

# INTERNSHIP IN FREETOWN - REPORT

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The aim of this report is to highlight my work tasks in Freetown, Sierra Leone, during my internship, which I began remotely in July and continued in September. I was given the opportunity to work with Modupe Williams and Mariama Whitmore at the City Council, two colleagues of my professor, Michael Templeton.

The main tasks I was involved in included:

- Create a report in a “brochure” format for the City Council, aimed at attracting investors and stakeholders into the city developing plan already in progress and potential future projects. This work included, among other things, gaining information on possible innovations for King Jimmy market, with a design idea to improve facilities and spaces that has been implemented in Senegal; proposing ideas for the conversion of the old City Council building into an African History Museum, with a potential active collaboration between Freetown and Charleston that have signed to become International Sister Cities to share history, culture and ideas for economic development; and think about ways to reconfigure the junction space where the historical Cotton Tree recently felt, to improve both the efficiency of the junction and mark the importance of such an historical symbol for the country. The Central Business District regeneration plan was presented to the Ministry of Land, who agreed to designate the specific areas as developing zones.
- Working on a Neighbourhood Upgrade of three informal settlement being funded by the World Bank under the Resilient Urban Sierra Leone Project with Freetown City Council (FCC) as the client of the project. This project seeks to explore possible infrastructure interventions to improve the living conditions for the identified communities. My tasks involved a number of visits in the interested slums areas, with interviews to the chiefs of the communities to understand their needs and difficulties; and to develop a final detailed map of the infrastructures in order to identify possible available zones where safe housing could be integrated.
- Working on an agreement document for a Central Parking Zone (CPZ) and Towing Infringements within the Central Business District, involving the Freetown City Council (FCC), Road Safety Authority (SLRSA) and Sierra Leone Road Authority (SLRA). After attending their official meetings, my specific role entailed reporting on the points of agreement and disagreement among all the parties involved and discuss the details of a MUO contract to finalize the proposal, including expenses, revenue shares and administration issues.

These main tasks specifically required me to gain information and data of the interested areas of the city and use my knowledge to think about possible renovations within the budget restrictions.

The data collection was carried out through several visits around the Central Business District, Kroo Bay, an informal housing settlement in central Freetown; and two other slums within the city, Susan’s Bay and Cock-le Bay.

## 1. Context

Freetown is the capital and largest city of Sierra Leone. It is a major port city on the Atlantic Ocean and is located in the Western Area of the country. The Central Business District in Freetown has the highest concentration of public buildings, banks, and commercial trade in the city. It is the main hub of employment in the municipality, with an inefficient transport system that is meant to carry a high volume of commuters and goods.

Due to traffic congestion, excessive street trading and uncontrolled youth activity and crime, the CBD has become a less attractive place for commercial businesses, national embassies, and government agencies. Many have had to locate their main offices to less congested and quieter residential areas. Many commercial buildings are unoccupied, dilapidated or in a poor state of repair. The highway infrastructure i.e., footways, drainage and streetlighting is in poor condition which discourages walking, and no street lighting prevents a night-time economy in what used to be

a thriving city centre. Moreover, youth unemployment in the city is exceptionally high, with a low level of formal education and training. Often it is likely that the younger try to create alternative livelihoods through informal approaches such as on-street parking controls, car washing and petty trading; in most cases these approaches lack structure and discipline. These multi-faceted and interrelated challenges are currently difficult to solve due to an inadequate overarching policy framework for urban planning and development as well as inefficient planning and management processes.

The City Council has been involved in introducing an Integrated Programme Plan that will contribute to regeneration of the Central Business District (CBD) in Freetown.

The project includes improvements to the road infrastructure to make walking safer, piloting the Cable Car as a mode of mass transit and developing a Local Area Plan for the CBD area. In this context, the objectives of the Central Business District Regeneration program are:

- Improving the overall amenity of the Central Business District from improved and targeted land use planning.
- Maximise revenue generation from high-quality property development that attracts businesses to locate in CBD and parking controls.
- Reduce congestion and improve air quality by promoting walking and clean, high occupancy public transport.
- Creating attractive public spaces in the CBD to encourage leisure activities and tourism in the city.
- Creating safer environments by installing streetlights around the CBD and repairing footways for pedestrians and vulnerable road users.
- Promoting tourist activity in the CBD by creating a museum for African History.

## **2. Outcome**

Freetown's Central Business District is an economically thriving city centre with employment opportunities for all income levels and offers safe and inclusive public and green spaces for social, cultural and recreational activities for the city's residents and tourists alike, while at the same time maintaining an ecological environment.

### **Outcome 1: Strengthening the policy framework for integrated urban planning and sustainable development.**

A local area plan for the Central Business District could guide and provide for the diverse use of land and buildings and regulate business and settlement activity.

The means to achieve this outcome include the development of a local area plan for the CBD broken down into Area Action Plans and several masterplans of blocks, i.e., development action plans. Integrated urban planning processes will be developed and improved if existent.

### **Outcome 2: Promoting diverse economic activity and income opportunities.**

The Central Business District offers a diverse business landscape ranging from national government, city administration, foreign representations to commercial enterprises, gastronomy, night-time economy, marketplaces, and formalized street trading.

The means to achieve this outcome include raising revenue for infrastructure improvements and property value, e.g., through the planned parking scheme, and creating incentives for property owners to improve property management and values, such as through the taxation system, public-private partnerships, etc.

### **Outcome 3: Establishing safe and efficient transportation and mobility.**

Safe access to and circulation in the Central Business District is enabled by a diverse transportation system that integrates public transport, private traffic and pedestrian mobility.

The means to achieve this outcome include the improvement of road and pedestrian safety as well as the reduction of traffic congestion through improved street lighting, the introduction of a regulated and chargeable parking scheme, parking regulation and enforcement as well as more safe walking space through footway improvements and new pedestrianized streets.

### **Outcome 4: Enabling safe and inclusive public spaces and a green environment.**

The Central Business District is frequented by citizens of Freetown and visitors for social, cultural, recreation and tourist activities as a result of safe and inclusive green public spaces as well as inviting social and cultural offers.

The means to achieve this outcome includes investing in beautification and landscaping in the CBD to make existing public spaces more inviting and designating new areas for public use, e.g., by creating more pedestrian and sitting space on footways and street corners, greening public spaces, etc. Another planned means under this outcome is the establishment of a Museum of African History in the former Freetown Council Building.

### **3. Personal reflection**

This opportunity was an extremely enriching experience, especially during my time in Freetown. I learned a lot from my mentors and colleagues, who generously shared their knowledge and expertise. From the very beginning, I felt included and valued, which created an atmosphere where learning and growth were natural. The stimulating exchanges with my colleagues and the people I interacted with were invaluable.

Their guidance not only improved my technical skills but also provided valuable insights into the dynamics of working in an office setting.

Moreover, this internship allowed me to experience things I could have never encountered otherwise.

I gained a profound understanding of the social and economic background of the city, which made me realize the importance of considering the social aspect when planning civil engineering projects in low-income countries. This aspect of my learning journey emphasized that successful projects aren't just about engineering solutions; they must be sensitive to the needs and realities of the local community to truly make a positive impact.

Additionally, I gained profound insights into the city and country. I learned about the numerous challenges they are facing, both socially and economically.

This experience was very helpful in showing me the need to consider many different factors in civil engineering projects, with an approach that takes into account the broader context and involves multiple stakeholders. It was eye-opening to see how the traditional working approach in engineering I learned until now, needs to be adapted and evolve to address the complex challenges low-income countries have.

In summary, this internship gave me not only technical knowledge but also a full understanding of the challenges in real-world civil engineering projects, and I will cherish this experience forever.

### **4. Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the Old Centralian Trust Decision Board for giving me this opportunity that has allowed me to grow both professionally and personally.

I would also like to thank my professor Michael Templeton, for trusting and helping me through this whole experience.