

# FREETOWN CITY LEARNING PLATFORM

## PRACTITIONER BRIEF #1:

# Principles of Engagement for the City Learning Platform

Freetown, Sierra Leone  
November 2019



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Urbanism



THE BARTLETT

This Practitioner Brief has been produced based on the discussions and agreements that took place during the **City Learning Platform (CiLP)** meeting in August 2019. The meeting was hosted and coordinated by the **Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC)**, who also reported on the agreements.

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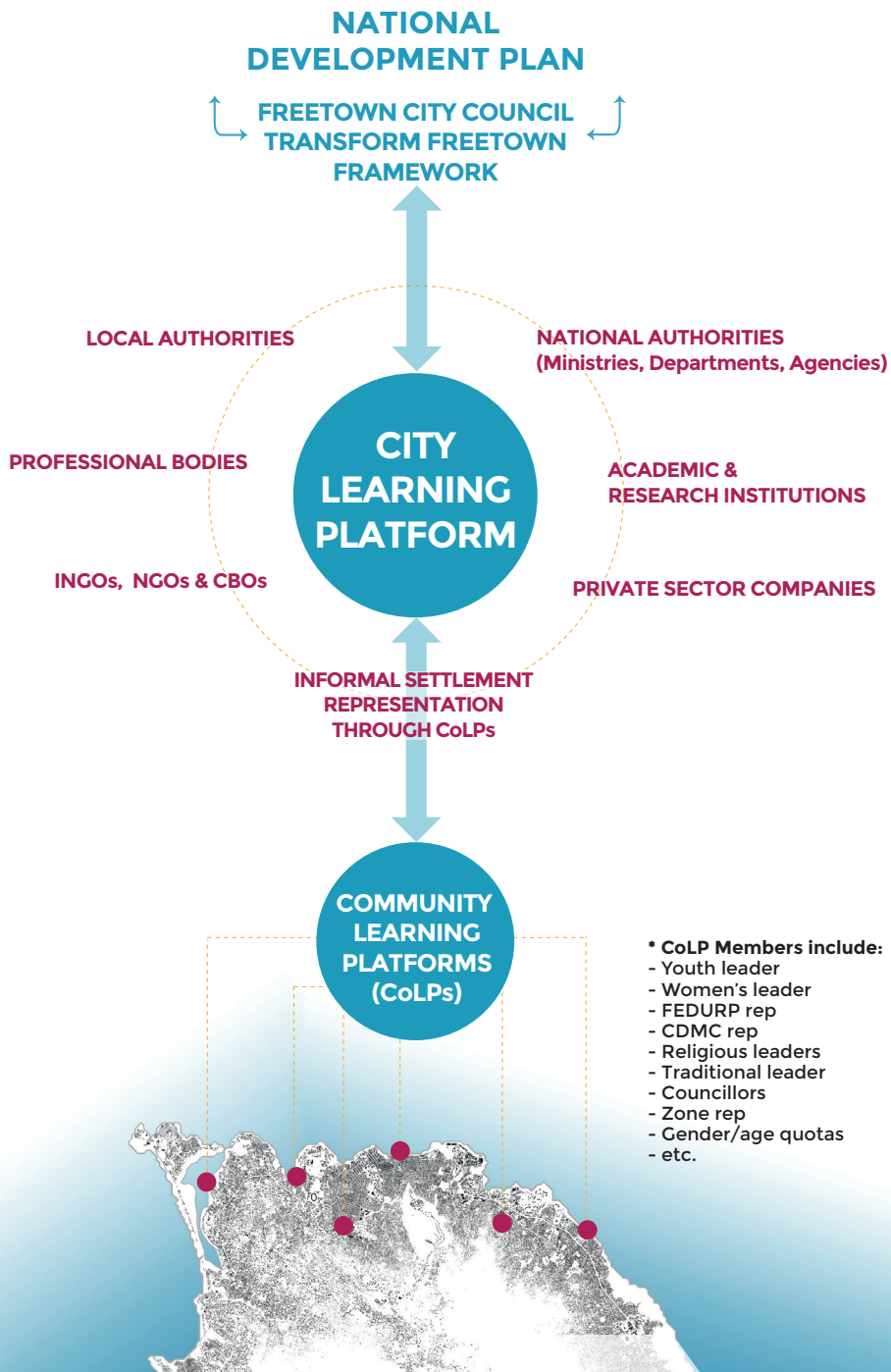
## I. INTRODUCTION

# Why a City Learning Platform?

The residents of Freetown, the capital city of Sierra Leone, experience serious disparities in relation to their access to basic housing, infrastructure and services. Currently, Freetown's informal economy is estimated to provide jobs for as much as 70 percent of Freetown's population (Macarthy and Koroma, 2016). Informal settlements provide home to a large part of the city population, nearly one-third according to Freetown Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, and the high concentration of the urban poor in such places result in accentuated vulnerabilities to economic insecurities, health and environmental hazards (SLURC, 2018). Taking forward concrete actions to improve the social, physical and environmental conditions of the lives of informal settlement residents, should be at the centre of Freetown's concerns.

The last decade has witnessed more and more efforts to work collectively to resist evictions and improve the conditions of informal settlements, with the emergence and consolidation of community-based organisations such as the Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP), and the creation of community structures around saving groups, disaster risk management, and action area planning processes, to name just but a few. Likewise, civil society organisations, NGOs, research institutions and authorities at different levels, have a growing interest in creating partnerships to improve the lives of those who inhabit informal settlements, understanding that it is only through an inclusive and collective process that the city of Freetown can be truly transformed.

The City Learning Platform (CiLP) is a space for learning and sharing, in which different actors can gather to discuss experiences, current urban issues and identify solutions, coordinate, and develop proposals for the upgrading of informal settlements in the city of Freetown. The City Learning Platform is a city-wide initiative that operates through periodic meetings representing a variety of voices and organisations, in constant collaboration with Community Learning Platforms (CoLP) set up at the settlement level. This coordination effort is not an uncharted task. At the city level, this Platform builds directly upon previous initiatives such as the 'Pull Slum Pan Pipul' (PSPP) project, the Advisory Committee set as





part of Community Area Action Plan (CAAP) process<sup>1</sup>, and previous SLURC-led research and learning projects such as Urban ARK<sup>2</sup>. At the settlement level, the CoLPs emerged as an expanded version of the Steering Committees set in Cockle Bay and Dworzark as part of the CAAP process, in direct collaboration with FEDURP at the local level. CoLPs currently exist in 10 informal settlements and meet regularly, bringing the voice and concerns of the community to city level through representation at CiLP meetings, while feeding learning and actions back to the community.

The CiLP, in coordination with multiple CoLPs, seeks to provide a safe space to learn and discuss informal settlement upgrading, with a strong focus on participatory and inclusive practices. It aims to feed into, and disseminate, the discussions taking place as part of the Transform Freetown framework, the National Development Plan and other policy developments.

As a part of these efforts, these Practitioner Briefs are produced to reflect the learning and discussions emergent from the Platform's activities. This first Brief, along with setting the base of the Platform's scope and operation, provides what we have called 'Principles of Engagement', seeking to outline the underlying motivations for the City Learning Platform in building an inclusive and transformative Freetown, with special attention to engaging participatory and sustained engagement with informal settlement residents. It can also guide other municipalities with setting up their own City Learning Platform. The content of this first Practitioner Brief emerged from discussions held during the Platform meeting in July 2019, which has been possible thanks to the participation of the Sierra Leone Urban Research Centre (SLURC) in the Knowledge in Action for Urban Equality (KNOW) programme, and the Comic Relief Sustainability grant provided to the Pull Slum Pan Pipul (PSP) consortium. The future issues of this Practitioner Brief series will address specific thematic areas, such as Community engagement; Urban planning and housing; Environmental management; Waste management; Community livelihoods opportunities; Health; and Security.

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**1** The CAAPs were developed as a response to the recognition of Action Area Plans within the Freetown Structure Plan for 2013-2028, as a mechanism that can enable planning processes that improve neighbourhoods in Freetown. The CAAP process was designed through a collaboration between SLURC, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit at UCL, Architecture Sans Frontières-UK (ASF-UK) and FEDURP- Sierra Leone. In 2017-2018, two CAAPs were developed in the informal settlements of Dworzark and Cockle Bay, with a third CAAP being produced in Portee/Rokupa in 2020, suggesting different options for the upgrading of their areas.

**2** Urban Africa: Risk Knowledge (Urban ARK) was a research and capacity building programme funded by DFID and ESRC, led by King's College London with Professor Mark Pelling. In Freetown, Urban ARK worked grounded in 15 selected informal settlements in collaboration with FEDURP, including the use of the community led tool ReMapRisk developed by Urban ARK researchers based at The Bartlett Development Planning Unit at UCL.

## II. SCOPE

# What does the City Learning Platform seek to achieve?

The **City Learning Platform** seeks to facilitate and coordinate knowledge sharing, bringing together all sets of stakeholders that are involved in addressing critical, urban issues and challenges. Then, it will provide a model of engagement that targets **three major elements**:

Creating a **democratic platform** for policy dialogue, debate and discussions. This hopes to advance clear, coordinated and robust mechanisms that allow the existence of democratic spaces at different scales for policy dialogue, able to foster pathways towards urban equality

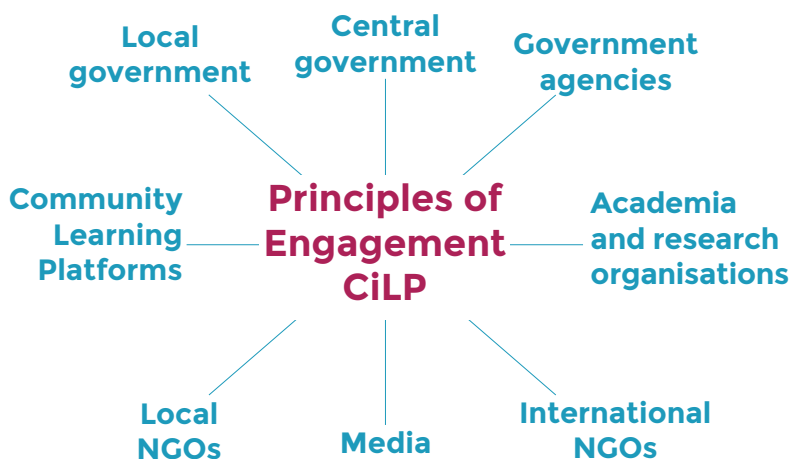
Creating a **feedback chain** from community to the city level, and vice versa, allowing a **scaling-up** of practices from particular communities to more informal settlements within the city, and to **institutionalise and disseminate** participatory planning methodologies that foster pathways to urban equality

Providing **concrete solutions** on how participatory processes can shape and solve developmental challenges in Freetown, deepening current understanding of informal settlements conducive to **enable actions** at different scales.

### III. MEMBERS

## Building an inclusive platform: Who are we?

The **City Learning Platform** is an **open forum**, and therefore the membership will vary according to the theme, scope and focus of each meeting, which will take place **every quarter**, in different locations offered by the Platform's participants. Participants are regularly asked to propose more actors that should be invited to the conversation, as well as experts or speakers for each theme. However, a series of institutions have been at the core of the creation and shaping of the Platform.



During the meeting in **August 2019**, the organisations and actors present were:

**Central government:** Ministry of Lands, Housing and Environment, Ministry of Planning and Economic Development / **Local government:** Freetown City Council / **Community Learning Platforms:** Cockle Bay, CKG, Colbot, Dworzark, Funkia, Mabella, Moa Wharf, Oloshoro, Portee Rokupa, Susan's Bay / **Academia and research organisations:** Makeni University, Njala University, SLURC / **Government agencies:** Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) / **International NGOs:** BRAC, Restless Development, Save the Children, YMCA / **Local NGOs:** CODOHSAPA, YDM / **Media:** Global Times, Premiere News



# IV. PRINCIPLES OF ENGAGEMENT

## How to build partnerships to address critical urban challenges impacting informal settlement residents, in a participatory and sustained manner?



## PRINCIPLE 1:

# A shared vision, a common purpose

Key to the mandate of this group is the establishment of a shared vision for the future development trajectories of Freetown. As a starting point, the Platform proposes to direct their vision and mandate towards the aims of **'inclusivity.'** That is, aiming to work towards a city that everyone can feel safe and secure in, that they can identify with, that is equitable, and that speaks to the aims of sustainability.

This shared vision implies working towards improving the living conditions in informal settlements, encouraging upgrading when possible and restricting relocation to situations in which it is strictly necessary. Likewise, this requires inclusivity in the Platform attendance and in discussions of issues themselves.

Practically, this entails a commitment to inviting a diverse range of stakeholders to meetings and facilitating discussions which allow the range of participants to speak – including especially CoLP representation of residents of informal settlements, and with particular respect to women, people with disability and youth members. It also entails a commitment to maintaining an inclusive focus on identities within future discussions. That is, whether focused on issues such as health, housing, urban livelihoods, or environmental management, the Platform's members commit to exploring how these issues may differently impact diverse residents, including women and men, those with disabilities, structure owners and tenants, or those on hillside and coastal settlement areas.



***Inclusive*** Community Learning Platforms: Meetings in Cockle Bay (Top) and Dworzark (Bottom). Pictures by Camila Cociña, June 2019.

## PRINCIPLE 2: Sharing knowledge and information

Coordination and sharing is at the core of the Platform’s purpose. While recognizing that many stakeholders in the city have been working on issues of informal settlements, this principle acknowledges the need to engage **collective thinking** on some of Freetown’s most critical challenges. That is, the City Learning Platform seeks to coordinate and build upon the number of significant efforts which are aimed at improving conditions in informal settlements, and from various arenas. The Transform Freetown agenda of the city government is one example, as are the various organizations and improvements which have been undertaken by FEDURP and its partners at the community-level. However, this principle also acknowledges that solutions do not lie only within the mandate of a single actor or institution, and that as such, knowledge-sharing partnerships are key to effective action. At the heart of this principle is the commitment to providing a space for institutional learning and exchange on these different activities from the various stakeholders, as a way to formulate consolidated actions for the future.



**Sharing knowledge and information:** Discussion during the CAAP process in Cockle Bay. Picture from “Change by Design: Cockle Bay Community Action Area Plan”, 2018.



## PRINCIPLE 3:

# Sustainable and knowledge-based solutions

The City Learning Platform recognizes the need to ensure the long-term sustainability of any collective activities undertaken, as well as of the city as a whole. This requires coordinated **evidence-based decision-making**, which is informed by grounded data produced and analysed across the community-level and city-level learning platforms. This requires a multi-staged approach, which entails assessing the data which currently exists, identifying current gaps, and devising strategies for the co-production of knowledge which meets these needs. The emphasis on sustainable solutions also speaks to the need for the Platform to have a clear focus on time-bound and concrete deliverables. Therefore, respecting the timing of the Platform is important in terms of prompt attendance, regular meetings, and committing to defined outputs.



**Knowledge-based solutions:** Negotiations led by residents have ensured that the construction of a drainage systems responds to planning priorities. Pictures by Camila Cociña, October 2018.

## PRINCIPLE 4:

# Collaboration, participation and communication

As evident throughout many of the principles shared above, key to the Platform is the emphasis on collaboration and communication amongst various stakeholders. Importantly, however—while drawing on the interests, knowledges, and capacities of a broad range of stakeholders—the Platform should put the concerns and aspirations of the urban poor at the forefront of all discussions. That is, activities and discussions undertaken by the Platform members should aim to speak directly to the demands of informal areas, with informal settlement residents seen as equal partners in articulating the priorities of the Platform. As such, Community Learning Platform representatives identified, discussed and agreed on a set of urban issue priorities in an Advocacy agenda development meeting prior to the CiLP meeting. The proposed Advocacy agenda was further discussed and amended at the CiLP level and it now provides guidance for future themes of CiLP meetings, however, it remains open to evolve and change as necessary. As with the principle above, this therefore speaks to the need for close collaboration with the Community-level Learning Platforms, to generate a dynamic feedback loop between the different learning spaces. Adopting a **participatory and community-led** approach to any research or activities which are undertaken is one mechanism to ensure that the Platform's actions are closely aligned with the realities of diverse women and men living in Freetown's informal settlements.



**Participation** of Community Learning Platforms' representatives in City Learning Platform meeting. Picture by Braima Koroma, 2019.



## PRINCIPLE 5:

# Mutual respect and trusted relationship

Finally, this platform is seen as a key space to connect different stakeholders in the city, and to establish a level playing field for actors with different knowledges, responsibilities, or authorities to come together. As there is a diversity of participants involved in the process—from national and local government authorities, local communities, private sector, academia and civil society organisations—this requires mutual respect in interactions, with space for varied views and opinions to be expressed. While recognizing that not all participants will start from a position of trust, the Platform is understood as a **vehicle to build such relationships**. This requires an approach to discussion and facilitation which ensures non-judgemental participation, respect, and confidentiality. Therefore, apart from the interventions and collective projects which may emerge from its members, building and enhancing respect and trust is also understood to be a clear and important legacy for the Platform.



**Mutual respect and trusted relationship:** City Learning Platform discussions in September 2019. Source: SLURC.

