

Freetown microgrid economics

The UN's five indicators for a slum, defined in the report "The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements" (2003) are lack of tenure, poor access to services, overcrowding, inadequate housing standards and hazardous locations.

In 1808, the Freetown region was declared a British colony, while the country's hinterland was annexed as a protectorate, an administrative subdivision that lasted until independence in 1961.

Liberated slaves from the entire Atlantic coast or from the Caribbean gave birth to a lingua franca based on English, a unique architectural style and a polycentric urban agglomeration, divided into ethnic villages. According to a census of 1850, the approximately 25,000 residents belonged to over 200 different ethnic groups.

According to the latest data, only 26% of households are served by municipal waste collection; the main Freetown landfills are not equipped for waste differentiation, and they are all located in areas with high environmental risk: along riverbeds or near the sea.

The interventions, developed by the Freetown City Council or by NGOs, have provided for the transfer of some small communities of slum dwellers to new settlements with buildings and small plots of land offered under concession. Despite this, the location of the areas in the extreme east of the city (the only place with available building areas), more than 15 km from the city centre, has led almost all the beneficiaries to return progressively to their slums of origin by subletting the buildings under concessions.

The most interesting example is the shantytown of Kroo Bay, one of the largest slums in the city, located in a marshy area at the mouth of the Alligator River. The settlement developed around a large, central square used as a meeting place, market, sports field and entertainment area: the square has been kept intact, while new houses were built raising the land from the sea, a solution that required considerable work and financial disbursement. Keeping this large open space totally unbuilt implies the existence of rules and efficient control systems.

Article 170, Clause 1 of The Constitution of Sierra Leone states that "the law of Sierra Leone must include [...] customary law: the norms of law which, by custom, are applicable to particular communities in Sierra Leone".

The absence of cadaster maps and registration systems and the corruption of some public officials have led to the proliferation of false property certificates, so much so that over half of the trials in the Freetown High Court concern land tenure cases. Buying land in Freetown is now an almost impossible task, as anyone can claim ownership on the basis of counterfeit documents. It is common for buyers to discover, after years, that they have purchased land from people without any rights to it.

Of a sample of 64 households interviewed (about 2.5% of the residents of Kroo Bay), 13% claimed to work in the formal economy and 11% to work in public administration (in some cases with high-level tasks). In the National Census of 2003, the percentages of these categories in the Freetown region were 7 and 5.5% respectively. Such a large difference is justified by the location of the slum, a few hundred metres from public offices, institutions and health services.

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