

SLURC

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OVERDUE: Tackling the Sanitation Taboo across Urban Africa.

Braima Koroma and Sulaiman Kamara

In June, SLURC started OVERDUE, a Global Challenge Research Fund (GCRF) project that aims to 'tackle the sanitation taboo across urban Africa'. The objective of this 3-year (2020-2023) project is to interrogate infrastructural trajectories and possible pathways to tackle the sanitation taboo across African cities, a task at the core of the Open Defecation Free campaign and the 2030 SDGs, especially SDGs 6 and 11, with explicit consideration of gender relations and disproportional impacts upon women and girls. OVERDUE aims to produce fresh outlooks and robust evidence for effective pathways to equitable sanitation across urban Africa's diversity by examining grid and off-grid arrangements and explore the potential to bridge them at scale across Francophone, Lusophone and Anglophone urban Africa.

OVERDUE brings together a constellation of academics, practitioners, activists and organisations working in, on, and with the three fast growing and medium-sized cities of Freetown (Sierra Leone), Mwanza (Tanzania) and Beira (Mozambique). The team is led by Prof. Adrianna Allen and includes Pascale Hofmann, Julian Walker and Colin Marx from UCL's Development Planning Unit, working in close collaboration with African-based research institutions (Ardhi University and the Centre for Community Initiatives in Tanzania, Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre and COWI Mozambique), community based organisations such as FEDURP, as well as international and regional organisations (COWI Denmark, L'Etre Egale in France).

For more information about this project, contact: Braima Koroma (Director of Research and Training) at bkoroma@slurc.org



OVERDUE

Tackling the **sanitation** taboo across Urban Africa

SLURC's Protocol for Research Partnerships

Dr. Joseph Macarthy, Braima Koroma and Andrea Klingel

SLURC together with the DPU developed a protocol for its research partnerships with the aim to create a common understanding of SLURC's vision, objectives, and way of working reflecting key areas of strategy. It will enable SLURC to build stronger partnerships by providing clarity and direction from the start, outlining the various areas where SLURC asks partners to commit their support and cooperation within the framework of their projects.

The first 4 years of establishing a reputable research centre focused on putting the relevant structures, policies and procedures in place that support SLURC's vision and strategic direction which was an iterative and evolving process, given there hasn't been a previous example of a research centre being established in Sierra Leone. So now was the time to firm up and formalise the type of partnerships SLURC hoped to build on in the future.

During a one-day seminar that was held last year with internal and external partners and stakeholders, participants reflected on the journey of SLURC and lessons learned so far and looked at future areas for development discussing three key areas; knowledge management; ethics; and learning at SLURC. These rich discussions and exchanges resulted in the drafting of a Protocol for Research Partnerships.

The protocol includes six principles that SLURC asks partners to commit to on joint projects and to consider during project design, implementation and for outputs allocating time, human and financial resources as well as knowledge and expertise.

The principles include:

1. **Engage ethically** with different groups such as partnering with communities and involving communities in setting the research agenda, issues around sensitive data and knowledge dissemination, safeguarding, ethical clearance etc.
2. **Build capacities** within communities, SLURC staff, Njala University and fostering internships
3. **Enable co-learning** through exchanges and discussions with other stakeholders
4. **Promote synergies, coordination, and good use of resources**
5. **Guarantee co-ownership of data** including looking for synergies across projects and good data management
6. **Encourage co-authorship**

SLURC invited current and past partners last month to come together in an online Q&A session to discuss the protocol and contribute their thoughts and ideas. The consensus was that this protocol was very welcome and the session was engaging with interesting points raised such as around SLURC's Safeguarding policy, who the custodian of data is and the need for a knowledge consolidation strategy as well as career development within SLURC. The various contributions will be integrated into the protocol and a finalised version published on the SLURC website shortly and circulated widely while the protocol remains a living document with further contributions welcome.

Some of the SLURC partners that participated in the Q&A session in May (Photo credit: Andrea Rigon)



ESD Learning Alliance: Perspectives from Staff and Interns

Multiple authors

The learning alliance is a partnership between SLURC and UCL allowing students from the MSc in Environmental Management and Sustainable Development to visit Freetown every year for field research on different subjects. Due to COVID-19, this was the first remote research undertaken by students from UCL in Sierra Leone alongside SLURC staff and interns.

The MSc Students, SLURC staff and interns have just completed the third year of field work in Freetown. This year's research was segregated into topics including Enhanced Mobility, Integrated Solid Waste Management, Decentralised Water and Sanitation Infrastructure and Services, Food Security through Urban Agriculture, Sustainable and Equitable Energy Transitioning and Land and Shelter Tenure Security. Below are short reflections by both SLURC staff and interns on the challenges and opportunities of conducting this fieldwork remotely.

Decentralised Water and Sanitation Infrastructure and Services

by Michael Garrick and Abu Conteh

With the COVID-19 outbreak and its associated travel restrictions and social distancing, remote field research became the only effective and feasible research approach for this year's ESD Learning Alliance field research.

The research tools used were relatively novel to the Sierra Leonean context and to the participating students and interns. With the use of google drive, members in the sanitation group prepared interview guides with everyone on the team making real-time comments and inputs. This made planning more straightforward and less time consuming. In order to get as many survey responses as possible within a short period, the sanitation team received responses from participants through Google forms and a Facebook survey. However, difficulties arose as community respondents were not familiar with both platforms, in addition accessing data bundles by community residents to complete the surveys was also challenging. Despite this, response rates from communities were reasonable for both research platforms.

In addition, reaching out to community respondents was challenging. Given that researchers weren't able to go into communities due to the high risk, a community facilitator who served as a liaison between community people and the intern. The presence of the community facilitator helped to build trust and allowed participants to participate in the interviews. Some interview sessions however, lasted longer than expected because some interviewees were distracted by other responsibilities during the interview. Some made additional enquiries about the purpose of the interviews before finally consenting to participate, while others turned down our request at the last minute.

The entire research was done within a short period amidst these challenges. Ensuring there is adequate time in the future would be useful for such a research approach. Also,

interpreting the body language of participants and communicating this with other researchers who weren't present was a very useful skill used by the intern.

Integrated Solid Waste Management

by Mary Sirah Kamara

During the ESD Learning Alliance, students together with SLURC staff Mary Sirah Kamara and intern Musa FM Wullarie aimed to better understand and improve Solid Waste Management practices in Freetown. Several meetings were held via zoom both to prepare the research and conduct the research/data collection itself. Questions were developed by the students and reviewed by the team as a whole and agreed upon before the commencement of the data collection which lasted for a week in the following communities; Crab town, Kollah town and Grey Bush (CKG) and the Dworzark communities.

The data collection involved interviews through Whatsapp calls with a wide range of community members and groups including Dworzark Households, Dworzark Ward Committee and Community Leader in CKG (Elliot), the chairman of FEDURP, DESPRO at Dworzark, Scavengers and the leader for Scavengers Association of Kingtom Dumpsite (Bummeh), Tricycle Micro Enterprises such as ENSADO, New England Ville Youths, Leicester Road Waste Management Cooperative, respondents from private companies like MASADA, Le Plastics, Authorities from the Freetown City Council including Sanitation Committee Chairman, Environment and Social Officer.

The advantage of doing remote research compared to face to face data collection is that data collection can be done in a very short time. Furthermore, this year's research provided the opportunity for more inclusiveness and or involvement of SLURC staff and interns compared to the previous years due to having several zoom meetings for discussion in each stage of the work, reviewing of questions, planning and doing sessions together as a team.

However, there were challenges: Availability and location of participants for interviews, level of understanding of survey questions and poor connectivity were particularly difficult to overcome.

Despite the above challenges, the team was able to get 100% response rate. Therefore, I conclude that future research should consider using these research methods, despite their challenges.

Enhanced Mobility

by Abdulrahman Dukuray

The ESD Learning Alliance was an exciting and adaptive learning exercise.

Given the circumstances relating to the global health crisis, this was a novel experience that enhanced my knowledge

and understanding of conducting a survey with a team spread across the world.

Working with the mobility group deeply enhanced my knowledge and understanding of how challenges to mobility affect the livelihood conditions of low income residents and also those actors engaged in the transport/mobility sectors. I learnt from this experience, how multi stakeholder support, including from the private sector, helps mitigate the livelihood constraints of people living under very poor conditions, who are severely impacted by the harsh constraints that often comes in dealing with crises of this nature. Providing relief support in form of food items and safety equipments to help local residents overcome such challenges is therefore very important.

Additionally, the exercise was quite revealing, on the gender constraints of mobility restrictions in public health emergencies such as COVID-19. Also, our findings show that constructive engagement between central government, local government, private sector, and informal transport sectors greatly impacts policy choices, compliance, and decision making in complex situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

From an operational aspect, the level of support from SLURC helped me navigate the various constraints, and ultimately allowed me to carry out the exercise in the most effective and efficient manner. In particular, SLURC demonstrated a strong concern for the safety and protection of interns in engaging with the public under such grave health challenges.

The biggest challenge in conducting this work was the public caution and public safety. However, with the various adaptive measures such as remote interviews, social distancing and managing expectations, the project still achieved great results.

Overall, I deem this activity to be hugely successful, with commitment and support from all actors engaged. The students based at the Development Planning Unit were very understanding and resourceful in utilizing available data towards achieving their goal. People from the community, community support staff, SLURC staff, and absolutely everyone involved contributed immensely towards the success of the work. The results were evidently satisfactory, all thanks to each and every one who put in their best effort towards achieving the overall objective of the exercise.

Food Security Through Urban Agriculture

by Amadu Labor and Hawanatu Bangura

Doing online research for the first time using a mixed-methods approach came with challenges and opportunities. Challenges included delays in sharing information due to internet connectivity issues which was minimized by working from a shared cloud drive. This ensured any upload or edits made would sync when there was a stable internet connection.

Another challenge was having face-to-face meetings and establishing relationships with stakeholders within Peri-Urban communities amidst the social distancing regulations. We were able to navigate around this by doing a scoping study to determine and map key stakeholders through whom we created links with a range of participants from different farming associations within the urban and peri-urban communities.

In conclusion, being part of the learning alliance was a new and enriching experience for us. Despite our knowledge and experiences in field research, we found that this was a period of learning and capacity building for us.

SLURC Intern Amadu Labor during Fieldwork (photo credit: Amadu Labor)



Adapting to COVID-19: Revised Research Plan for AT2030

Hawanatu Bangura (Awa)

Last year, the action-research project “Community-led solution: Assistive Technologies in Informal Settlements” called AT2030 started working in Freetown with two informal settlements (Dworzark and Thompson Bay). AT2030 research project is working with people with a range of disabilities, AT users and non-disabled residents in urban low-income communities in Freetown and Banjarmasin (Indonesia). The objective of this project is to seek lived experiences and priorities of disabled residents, as well as spaces to include the participation of disabled residents in the wider decision-making process of low-income communities.

The project conducted series of participatory activities in the communities led by community members. It also mapped out how local residents pursue a number of shared aspirations for life outcomes.



FEDURP member distributing food items to a visual impaired participant in Thompson Bay, Source FEDURP

Pre COVID-19 the project used a wide variety of research methods such as photography, focus group discussions, the rATA survey developed by World Health Organisation, gallery workshop, shadowing, resources workshop and barrier workshop.

To mark the end of phase 1 of the project and to plan the next steps for phase 2, the project team met in London in February 2020, to share reflections and learnings of phase 1 from the action-research project in Freetown (Sierra Leone) and Banjarmasin (Indonesia). During that meeting, the team also held an event titled “The Politics of Making Disability Visible in Community-led Urban Research” which was well-attended.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the start of phase 2 has been affected, primarily due to international travel restrictions and the social distancing requirements. The team has started to plan how to deliver some outputs of phase 2, but we are yet to conclude on how and when it will be implemented.

To maintain the relationships with our research participants during this difficult time, the project is working with the Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor to support participants, the HEPPO community and some elderly residents with food items. Many of whom are the most vulnerable in this health crisis.

While it is still unclear how the pandemic is affecting disabled people and the elderly, we know that due to restrictions in movement in Freetown people are less likely to work/beg, and this affects the disposable income people have to buy food.



Poster of Event in DPU website: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/bartlett/development/events/2020/feb/politics-making-disability-visible-community-led-urban-research>

To support the work that FEDURP is doing in communities during the COVID-19 state of emergency, AT2030 is working with them on two fronts:

1. **General fund to support FEDURP’s** on-going awareness activities, making sure it reaches disabled people and the elderly.
2. **Humanitarian assistance for AT2030 participants:** Specific support to participants and HEPPO community members through food delivery or other specific needs.

The team is conducting regular phone interviews to document the response to COVID-19 in informal settlements in Freetown, specifically in Thompson Bay, Dworzark and with HEPPO. It is specifically seeking to understand how the COVID-19 crisis affects disabled and the elderly in particular.

During the AT2030 event in London at UCL (Source Nina)



Webinar – Learning from African post-pandemic experiences to tackle deep inequalities

Braima Koroma and Dr. Joseph Macarthy

The Post COVID-19 Urban Futures Webinar series No.3 was hosted by DPU's Adriana Allen and Rita Lambert and jointly organised with Habitat International Coalition (HIC) and the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) on the 28th April 2020. The Webinar attracted 260 participants from 56 countries from all over the world including CBOs, NGOs, professionals, Local Government, UN Agencies, Funders, academics, students and the general public.

The discussion noted that Africa has endured a series of acute and extensive health crisis, ranging from the yellow fever outbreak in Angola, the west Africa Ebola Outbreak, Ebola in DRC, Plague in Madagascar and now COVID-19. However, until the COVID-19 pandemic, much of the crises were almost entirely invisible to the world in spite of their scale. A few of the outbreaks only gained international media headlines owing to the huge external support that was required mostly in the form of humanitarian assistance which in many cases only arrived in the affected region quite late. We think it is time for the world to learn from Africa about how countries have risen to the challenges brought on by health epidemics. It is also time to show examples of how countries, cities, local government and communities across the whole region have worked to bring their skills, experience and learning to bear on the massive response needed to overcome the health crisis. The purpose of the discussion was therefore, to understand what can be learnt from previous pandemics, such as the Ebola crisis experienced in Liberia and Sierra Leone or the HIV crisis in South Africa, both to contextualise social protection measures and to tackle deep entrenched inequalities. In doing so, the webinar aimed to go beyond learning from humanitarian assistance and emergency management to provide unique opportunities for lessons that focus not only on what to do in the immediate aftermath of the crisis but to address the underlying structural factors that shape vulnerabilities of marginalised communities, as well as their rights to habitat and the collective capacities to act.

The webinar session started with intellectual depictions on learnings from the past based on experiences from previous health crises to explore what unexpected windows emerged to tackle the accompanying deep inequalities. Two speakers Annie Wilkinson (Institute of Development Studies, UK), and Yirah Oryanks Conteh (Federation of Urban and Rural Poor, Freetown, Sierra Leone) shared their experience and provided answers to key questions raised by the audience. The second discussions were framed around looking into the future – what lessons have been learnt and how can assertive actions to address urban inequality be sustained in time. The discussion was led by Aditya Kumar (Development Action Group (DAG), South Africa), Joseph Macarthy and Braima Koroma (Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre), and Sinead Walsh (European Union Ambassador to South Sudan and author of Getting to Zero).

Summary of key findings from the Webinar:

Learning from the past:

- While every health crisis tends to overwhelm the response capacity of city authorities with serious implications for poor communities, there also exist a variety of opportunities to tackle the intractable challenges underlying inequalities in cities. The scale and size of the opportunities are closely linked with the ability to learn from previous experiences and the readiness to act.
- Public health responses following epidemics tend to focus more on health system reforms geared towards improving preparedness and response to ensuing epidemics, but they are largely detached from understanding the social determinants of health and inequality which drives everyday vulnerability to epidemics. Therefore, we need to recognise the politics of how epidemics and pandemics are framed in relation to existing entrenched and enduring inequalities and vulnerabilities and how they change during a health crisis.
- Recent experience about urban epidemics particularly in Africa have shown that a combination of actions of social justice, urban planning and health systems planning are needed to bring about the changes we all desire to see in the COVID-19 response.
- It is important to think about communities, not just about implementing measures designed by top government officials. There is evidence of community residents playing key roles in disease prevention. If included in decision-making processes, they can enable an understanding of what the crisis means to them and how it is experienced on the ground. This could be achieved through community engagement forums, information sharing and outright participation.
- Framing the health crisis is often subjective. Mostly short-term response to epidemics breeds mistrust between the people and the authorities. Often, mistrust can be severe when similar symptoms for everyday illnesses are used as the main indicators to show that a person has tested positive for the disease of the epidemic. It is therefore essential to listen to people's priorities, concerns and their needs, and subsequently empower them in a way that reduces those everyday risk and crisis to make them less vulnerable and build trust that they need to respond to shocks.

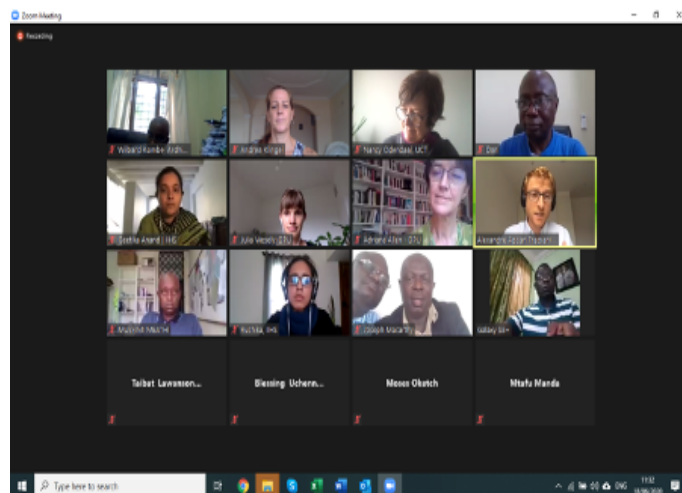


Looking into the future:

- Make sure that short-term interventions such as access to basic services, water, sanitation, food and relief are addressed promptly.
- Re-densification of informal settlements should be pursued to improve the well-being of residents, their economic viability, and long-term development needs (e.g. social housing). This should not be based on knee-jerk responses that can be more damaging in the long run.
- There is need to tailor responses to the existing realities of people in informal settlements rather than adopting a one-size fits-all measure. This should be based on place-based understanding of the daily struggles of people to meet their health needs.
- Much of the inequalities are interconnected and complex. It is important to understand this complexity to address the multi-dimensional inequality and vulnerability – spatial, health, economic and services.
- Connecting voices on the ground with city-wide decision making bodies and NGOs to connect communities with high-level decision-makers; make their local/tacit knowledge evident and give them the recognition they deserve.
- Awareness raising as a pandemic response strategy should be a two-way communication process. There is a need to listen to the community's experiences and ideas to make disease prevention and control less harmful to people's livelihoods and existence.
- Support should be provided to encourage leaders at various levels to have in-depth conversations with residents about their key priorities and aspirations
- The need to coordinate health response actions that take all levels (national and local) into account is urgent. This should involve clarifying roles, agreeing on implementation , resources and ensuring that adequate national and local capacity is built.

Workshop on Transforming Planning Education in Africa

Andrea Klingel



Some of the participants of the Transforming Planning Education workshop (Photo credit: Andrea Klingel)

As part of the process of developing a new Master's course on 'Planning and Development in African Cities', SLURC hosted together with the DPU-UCL the first of a series of workshops on "Transforming Planning Education in African Cities" in June 2020. Twenty four scholars and pedagogues from ten different African countries as well as India and the UK representing a range of universities, research institutions as well as the Association of African Planning Schools AAPS and the Global Planning Education Association Network (GPEAN) came together to discuss and share their experiences on Planning Education in Africa. The workshop which was originally planned to bring participants together over two days in Freetown had to be moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The workshop started with framing the conversation before looking at the wider political economy: the changing context and content of urban planning education in African cities. Three speakers shared their thoughts, answering key questions before a general discussion. It then moved on to explore critical and learner-centred pedagogies: stimulating emancipatory learning for diverse urban practitioners.

Thought provoking contributions and new ideas were discussed and will be built on during the next 2 workshops. The wealth of experience the participants brought to the workshop will assist SLURC in addressing aspects such as decolonising Planning Education and avoiding the blanket application of theories developed in the Global North that are not applicable in the Global South. The new Master's course that is being developed is aiming to start in September 2021 at Njala University.

This and the following workshops are being organised in collaboration with the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) programme and supported by the UCL Global Engagement Office.



Interns from the ESD Learning Alliance 2020

Other News & Updates

SLURC is delighted to welcome two new members to the team.

In May 2020, Zuzana Hrdličková joined SLURC as Senior Researcher.

Zuzana is a PhD qualified social anthropologist with a background in South Asian studies. She is a development practitioner and humanitarian worker with over 15 years of experience spanning policy & project implementation, academic research, and monitoring & evaluation. Zuzana has worked in academia, consulting, the EU government, international humanitarian organizations and local NGOs. She has completed assignments in West Africa, South Asia, Central Europe and the UK in public health, disaster management, gender, conflict, humanitarian action, peacebuilding and education. She has a track record of original, innovative and internationally recognised research which she publishes in academic journals, special volumes and reports, and presents at multiple international conferences.



More recently, in June 2020, James Clifton Polit joined the team as Knowledge Management Officer.

James is a young professional with degrees in Political Science (BA) and Law (LLB) from Fourah Bay College, USL. James has a decade of experience managing research projects, implementing, monitoring and evaluating programs in Sierra Leone on various topics, ranging from the private sector to mining to education to legal aid, social justice and child protection. His experience spans a wide spectrum from research field work and training, to research and project design, research development and management, to data management and analysis, electronic data capture/ICT solutions. James has worked with reputable teams, projects and institutions including the World Bank, The International Growth Centre/London School of Economics, Innovations for Poverty Action, amongst others.



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