



OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
FREETOWN MUNICIPALITY

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Professor Osman Sankoh  
Statistician General  
Statistics Sierra Leone  
A J Momoh Street  
Tower Hill  
Freetown, Sierra Leone  
8<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Dear Statistician General

**CONCERNS RE ACCURACY OF MID-TERM CENSUS RESULTS FOR WESTERN AREA URBAN (FREETOWN)**

I have seen on social media the provisional results of the mid-term population and housing census which indicates that the population of the capital city, Freetown (Western Area Urban), has decreased by 42.5% from 1,055,964 in 2015 to 606,701 in 2021.

As the Mayor of Freetown, I am extremely concerned about the accuracy of this data and the significant additional development challenges that would result from the adoption of inaccurate data in respect of Freetown's population.

I wish to bring to your attention published and/or independently verifiable data points which strongly suggest that there has been a substantial undercount of Freetown's population in the mid-term population and housing census. I set these data points out below with brief explanations of how they relate to the provisional results of the Freetown mid-term census population:

- The total number of voters in Western Area Urban registered by the National Electoral Commission (NEC) for the March 2018 general elections was **606,939** ([https://nec.gov.sl/uploads/files/Completed\\_RegistrationPressRelease2017.pdf](https://nec.gov.sl/uploads/files/Completed_RegistrationPressRelease2017.pdf)). NEC registered voters are 18 years old and over and are thus a subset of the entire population. But this number is greater than the mid-term census provisional Freetown population of **606,701** which is meant to reflect the entire population.

- The Ministry of Basic and Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE) 2020 school census<sup>1</sup> confirmed that there are **413,407** pupils enrolled in Western Area Urban (pre-primary to senior secondary) (<https://www.dsti.gov.sl/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ASC-2020-Report.pdf>). The number of school pupils in the MBSSE school census gives an indication of those in the Western Area Urban between the ages of 6 years and 18 years, but it must be noted that: (i) it does not include those under the age of 6 years; and (ii) there are many children in Western Area Urban who are not enrolled in school so the total number of those between 0 and 18 in Freetown is in fact greater than the 413,407 recorded in the MBSSE 2020 school census.
- The combination of the school pupils recorded in the MBSSE 2020 school census (413,407) and the number of NEC registered Western Area Urban voters (606,939) effectively covers those between 6 to 18 years and those 18 years and over who chose to be registered giving a total of **1,020,346**.
- Freetown City Council introduced a digital property rate system in 2020 which used satellite images of the city to capture all properties in the city for inclusion in our property database. A distinction is made in the property database between formal structures (properties with foundations, walls, roofs etc) which are assessed for property rates and informal structures (those without foundations) which are not assessable for property rates. As at 8<sup>th</sup> June 2022, Freetown City Council has **107,526** assessable domestic properties (formal structures) in our property database. Based on the 2015 National Census data, Western Area Urban has 9.2 population per house (<https://www.statistics.sl/index.php/census/census-2015.html>), so it could be assumed that there are approximately **989,239** people (107,526 x 9.2) living in the domestic properties in Freetown City Council database.
- Slum Dwellers Association's partner organization, the Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA), conducted population profiling of 58 slum communities in Western Area Urban between November 2020 and May 2021 and recorded **344,147** people<sup>2</sup>. The vast majority of these people live in informal structures which are not assessable for property rates.
- Combining the estimated 989,239 people that live in the Freetown City Council assessed domestic properties with the 344,147 people profiled as living in 58 slum communities, gives a total of **1,333,386** people.

With rapid rural-urban migration and in the absence of development controls (land-use planning and an effective building permit regime) Freetown has in recent years experienced an exponential growth in the number and size of informal settlements (slum communities) with many of these, unfortunately expanding into the coastal mangroves and up onto the hills around the city.

<sup>1</sup> The MBSSE 2020 school census was funded by the World Bank and the European Union

<sup>2</sup> The population profiling was funded by the World Bank and Slum Dwellers International

The Migration and Urbanization Report published by Statistics Sierra Leone in October 2017 states “The percentage of lifetime in-migrants shows that the most migrant-attractive region in Sierra Leone is the Western Area, where a little more than half of the enumerated population were born outside the region..... The influence of the capital Freetown certainly plays a major role in making the Western Region attractive to migrants. This city is the economic, financial and cultural centre of Sierra Leone. Most of the country’s largest companies and international companies locate their headquarters in Freetown. Furthermore, Freetown has the most functional harbour, around which its economy revolves, is home to the Government, and has the best social and economic infrastructure”.

The Statistics Sierra Leone findings resonate with the findings of our work on rural-urban migration at the Freetown City Council. Related to membership of the Mayors Migration Council, Freetown City Council conducted a survey of members of sanitation tricycle groups in 2020 and confirmed that over 40% of the existing members were rural-urban migrants. Similarly, through our work on informal settlement upgrades and related surveys conducted in 2020, we note that 37% of people living in Cockle Bay and 35% of people living in Kolleh Town are rural-urban migrants. (Survey results are available for review).

Furthermore, ariel images taken between 2015 and 2022 and provided below, show the physical expansion of four informal settlements (slum communities) from year to year as more and more people have moved into Freetown. This physical expansion of slum communities is replicated across all 74 slum communities in Western Area Urban.

#### Cockle Bay



May 2015



Jan 2020



June 2022



## Kolleh Town



May 2015



June 2022

## Thompson Bay



May 2015



June 2022

## Colbat (Culvert)



May 2015



June 2022

The delivery of services and much needed infrastructure for the residents of Freetown is already a significant challenge due to serious financial resource constraints including but not limited to fiscal transfers from the Government of Sierra Leone. Approximately 55% of Government fiscal transfers are allocated to cover the operations of Freetown's secondary hospitals (Macauley Street Hospital and Lumley Hospital) and the District Health Medical Team (DHMT). Government fiscal transfers to Freetown City Council have already been subject to substantial reductions in recent years, including a 90% reduction in the administrative grant allocated to the Freetown City Council from 2018 to 2022. (It should be noted that no allocation has yet been disbursed to the Freetown City Council and other local councils for 2022).

### GOSL FISCAL TRANSFERS MADE TO FREETOWN CITY COUNCIL (2018 - 2022)

Source	Sector	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
GOSL	Agriculture	402,372,845	236,699,406	153,260,787	202,116,796	0
GOSL	Primary Health (DHMT)	975,238,386	1,449,490,356	1,201,452,096	998,560,447	0
GOSL	Education	736,993,103	914,858,015	694,845,731	760,661,019	0
GOSL	Library Board	528,326,373	476,921,516	299,876,613	342,498,670	0
GOSL	Rokupa Hospital	976,521,418	1,570,486,188			0
GOSL	Macauley Street Hospital	529,497,195	1,012,687,316	1,408,182,776	1,348,681,730	0
GOSL	Kingharman Road Hospital	1,102,354,958	2,164,244,456			0
GOSL	Lumley Hospital	677,332,753	1,309,865,959	2,435,675,825	2,283,351,805	0
GOSL	Social Services	394,352,226	385,213,094	331,842,621	436,047,690	0
GOSL	Sport	161,631,089	344,048,915	225,855,609	239,673,219	0
GOSL	Youth	161,631,089	344,048,915	150,570,406	191,738,575	0
GOSL	Fire Prevention	64,652,436	68,809,782	94,106,504	119,997,333	0
GOSL	Marine Resource	53,956,545	68,324,185	50,803,324	64,633,164	0
GOSL	Environment				11,342,500	0
GOSL	Administrative Grant	2,262,835,246	2,303,626,027	846,958,535	231,328,002	0
GOSL	Solid Waste Management	225,910,535	791,312,505	564,639,023	925,312,010	0
GOSL	Ward Development Committees	355,961,384	312,120,803	258,295,964	188,878,924	0
	<b>TOTAL FISCAL TRANSFERS</b>	<b>9,609,567,581</b>	<b>13,752,757,437</b>	<b>8,716,365,814</b>	<b>8,344,821,884</b>	<b>0</b>
GOSL	National Cleaning Days**	8,349,268,800	8,150,000,000	214,500,000		
GOSL	<b>TRANSFERS plus Cleaning Days</b>	<b>17,958,836,381</b>	<b>21,902,757,437</b>	<b>8,930,865,814</b>	<b>8,344,821,884</b>	<b>0</b>

\*GOSL Fiscal transfers are made to every local council to execute devolved functions as per LGA2004

\*\*National Cleaning Day budgets were utilised in accordance with Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Finance instructions



If the mid-term provisional Freetown population result is adopted, it would trigger a commensurate reduction in the Government of Sierra Leone fiscal allocations to Freetown as well as a potential reduction in other financial inflows (overseas development aid, foreign direct investments, private sector funds etc). This would be a great injustice to the well over 1 million Freetonians living in this very overcrowded city with a high demand for and right to improved services.

The purported 42.5% reduction in the population of Freetown suggested by the provisional results of the mid-term census is not consistent with independent verifiable data points as highlighted above, nor with the visible physical experience of informal settlement growth within the city. In the light of all the above, I would be most grateful if Statistics Sierra Leone could urgently review the provisional results for the mid-term census for Freetown as the current results clearly significantly undercount the city's population.

Assuring you of my highest regards



**Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr OBE**

Mayor of Freetown

cc

The Minister of Development and Economic Planning

The Minister of Western Region

The Minister of Local Government and Rural Development

The Chairperson, Budget and Finance Committee, Freetown City Council

The Chief Administrator, Freetown City Council