarded it as "one of our biggest problems, in all senses".

Having two directors in Freetown and two focal points at the DPU in London, each with their own specific interests and experiences, initially caused some differences of opinion in the direction SLURC should be taking. Defining a common vision for SLURC was a protracted discussion, with the role envisaged for Njala University and UCL an issue that required much debate and discussion. Respondents also noted some different priorities, and importance attached to those priorities, between the directors in Freetown and focal points in London, at least initially. The need to have a formal boardroom table and chairs was not a view shared by the UK focal points who felt that the space would have been better used as a more practical training room. Agreement required extensive discussions and ultimately the decision was taken that Sierra Leonean ownership of, and vision for, the centre was to be prioritised.

Frequent visits to Freetown, and less frequent trips to the UK, have been crucial in building a shared understanding and profound mutual respect. This has overcome some of the initial communication challenges which were exacerbated by the physical distance and poor internet connectivity. Respondents spoke of the ease with which these factors could be “weaponised” to avoid discussions of points of disagreement.

There was recognition that the “DPU/SLURC connection has enhanced the mutual learning process and given us greater international exposure”. It was interesting to note that when asked during the evaluation for their highlight from the three years of working as part of SLURC, all four chose very different highlights. This diversity showcases both the benefits of having such a collaborative approach, in that it allowed for a diversity of views and interests to flourish, but also a potential challenge of different people pulling in different directions.

SLURC Highlights

“The work we have done on Community Area Action Plans has shown that things proposed in the Freetown Development Plan are doable without much money if you can utilise the knowledge and capacity of local communities”

“Visiting local communities and seeing functional community learning committees that SLURC has supported the creation of, working to change their living environments for the better. Policy is important but for me material changes in people's lives and democratising knowledge is so vital”

“Sharing and presenting findings about research into the informal economy on a national platform was a particularly proud moment”

“The exchange visit SLURC led to Cape Town was a real highlight as it instigated a significant change of attitude in participants that we are gradually seeing applied to Freetown”

Communication at all levels, though much improved, could be enhanced further by more real-time internal documentation and dialogue between staff members. Ensuring that systems are in place to document meetings and measure progress towards agreed objectives and timeframes is crucial in ensuring that all partners, particularly on distance research collaboration projects, are kept up to speed. Making these mechanisms open to all SLURC staff working on the research will ensure that accurate information is captured. A lot of the work that SLURC does is quite discursive but ensuring that those discussions are captured in weekly reports of what activities were held, who was met and what the follow ups are will help improve the efficiency of the organisation and make the report writing requirements of funders easier to meet. It will also ensure that internal learning and documentation is institutionalised; avoiding scenarios where documents are lost due to the departure of individual members of staff, as was the case when the previous project manager resigned in March 2018. “Institutional memory is not very well captured in SLURC” was the view one respondent.

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One research partner also encouraged SLURC to be “more engaged with the partner as the research evolves; more discursive in terms of how the output should look as this will ensure a product we all agree on at the first time of asking”. This was not a criticism of the diligence of SLURC’s approach but rather a request for greater collaboration in the production of knowledge. On the whole they stressed that “working with SLURC is a real pleasure...by far and away the most positive local partner organisation I have worked with in Sierra Leone: interactive, well capacitated and offer intellectual contribution”.

Nonetheless a concern raised by a number of respondents surrounded the time commitments of the SLURC co-directors, who as well as running the centre also have significant teaching commitments to fulfill at Njala University. Described as “a design flaw rather than a criticism of their work ethic” there is need for a discussion to be had to ensure that Dr Macarthy, for example, is granted sufficient time to provide the strategic direction to SLURC that the newly created role of executive director is designed to provide. As the DPU looks to reduce its role in the day to day management of the centre, this recalibration of SLURC’s management structure is welcome. It should allow for a clearer direction of SLURC’s future vision to emerge, something that is particularly needed in the area of financial mobilisation, and provide the space for the directors of operations and research respectively to improve institutional cohesion.

Attracting and retaining staff who can ensure that SLURC’s high quality standards are maintained were noted as a challenge by several respondents. The position of communications officer was highlighted as one example where recruitment processes have failed to attract the quality of personnel required. SLURC is “increasingly mindful of the importance of exposing staff to new ideas and opportunities for learning” in order to retain those staff already in place. It has recently conducted staff appraisals for the first time: a practice that will be continued on a regular basis. It allows existing staff, many of whom are very competent, to discuss their ideas for enhancing their own personal development as well as SLURC’s as an institution.

“Building the research capacity of younger staff would be an enormous contribution to the urban field in Sierra Leone more generally”

A respondent noted that currently “how you come to SLURC [in terms of position] is where you leave it” and that more could be done to give greater responsibilities to researchers in terms of running trainings and workshops; with promotions - both in terms of job title and salary - available for sustained good work. Listening to the concerns of junior staff is integral as without competent research officers to carry out much of the primary work SLURC would be at risk of being “a boat with no engine”. Although limited by funding, SLURC could explore ways of bridging the gap between research officers and the directors so as to free up more of the directors time to provide strategic direction and to create a new cadre of young, qualified Sierra Leonean, urban researchers. “Building the research capacity of younger staff would be an enormous contribution to the urban field in Sierra Leone more generally” was the view of one respondent, with another arguing that “consolidating mid-level staff will be vital before SLURC can expand”.

B. Policymaker engagement

SLURC’s engagement with policymakers has focused on two different levels of government. The national government - specifically the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development, The Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and Environment and the Disaster Management Department in the Office of National Security (ONS) (particular after the 2017 mudslide) - and FCC whose responsibilities for the development of the capital are set out, in theory at least, by the 2004 Local Government Act. Despite the national scope implied in SLURC’s name, its research work has to date been focused exclusively in Freetown, Western Area Urban district.¹

SLURC has been instrumental in supporting the gradual transformation of attitudes, of some individuals in the aforementioned ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), when it comes to the approach for dealing with informal settlements. It was noted that soon after SLURC was created there were forced evictions, led by FCC, in Crab Town - a coastal informal settlement. Now, a respondent noted, “for the most part, I see those attitudes have changed or are changing; upgrading is talked about as the first port of call. The threat

¹ Sierra Leone is comprised of 16 districts

of evictions has not gone away but has been pushed to the back”. A civil society representative stated their belief that the “attitude among government has really changed...previously people saw them [slums] as an eyesore and a menace to the city; in choosing to live there, they [residents] were responsible for their own problems...but that is gradually shifting within government, even if within city at large a negative perception still prevails”.

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In several interviews with key government stakeholders mention was made of a knowledge exchange trip that SLURC organised, which brought a mixed delegation of urban actors from Sierra Leone to Cape Town, South Africa. The visit was designed as a chance for city authorities, as well as civil society organisations, to learn from counterparts in Cape Town as to how they were addressing the challenge of informal settlements through approaches such as reblocking.² One government official who travelled to South Africa noted that “forced relocation has been the approach in Sierra Leone but this is the wrong approach; women are affected, children’s education is affected and local economic opportunities are limited... I now believe upgrading to be the answer”. A similar view was expressed by another respondent, “we want to work with communities to educate them, rather than force them to leave”. However they acknowledged that “there is still a battle ongoing between those at the policy level and those at the political level”.

SLURCs engagement with policymakers in Freetown has been significantly aided by the personal connections of the two directors and the way they have been able to leverage Njala University contacts to open doors. They have navigated potentially tricky terrain and enabled SLURC to “float above politics like a twig on the water”. In some instances the doors may have been opened but the challenge has then been bringing individuals on side. “Using individual connections within ministries, departments and agencies to build institutional connections so as to reduce reliance on individuals” was viewed as an important next step. SLURC has deliberately targeted “professionals within ministries than politicians who already think they know it...these technical advisers can be our champions who can influence government from the inside”. This approach has been beneficial in getting SLURC involved in discussions around policy.

SLURC has been part of discussions around the National Land Policy and are set to be included in consultations during the development of a National Housing Policy. Government officials also noted that the fourth iteration of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PSRP) - to be entitled the National Development Plan - has sought to gather the inputs of informal settlement residents and that plans are underway to include a National Spatial Development Plan as part of PRSP by 2023. SLURC has also been working closely with ONS on urban vulnerability and disaster risk management, particularly since a mudslide which killed over 1,000 people brought global attention to some of Freetown’s urban development challenges in August 2017. The research data and outputs produced by SLURC were cited by ONS officials as having helped them better understand urban dynamics and design more responsive interventions. “What SLURC is doing in creating an accessible repository...it is giving us much greater data than the patchy information we have previously had to work with”, noted one respondent.

At the local government level SLURC has positioned itself as a key part of the newly elected Mayor’s Transform Freetown agenda, which has committed to slum-upgrading over evictions in its approach to informal settlements. SLURC is the focal point on the urban planning and housing and environmental management sector working groups.³ These recent developments, Mayor Aki-Sawyerr was only elected in March 2018, highlight the benefits of continued engagement even if immediate benefits are not apparent. SLURC worked closely with the previous FCC administration and sought to raise its profile and capacity by bringing the Mayor and Environmental and Sanitation Officer to the Habitat III conference in Quito, Ecuador and by building links with Cities Alliance. But changing attitudes in practice proved much more challenging and little progress was made. Despite this SLURC continued to invite FCC staff to be part of workshops and meetings and they now have the chance to work with a more receptive city administration. As one respondent noted “they [SLURC] have the knowledge and experience that FCC can, and should, be benefiting from”.

² Reblocking is a process of physical transformation of a slum to provide street access to all its structures and set up urban services, efficient water management, emergency assistance and all other benefits of an urban street network.

³ The Transform Freetown plan has 4 clusters and 11 priority sectors. The Resilience Cluster includes: environmental management, urban planning and housing and revenue mobilisation. The Human Development cluster includes: education, skills development, job creation and disabilities. The Healthy Cities cluster includes: health, water and sanitation and the fourth cluster is a standalone cluster looking at Urban Mobility.



Figure 1: SLURC and Urban KNOW team meeting the Mayor of Freetown. Image: KNOW team

SLURC has quickly established itself as a key urban interlocutor among national and local government actors. Within specific ministries and the FCC it has established good working relationships that have endured a changeover in political administration. However one concern that was raised was that it is often people from a limited pool who attend workshops and events; when they are unable to attend it proves difficult to attract replacements, even from within the same MDA.

“I learnt on visits to these communities [facilitated by SLURC] that these people are very educated and saying something based on practical experience that you cannot find in any book”

SLURC has been strategic in positioning itself as a key mediator between communities, civil society groups and policymakers. More than just bringing them together to discuss key urban issues they are ensuring interactions are done in “a way that they learn together, both through the formal trainings but also in one-to-one interactions”. As one official noted “I learnt on visits to these communities [facilitated by SLURC] that these people are very educated and saying something based on practical experience that you cannot find in any book”. This dialogue driven approach is supporting policymakers to have a better understanding of urban dynamics. Previously the approach of local authorities was top-down “we just tell them what they (communities) need” whereas now, thanks in part to the engagement SLURC has been able to foster between communities and FCC in places like Dwarzack, “we want them to tell us what they need and how they want it, even though we can’t always deliver on their wishes”.

This mediator role has led to SLURC being seen as a key coordinator in the urban development of the city; as it works “to stop key actors working in silos”. It has successfully acted “as bridge between government, civil society and communities”. Initiatives such as the City Learning Platform, which is a part of the Transform

Freetown agenda and which SLURC is to coordinate, offers further opportunities to position the centre as a credible, independent voice on Freetown's urban development that can continue to push forward a progressive urban agenda in the future.

Expanding its connections to new individuals, in new departments, using a similar approach to its initial policymakers engagement, would help to further diversify engagement and avoid interactions becoming too formulaic: the same participants and stakeholders, having the same conversations. Targeting more high profile political figures, as was trialled during the National Conference on the Informal Economy SLURC hosted in August 2017, is worth repeating. Even though the vice-president, having committed to open the event, pulled out at the last minute, these types of events can raise not just the issues at a national fora, but SLURC's profile among policymakers. As well as involving national stakeholders in these processes, SLURC could do more to interact with international development partners working on urban issues or related topics.

The Head of the Civil Society and Governance team at the European Union (EU) was not aware of SLURC's work in Freetown. In a meeting in November 2018 he noted that the EU had not focused on urban development since the completion of the Freetown Development Plan in 2008. However he did mention that it was an area under review and its plans to support the FCC emerged during discussions with the council. Interaction with DFID has been limited despite it being an indirect funder of the centre through Comic Relief and although the World Bank is now engaging with SLURC on an urban transport initiative it was not initially aware of SLURC's work.

Given that these large multilateral organisations are often working in close collaboration with governments, seeking to engage them should be a part of SLURC's strategy for engaging policymakers going forward. SLURC should ensure that copies of its reports and publications - physical and electronic - are distributed to focal persons at prospective donors, even those who have shown a limited interest in urban issues to date. They are likely to be more receptive to the progressive ideas and community-led approach for urban development being advocated for by SLURC. With donors, the engagement approach may be less about changing attitudes and more about ensuring they are aware of the research work being done and how SLURC is engaging key stakeholders; from government officials to local community members.

C. Community interaction and learning

Situating SLURC within local community structures has been vital for its institutional credibility. Whilst the directors have been instrumental in facilitating those exchanges at a policy level, they have been ably assisted by the research officers in building positive working relationships with communities, particularly FEDURP. "FEDURP is a vital source of knowledge and can connect us to the community - unlike NGO staff they are present in these communities everyday and this gives them credibility". However working so closely with FEDURP is not without risks. The "danger that FEDURP becomes exclusionary and leads to other key actors being ignored from community discussions" is something to keep in mind. But on the whole they are "credible, legitimate and offer access to the community" in the view of one respondent. FEDURP also share a similar approach to urban development that raises the voice of residents of informal settlements in the discussions around solutions. This shared mission and vision has created a strong working relationship that SLURC staff view as integral. The fact that they are "cost effective", in the view of one respondent, is an added benefit, but not part of the rationale for partnering with FEDURP.

"FEDURP is a vital source of knowledge and can connect us to the community - unlike NGO staff they are present in these communities everyday and this gives them credibility"

Given the importance and significance of building on existing networks to advance community engagement in Freetown, SLURC could explore ways of further working with FEDURP, which has representation in 15 informal settlements in Freetown, to facilitate knowledge exchange visits between residents of informal settlements. In the focus group discussions it was noted by community members that these interactions are already taking place informally. SLURC could utilise these existing structures by employing a training of trainers approach to some of its data collection workshops; allowing for increased information on informal settlements outside of those they are directly working with to be collected.

“SLURCs approach is much more community driven. Before NGOs came with their own ideas, they tell us what they want to do and then they claim community participation, but we don’t have the chance to tell them what we really need or want”.

Across interviews the combination of SLURC staffs regular engagement, along with the local networks of FEDURP was viewed as key in ensuring that communities were receptive, engaged and understood SLURC’s role. In almost every community interaction, SLURC staff made efforts to explain their research focus and how they were different to NGOs in order to manage expectations, particularly around any financial support that communities might have hoped for. One resident of Dwarzack explained how they viewed SLURC, as compared to an NGO, “SLURCs approach is much more community driven. Before NGOs came with their own ideas, they tell us what they want to do and then they claim community participation, but we don’t have the chance to tell them what we really need or want”.

Involvement as part of the Pull Slum Pan Pipal (PSPP)⁴ network has also been fundamental, not only in helping SLURC understand their operational context but in ensuring effective coordination between partners. SLURC has brought a research component to a more practically oriented network and took on a coordinating role, something that was previously lacking. According to one of the networks members “PSPP did not really have a coordinating partner [before SLURC] but when SLURC joined it took this leadership role which has been very critical in advancing the work and impacts of PSPP”.

Pull Slum Pan Pipal: Learning together with partners

The PSPP network was a very important mechanism that allowed SLURC to collaborate with other key urban stakeholders and communities in Freetown and provided a platform for it to share learnings of mutual interest. Here are some of the views of the network, which is now drawing to a close as project activities near completion, from the interviews conducted:

- *“The PSPP network helped to raise SLURC’s profile with a new audience; it helped to plug us in to the NGO world in Freetown”*
- *“SLURC took over the coordination of PSPP. This has solved a problem we have had in the past. They also offered an element of research which complemented our more practical community development work”*
- *“We draw learnings from each other and when we face challenges the network provides a space where we can go and ask for advice or relevant research that can then be used to formulate new project proposals”*
- *“SLURC has helped by providing support and input as we bid for grants applications. Their research can be used to make the case stronger for certain interventions”*
- *“Sustained advocacy by PSPP toward key urban stakeholders to support an approach that promotes slum upgrading not forceful evictions is starting to change attitudes in government”*
- *“Engagement with PSPP partners has been crucial to our work. The national conference held in August 2017 would not have been possible without the buy-in of all network partners”*

Community Action Area Plans (CAAPs) offer a good illustration of how working with communities can support their understandings in a co-learning process. “To see community members applying this learning [generated through the CAAP] to support small, self-financed [through osusu schemes], upgrading projects around drainage was really rewarding” for one of the SLURC staff interviewed. CAAPs were cited in the focus groups discussions as having been a particularly participatory approach that communities felt gave them a real chance to put forward their ideas for community development. A view shared by an expert working on the project who noted that the “project didn’t make them [Cockle Bay and Dwarzack communities] think about these ideas for the first time [they already have been thinking about them on a daily basis], but enabled them to convey ideas in a way they had never been previously able to do”.

⁴ PSPP was initially launched in April 2014. It comprised of five NGOs: Restless Development, Youth Development Movement, BRAC Sierra Leone, CODOHSAPA, and Young Men Christian Association. SLURC joined the network after its inception in 2015.



Figure 2: Developing Community Action Area Plans (CAAPs)

“Now if you come to our community and say we want to help you to plan the community, we say wait, we already have a plan developed with SLURC, so let’s use it”

These participatory community plans are a long term investment and so it is sometimes hard to see the immediate impacts and benefits but as the workshops drew to a close “I saw community members embrace drawing; they even brought some of their own materials to some of the workshops”. CAAP’s are “not only helping communities understand the realities but changing their ways of thinking” and this type of learning is likely to generate more long-term change. They are also allowing communities to set the agenda, rather than having others set their agenda for them. “Now if you come to our community and say we want to help you to plan the community, we say wait, we already have a plan developed with SLURC, so let’s use it”. However some community members, when asked what SLURC could do more of in interactions for this evaluation, wanted them to provide financial support, in addition to the participatory training, in order to have ideas discussed realised in practice. The need to find funds to refurbish footbridge in Portee-Rokupa was one example cited. This is something being done as part of the Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK)⁵ project, which puts greater emphasis on putting research into practice. Initiatives to address issues raised by research are now being undertaken in 14 informal settlements.

Focus group discussions also revealed that community level research validation workshops, predominantly conducted in Krio, are valued by communities in enabling them to “feel included in the full research process” and in allowing them to have “the chance to ensure that are views have been captured accurately”. This was

⁵ Urban ARK is a research and capacity building programme that seeks to open up an applied research and policy agenda for risk management in urban sub-Saharan Africa. The work highlights urbanisation processes that generate human vulnerability and exposure to a whole spectrum of hazards. Focus is on those at risk, especially in low-income and often informal or illegal settlements, but also on large scale planned urbanization projects and how these reshape the social and environmental geographies of cities and consequent risk profiles. For more details see <https://www.urbanark.org/>

a view shared by SLURC who believe that when it comes to engaging with communities “you are not only taking [data] from them, but giving them feedback and building their capacity”. An example was given by the FEDURP representative of an individual, residing in Dwarzack, who had used some of the trainings given by SLURC on research methods to successfully securing a job with an NGO as a community development worker. An unanticipated but welcome benefit of the training that certification of participation has helped generate.

Overall, community members noted that the trainings they had attended had been informative and useful. There was a preference given to those that were more interactive with some concerns about more abstract topics - land management was cited as an example - being interesting but “not applicable to their everyday reality”. The facilitation of the trainings was remarked upon by one respondent who stated that it was “rewarding to see how good SLURC were as community facilitators. They could talk to community members in a way that was respectful of community ideas and knowledge”.

Community members appreciated the connections SLURC has been able to forge with policymakers like the city council through the trainings and workshops. They acknowledged that they had previously been routinely ignored in discussions about their settlements and that whilst this was changing they still found elected officials particularly elusive. Residents of Portee-Rokupa noted that “only when elections are coming does the MP make an appearance in our community, the same for councillors. We have not been visited by either since March 2018”. They asked that SLURC continue to facilitate platforms that enable them to be seen and heard by those within government. For one respondent “SLURC has done a great job in generating engagement between communities and officials from government...this helps MDAs understand the realities facing communities. They understand much better when they visit and see the realities with their own eyes....they can’t just do a policy that is only for the rich, they have to include the poor”.



Figure 3: Developing Community Action Area Plans (CAAPs)

D. Creating and sharing knowledge

The focus on four key areas - livelihoods and the city economy, vulnerability and resilience, housing and urban health - in four informal settlements in Freetown - Cockle Bay, Moyiba, Dwarzack and Portee-Rokupa - has ensured that SLURC has been able to sustain high quality research outputs which draw on detailed empirical data and a strong understanding of the specific context. They have also been able to ensure a good balance of research across the four main areas, with only the issue of housing cited as having not yet received the attention it needs. However it was generally agreed by a wide array of respondents, including those within the centre, that SLURC could be doing significantly more to share the findings of those outputs in more accessible formats, to a much wider audience. These interventions can be shaped by a well thought out communications strategy; a document that's development and implementation should be prioritised.

“momentum which SLURC has generated in certain circles is great but citizens and a broader spectrum of policymakers need to be made more aware of the important urban issues SLURC is working on, and the ways they can be solved”

There is “a little bit at risk of their outputs being a report on a shelf” noted one policymaker who, when interviewed, expressed an interest in reading SLURC’s outputs but admitted that they had so far not had the time to read any of the lengthy reports. They admitted to valuing the insights shared by SLURC team members in meetings and interactions and suggested that producing short, concise outputs, highlighting key reporting findings, would be a good way of ensuring better policy level engagement. The “momentum which SLURC has generated in certain circles is great but citizens and a broader spectrum of policymakers need to be made more aware of the important urban issues SLURC is working on, and the ways they can be solved” according to another policymaker interviewed.

A frequent refrain heard in the interviews conducted by the evaluator was that Sierra Leone does not have a reading culture. At the same time, the primary outputs of SLURC have been written reports the majority of which are substantial in length. Although policy briefs have been produced as part of the Urban ARK project and SLURC produces a newsletter rounding up key activities and outputs, more emphasis should be given to the production of shortened summaries of key research findings, highlighting recommendations targeted at specific urban actors. Moving away from the use of data heavy PDFs in the production of these documents would be advisable.

Two page briefs for each of the four focus areas, introducing SLURCs work and the importance of the topic were noted as an outreach tool that if produced could be used for engagement with new stakeholders; domestically, regionally and even internationally. The brochure produced for the Freetown City Learning Platform is the sort of product SLURC could look to produce more of. Other outputs suggested by interview respondents included:

- practitioner guidebooks for MDAs;
- blogs or newspaper op-eds to discuss key issues;
- a read out of five key research findings in Krio from a report that is then uploaded to WhatsApp as an audio file;
- Tailored content for sharing on different social media platforms;
- more spatial and visual products such as maps.

One respondent felt that SLURC should be asking itself “can we say something in four maps that will take us 3,000 words to explain?”.

Striking the balance between academic contributions and the overall mission of the centre as stated in the 2018-2020 Sustainability Plan, which is “to create capacity and produce useful knowledge leading to improved well-being in informal settlements”, is difficult. One respondent felt that it was “often skewed in favour of academia [perhaps in part due to funders] and away from communities”. That is not to say that the research currently being done by SLURC does not have applications for communities, it clearly does, but the way that it is shared and communicated with them should be given more thought so they can use it more easily. The CAAP work highlighted how maps were much more effective in helping communities understand urban dynamics than written reports for example. These sorts of visual tools can also ensure that those who lack basic literacy are still able to engage in urban planning and development processes.

“SLURC is producing very good reports but they need to think more about how they can ensure these are reaching a wider audience; media engagement is key”

Dissemination, both in terms of the tools used and the strategy adopted, has not matched up to the quality of the research outputs being produced. The perception of one SLURC staff member was that “outside of the key partners we have and people we work with in the urban field, people don’t know SLURC very well”. A view that was echoed by a member of the PSPP network, “SLURC is producing very good reports but they need to think more about how they can ensure these are reaching a wider audience; media engagement is key”. A government official noted “the lack of media engagement” as a major impediment to wider awareness of the issues SLURC is working on. SLURC’s leadership is aware of this problem, describing media engagement as “very, very poor”, and recognises the need to think more about how the deficit can be addressed. Recent discussions with Westminster Foundation for Democracy, who work on building the capacity of parliamentarians in Sierra Leone, around ensuring that SLURC materials are being shared with MPs are a welcome step. But to ensure that the materials, once in the hands of elected officials are read and acted upon, SLURC needs to think more about the type of outputs it is sharing, if its valuable research is to continue to shape policy and debates among a wider audience.

Radio remains a key communication medium in Sierra Leone. SLURC took a representative from Radio Democracy to South Africa as part of the knowledge exchange visit and has held initial discussions about the possibility of having a short weekly or bi-weekly phone-in show where key urban issues can be debated and discussed with and by citizens. This should be followed up as it would increase awareness and knowledge of SLURC and the key urban issues facing Freetown amongst a much wider audience. One respondent stressed the need for there “to be a conversation that is happening beyond slum communities, one that is being lead by ordinary citizens”. Very good links exist with certain key individuals in government and civil society but where SLURC has fallen short, in the view of one respondent, is in making ordinary citizens “aware of its existence, aware of the messages it seeks to promote and in encouraging wider debate and discussion”. SLURC can use tools such as radio, print media and social media messaging apps to start those discussions.

Engagement with academic institutions and audiences has been much more successful. SLURC has successfully collaborated with leading urban experts as part of the Urban ARK and Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW)⁶ projects or in working with the Institute for Development Studies (IDS) as a partner in its Future Health Systems consortium.⁷ Urban ARK for example, has also given SLURC the chance to share knowledge and exchange ideas with other research entities on the continent - Malawi and Nigeria are just two examples-, raising its regional profile in the process. The willingness of these partners to re-engage SLURC, suggests the quality of work they produce is high. One partner noted that the data collection and insightful analysis provided by SLURC was invaluable, but highlighted report writing as an area where improvements can be made. However it seems clear that SLURC’s ambitions of “we want to feel valued and be viewed as valued by our collaborators” is being realised. In return, being part of initiatives like the Urban ARK project, which covers 13 cities in nine countries, offers a great chance to learn from a wide variety of perspectives and approaches.

Engagement with academics within Sierra Leone, particularly at Njala University, has also seen a change in their attitudes and the use of SLURC materials and ideas being applied in the teaching of a range of development courses. The ambition of the Urban KNOW project, to support the development of an urban planning masters curriculum, can play a significant part in establishing much needed academic training, not only for the country, but also for the region, in the view of one respondent. Running the masters in partnership with Njala University, SLURC would drive a closer working relationship between the two institutions and could eventually enable SLURC to draw some core funding for its continued existence from Njala University.

6 KNOW is a consortium of local and international researchers, academics, and community partners in Africa, Latin America and South Asia. It is a response to growing inequalities in cities and aims to co-produce knowledge to activate transformations towards urban equality, to build partnerships with equivalence between networks and organisations of the poor, government, the private sector, and academia and to co-create responsive Urban Learning Hubs that will analyse, plan, monitor and compare city progress towards national and global goals on urban equality. As part of the KNOW project, SLURC will build upon the previous experience of developing Community Action Area Plans (CAAPs) to develop Informal Settlement Profiles in three informal settlements to reveal diverse needs and aspirations, combining activities that involve capacity building, participatory research methods and conventional qualitative and quantitative methods. For more details see <https://www.urban-know.com/>

7 The Future Health Systems consortium aims to generate knowledge that shapes health systems to benefit poor people. Future Health Systems addresses fundamental questions about the design of health systems and works closely with people who are leading the transformation of health systems in their own countries. In Sierra Leone SLURC recently completed a study in four informal settlements in Freetown to understand how living conditions relate to key health concerns of communities. The study also looked at whether socio-economic conditions of people living in informal settlements affect their access to health service provision. For more details see <http://www.futurehealthsystems.org/>



Figure 3: Urban ARK presentation

International academic engagement has seen SLURC directors produced co-authored academic book chapters and speak at conferences hosted by IIED in London and the African Centre for Cities in Cape Town. The Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) created in 2018 has also raised SLURCs profile with urban experts internationally - 1,696 individuals subscribed (though only 204 completed it) to take part in the free four week course that drew on the insights of SLURC staff, urban experts at DPU as well as key stakeholders and partners in Sierra Leone. Sustaining this international profile is important for SLURC's continued growth.

“it is not quite clear what, and for who, the initial purpose was and this has been realised in its [the libraries] usage, which is very low”

However the physical library and online resource unit are not working as envisioned. As one respondent noted “it is not quite clear what, and for who, the initial purpose was and this has been realised in its [the libraries] usage, which is very low”. Even some of the key stakeholders interviewed within government were not aware of the resource unit, with one going as far as to suggest that SLURC should “create a resource unit where its research would be readily available online”, unaware that one already exists. Another academic based in Sierra Leone but outside of Freetown noted that whilst they were aware of the online repository of information “it is very hard to find the information you are looking for....the website design overall is an area for improvement”. Students from Njala do on occasion use the library but no-one was observed using it during the evaluators visit. In fact it was being used by three staff members as an office due to a shortage of desk space.

The location of the physical library, away from the communities, the dominance of written materials, the fact that it serves a dual purpose as SLURC's boardroom and the lack of publicity to make citizens or students aware of it were all cited by respondents as reasons for its failure to become a learning hub. The online resource unit, whilst having some notable benefits in increasing awareness of SLURCs work amongst an

international audience, has in general seen very low levels of access, with respondents citing the “data heavy” and “unwieldy” platform and “its incompatibility with mobile devices” as barriers to entry. “One of the key envisaged functions of the resource unit was to make knowledge that was already available in country (for free), available in a way that was readily accessible...we have failed to make this a reality”. This was the view of one respondent who cited further challenges of finding the time to constantly update the resource and a continued reluctance from some actors to share urban research on such a publicly accessible platform.

Despite the numerous challenges that exist the library and e-resource unit also offer an opportunity for the future. It is already a resource used by urban academics in other parts of the world. In fact the online resource unit was mentioned most often in the interviews by academics based outside of Sierra Leone as a source of useful information. SLURC has been able to collect, both digitally and physically, an impressive array of academic and policy-related material that relate to urban development in Africa on the whole, and Sierra Leone specifically. These materials can be used to support learning around urban development in the country for current and future generations and therefore it is vitally important that SLURC invests time in finding ways to make both the physical and electronic material more widely accessible and to raise citizen awareness of its existence in Sierra Leone. This could include discussing with Njala University ways in which an annex of their library could be created specifically for urban studies that would be free to access for interested citizens; exploring how written resources that focus on policy could be made into audio materials and exploring the possibility of building a mobile phone application, given this is the way most people access the internet in Sierra Leone, that would allow the electronic materials to be more easily accessible for a domestic audience.

E. Building institutional sustainability

SLURC has done well in winning, often as part of consortia, funding - primarily research grants - to ensure its financial viability in the immediate future. It has built a very good relationship with current partners; several, like IIED, are coming back and doing more work because they regard SLURC as a “very strong research partner in bids”. To ensure this continued success in securing external funding for the organisation, particularly as the DPU’s support is reduced, SLURC will need to ensure it builds the capacity of staff in proposal writing so they can begin to develop their own proposals and lead on application bids.

To date SLURC has been predominantly feeding in to processes that others are leading. In the next five to ten years SLURC should be looking to move from being a partner in a consortia bid, to leading bids on their own, or with partners, and to do this it will need to build internal proposal development capacity. A requirement that is acknowledged in the 2018-2020 Sustainability Plan, where a budget for a resource mobilisation officer has been identified. However the actualisation of this plan has yet to be realised. In addition to research funding, SLURC can do more to explore institutional funding from international donors and partners. Whilst recognising that international donors have specific areas of interest that are not always aligned to SLURC’s core areas of interest, the centre could be doing more to engage these prospective sources of funding so that when opportunities arise, they are well placed to take advantage of them.

Outside of funding sources SLURC continues to think about the possibilities of monetising training or research services; an idea first mooted in the scoping assessment in 2014. But it remains a challenge. “I will only be happy when SLURC can raise sufficient revenue sustainably but this is difficult. NGOs prefer to spend money on sending a member of staff to Europe or elsewhere for a training at £3,000 but when we tried to charge for training people said that didn’t have money to pay...Does this mean that the interest in urban development still has a way to go to really be embedded?”. Continuing these conversations are important. SLURC could look at ways of charging for the MOOC and other online courses; being contracted by government actors such as Statistics Sierra Leone; or through building a closer working relationship with Njala University that will eventually lead to them covering some of the centre’s operational costs.

As DPU reduces its influence in the day to day operations of SLURC, Njala will need to play a more engaged role in SLURC’s development. So far the university has been involved primarily through staff attending training and workshops which have helped change misconceptions held by some staff. One noted how “before engaging with SLURC these guys (slums) just need to go...but now I appreciate more how integral they are to the functioning of the city”. The development of an urban planning masters programme at

Njala University, in collaboration with SLURC, could have multiple sustainable impacts. It would strengthen SLURC's ties with university and create a new generation of well trained urban professionals that will have an impact for years to come. Assisting SLURC in achieving its ambition of "becoming a centre for excellence" and ensuring that "urban experts, those who can train the next generation, are retained in the country and are thinking and shaping urban development research agenda in the present".

SLURC and Njala University: Building a partnership for the future

In order to achieve this strengthening financial management is a key area in need of development. Ensuring that between them they have the financial controls and capacity to manage international grants should be a priority and one of the Njala University staff interviewed highlighted the "usefulness of holding a financial management workshop" in 2018. Further discussions aimed at strengthening the partnership could explore ways in which Njala University might be in a position to contribute to SLURC's core funding, using a percentage of revenue gained from student fees, should a proposed masters programme in urban planning begin. Efforts to extend interactions with the university from academics to students, through an internship programme, should be designed with mutual learning and benefits in mind. The ideal long-term goal for SLURC would be to negotiate a position with Njala University in which it would receive a limited amount of core funding for key staff members, that would ensure its continued existence without compromising its independence. However the evaluator notes that given the difficult financial environment in which university education providers operate in Sierra Leone - some Njala University staff were on strike during the evaluators visit over unpaid salaries - this will require extensive dialogue in which SLURC will need to make a business case for funding based on its contribution to the university.

For DPU staff SLURC offers "a model for the internationalisation of higher education" in that it is doing something to address prevailing inequalities of knowledge creation and sharing. UCL sees this collaborative approach as an alternative way of working with universities in developing countries, that builds national university capacity and raises UCL's profile without the need for opening international campuses. Over 20 UCL staff and 50 masters students have visited Sierra Leone since SLURC was established in 2015, further supporting the building of the centre's capacity but also enhancing the profile of Njala University. As one respondent noted "already we have been hosting students from the UK and this kind of cross-border collaborative learning is key for sustainability".

"I see small cities as keys to how urban development takes place in Africa so expansion will be necessary we just need to use caution in our approach"

Expansion, to areas outside of Freetown and eventually to the West Africa sub-region, was cited by SLURC staff in the evaluation process and is mentioned in the sustainability plan as an ambition of the centre. For now, Freetown should continue to be the priority but SLURC can look at expanding to other parts of the country - towns like Bo, Kenema, Kono and Makeni - where urban challenges are increasingly prevalent and, for Bo specifically, where Njala University has its main campus. "I see small cities as keys to how urban development takes place in Africa so expansion will be necessary we just need to use caution in our approach" said one respondent. "Expansion into second cities, done with caution, would not only help paint a better picture of Sierra Leone, but will contribute to the broader, and currently lacking, literature on urban development in secondary cities in Africa".

"a drop in the quality of research outputs will have several multiplier effects"

Starting with a scoping exercise to assess the possibilities of expansion and meeting with key stakeholders would be wise to avoid the danger of overstretching. With the research centre still in its infancy it remains vital that its research outputs retain a high-level of quality as without this output the ability to secure funding and continue to operate will be a challenge, "a drop in the quality of research outputs will have several multiplier effects". Retaining focus, geographic and around certain issues, is important to avoid "being everywhere but with little impact". But that should not preclude expansion, even with Freetown itself where SLURC is working in less than 10% of informal settlements. In an interview for this evaluation Mayor Aki-Sawyers noted that FCC was looking to work closely with the local council in Western Area Rural "to ensure joined up thinking between the two as the city sprawls to a point where the boundaries between them are increasingly blurred". SLURC could explore ways in which it too can support greater harmony in approach,

and understanding of, informal settlements across Western Area.

SLURC has established solid foundations on which it can now build. The strategic leadership of the centre, and particularly strategic financial leadership, will be crucial to its ongoing success. It was notable that the SLURC directors spoke at length about the importance of enhancing the fiscal sustainability of the centre during the evaluation. Translating that into practice will not be easy but by building resource mobilisation capacity, and devoting greater resources to it, the evaluator is confident that SLURC can build on existing partnerships and collaborations to continue to produce important insights into Freetown's, and Sierra Leone's, urban dynamics.

Lessons learned

Internal processes

- Open internal communication is key to successful partnerships on projects that are being managed remotely. Frequent physical visits have been crucial in building a shared understanding and profound mutual respect.
- Continual dialogue with, and support to, staff around their goals and expectations helps them feel more valued and is likely to improve retention.

Policymaker engagement

- Targeting civil servants, often through personal connections, within ministries allows individuals to cut through the politics & grants access to people less politically exposed and thus more receptive to new ideas.
- Knowledge exchange visits can have a transformative effect in changing participants attitudes. But applying new attitudes in practice is a political as much as a technocratic process.
- Providing briefs that summarise key findings of reports and studies are critical ways to ensure that busy policymakers are reading SLURC materials.

Community interaction and learning

- Networks, partnerships and collaborations are key in building the profile and credibility of SLURC among policymakers, international partners and within informal settlements. The partnership with FEDURP has been fundamental to SLURC's success.
- SLURC's role as a mediator - bringing together residents of informal settlements, civil society and government - has facilitated conversations that were not being had.
- Residents of informal settlements not only value being part of the research or trainings but emphasised the importance of research validation processes in ensuring their views are captured correctly.
- The CAAP project highlighted the important roles that locally developed maps can have in helping communities think about urban planning challenges.

Creating and sharing knowledge

- Ensuring that research produced is disseminated in formats tailored to different audiences will increase and improve its reach and impact.
- High quality research processes, analysis and outputs are key to building institutional credibility and enhancing and sustaining research partnerships.
- The identification of four key thematic areas for research have enabled SLURC to cover, comprehensively, the cities urban challenges whilst retaining a clear focus.
- Creating the library as a venue to store key urban documents that could be accessed by the public was a positive step but not enough thought was given to creating an enabling environment for its use.

Building institutional sustainability

- Online courses have been widely subscribed to and offer an excellent way of raising the centres international profile.
- SLURC is most successful in winning additional grants for its work when it partners with international organisations in a consortia.

Recommendations

Internal processes

- Put in place systems for improving internal documentation of actions, impacts and learnings on a project-by-project basis that is accessible remotely.
- Explore ways of including a greater diversity of experience and gender into the international advisory board - civil society, policymaker, business.
- Enhance gender mainstreaming into both SLURC internal processes and community-driven research. For advertised posts 50% of persons interviewed should be women. Explore working with the newly elected, female, Mayor of Freetown to encourage girls and young female students to engage with urban issues.
- Invest in building the management and overall capacity of research officers to help bridge the gap to the directors and in doing so, improve staff retention by offering clear personal development opportunities.

Policymaker engagement

- Produce two-page briefs outlining SLURCs work and thinking on its four key areas and use these as part of a strategy to expand the centre's network of policymakers and partners.
- Following on from the informal economy conference in 2017, explore the possibility of holding an annual national conference, bringing together key stakeholders on a pressing urban issue.
- Take the opportunity provided by being part of the Transform Freetown agenda and other policy development fora's such as the National Housing Policy to push forward SLURC's vision for the urban development of Freetown.
- Move from personal contacts among policymakers to institutional contacts.

Community interaction and learning

- Build on FEDURP networks within informal settlements in Freetown to facilitate exchange visits between informal communities and expand community driven learning.
- Conduct a scoping visit to map out possible expansion of centre to regional towns to discuss feasibility, interest and identify key issues. Give specific consideration to expansion into Western Area Rural.
- Build on the success of the CAAP mapping exercise by looking at ways in which more spatial work can be undertaken.
- Explore the possibility of receiving delegations on knowledge-exchange visits to share the experiences of SLURC and residents of Freetown's informal settlements.

Creating and sharing knowledge

- Develop and implement a communications strategy with an emphasis on both creating targeted research outputs for different target audiences - more visual, shorter and more interactive - and ensuring wider dissemination, using radio, social media and press conferences.
- Re-engage with Radio Democracy about hosting a radio show that will focus on discussing urban issues and challenges with a wide and interactive audience.
- Discuss with key stakeholders in Sierra Leone the ways in which the online resource unit and physical library can be made more accessible to them. A basic smartphone app could be one idea for consideration.
- Provide leadership and coordinate the City Learning Platform in a way that supports mutual learning between all stakeholders working on Freetown's urban development.

Building institutional sustainability

- Train staff in proposal development and appoint a specific person to the role of resource mobilisation officer as set out in the 2018-2020 Sustainability Plan to explore different ways of raising revenue or funds.
- Work closely with the KNOW project and Njala University to develop a curriculum and establish an urban planning masters programme in the next three years. An internship programme for students of Njala University to gain some work experience at SLURC should be created.
- Continue to explore the possibility of monetising training or research services to raise revenue domestically. Charging for online courses; being contracted by government actors; or through building a closer working relationship with Njala University that will eventually lead to them covering some of the centre's operational costs are all avenues to be explored.

Annex I: List of Interviews

22-23 November 2018

- Alexandre Apsan Frediani, Associate Professor, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London; Chair of the Board, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
- Charles Wright, Associate, Architecture Sans Frontières – United Kingdom

26 November 2018

- Victoria Blango, Institute for Geography and Development Studies, Njala University
- Alpha Sesay, Lecturer, Njala University
- Andrea Klingel, Project Manager, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
- Sulaiman Kamara, Research Officer, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
- John Rogers, Disaster Management Unit, Office of National Security
- Francis Refell, Executive Director, YMCA

27 November 2018

- Alphajoh Cham, Deputy Director, Planning and Policy, Ministry of Lands, Environment and County Planning
- Abu-Bakr Jalloh, Ministry of Lands, Environment and County Planning
- Dr Brima Gogra, Dean of School of Environmental Sciences (2015-2018), Njala University
- Abdul Marah, Director of Urban Planning, Freetown City Council

28 November 2018

- Focus group discussions held with community members from Dwarzack and Portree/Rokupa
- Jenneh Gbao, Programme Manager, BRAC Sierra Leone
- Sallieu Timbo, Programme Manager, Restless Development
- Eric Hubbard, Urban Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction Program Manager, Catholic Relief Services

29 November 2018

- Braima Koroma, Director of Research, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
- Joseph Macarthy, Executive Director, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre

30 November 2018

- Yirah Conteh, National Chairperson, Federation of Rural and Urban Poor
- Sam Gibson, former Mayor of Freetown
- Yvonne Aki-Sawyers, Mayor of Freetown
- Lucy Garrett, seconded to Freetown City Council, Institute for Global Change

3-13 December 2018

- Annie Wilkinson, Research Fellow, Institute for Development Studies
- Andrea Rigon, Lecturer, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London; Member of the Board, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
- David Dodman, Director of Human Settlements, International Institute for Environment and Development
- Nancy Odendaal, Associate Professor, University of Cape Town
- Adriana Allen, Professor, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London

Annex II: Acronyms

CAAP	Community Area Action Plan
CBO	Community Based Organisation
DFID	Department for International Development
DPU	Development Planning Unit
FEDRUP	Federation of Rural and Urban Poor
FCC	Freetown City Council
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
KNOW	Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality
MDA	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ONS	Office of National Security
PSPP	Pull Slum Pan Pipal
SLURC	Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre
UCL	University College London
Urban ARK	Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge

