

# SLURC

## SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE

Sierra Leone Urban Research and Development News | Vol. 12 | April 2022



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### Unveiling the ACRC Freetown Study

Dr. Joseph M. Macarthy and Braima M. Koroma

In December 2021, SLURC started a new project titled African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC). ACRC is an international research partnership funded by the UK's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) with UK aid. The project is led by the Global Development Institute at University of Manchester in the UK in partnership with a wide range of researchers, consultants, and practitioners. Our research aims to gain a clearer understanding of the development challenges confronting African cities and to directly inform and support interventions that can improve living conditions within African cities and the contribution of cities to economic development and poverty reduction in Africa. The study will be undertaken in close collaboration with researchers (local and international), government officials, civil society organisations and other policy actors working to promote urban development in 13 cities, namely Freetown, Accra, Addis, Bukavu, Dar es Salaam, Harare, Kampala, Khartoum, Lagos, Lilongwe, Maiduguri, Mogadishu, and Nairobi.

In Freetown, pathways to the city's urban development are at the heart of the ACRC study. As the trajectory of Freetown's urban development has featured prominently in most discussions on how to make the city inclusive, safe, and sustainable, the



View of CBD and Eastern Freetown (Photo credit: Andrea Klingel)

research in Freetown will have a particular focus on five domains: housing; informal settlements; health; nutrition and well-being; safety and security; and youth and capability development – key fundamentals at the heart of urban reform with prospects to reinvigorate urban planning efforts in the city. The study will also interrogate the city as a City of Systems interlinking with the domains and looking at Political Settlements. The research will involve a range of methods, with a particular focus on interviews, focus group discussions and documentary analysis.

ACRC is fully committed to ensuring that its research findings will be shared with local stakeholders and help to improve interventions that can secure higher levels of economic development and poverty reduction. We hope to build strong relationships with government officials and other policy actors in key policy domains and to help identify workable solutions to pressing problems of urban development.

For more information on the ACRC study in Freetown, contact [jmacarthy@slurc.org](mailto:jmacarthy@slurc.org) or visit [www.african-cities.org](http://www.african-cities.org)

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## **SLURC and the DPU Conclude Their Four-Year Learning Alliance for Transformative Action in Freetown**

Amadu K. Labor

In 2017, SLURC and the Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU) Master's Program in Environment and

Sustainable Development (MSc ESD) established a learning alliance to support transformative actions towards building a socially and environmentally just Freetown. It was a four-year alliance that ended with a closing event in November 2021 where the outputs of the final year students were presented but also reflected back on the overall learning and knowledge exchange that such a learning alliance offers. Bringing together a number of partners including DPU, SLURC, the Federation of Rural and Urban Poor (FEDURP) and Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA), it provided the opportunity for over sixty MSc students to visit Freetown as part of their ESD practice module. However, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the visit was only possible in the first two years of the learning alliance (2018 & 2019), while it had to be moved to a remote exercise with support from local staff at SLURC as well as interns who undertook field activities to support the MSc students in their work in the final two years.

Community facilitators and local interns were recruited to provide a crucial link between the MSc students and the local communities and organisations in Freetown as well as providing contextualized understanding of the findings. The students, staff and intern were divided into groups with different focus themes, in 2021 these included Land and housing, Urban infrastructure and services, Ecological infrastructure and Food security, and undertook desk research as well as field data collection. They also facilitated capacity building of the interns and SLURC staff, an important aspect



MSc ESD course team and SLURC team from 2019 study visit



of the learning alliance which aimed to facilitate knowledge exchange and shared learning, analysis and problem solving.

Students and their local counterparts learned to tackle challenges such as different expectations, technology issues and cultural differences by exploring joint solutions to these and build their interpersonal skills. Together, they produced excellent outputs such as policy briefs, videos and reports. The ESD learning alliance has been a great success and has emerged as a valuable approach to learning and knowledge exchange while its outputs contribute to building a more socially and environmentally just Freetown.

All outputs are available at [www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/esd-overseas-learning-alliances](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/esd-overseas-learning-alliances)

## SLURC Is Forging New Partnerships

Andrea Klingel

A vital part of SLURC's work is building relationships between urban stakeholders, looking out for synergies, and identifying opportunities for collaboration to enhance the impact SLURC and its partners have on decision making relating to urban issues and urban development in general.

One of the academic institutions in Sierra Leone that also focuses on the urban is Fourah Bay College (FBC, University of Sierra Leone). Despite SLURC having already had close links with the Department of Geography at FBC and receiving support from FBC colleagues at various events SLURC organises, both institutions decided to take the relationship a step further and formalize it with a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The MoU clearly describes the mutual benefits of their collaboration and shared objectives that both partners will be working towards.

Another MoU has been signed with the relatively new Ministry of Western Region, a further link to central government where aspects such as capacity building, networking, and informing research as well as evidence-based decision making can assist in creating a more socially and environmentally just Freetown. It is encouraging to see that the Western Region comprising of Western Area Urban and Rural has its own ministry with the Honourable Minister Mrs. Nabeela Farida Tunis having particular interest in research and connecting with existing stakeholder to ensure joint working.

The National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA), which was established in November 2020, is another urban stakeholder that looks at strengthening ties with SLURC considering capacity building in the form of a short course related to disaster risk management and other joint opportunities. A presentation by NDMA at the recent City Learning Platform on 'participatory slum upgrading' has provided an opportunity to share information about NDMA's work and be involved in discussions with various other urban stakeholders such as Community Learning Platform representatives around disaster risk in informal settlements and the need for upgrading of those communities.

SLURC is excited about these new collaborations and looks forward to projects and joint work programmes that contribute to sustainable change in the urban.



## City Learning Platform - Participatory Approaches to Slum Upgrading

Yiorgos Papamanousakis

The latest City Learning Platform (CiLP) meeting in January 2022 brought together several partners working on slum upgrading programmes and research. This CiLP meeting was an opportunity to share insights as part of the 'KNOW' research programme (Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality, led by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, UCL) as well as from the 'Participatory Slum Upgrading Program'. The latter was jointly implemented by Freetown City Council (FCC) and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in partnership with UN-Habitat. This was followed by an in-depth discussion reflecting on Participatory Approaches to Slum Upgrading and how we can improve the conditions and wellbeing of informal settlements dwellers in Freetown. Presenters from the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), FCC, CRS, CODOHSAPA, FEDURP, and NDMA, shared their experiences, successes, and challenges. Participants from the Community Learning Platforms (CoLPs), I/NGOs, central and local government and

## Freetown City Exhibition: Culmination of KNOW's Four Years of Research Work Towards Urban Equality in Freetown

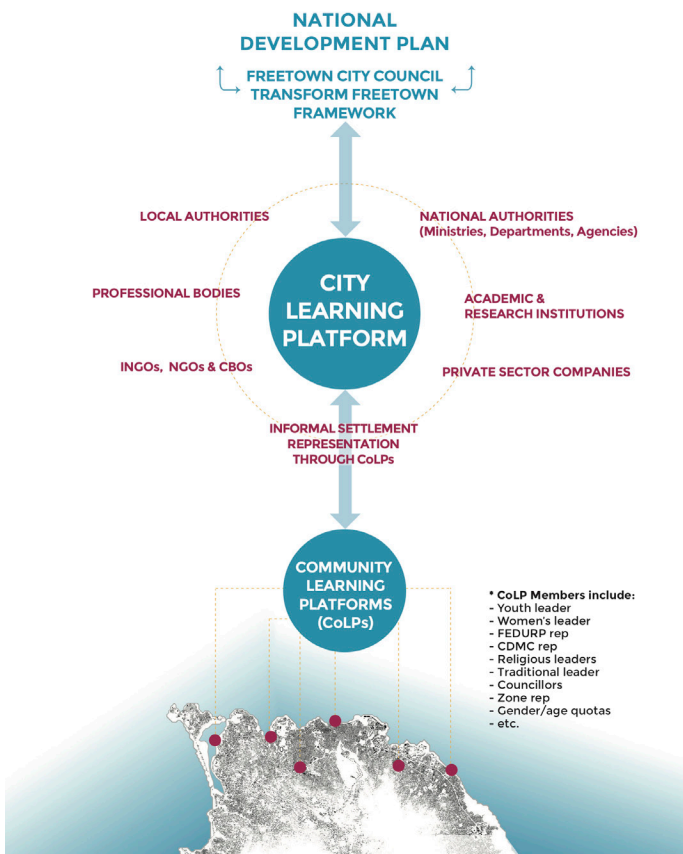
Yiorgos Papamanousakis

On 1 February 2022, the Freetown City Exhibition celebrated the KNOW project's four years of transformative research and capacity building work towards a more just Freetown. Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) is a research programme tackling global inequality, led by The Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), UCL. The programme sought to deliver research and capacity-building for innovation in policy and planning to produce more equal cities. KNOW worked with local partners in Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Tanzania in Africa; in Cuba, Peru, Costa Rica, and Colombia in Latin America; and in India, Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Myanmar in Asia. The Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) is the KNOW city partner for Freetown.

As part of KNOW, SLURC developed Community Action Area Plans (CAAPs) in Dworzark, Cockle Bay and Portee/Rokupa. In each of these settlements, SLURC in collaboration with local residents and FEDURP and CODOHSAPA has developed an Informal Settlement Profile to reveal community needs and aspirations, combining activities that involve capacity building, participatory research, and conventional qualitative and quantitative methods. The necessary capacity building to undertake these activities has been facilitated by Architecture Sans Frontières UK (ASF-UK), giving continuity to previous collaborative work using the 'Change by Design' methodology.

Additionally, SLURC has set up in collaboration with FCC, FEDURP and CODOHSAPA a City Learning Platform (CiLP) which is a space for learning, sharing and relationship building between urban stakeholders and consolidate several Community Learning Platforms (CoLPs) representing informal settlement residents to address issues of recognition and participation of the urban poor in planning discourses in the city.

Closing the KNOW project in Freetown, this event brought together a number of urban development stakeholders, including policy makers from the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Country Planning, Ministry of Western Region, National Disaster Management Agency (NDMA) and the Freetown City Council, I/NGOs, Academia and representatives from the Community Learning Platforms, chiefs and



City Learning Platform

academia discussed possible solutions, explored what key supporting mechanisms need to be in place in order to effect change, and developed key recommendations for different urban stakeholders.

The City Learning Platform is a space for learning and sharing, in which different actors can gather to discuss experiences, coordinate and develop proposals for urban issues that have been identified by the communities and included in an agenda of themes to be discussed that help in improving the wellbeing of those living in informal settlements in the city of Freetown. It is a city-wide initiative that welcomes multiple actors working in Freetown and operates through periodic meetings representing a variety of voices and organisations, in constant collaboration with Community Learning Platforms set up at the settlement level. The initiative builds upon existing networks of institutions involved in processes of improving the quality of life of informal settlement dwellers and aims to expand these networks





Braima Koroma from SLURC explaining the CAAP to participants from Ministry of Western Region, CODOHSAPA and community chief Freetown City Exhibition (Photo credit: Zuzana Hrdlickova)

councilors to share key insights from their work in the programme, discuss its impact and legacy, and explore perspectives on the role of Community Action Area Plans in research, policy, and practice.

Please visit [www.slurc.org/reports](http://www.slurc.org/reports) to access the CAAPs and related documents.

## Implementation Edge to Research: Linking Evidence to Inclusive Health Solutions

Abu Conteh

The use of action research to address problems in low resource settings is becoming more relevant in the current state of rapid urbanization. Action research is becoming much more useful to the urban areas where increased health and social inequalities are exposing people to health, sanitation, housing, and many other challenges. In the past, research studies in marginalised urban settings have often not been participatory or democratic, which limited the ability of the urban to contribute to the transformation of research evidence into meaningful health and

wellbeing outcomes. As such, urban residents tended not to be interested in research or suffered from research fatigue because the outcomes did not directly impact their lives. Drawing from this experience, SLURC supports a different approach to research, which is based on participatory action research. This involves working with community residents, local and city governance actors to co-produce knowledge and action for change. Through its different health projects, SLURC has utilized several co-production strategies that have worked to benefit communities as described below:

**Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity (ARISE):** Through the ARISE project, we have worked with community residents and stakeholders including co-researchers from diverse social backgrounds by applying the Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) principles. This CBPR aimed at exploring the key drivers of health vulnerabilities and to co-design realistic and practical solutions. For example, through the responsive funding component of the ARISE project, emergency funding has been



provided to address vulnerabilities emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. The co-researchers have identified members of their communities who were severely affected by the pandemic to benefit from food support and supply of sanitation kits. Through the responsive fund, co-researchers and researchers recently also had discussions with community residents to encourage the uptake of vaccines in order to limit the risk of COVID-19 infection. The ARISE team has also been working with the District COVID Response Centre (DICOVERC) and co-researchers to adapt COVID messaging to the needs and realities of informal settlement residents. Additionally, the team is working with residents and community/city actors to increase understandings about how to work together to address health and wellbeing challenges.

Read more at [www.ariseconsortium.org](http://www.ariseconsortium.org)

**COVID-19 Research Project:** The World Health Organisation (WHO) funded project is in its second phase of implementation. After exploring awareness of Covid-19 and attitudes to Covid-19 vaccines in its first phase, the study undertaken jointly with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (LSHTM) has moved on to explore the gendered dimensions of Covid-19 vaccine uptake. The outcome of this second phase will support the National COVID Emergency Response Centre (NACOVERC) and community stakeholders to increase vaccine

uptake for women. The study is inspired by earlier evidence from NACOVERC which suggests that vaccine uptake is lower for women than men.

**ESRC Shock Tactics:** The Shock Tactics project funded by UK's Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) has generated a lot of evidence about the state of sanitation and health problems in two informal settlements in Freetown. The project has an implementation component which has worked with communities to address these sanitation and health challenges through a training workshop, community exchange visits and community sensitisation. Following a community training workshop focusing on leadership, community mobilization, project planning, networking and communication, community residents from both communities have been engaging their counterparts to raise awareness about the benefits of improved sanitation practices. Together with the communities, a video has been produced emphasising the relevance of working together to address health and sanitation priorities.

**AT2030 Mobile Health work:** The 'Assistive Technology For All' project works with people living with disabilities and different stakeholders to address barriers to access and utilisation of assistive equipment such as wheelchairs, crutches, spectacles etc. The project branched out into a pilot phase to test the viability of mobile phone devices using a specifically designed app to raise awareness



Awarding community health champions trained to relay health conditions to medical doctors (Photo credit: Hawanatu Bangura)



Community workshops (Photo credit: Zuzana Hrdličková)

about different health risks and prevention. The project worked through community health champions (mostly people living with disabilities) to discuss and cascade health messages from health professionals to community members. The initiative has encouraged openness among community members about health problems such as sexually transmitted diseases and pregnancy related complications. We encourage research partners to use more of these participatory approaches in the future and across projects of all research themes.

Read more at [www.at2030.org](http://www.at2030.org)

## Surviving ODA Cuts and the Funding Climate

Andrea Klingel

The announcement of the UK government in February 2021 to reduce its UK Aid budget from 0.7% to 0.5% which translated into drastic cuts to their Official Development Assistance (ODA) with immediate effect from 1st April 2021, sent shockwaves through the research and development sector. The impact on organizations like SLURC which receive a large part of their funding from various funds of UK government support, was immense. It required for organisations to make the difficult decision whether to continue their projects in the financial year 2021/22 with a third of their funding being cut, or immediately end their projects. For those projects that had been commissioned but not yet started, it meant the funding was completely withdrawn which was the case for one of SLURC's projects focusing on Youth Violence. However, the cuts were not just a financial dilemma but a morale one too, given that staff as

well as communities and other urban stakeholders that had been involved in the affected research projects, and ultimately the beneficiaries, depended on this funding. In Sierra Leone, it led to many redundancies especially in the development sector, progress in certain areas of research came almost to a halt and beneficiaries suffered the withdrawal of critical services. SLURC was in the lucky position that it did not have to make any redundancies and managed to continue with those projects that were already running in a reduced way, thanks to the help of its research partners in the Global North as well as in Sierra Leone who worked hard on rethinking projects, realigning funding between partners and roles and bridging some shortfalls with internal funding.

This difficult situation for the fiscal year 2021/22 was exacerbated by the uncertainty about what would happen from April 2022 onwards, not knowing if the cuts would continue and if so, at what level. Partners planned for all eventualities by looking for new funding options and developing workplans that dealt with a possible end of project by March 2022. All this just happened shortly after the Sierra Leone Labour Law changed, affecting the pay structure and funding allocations on projects which was a challenging time for non-profit organisations like SLURC and I/NGOs.

Good news reached SLURC and its research partner at the end of January that original commitments to research projects for the financial year 2022-2023 would be met in full which meant projects budgets would return to their original funding levels.

While SLURC managed to ride this wave of cuts relatively unharmed and the organization's sustainability plan as well as mitigating measures such as risk reserves helps dealing with such shockwaves, it clearly highlighted the need for funding diversification. A new fundraising strategy was developed, and various funding streams explored which led to successful funding from European partners, USA as well as the first funding from Catholic Relief Services (CRS) within Sierra Leone. However, the fundraising efforts to diversify SLURC's funding sources continues.



## Recent Tragedies Highlight the Need of Working Together With Informal Communities Towards Risk Mitigation Strategies

Yiorgos Papamanousakis

131 people died in a fuel tanker explosion last November in Freetown. The explosion happened outside a busy supermarket in the densely populated Wellington suburb at the south-east of the city. It was triggered following a collision between a lorry carrying granite and a fuel tanker while the latter was entering a filling station to discharge its fuel. In the time between the collision and the explosion, people had gathered around the tanker to collect the leaking fuel. The fire engulfed the surrounding crowd, roadside traders, and commuters caught in the traffic in the usually busy road. Many of the victims were burned beyond recognition; identifying their families will involve DNA testing and could take several months. In the area, motorbikes, cars, shops, and homes, providing the means of livelihood for many, were burned to the ground.

More than an unfortunate and isolated incident, the explosion is a tragic demonstration of how the contextual conditions of poverty and social attitudes to risk coupled with an inadequate road-safety framework and incident response can bring about disastrous accidents and exacerbate urban risk. It is illustrative of how people living in poverty will expose themselves to great danger in order to secure their families' livelihoods. While such exposure to danger may often be knowingly made, public education with

regards to road safety and fire explosion hazards still has a significant role to play in risk mitigation. Last, with road accidents in Africa being the highest in the world, Sierra Leone being no exception, a lot can be achieved by improvements in infrastructure and safety standards, as well as enforcement of appropriate driver and vehicle testing.

Only a few months earlier, on the 24th of March 2021, a fire had devastated the informal settlement of Susan's Bay, one of Freetown's largest, home to almost 4500 people. Reports from residents and a local NGO estimate about 190 structures were destroyed, 1000 residents made homeless and more than 7000 people directly affected from more than 1500 households. The damage resulted in turn in the displacement of hundreds of people and the destruction of the livelihoods of many more, including business people who lost the entirety of their businesses' assets and capital.

The conditions of slums increase the likelihood and the severity of fire risk. Overcrowding, lack of access for emergency services, exclusion from the city's infrastructure, services, and utilities provision including the safe provision of water and electricity, all add to the ease of a fire to occur and spread as much as they add to the difficulty of emergency services to effectively intervene and limit its damage. Illegal electrical connections, lacking proper electric cables or the services of qualified electricians, are the norm. Residents report that outbreaks are now seasonal events: winds during the dry season cause friction in the overhanging poorly-connected cables



Susan's Bay following the fire (Photo credit: Advocacy Initiative for Development (AID))



resulting in sparks acting as fire triggers.

Both incidents highlight the double injustice suffered by the most vulnerable communities in Freetown: while poverty is the first injustice, its spatial and material manifestations, lay the foundation for the second one, an increased exposure to urban risk and the impacts of disaster. It is these injustices that drive the work of SLURC with and for informal settlements focusing on those dimensions that can mitigate similar urban risks in the future. To address them it is imperative for I/NGOs, local government, and the wider ecosystem of development stakeholders to work ever more closely together with informal communities, recognising them as peers in the making of a more just and safer Freetown.

## Energy, Water and Sanitation: Urban Infrastructure is SLURC's New Research Theme

Dr. Zuzana Hrdličková

Since 2020, SLURC has been collaborating with the University of Bristol (UK), African Centre for Cities, University of Cape Town (South Africa), Loughborough University (UK), and Makerere University (Uganda), as well as local stakeholders,

government, and development agencies, on a three-year project “Beyond the Networked City: Building Innovative Delivery Systems for Water, Sanitation and Energy in Urban Africa” funded by the ESRC under the Global Challenges Research Fund. The project has been comparing access of informal settlement communities in Kampala and Freetown to energy, water, and sanitation.

Despite the challenges resulting from temporary ODA cuts, the research teams have gathered wealth of data both in Kampala and in Freetown. The SLURC team in Freetown has interviewed relevant government and private stakeholders for water, sanitation, and energy, surveyed 385 households interviewed over 30 key community members, and conducted 6 focus group discussions with landlords and tenants in the formal and informal parts of Portee Rokupa settlement in eastern Freetown.

Our emerging findings indicate that over the past several decades provision of some services in Portee Rokupa has improved, especially electricity. For example, 94% of our household survey respondents said they were connected to on grid electricity. However, not all households had their own electricity meters. Some people connected to their neighbour's or landlord's meters and some used illegal connections. The electricity supply is unreliable, with frequent blackouts and current



Cooking in Portee Rokupa (Photo credit: Zuzana Hrdličková)

fluctuations which can damage appliances. Some connections are unsafe and pose fire hazard. In terms of cooking energy, people mostly cook on charcoal, and use wood to smoke fish. This exposes them to health hazards through inhalation of smoke. Very few people use solar energy or LPG (locally known as Afrigas).

The community is badly affected by water scarcity, especially during the dry season when public taps stop running. Getting water to meet family needs takes up a lot of people's time. As women and children who are usually tasked with fetching water queue for hours to fill their jerry cans at protected wells, they often miss school and become vulnerable to abuse.

The sanitation situation is different between the two parts of the settlement. In the formal part, people mostly use pit latrines in their compounds and have satisfactory hygiene conditions. Whereas in the informal part, there are public hanging toilets releasing the human waste into the sea. The cubicles in the informal part are often dilapidated, unhygienic and they pose risk of injury. This is especially the case at night as there are no lights. People cope with this challenge by using buckets ("Blackberry") or plastic bags to ease themselves at night in their homes.

In the final year of the project, which ends in September 2023, SLURC will together with our research partners publish academic publications about Portee Rokupa as well as policy briefs. Comparing the situation with Kinawataka informal settlement in Kampala has provided many useful insights. Using this learning, SLURC will facilitate roundtable discussions between community members, service providers and private businesses with the aim to design and test improved systems to deliver water, sanitation, and energy services to marginalized people living in urban areas.

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## Assessing Opportunities for Intercity Cooperation – Freetown and Zürich (CH)

Ansumana Tarawally

The cities of Zurich and Freetown agreed to establish a city-to-city-co-operation (C2CC) which is based on strengthening the mutual exchange between the two cities on a political and administrative level, establishing an expert exchange on jointly defined questions, and planning and/or implementing



Freetown CBD

concrete projects. The initiative for this partnership originates from an exchange since autumn 2019 between the two Mayors Yvonne Aki-Sawyer (Freetown) and Corine Mauch (Zürich), both members of the Mayors Migration Council's Leadership Board. The two cities agreed to put the focus of the cooperation on the regeneration of Freetown's CBD. However, both cities intend to establish a partnership and a regular mutual technical exchange that may also go beyond Freetown's Central Business District Urban Regeneration Project (CBDURP).

The feasibility study that was conducted by Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation (Helvetas), EBP Schweiz AG (EBP) and Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC), employed site background information gathering, analysis of existing information (reports, existing analyses, available geodata) on the CBD and Freetown more broadly; team workshop on Political Economy and Power Analysis (PEPA) in the field of urban development in Freetown and Key Informant Interviews (KIs) with the City of Zurich and FCC and its partners. The research provided recommendations on key areas of this partnership and how the scope of Freetown's CBD Regeneration proposals could be enhanced, identifying areas where the City of Zurich could provide assistance to support the delivery and complement FCC's capabilities.

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## Transitions of Informal Transport in Freetown

Ansumana Tarawally

The recognition that most of Sub-Saharan African cities rely on informal transport for true mass and collective form of transit to meet daily needs, was the starting point of the 'Transitions' applied research project. In the context of 'climate crisis', rapid





Podapodas awaiting passengers (Photo credit: Ansumana Tarawally)

urbanisation, increasing congestion, and worsening air quality, the project is set out to address the role of informal transport in cities in the global south and how transition towards a clean, affordable, efficient, and safe transport network involving informal transport can be enabled. This project will set out an overarching framework for understanding the organisational context and capacities planning and operation of collective transport in a city, while it will also investigate specific aspects of informal public transport that would represent a valuable advancement of understanding in relation to delivering, clean, affordable, efficient, and safe mobility in the long term.

This research was funded by UKAID through the UK FCDO under the High-Volume Transport Applied Research Programme, managed by IMC Worldwide. It is conducted in five cities which include Freetown, Accra, Kumasi, Cape Town, and Maputo. SLURC, which leads the research activities in Freetown, have successfully completed stakeholder interviews, passenger option survey, and most recently, a

fuel consumption survey. The research findings, guidance and policy recommendations that will stem from this project will be communicated to relevant stakeholders so that they can have the opportunity to discuss and engage with the project team in a meaningful way.

The projected impact of this project will include:

- Transitioning the policy debate on the role of Informal Transport,
- Transitioning stakeholder relations by equipping policy makers with information and approaches for fostering positive dialogue with the Informal Transport sector(s), and
- Transitioning towards low carbon and clean, shared mobility

## Other News and Updates

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SLURC team at the staff retreat (Photo credit: Andrea Klingel)

### SLURC Held Its First Staff Retreat

Andrea Klingel

At the end of November 2021, the SLURC team spent 2 days at its first ever staff retreat at a beach resort just outside Freetown. After initial hesitations from staff, given no one had ever participated in such an event, it turned out to be a full success with rich contributions, valuable ideas and resulting into staff asking for the retreat to be extended; everyone returned to the office with new motivation for the year ahead.

During the retreat, the team explored certain core areas of SLURC as an institution and its work which will feed into the next 5-year Strategy Plan to be implemented from 2024 to 2029. It created a sense of ownership amongst the team which is a very important aspect for SLURC and its continued success.

We looked at what the aspirations are for SLURC in the future, referring to areas such as the organisational structure, project cycle, capacity to deliver and how SLURC wants to position itself including relevance to priorities of central and local government, communities, funders, academia, and other stakeholders. We further explored how to foster community and local structures and networks which are crucial to SLURC's work and how to ensure continued engagement and to support sustainability. Looking at external relationships within Sierra Leone but also internationally, the team discussed ways to nurture existing ones and broker new relationships. One of SLURC's board members working for the Ministry of Finance, Mrs Rachael Kuyembeh, managed to attend one of the days and added valuable contributions from her experienced point of view.

The two days ended with synthesizing the various discussions into the strategic direction of SLURC for 2024-29 and the specifics of the workplan for the year ahead.



SLURC staff retreat session (Photo credit: Andrea Klingel)



## Other News and Updates

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From left to right: Abdulai Turay, Ibrahim Juldeh, Ansumana Tarawally, Abibatu I. Kamara

### The SLURC Team Is Growing

Andrea Klingel

Since our last newsletter, four new staff have joined the SLURC team. Abdulai Turay and Ibrahim Juldeh Sesay started at SLURC as Research interns during their final year of their Environmental Sciences course at Njala University. Both received a first-class Bachelor of Science Degree in Environmental Sciences with major in Rural Development Studies. During their internship, they proved to be valuable assets to SLURC and fast learners, working on a variety of projects spanning Land and Housing, Urban Infrastructure, Sanitation, Urban Mobility, and Disability (Assisted Technologies for All) which led to both being offered the roles of Research Assistants.

Ansumana Tarawally joined SLURC initially as Research Officer on a short-term contract to cover for a colleague on long-term sick leave. In September 2021, he was offered a permanent contract having proven his ability, variety of skills and work ethics. Ansumana holds a Master's degree in Environmental Science and Engineering from Southwest Jiaotong University in China and a BSc in Applied Ecology and Conservation from Njala University. He has accumulated work experience as a Research

Assistant, Research Officer, Technician Assistant, and Lead Data Analyst for different institutions and projects including FCC's Transform Freetown Project and a Revenue Mobilisation project at Unimax SL Ltd. He also worked as Sector Specialist for the Skills Development Fund Secretariat. At SLURC, he works on a range of research themes including land and housing, transport, urban infrastructure, and city systems.

The fourth new member of staff, Abibatu I. Kamara, had also initially joined SLURC as an intern focusing on areas including Finance, Administration and Human Resources. Abibatu brings 5 years of work experience in Administration and Finance at Complete Solutions Ltd with her and she holds a Higher National Diploma (HND) in Human Resource Management and Operations Management. She showed great potential for a continued career path in that field and in September 2021, SLURC offered her the position of Finance and Administration Assistant supporting the Senior Finance Administrator.

The full SLURC staff team, but also Board members and members of the International Advisory Committee can be found at [www.slurc.org/our-people](http://www.slurc.org/our-people)

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This newsletter is also available on our website: [slurc.org](http://slurc.org)

