

REPORT ON VISIT TO MONROVIA, LIBERIA.

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Background

On the 4th of May 2009, three (3) persons from Ghana namely, Farouk Braimah (People's Dialogue) , Janet Adu, (Ghana Federation of the Urban Poor) and Honourable John Koomson, (Local Councilor from Takoradi) -visited Monrovia, Liberia.

This visit was a response by SDI to a request by the World Bank to participate in a workshop to share

experiences and explore the possibility of extending SDI's work in Liberia. The Workshop was organized by the Monrovia City Corporation.

Report of 3rd Consultative Workshop on Monrovia City Corporation's Slum Initiative, 5th May 2009, Monrovia City Hall.

The workshop started at 10 :00am. Participants were drawn largely from members of the Slum Dwellers Association of Liberia (SLUMDAL) , women groups, local NGO's and Officials from the MCC, National Housing Authority, and relevant Departments and Agencies. There were about 50 participants in all.

After a brief introduction and welcome speech by the Chairman of the occasion, we were invited to make our presentations. Our Presentations as usual focused on land, housing, poverty and Urban Governance. We also touched on Community-City-National partnerships. Janet Adu, the Federation representative took time to present the SDI rituals of Savings, Meetings, exchanges, enumerations, housing construction, women's central role, etc. Janet also shared experiences on community constructed and managed toilets. This took 1 hour after which questions were taken and answers provided. Some of the questions centered on how Liberia could be SDI affiliate and how long people will save before houses will be constructed. These questions were dealt with by Janet. After the Ghana presentation,

The Consultant engaged to prepare the Monrovia Slum Improvements report presented her Final work and distributed copies. The workshop closed at 1:15pm as scheduled. Below is a full report of the issues, challenges, responses and way forward.

Context

Like many countries and cities in West Africa, Monrovia is rapidly urbanizing but government and local authority have inadequate strategies to deal with, or effectively manage the change process. According to a recent study by the Monrovia City Council on slums and informal settlements revealed that, currently there are 27 slums and informal settlements that have been formally recognised by the City Council. Notable among them are, West Point, Clara Town, Logan Town Sonewein, and South Beach Bay. Data from the most recent census estimates that over 30% of Liberians live in Monrovia. Current population of Monrovia is put at 3,489,072 (2008 Census) Undisputedly, the 15 years of civil war in Liberia has left deep scars on every aspect of life in Liberia. The effects of the war manifests itself in the poor state and excessive pressure on safe water, sanitation, drainage, electricity, access roads, housing as well as basic services such as, education and health. Beyond these,

are the critical issues of social cohesion and integration.

Observations

- **Urbanization**

Monrovia is rapidly urbanizing (Over 30% of Liberians live in Monrovia) due largely to rural–urban migration, coupled with the ravages of the war. Internal migration of internally displaced persons also contributes to the urban population influx.

Monrovia, the capital city of Liberia, has experienced an increase in its population mainly as a result of the war, coupled with the general destruction as well as the breakdown of traditional source of livelihoods of the rural folks and the resultant endemic poverty levels which has eroded the quality of lives of people. Unfortunately, however, the increasing population is not matched with a corresponding increase in the housing stock, employment opportunities, the adequate socio-economic infrastructure and services.

There exist real challenges for the country. Urban poverty is very high . According to the 2008 Census

results, 68% of Liberians live on less than US\$1 a day.

The result effect has been the proliferation of slums and squatters settlements in the city of Freetown and other major towns.

- **Characteristics of Slums**

Features and reasons for slum developments in Freetown are not different from that of other African cities. During the visit, I interacted with residents of 5 slum communities namely, West Point, Clara Town, Logan Town Sonewein, and South Beach. Most of these are government lands, and are situated along the sea shores, mountains and the basin of rivers and streams. They are flood prone areas with a high rate of vulnerability to environmental health pandemic by virtue of their proximity to major refuse dump sites. These settlements exhibit the general characteristics of slums and informal settlements. The most striking features in these settlements were the deplorable housing and unhygienic sanitation system.

- **Land and Tenure Security**

Settlements in Liberia have different tenure arrangements. Some have titles but not long enough to motivate occupants to make huge investments in housing developments. Most of the slums do not have clear titles.

Eviction threats are not currently a major issue in Monrovia , but given the erratic tenure and magnitude of slum growth in Monrovia, it is certainly predictable that mass evictions are eminent in the near future. It was therefore not surprising that, on the day of our departure, an estimated 50,000 residents were under threat of evictions. (Liberian Express, Monday, May 11 edition) But the good news is that, the City and Government's present position is that of recognising slums and upgrading them. **(For Government's Commitments see MOU attached)**

- **Official Response/Policy**

The Government has already initiated studies into informal settlements and slums in the country. In particular, the government has recognised the socio-economic and political significance of improving the living conditions in slums and informal settlements as well as reducing urban poverty generally. This is a major feature in the country's most recent poverty reduction strategy document. A clear manifestation of its commitments on tenure security and slum upgrading could be found in the MOU signed with Slum Dwellers International during the visit. Government already recognises their stay and willing to work with the community through public agencies like National Housing Authority, Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs, Ministry of Public Works, Ministry of Lands, Mines and Energy, to

upgrade the settlement instead of evictions. After the War, most interventions by public bodies were aimed at bringing back hope to communities. Typically, projects provided by such interventions included, health, educational, sanitation facilities. Since these projects were designed on isolated project by project basis it had varied impacts but no real effect on scale.

NGO Interventions in Housing

The government further recognizes the critical role of civil society and NGO in addressing the slum challenge. The Government works closely with the Slum Dwellers Association of Liberia.

According to the Monrovia City Corporation's Slum Initiative report, "there is hardly any NGO or International NGO operating in Liberia that engages in the direct provision of low income housing. However the report recognizes the existence of many NGO's and INGO's that provide funding for housing-related such as solid waste, sanitation, water etc. These Organisations include, The World Bank, UNDP, EC, UNICEF, GTZ, JICA, OXFAM, DFID, and Concern Worldwide.

SLUMDAL: Unlike most Countries, Liberia has a well recognized association of slum dwellers called

SLUMDAL. It was registered in March 2008 purposely to create awareness of slum issues and mobilize slum dwellers for improvements in their living conditions.

SLUMDAL has membership in almost all the slum communities and is working closely with the City and Government on slum upgrading. It is headed by a President –Mr Bestman Toe , who is very passionate and committed the cause of improving the lives of slum dwellers. SLUMDAL facilitated meeting for us to meet with 5 slum communities. We established 4 savings groups in 3 communities-Clara Town, West Point and Logan Town. The Logan town visit was facilitated by Madam W. Christiana who runs a local NGO in Logan Town called Logan Town Women Development Association. While we were jointly hosted by West Point Women and Health Association in West Point and the Commissioner of West Point.

Challenge

The ability of the slum dwellers of Liberia transcend simply demanding rights to shelter, humanitarian relief/assistance and government sponsored projects to finding lasting and sustainable solutions to evictions, engaging proactively in partnerships with governments, participating as equal partners in urban infrastructure and services provision remains to be addressed.

There is also a need for a local NGO to be identified or established that will be dedicated to providing strategic professional, technical and administrative support to the emerging federation.

The Way Forward

During the planning stages of this Visit, the World Bank and SDI agreed to a 2 way exchange and we are tentatively expecting the visit to Ghana from our Liberian Counterparts first week in June 2009. The Team will be drawn from the signatories to the MOU.

As indicated earlier in this report, the MOU that was signed on May 9, 2009 sets out clearly the expectations, commitments and strategies to achieve our collective vision in Liberia for the next 2 years. In conclusion, I can only hope that, all parties to the MOU endeavour to play their respective roles effectively.

Gratitude

I can not make any reference to this MOU without first expressing our gratitude to the Chairman of Monrovia City Corporation-Hon. Daniel Johnson. Hon Johnson brought SDI onboard this MOU. We are also very grateful to the Managing Director of National Housing Authority and all his Staff who spent their Saturday working on the MOU at the Office.

And to the SLUMDAL and the Women groups , I say, Keep it up!.

To the World Bank Team ,I say a big thank you for all the support you provided before, during and after. And to all the good people of Liberia who made our stay happy and successful, I say God bless you all.