

Habitat International Coalition

Social Production of Habitat in practice, experience sharing, outcomes, and lessons learnt

I am delighted and humbled by the singular honour accorded me

From all the deliberations today, it is emphasized that issues of housing are very critical in urban planning, development and growth; and I am a firm believer that when housing needs of families are met, the following SDGs are also met, namely, SDG 1 – No poverty; SDG 3 – Good health and wellbeing; SDG 6 – Clean water and sanitation; SDG 7 – Affordable and clean energy; SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities; SDG 11 – Sustainable cities and communities; and, SDG 13 – Climate action. This is because a housing facility is an embodiment of sanity, safety, security and dignity. Therefore, the importance of housing cannot be overemphasized in inclusive urban planning and development.

As revealed in our deliberations, the nation was caught off guard by the urbanization trend, that has been rapid after the war, particularly in Western Urban where Freetown is situated. Despite these emerging realities the thinking of government, both local and state, 15 or more years ago, was that the emergence of slums and informal settlements are illegal and can be addressed by forced eviction because the law books make provision for that. And very few agencies were working in these informal urban spaces. Fifteen years down the line, these localities have grown exponentially, both spatially and demographically, with far-reaching complex problems and challenges, and growing intersectionality. It is estimated that there are 68 – 72 informal settlements sprawled across Western Area from the far east to the far west bearing 35 – 40% of Freetown's population. This situation has resulted in the urbanization of poverty, exacerbated by extreme climate change impact. The factors responsible for these inequalities according to most studies and confirmed by today's deliberations, can be summarized as follows: i) concentration of social and economic opportunities in Freetown; ii) failure to adequately devolve functions to Freetown City Council; iii) persistence of colonial and outdated urban and city planning policies and codes; iv) limited institutional capacity to address urban growth; and, v) collapse of rural agricultural sector due to lack of incentives to retain the youth population working in the sector, etc.

These emerging realities have attracted a number of INGOs, NNGOs and CSOs focus their work in Western Urban and other secondary urban centres, to address the growing poverty and inequalities, including housing inequalities. A major breakthrough took place between 2013 and 2019 when Comic Relief-funded "Pull Slum Pan Pipul" (PSPP) program, that brought together in a loose coalition, 4 local agencies (namely, CODOHSAPA, SLURC, SL YMCA and YDM) and 2 INGOs (BRAC and Restless Development). This initiative enhanced and brought to the fore of urban planning and development discourses, bottom-up and inclusive approaches and methodologies. In that frame, Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA) for example, has continued to strengthen a network of savings groups into a social movement called Federation of Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP). Today, this CODOHSAPA/FEDURP alliance, serves as the Sierra Leone alliance of Slum Dwellers International (SDI), a global network of slum dwellers and NGO professionals, which now stands as a vanguard of community organization for the promotion of lands and housing rights and justice, and inclusive urban planning and development. Its actions are epitomized in the ideals of ***"remove the slum from the people, and not the people from the slum,"*** which captures the very essence of the New Urban Agenda of ***"Leaving No One Behind"***. To materialize this ideal, collaboration and partnerships with both state and non-state actors is progressively pursued, which we believe is critical to achieving inclusive urban agenda. Practically, two bottom-up platforms have been conceived and supported, namely, **community learning platforms (CoLP)** involving community actors, and **city learning platforms (CiLP)**, involving municipal and state actors and CSO partners, which provide democratic spaces to engage and deliberate on issues that can generate housing justice mechanisms and inclusive urban planning and development. Thank you SLURC for being a

partner in this journey, and thank you FCC, CRS, Transforming Lives consortium and Ministry of Lands Housing and Country Planning (MLHCP) for recognizing the relevance of these platforms.

Ideally, the collective results of these actions include changes in a number of practices, especially a shift from *“forced eviction”* to *“upgrade where possible and relocate where necessary,”* which is most significant in inclusive urban planning and development. This means that, these arrangements have formidable potential for setting in motion, maximal utilization of CSOs’ resources and enrich their participation in tackling housing inequalities that is critical to inclusive urban planning and development.

Please allow me to share some examples from other countries where CSO participation and actions have progressively helped to tackle urban housing inequalities. In Nairobi, Mukuru informal settlement was declared as a special planning area (S.P.A.) effective 1st August 2017 under Kenya Gazette Notice Number 7655 – a locality with 100,561 HHs, and a housing density of up to 240 HHs per acre. The process began with Muugano (SDI federation) and its professional allies SDI-Kenya and Akiba Mashinani Trust, with support from their international partners persistently engaging with Nairobi County Government, with data and other evidences showing that it is possible to upgrade Mukuru settlement. The declaration provided for a 2-year timeframe within which Mukuru residents and Nairobi City County had to develop a plan for Mukuru, which provided an opportunity for an effective, active community participation in the planning process. In that vein, the following steps were applied: i) sectoral planning was adopted in this project; ii) County government of Nairobi mobilized different partners within the project – academia, private sectors, CSO’s; iii) a total of 46 organizations were brought onboard; iv) these organizations were then clustered into 8 consortia, to represent 8 sectors of the S.P.A. With the plan developed, the County government partnered with the Engineering Unit of the Kenyan Army for the road construction, with additional skilled and unskilled labour provided by the community; pipes for water and sewage are laid out concurrently by the recognized service providers; and, and some households are now improving their houses and connecting to these public services to make their houses homes.

In Ghana, the Amui Dzor housing project is a good example of low-income housing in contemporary Ghana. It is located to the east of Accra, within one of the informal communities that emerged as a result of the growth of Tema industrial city. The project accommodates 32 families on the first and second floors, with the ground floor dedicated to commercial activities. Nestled within the compact clusters of self-built houses it is an excellent example of how some of the seemingly intractable urban challenges in Ghanaian cities can be solved with local resources, provided there is political will. One of the most interesting aspects of the project is that, whilst construction took over 15 months, consultations between the local government, UN-Habitat, landowners, the traditional council of chiefs, Ghana Federation for the Urban Poor and the Peoples Dialogue (which are Ghana alliance of SDI) took over 8 years. This meant that the project started in one political regime and was completed in the next, a situation that is uncommon in Ghana's recent history of housing and politics.

Before I conclude, the burning issue I wish to emphasize and leave with you is **“no one wants to do business with the poor, except on political election business!!”** If this narrative does not change, the decisions we have agreed on here will remain as mere rhetoric. So, for our political leaders, re-echoing the voices of slum dwellers, **“if our votes count, our voices count too!”** On that note may I end on this declaration as a collective contract: “We as civil society organizations, are committed to undertaking the following actions:

1. Organize reformed coalition that will establish a structured bottom-up and inclusive platform for engagement to promote housing justice and inclusive urban planning and development – CoLP and CiLP are existing opportunities for this;

2. Mobilize and document relevant data and case studies from local sources and best practices from other countries and regions that would inform policy deliberations and adoption that are relevant to promoting housing justice and inclusive urban planning and development that can tackle today's urban inequalities;
3. Mobilize and organize marginalized communities to amplify their voices and aspirations and by extension, their participation in and ownership of demanding housing justice for all so as to influence affordable housing production for the urban poor and inclusive urban planning and development – CoLP and CiLP are existing opportunities for this too;
4. Provide technical resources to support innovations that can increase the use of local materials in the housing industry to enhance housing affordability and equity for the urban poor; and,
5. Consistently engage and negotiate with local and state actors on the devolution of relevant functions to the municipal councils, which is a vital pathway to ensuring efficient governance and service deliveries, including housing governance for the benefit of the urban poor.”

Thank you for your kind attention.

1. From your regional or national experience, what qualities or attributes characterise Social Production of Habitat processes? Could you share an example that illustrates these qualities?

Like many other countries in Africa, Sierra Leone faces challenges related to housing and urban development. The concept of Social Production of Habitat, with its emphasis on community participation and grassroots initiatives, has been relevant in the context of informal settlements and urban planning in Sierra Leone. In Africa and Sierra Leone specifically, Social Production of Habitat exhibits the following qualities:

- A) Self-help/community-driven initiatives – individuals or community-based social units
 - Incremental development of housing and infrastructure using indigenous techniques and skills
 - Local knowledge-driven advocacy
 - Social cohesion

This is because more often than not, most of use development professionals tend to appreciate community inputs from the time we begin to engage them, but before we intervene, they are already doing their stuffs.

- B) Donor-driven initiatives and projects – state (local and central) and NGOs
 - Community empowerment and capacity building
 - Participatory planning and designing
 - Incremental development of housing and infrastructure
 - Data-driven advocacy and policy engagement
 - Social cohesion

Examples

Self-help/community-driven initiatives: there is an exponential numerical and spatial growth of informal settlements in Freetown, during and after the civil war from less than 20 informal settlements mostly in the sea front, to now over 65, sprawled across the sea front and hillside. Communities like Kroo Bay, Susan Bay, Dwarzack, etc. have spatially grown from size A to size B, and population grown from A to B. The housing and infrastructure have been undertaken through individual or group self-help efforts, such land reclamation into the sea front using waste materials, and building housing units, construction of ‘hanging’ toilets or extending toilet waste pipes into sea. Over time, as separate settlements, they have used their social capital as a political capital to agitate

against forced eviction through their political representation, particularly Local Councilors and MPs. These are all reflective of incremental development of housing and infrastructure using indigenous techniques and skills, local knowledge-driven advocacy and social cohesion.

Donor-driven initiatives and projects: there are a number of initiatives that have immensely shaped landscape of social production of habitat and these have been most visible in the past 15 years. They are reflective of some or all these qualities – community empowerment and capacity building; participatory planning and designing; incremental development of housing and infrastructure; data-driven advocacy and policy engagement, promotion of social cohesion. Poised on bridging the gap between formality and informality.

These initiatives and projects include:

- YMCA Slum Livelihood Project: initiated the establishment of FEDURP and SDI processes that triggered intense participatory engagement between community and state actors, funded by Comic Relief (UK).
- Pull Slum Pan Pipul (PSPP): a programme of loose coalition of 4 local NGOs and 2 INGOs funded by Comic Relief (UK) targeting most major informal settlements that most huge community-led social capital that brought critical discourses on informality to the fore. It further strengthened the voices of informal settlers, championing their own advocacy efforts. It included data collections, WASH services, youth technical and life skills training, women and youth entrepreneurship support and stakeholder engagement.
- #FreetowntheTreeTownCampaign: Freetown is losing 500,000 tree covers annually and planting and growing of 1m forest trees and mangrove, tree cover loss of 12% or 555 ha per year between 2011 and 2018. 657,000 trees planted to date under the #TreeTown model CODOHSAPA / FEDURP has planted, tracked and is growing 183,000 [103,000 of this number are mangroves].
- RUSL Project: (i) improve urban management in select cities, (ii) increase access to services and resilient³⁴ infrastructure in Greater Freetown, and (iii) enhance local and national capacity for emergency preparedness and response. Key expected results in the Project include: improved capacity in urban management in secondary cities and Greater Freetown; improved integration and mainstreaming of disaster and climate change considerations into territorial planning and infrastructure design; reduced flood risks in select low-income areas in Freetown; improved access to infrastructure and services in Greater Freetown; improved waste management capacity in Greater Freetown; enhanced emergency preparedness and response capacity; and, reduced flood risks in select low-income areas in Greater Freetown.
- OVERDUE: to tackle sanitation taboo and provide toilet facilities, co-designed with communities and with community-based management structures.
- Urban Planning Project (Freetown Structural Plan): It aims "...to also contribute to start a process of definition of a National Spatial/Territorial Development Plan. This Plan will analyse and recommend the spatial transformations that must happen for Sierra Leone to develop. With the overall objective of facilitating market access, the Plan will take into consideration topics like urban/rural linkages, mobility, regional exchanges, transport and energy network extension, mining, environment protection, climate change, etc. It will also include specific issues ... concerning the Freetown development and [which] might also have national implications."
- FEDURP – CDMCs/CCAA: community-driven social movement with support from its PSO CODOHSAPA and other development partners, are driving community-led and

data-driven advocacy, community planning, CDMCs undertaking disaster responses and risk management and CCAA leading

- WASH Consortium: Since 2010, the Freetown WASH Consortium – consisting of Oxfam, Action Against Hunger, Save the Children, Concern Worldwide and GOAL – has worked to decrease mortality and morbidity stemming from preventable WASH-related causes in Sierra Leone’s capital. Now in its third phase, the DFID-funded consortium is undertaking a range of integrated activities to improve access to drinkable water and adequate sanitation services, promote safe hygiene behaviours, build the capacity of duty-bearers in risk reduction and contingency planning, and lobby for pro-poor investment in WASH services.
- Transforming Lives: The Transforming Lives program seeks to promote participatory community engagement and strategies for scaling city-wide for sustainable livelihoods, decent and affordable accommodation, basic services, improved governance of urban planning and social behaviour change, to enable people live in safer environments. It is driven by 5 INGOs and three local partners, including FEDURP, FCC, NPAA and MLHCP. Currently, it is primary funded and coordinated by CRS, through which two communities have been organised and taken ownership and collaborating for massive settlement upgrading. About 2 hectares of mangrove restored and frantic collaboration and coordination with FCC and MLHCP are working to declared the location special planning areas.
- Knowledge Generation: SLURC is driving participatory action research, in which massive data and evidences for
- ARISE

2. Could you mention key challenges from your regional or national context to guarantee the control of inhabitants over the collective processes of Social Production of Habitat? Could you mention and exemplify which mechanisms or actions can help facing these challenges?

Controlling and ensuring the active involvement of inhabitants in the collective process of the Social Production of Habitat, can be challenging due to various socioeconomic, institutional and environmental factors. Details of these challenges and mechanisms or actions to address them are as follows:

Inadequate financial resources for housing and infrastructure improvements in informal settlements	Facilitate access to microfinance, grants, or low-interest loans for community-driven projects. Collaborate with financial institutions, NGOs, and government agencies to secure funding. Women in Informal Settlements
Insecure land tenure in informal settlements, leading to the vulnerability of residents to eviction or displacement.	Advocate for and work towards securing legal land rights for residents. Collaborate with legal aid organizations to address tenure issues and promote

	tenure regularization programmes. PSPP programme and FEDURP
Lack of technical skills among community members for construction and maintenance	Implement training programs that provide technical skills in construction, infrastructure development, and maintenance. Partner with vocational training institutions and NGOs to deliver skill-building initiatives. YMCA Slum Livelihood and CRS
Traditional top-down urban planning approaches that marginalize community input	Advocate for and implement participatory planning strategies. Involve communities in decision-making processes, design charrettes, and collaborative workshops to ensure their needs and preferences are considered. PSPP and CRS
Lack of basic infrastructure, such as water and sanitation facilities, in informal settlements.	Collaborate with relevant authorities to secure funding for infrastructure development. Implement small-scale, community-led projects for immediate improvements. Transforming livess
Lack of access to information among community members about their rights and available resources.	Conduct awareness campaigns and community workshops to inform residents about their rights, available support, and opportunities for participation in housing and development projects.
Political instability affecting the continuity of projects and policies.	Build partnerships with local and international organizations to provide stability and continuity. Advocate for policies that prioritize community-driven development despite political changes.
Vulnerability to climate change and environmental risks, particularly in low-lying areas or regions prone to natural disasters.	Integrate climate-resilient strategies into housing and infrastructure projects. Collaborate with environmental agencies to assess risks and implement adaptive measures.

Challenges

- Disregard of cultural context – Home Leone
- Climate change impact

How face challenges

- Community-led and data-driven advocacy and policy engagement – YMCA Slum Livelihood and PSPP and SLURC work
 - Capitalise on and directly involve local technicians and artisans – transforming lives
 - SPAs
 - Local climate adaptation plans for settlements and neighbourhoods in cities, linked to city and national plans
3. In the quest for the realization of the right to adequate housing and other human rights related to habitat, what advantages does the Social Production of Habitat offer in relation to the commercial production of housing offered by the State or companies? Could you share some examples to illustrate this?

The Social Production of Habitat offers several advantages in the realization of the right to adequate housing and other human rights related to habitat, particularly when compared to the commercial production of housing by the State or private companies. Here are some key advantages, along with examples to illustrate these points, in the context of Sierra Leone:

- Community empowerment and participation: Social Production of Habitat involves active participation and empowerment of communities in decision-making processes, fostering a sense of ownership and control over their living environments.
- Cultural sensitivity and customization: Social Production of Habitat allows for the incorporation of cultural elements and the customization of housing designs based on the specific needs and preferences of the community. Home Leone Destiny Village.
- Incremental development and affordability: Social Production of Habitat often follows an incremental development approach, allowing residents to make gradual improvements based on their financial capacity. This can enhance affordability and reduce the financial burden on households.
- Addressing informality and inclusivity: Social Production of Habitat is well-suited to addressing the needs of informal settlements and marginalized communities, providing a pathway to inclusive development.
- Flexibility and adaptability: Social Production of Habitat allows for flexibility and adaptability in responding to changing circumstances, such as population growth or environmental challenges.
- Social Cohesion and community building: The process of Social Production of Habitat often fosters social cohesion and community building, creating stronger social ties among residents.
- Human rights-centred approach: Social Production of Habitat aligns with a human rights-centered approach, emphasizing the right to adequate housing and the dignity of individuals and communities.

In summary, the Social Production of Habitat in Sierra Leone offers advantages such as community empowerment, cultural sensitivity, affordability, inclusivity, flexibility, and a human rights-centered approach. These advantages contribute to more sustainable, people-centred, and rights-based housing solutions, especially in contexts where informal settlements and community-driven initiatives play a significant role in urban development.