

# SLURC

## SIERRA LEONE URBAN RESEARCH CENTRE NEWSLETTER

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### Life Changing Assistive Technology for All in Sierra Leone

Thomas Doughty

SLURC is part of a major new research collaboration, AT 2030, with the Development Planning Unit (DPU) and Leonard Cheshire, which seeks to answer the question "How can collective, and community-led responses, enable disabled people to access better life outcomes through increasing the relevance and uptake of Assistive Technology (AT)?".

The SLURC collaboration is one sub-programme of a larger project, led by the Global Disability Innovation Hub (GDI Hub) and funded by DFID, seeking to lay the foundations for global AT access and reach 3 million people worldwide.

The sub-programme focuses on Life Changing Assistive Technology for All by learning directly from communities living in informal settlements in Freetown, Sierra Leone and Banjarmasin, Indonesia. SLURC is the local research partner in Freetown, and the Indonesian NGO Kota Kita ("Our City") in Banjarmasin. Through a participatory process of knowledge co-production, the research will take place in two phases. Firstly, mapping the aspirations of people with disabilities



Football on the beach in Freetown. Image: Ignacia Ossul Vermehren, UCL

in the partner communities, and existing grassroots solutions and innovations within their communities which support them. The second phase will link these into the wider AT2030 project, through co-producing and trialling AT interventions that target both the aspirations and the community support strategies mapped during the first phase.

The Freetown strand of the project launched in April 2019, with a visit from the DPU and GDI teams. As well as an opportunity to meet with local stakeholders - including Humanity and Inclusion; the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs; Sight Savers; Cheshire Homes; Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA); Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP); and DFID - the teams visited several informal settlement communities during the trip. In collaboration with FEDURP, two informal settlements were selected as the focus communities for the research in Freetown: Thompson Bay and Dworzark. Whereas Thompson Bay is a small, densely populated, coastal settlement lying at sea level in western Freetown, Dworzark is a steep, sprawling, hillside settlement stretching from the city centre to the suburbs. Therefore, AT 2030 in Freetown hopes to capture diverse views from communities facing a range of challenges in the two main typologies of informal settlements in Freetown, each of which comes with its own challenges for people with disabilities.

As we go to press, some of the SLURC research team are visiting Indonesia to exchange ideas and discuss research methods with Kota Kita. This international meeting will allow for rich discussions between all stakeholders, on the existing state of disability rights and access to AT in the two countries, and the way in which SLURC and Kota Kita approach community collaboration in each context.

SLURC is excited to be part of the AT 2030 research project in order to help ensure those living in informal settlements are not left behind in the rapid advances in AT globally.



SLURC and FEDURP commencing AT 2030 in Freetown. Image: Ignacia Ossul Vermehren, UCL

## Engaging Urban Stakeholders to Understand the Current State of Transport in Freetown

Sudie Austina Sellu



Freetown kekes. Image: Sudie Austina Sellu

Transitions to Sustainable Mobility (T-SUM) is an interdisciplinary, cross-sector, collaborative project which aims to identify the conditions needed to accelerate pathways to sustainable, inclusive transport and land use development in growing sub-Saharan cities like Freetown.

In the first part of the project we seek to develop a conceptual framework based on alternative development trajectories for (un)sustainable urban transport, drawing on data from cities across the Global North and the Global South. The next part of the project involves the assembly and co-production of evidence by interrogating urban transport and land use data in two rapidly developing cities in the region, Maputo (Mozambique) and Freetown. This evidence will feed into the engagement with the public and professional stakeholders across sectors to develop new models of urban mobility.

An in-depth diagnosis of the socio-economic, environmental, spatial and governance conditions for urban transport development practices will be developed in the two case study cities (Maputo & Freetown). This will be enabled by uncovering current challenges and opportunities for the acceleration of sustainable mobility policies and practices, through the analysis of spatial, quantitative and qualitative evidence.

To achieve these objectives, the team has identified all stakeholders with direct and indirect influence on the transport sector in Freetown, and has selected four communities, which cover a range of income, mobility and accessibility criteria: Moyiba, Cline Town, Brookfields and South Ridge Hill Station.



Dan Street poda-poda (minibus) park. Image: Sudie Austina Sellu

The DPU's Daniel Oviedo and SLURC's research counterparts (Braima Koroma and Sudie Austina Sellu) have conducted focus group discussions in the four selected communities to understand local perspectives on accessibility and mobility related issues; the challenges they face and how they think we can move towards more sustainable urban transportation. In addition to this, we conducted in-depth interviews with heads of national and local institutions and policy makers in transport, to understand their views and assess the plans, potentials and strategies for future improvements in the city.

Learnings from the engagements so far include:

- There is a need for a centralised data hub on transport, as many institutions collect information individually based on their interest but the management and accessibility of that information is a problem.
- There are some government infrastructure facilities, such as bus stops, that can enhance transport in Freetown but over the years they have either been taken over by individuals or are not maintained to meet the current demands of the city.
- There is the need for proper coordination and collaboration between transport institutions and stakeholders in Freetown. Many institutional roles appear to be duplicated across MDAs, and at local and national levels.
- There seems to be a capacity and skills gap within government implementing agencies and institutions to take on tangible moves that can lead to transformative change in transport in the city.

The information collated will be used to develop a profile on sustainable urban mobility in Freetown, which will be shared with transport-related institutions and other interested parties.

## Researching Community Perspectives on Urban Health

Abu Conteh

SLURC's Urban Health research continues to grow, with three main ongoing projects currently underway.

### i) The ARISE Hub – Accountability and Responsiveness in Informal Settlements for Equity

This international research consortium was launched in Nairobi in February 2019 as a partnership between organisations in Sierra Leone, Kenya, India and Bangladesh, led by UK partners including Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine (LSTM) and the Institute of Development Studies (IDS). ARISE seeks to improve accountability and advance the health and wellbeing of those living in informal urban settlements.

The ARISE SL partners - SLURC, College of Medicine and Health Sciences (COMAHS) and Slum/Shack Dwellers International affiliates (Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation CODOHSAPA, and Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor FEDURP) - will work in three communities: Dworzark, Moyiba and Cockle Bay. All three partners will work collaboratively in one community at first, in order to coordinate our approach consistently and draw from the experiences of each partner. Following this, SLURC and COMAHS will work separately in the remaining two communities with support from SDI.

The ARISE SL team has also been involved in developing concepts and methods across the whole research hub, which will inform understanding of health from multiple lenses in urban informal settlements. The conceptual



Collecting water from a shallow well. Moyiba, Freetown. Image: Sudie Austina Sellu

reviews will also help in developing thematic papers along issues like social inequity and health, urban informality, and health and wellbeing.

The first ARISE annual meeting will take place in Bangladesh in June 2019. Until then, partners will be preparing the local ethics plan, with support from LSTM.

### **ii) Shock Tactics: Urban Health Futures in the Wake of Ebola**

This research, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), explores actions and perspectives around infection control and health in informal settlements. SLURC has now completed the second round of 'governance diaries' and is processing field notes ahead of our next set of community visits. Through these, we have sought to understand the shifting realities about personal and community health, security, taxation and leadership in informal settlements.

The governance diaries record community perspectives on these issues, in order to understand how they interact and influence health and wellbeing. By visiting the same sets of households on a monthly basis in CKG (Crab Town, Kolleh Town and Grey Bush) and Moyiba informal settlements over a prolonged period, we are gradually building trust which is helping us to go deeper into these issues.

### **iii) The Role of Social, Cultural and Environmental Factors in Improving Ebola Virus Disease Response and Resilience: Exploring the Potential of Community-Based Initiatives**

This project is being undertaken in collaboration with York University (Canada), the University of Hawaii (USA) and the Community Based Initiative for Disease Surveillance and Sustainable Development (CBI-DSSD) in Liberia. The study seeks to elicit the experiences of communities in the fight against the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) epidemic in West Africa, by focusing on Liberia and Sierra Leone. Key issues being explored include the chain of infection in communities; governmental approaches (including quarantine, burials, and treatment); and community perceptions and approaches to stemming the virus.

The findings will be useful for sharing with responders and authorities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) on the central role of community inclusion and engagement for fighting current and future outbreaks in the country. The research is being carried out in three places deemed to have experienced the highest infection rates in Sierra Leone. These include Moyamba Junction (Southern Province), Waterloo (Western Area Rural District) and Dworzark (Freetown).

## Disrupting Risk Traps in Seven Informal Settlements: the DPU-SLURC Learning Alliance

Ibrahim Bakarr Bangura

As part of the long-term co-learning alliance between the University College London's Bartlett Development Planning Unit (UCL-DPU) and SLURC, students of the DPU's MSc Environment and Sustainable Development programme have recently completed fieldwork in Freetown for the second year running. Their focus was on seven informal settlement across Freetown - Portee Rokupa, Moyiba, Susan's Bay, Colbot, Dworzark, CKG (Crab Town Kolleh Town and Graybush) and Cackle Bay. Through the research projects, students have worked with community members to analyse the everyday risks they face, explore plausible future scenarios and develop strategies that can contribute to transformative action to disrupt risk traps. Ultimately, the aim is to go beyond risk mitigation in order to disrupt urban risk traps in a structural way.

The UCL team comprised of 53 students and seven staff from a total of 35 countries. To facilitate the research process in each community, SLURC recruited seven local interns who worked together with community facilitators recruited by the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP). The internship enabled the alliance to facilitate capacity building of aspiring local practitioners, and enable a knowledge exchange with students from around the world. The interns provided a link between the students and the seven local communities in which they worked. They were also engaged in Work Package 5 of the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) project, through interviews conducted by the DPU team and a workshop to explore their own learning trajectories. As part of the ongoing alliance, we hope to continue building the capacities of our interns and community facilitators.

Alongside the fieldwork, organisations working on risk in Freetown's informal settlements, including Catholic Relief Services (CRS) and FEDURP, as well as Freetown City Council and the Ministry of Lands, Housing and the Environment, were invited to a discussion session on how their interventions have impacted community resilience to disasters. The students had the opportunity to engage the speakers on various issues relating to their fieldwork.

The last day of fieldwork in the settlements, dubbed 'devolution day', provided community members with the opportunity to evaluate preliminary findings ahead of the final presentations. It was also a platform for community participants to develop a collective understanding of the outputs and recommendations coming out of the research.

On their final day in Freetown, students delivered presentations and preliminary video outputs to an audience including community members, NGOs and government representatives. Following the presentations, there was a lively discussion between the diverse stakeholders, encompassing crosscutting issues such as the relationship between land tenure and risk accumulation, as well as issues surrounding land banking.

Following the students' return to London, they are consolidating their findings to produce a policy brief and video for each settlement. These will be available on our website by July: [www.slurc.org](http://www.slurc.org).



This year's learning alliance team, comprising UCL students and tutors, interns, community facilitators and SLURC staff from 35 countries! Image: Julia Wesely, UCL

## Informal Settlement Profiling: Dworzark and Cockle Bay

Ibrahim Bakarr Bangura

A team of 12 local data collectors, together with community representatives, have recently completed a comprehensive data collection exercise in Cockle Bay and Dworzark. The process was led by SLURC with support from Architecture Sans Frontieres-UK (ASF-UK). The study aims to build community-driven informal settlement profiles of the two communities as part of the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) project in Freetown.

The exercise involved the use of a range of tools that had been co-developed jointly by SLURC, ASF-UK and community members. Two transect walks were conducted with community residents across all zones in each settlement, to explore the current conditions of the area by observing, asking and listening; with particular consideration given to themes like risk, sanitation and housing. A mapping exercise was carried out to record the location of a set of key facilities using both physical maps and the KoBo Collect mobile app. This laid emphasis on key facilities and spaces like the existing transport infrastructure, water provision, schools and religious buildings, with data collectors capturing age, usage, and ownership. The app was also used to undertake a door-to-door household survey.

Settlement timelines were created through focus group discussions, plotting events perceived to have affected the community positively or negatively in through time, in order to capture temporal and spatial data. Community-wide priorities were established through a ranking exercise, whereby community members described their individual needs before ranking them collectively. Finally, through a parallel exercise SLURC provided cameras for community members to record aspects of their daily lives in the form of a photo diary.

The whole exercise has created a comprehensive dataset on living conditions and amenities in Dworzack and Cockle Bay. SLURC and ASF-UK are hosting an international workshop in July to develop the analysis and visualization of this data. The workshop will bring together community members and international practitioners with the aim of making the data accessible, usable, useful and used.

## Learning From Urban ARK, and Building on the ReMapRisk Platform to Share Data

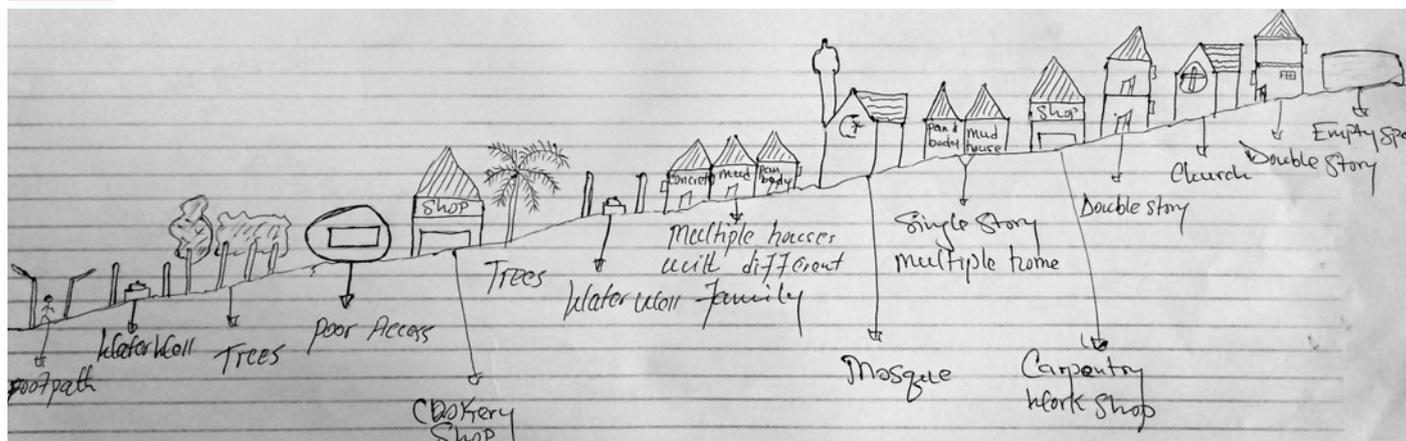
Thomas Doughty

SLURC was a partner in the Urban Africa Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) project - [www.urbanark.org](http://www.urbanark.org) - working in collaboration with researchers at UCL's Development Planning Unit (DPU), and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the UK Department for International Development (DFID). Urban ARK sought to disrupt risk accumulation cycles in sub-Saharan cities, by examining governance and planning practices, and how these enhance or suppress the capacity to act of those most vulnerable to be trapped in such cycles.

We have revisited some of the activities and outputs in recent months, to evaluate and learn, and also to take some findings further.

Urban ARK, and SLURC's other early research, strengthened our partnerships with FEDURP representatives in each target community, and allowing us to develop our community-led data collection practices. This paved the way for much of our subsequent engagements in Freetown's informal settlements. These relationships and practices have now fed into further survey and enumeration work, including our work with Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) and ASF-UK (see page 6, left) and the DPU-SLURC Learning Alliance (see page 5).

Working with Community Disaster Management Committees (CDMCs) in 15 settlements, we co-produced 15 strategic action plans to disrupt cycles of risk accumulation at the community level. These were accompanied by small seed-funds from Urban ARK which, combined with community resources, enabled practical interventions at scale in each settlement. These included improving drainage, building a footbridge, and developing better solid waste management. The Urban ARK team has been conducting a legacy consolidation phase, SLURC has been meeting with key stakeholders in each community in order to consolidate the lessons from the project. Selected video interviews with stakeholders from four of the settlements involved – Cockle Bay, Colbot, Congo Town and Dworzark – can be viewed on our website, [www.slurc.org/video](http://www.slurc.org/video). Key messages include the greater



Transect walk diagram, Dworzark. Image: Data collection team



Concrete footbridge in Colbot, built with support from Urban ARK. Image: Thomas Doughty

potential for scalability when interventions have leveraged community resources, meaning a precedent is created whereby communities can continue to invest.

A further output of the Urban ARK work was the ‘ReMapRisk Freetown’ online platform. A free web-based GIS platform and tool, which uses a community-led mapping methodology to document risk and vulnerabilities across Freetown’s informal settlements. We are now looking to take the ReMapRisk platform further, and utilise its potential to systematise much of SLURC’s other existing and future georeferenced data. For example, much of the data collected during the Urban KNOW fieldwork used georeferenced software on smart phones, meaning it can be fed into the platform. In addition, SLURC holds a significant volume of data from its many projects and research strands. We would like to make as much of this open access as possible, and ultimately aim to facilitate a process of data sharing between SLURC and any external organisation or actors involved in urban research and practice in Freetown.

## ‘Urban Transformations’ Conference and UCL’s High Level Visit to Sierra Leone

Dr Joseph Macarthy and Thomas Doughty

Preparations are well underway for a conference on ‘Urban Transformations in Sierra Leone’, which is part of a week of activities surrounding a high level delegation visit from University College London (UCL).

SLURC is the outcome of an international partnership between Njala University and UCL’s Bartlett Development Planning Unit (DPU), which after more than three years continues to go from strength to strength. As part of the UCL Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment’s one hundredth anniversary celebrations, UCL wishes to further strengthen its existing links with Njala University, and identify future collaborations. The high level UCL delegation will be led by Dame Nicola Brewer (Vice-Provost International), Professor Ijeoma Uchegbu (Pro-Vice Provost for Africa and the Middle East), Ciaran Moynihan (Head, Global Partnership, UCL’s Global Engagement Office), Professor Julio Davila (Head, Development Planning Unit) as well as other eminent academics. The delegation will visit the Njala University campus on 20th June this year.

The week of activities in Freetown serves to celebrate SLURC’s accomplishments, to reflect on the learnings and challenges of the past three years, and to structure

its future direction.

The conference will facilitate dialogues on how research about urban development in Freetown can be applied to influence policy and planning practices towards the transformation of informal settlements in Sierra Leone. It will cover four of SLURC’s five thematic areas, namely Urban Health; Urban Livelihoods and the City Economy; Urban Vulnerability and Resilience; and Land and Planning; and will directly inform the implementation of the Transform Freetown Plan, as well as the new National Development Plan. The Mayor of Freetown will deliver an opening statement, and the British High Commissioner to Sierra Leone will also speak, amongst other speakers.

These activities are intended to not only provide platforms for discussion, networking and collaboration, but to also strengthen the relationship between UCL and Njala University that laid the foundations of SLURC.

If you are interested in attending the conference, please contact Andrea Klingel: [aklingel@slurc.org](mailto:aklingel@slurc.org)

## SLURC Welcomes New Researcher Awa to the Team!

SLURC is delighted to welcome Hawanatu Bangura to the team, who has joined us as a Field Researcher for the “Life Changing Assistive Technology for All” project (AT 2030). She will be undertaking primary research, and acting as a community liaison, for two informal settlement communities in Freetown – Thompson Bay and Dworzark – with a focus on people with disabilities.

Born and bred in Sierra Leone, Hawanatu is a dedicated professional with over 5 years’ experience delivering high profile projects relating to human development, disability, urban development and public health. She has a BSc in Finance and Accounting.

During the post Ebola Recovery program, Hawanatu worked in the Operation Clean Freetown (OCF) initiative of the President’s Delivery Team (PDT). More recently she led four main sectors, including disability, in the development of Freetown City Council’s (FCC) Transform Freetown Plan under the current leadership of Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyers, by maintaining complex stakeholder relationships and driving delivery.





Community facilitators and UCL students conducting a transect walk in Susan's Bay, as part of the learning alliance. Image: Thomas Doughty

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS, MEDIA and UPCOMING EVENTS

### CAAP Reports and Leaflets published

The outputs of last year's extensive Community Action Area Planning, using ASF-UK's Change By Design methodology, have been published. As well as an in depth report on each of the settlements involved - Cockle Bay and Dworzark - three summary leaflets have been produced for each settlement in order to make the CAAPs as accessible and digestible as possible.

The reports and leaflets are available online ([slurc.org/reports](http://slurc.org/reports)) and physical copies are available in the SLURC office.

### ASF-UK Workshop: 15 - 26 July 2019

ASF-UK will be cohosting an international workshop in Freetown with SLURC, in order to drive the analysis, visualisation and management of the settlement profiling data collected as part of the Urban KNOW project (see page 6). The workshop will bring 15 practitioners from 9 countries together with Sierra Leoneans in Freetown (including residents of Cockle Bay, Dworzark and Portee-Rokupa).

### Executive Director Dr Joseph Macarthy Features in Radio Documentary 'The Right to a City'

Dr Macarthy features in the recent radio documentary 'The Right to a City: Building Urban Resilience in Africa' on the Irish network Newstalk. Presented and produced by Susan Cahill, the documentary explores how cities in Africa are planning for urban resilience, focusing on cities and informal housing settlements in Ethiopia, South Africa and Sierra Leone. The documentary also features Mayor of Freetown Yvonne Aki-Sawyer (OBE) and Samuel Sesay of YMCA and SDI, among others.

'The Right to a City' is available as a podcast: follow the link on [slurc.org](http://slurc.org).

### Urban ARK Evaluation videos available online

As part of the Urban ARK evaluation, key stakeholders in four of the informal settlements involved - Cockle Bay, Colbot, Congo Town and Dworzark - have been interviewed about their reflections on the project. Videos of these are now available online.

Go to [slurc.org/video](http://slurc.org/video)

This newsletter is also available on our website: [slurc.org](http://slurc.org)  
Editing and typesetting by Thomas Doughty

