

# The Pacific Urban Forum: Challenges and Lessons for Land Governance

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## Introduction

Urbanisation has defined modern times. The global urban population increased five-fold between 1950 and 2011. 2008 was a landmark year – when more than half of the world’s population lived in urban areas. Global urban populations are expected to reach 60% of total population by 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2015, p. 13). These global trends are reflected in the Pacific. In fact, the Pacific is now the world’s fastest-urbanising region (ibid, p. 14). In nearly every Pacific Island country (PIC) urban growth rates now exceed national growth rates (Keen & Barbara, 2015, p. 1). Within the Pacific urban growth is most pronounced in Melanesia; and it is here that the most dramatic population shifts in the coming years will occur (ibid; CLGF, 2015, p. 7). Given its size, Papua New Guinea (PNG) is unique in the region with an urban population of approximately 800,000 to 1.1 million people.<sup>1</sup> At current rates the urban populations of PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu are expected to double in 25, 17 and 16 years respectively (ibid). Solomon Islands and Vanuatu are among some of the world’s fastest urbanising countries. Demographer Richard Bedford, for example, projected that by 2050 the total urban population of PNG, Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu could be as high as 7.5 million – equivalent to their combined total population in 2010 (2010, p. 243).

Overall, however, PICs are ill prepared to manage this urban growth. As Keen and Barbara state “[t]hroughout the Pacific islands, urban planning and management remain largely neglected” (2015, p. 1). And as the Pacific Institute of Public Policy warns “we are simply not well enough prepared to cope [with continued urbanisation]” (2011, p. 1). Overall, a change to better managed urban growth is desperately needed. As has become so devastatingly apparent by recent events such as Cyclones Winston (2016) and Pam (2015) and the Guadalcanal flooding of 2014, PICs, and their cities and towns, are also particularly vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather events. With large proportions of urban areas built upon environmentally marginal land on riverbanks, floodplains, the seashore, or on low-lying atolls, a focus on building resilience to climate change is also essential. Unfortunately, to date, genuine political engagement with urban issues has been largely absent (Keen & Barbara, 2015, p. 1); a situation which is not helped by the fact that Pacific Members of Parliament usually serve rural constituencies. Indeed the view that the Pacific is, and should remain, largely rural tends to prevail in the Pacific. It is time to accept the reality of urbanisation, take into account its positive aspects, and plan for this transformation which is affecting the region.

In 2015, recognising all of the above, regional stakeholders gathered in Nadi, Fiji, to discuss urbanisation in the Pacific and how it should best be managed. The 2015 Pacific Urban Forum (PUF) built from earlier forums held in 2003, 2007, and 2011 and aimed for a ‘new urban agenda’

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<sup>1</sup> PNG’s urban population exceeds the *total* population of Polynesia (650,000) and Micronesia (525,000) respectively (CLGF, 2015, p. 7).

for the Pacific region to galvanise attention and critically *action*. Four key recommendations were endorsed through the official 2015 PUF resolution.<sup>2</sup> These were summarised as: (i) enhancing social equity; (ii) more comprehensively addressing issues of environment, resilience, and urbanisation; (iii) harnessing the urban economy; and (iv) strengthening urban governance (CLGF, 2015, p. 1–2). It was hoped that these would form the new urban agenda stakeholders were seeking (ibid, p. 1).

Reading further into the PUF official resolution and outcomes document these four recommendations can be further articulated simply as:

1. Undertaking housing and settlement upgrading programmes and improving access to land through partnerships (thus building social equity);
2. Addressing climate change through comprehensive urban vulnerability assessments and associated planning;
3. Recognising the importance of urban economies in the Pacific; and
4. Improving urban governance through policy development, supportive legislative frameworks, and capacity building.

This paper will, in turn, discuss the above four PUF resolutions – identifying the challenges they encompass, and indeed the opportunities they present, for PICs and potentially by extension for other Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

### Housing and Settlement Upgrading

One of the defining features of urbanisation in the Pacific has been the growth of informal settlements<sup>3</sup> – particularly in the capitals of Melanesia. While data on informal settlements remains scarce and where available limited, it was estimated that in 2013 20–45% of the total urban population of the Melanesian capitals resided in informal settlements (Greater Suva 20%; Honiara and Port Vila 35%; Port Moresby 45%). Overall, across the Pacific, UN-Habitat estimates that around 24% of the urban population are living in informal settlements (FIG; 2016, p. 6). These proportions are estimated to grow considerably (World Bank, 2015, p. 5). Informal settlements are characterised by poor quality housing, overcrowding, environmentally marginal locations, and absent or limited supporting services such as water, electricity, waste collection, and roads. By their very definition all are characterised by insecurity of legal land tenure.<sup>4</sup> Overall, it is clear that

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<sup>2</sup> The 2015 PUF Resolution and Outcomes document can be accessed at <http://www.clgfpacific.org/userfiles/3/file/2015%20Pacific%20Urban%20Forum%20Resolution%20and%20Outcomes%20Document.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Sometimes referred to as ‘squatter settlements’.

<sup>4</sup> Broadly, it is difficult to generalise across the informal settlements of the Pacific. In Fiji, for example, there are over 190 settlements nationwide (Kiddle, 2011, p. 85). These are on state, customary, and freehold land. Some of the settlements are congested (typically the settlements in central areas on state land) and some are more dispersed (typically the peri-urban settlements on customary land). Some settlements are large, some very small. Some are dominated by indigenous Fijian settlers, and some by Indo-Fijian settlers (and thus the styles of dwellings preferred by each ethnic group), and some settlements have roughly equal populations of both main ethnic groups (Kiddle, 2011).

poverty is increasingly concentrated in the urban areas of the Pacific, and predominantly so in informal settlements (PIPP, 2011, p. 3). Generally, as Jones writes, “the life of those living in the settlements is focused on survival and basic needs” (2012, p. 330).

Informal settlements on peri-urban land bring particular challenges, and are among some of the fastest growing in the region. These settlements, often on customary land and outside of formal city/town boundaries, are among some of the most poorly serviced informal settlements in the Pacific. *De facto* security of tenure in these areas often hinges on relationships and specific arrangements with customary landowners. Overall, government-led options for intervention for settlements on native land are more limited, and certainly more complex. Fiji, with considerable populations of informal settlers on tracts of native reserve land in peri-urban areas, is a case in point (Kiddle, 2011). Indeed the challenges of urban management are particularly pronounced in peri-urban areas. Storey, for example, writes that growth in peri-urban areas is “characterised by a contest for space, changing social structures, and fragmented institutions” (2005, p. 10).

Emerging theory suggests that understandings of security of tenure, and indeed approaches to housing upgrading, in informal settlements need to move beyond a legal/illegal dichotomy and focus on perceived security of tenure. A focus on perceived security of tenure accepts that a much broader continuum of land rights exist in any one context. Perceived security of tenure approaches also show that households may engage in processes thought vital to addressing growing informality, including ‘self-help’ housing investment (also known as ‘housing consolidation’), even in the absence of legal security of tenure. The author’s PhD research in Fijian informal settlements, for example, revealed that both perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation were more prevalent than might otherwise be expected – although there were important differences between indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian settlers<sup>5</sup> (Kiddle, 2011).

One of the principle advantages of perceived security of tenure approaches is that they promote a wider package of policy options for improving tenure security in informal settlements (which typically promotes housing consolidation and indeed the gradual increase in the quality of the housing stock over time<sup>6</sup>). In particular, perceived security of tenure approaches typically favour in situ housing upgrading (rather than the typically used, and largely unsuccessful, resettlement approaches favoured by many Pacific Island governments to date).

The 2015 PUF recognised the importance of in situ settlement upgrading. Indeed, encouragingly, the PUF overtly stated and recognised the permanence of informal settlements (CLGF, 2015, p. 7). The PUF resolution and outcomes document also referenced the importance of pro-poor approaches including increasing the delivery of water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services, and promoting access to affordable housing and serviced vacant land. The PUF also emphasised the importance of global and regional partnerships for delivering pro-poor housing solutions. It was, however,

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<sup>5</sup> Indo-Fijian settlers typically felt much less secure than indigenous Fijian settlers (Kiddle, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Although this may only be to a point that generally low incomes allow (Kiddle, 2011; Walsh, 1978). In addition, lack of legal security of tenure also means that dwellings may ultimately need to be portable which discourages the use of permanent building materials such as concrete (Kiddle, 2011).

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relatively silent on exactly what types of partnerships are necessary to make a critical difference. Nonetheless it is clear that, given the nature of the growing housing challenge in the Pacific, durable and long-lasting partnerships are necessary between government agencies, development partners, civil society organisations, and the private sector too. Clear regional focal points, with adequate resources, are essential also. Drivers, and local urban champions who can advocate for the potential positives of urbanisation, are needed.

The PUF recognised the importance of improving the delivery of WASH services in Pacific Island cities and towns, particularly in the peri-urban communities. Asian Development Bank (ADB) data produced in 2012, for example, showed projections for 2015 water supply coverage ranging from lows of 40% and 60% in Marshall Islands and Vanuatu respectively to 100% in five developing PICs (Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau, Tonga, and Tuvalu) (PIC sample average: 85%). Sanitation was similar with adequate sanitation coverage<sup>7</sup> ranging (2015 projections) from lows of 59% and 65% in Marshall Islands and PNG respectively to 100% in the Cook Islands, Fiji, Palau, Solomon Islands<sup>8</sup>, and Tuvalu (PIC sample average: 88%) (ADB, 2012, p. 16).

Generally, access to WASH services is least adequate in informal settlements. Drought – as has been seen recently in parts of the Pacific due to El Niño – only exasperates the situation for informal settlers reliant on rainwater for a significant proportion of their water needs. It is Melanesia that has some of the largest WASH needs in the Pacific. Recent data, for example, shows that across all urban areas (including formal seweraged housing areas) the use of shared or private unimproved toilets and open defecation is over 40% in PNG, 35% in Vanuatu, 19% in Solomon Islands, and 8% in Fiji (World Bank, 2015, p. ix). Clearly, there is a need for better WASH services in informal settlements particularly. However, solutions are not easy. A recent report<sup>9</sup> highlights that utilities are often constrained by technical, financial, and legal obstacles to serve informal settlements. For example, utilities often do not have a clear obligation to serve settlements, or may not have the authority to do so. And when authorisation is present, utilities tend not to prioritise extending services to informal settlements, as it is often more challenging than serving formal urban areas (ibid, p. x). Additionally, even where WASH services are provided, improving access can be inhibited by further obstacles such as household financial constraints, the nature of informal settlement connections<sup>10</sup>, and specific arrangements such as additional permissions and/or occupancy licenses from government authorities before connections can occur (ibid, p. xi & 17).

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<sup>7</sup> Defined as “access of excreta disposal facilities that prevent human, animal, or insect contact with excreta” (ADB, 2012, p. 15).

<sup>8</sup> This projection appears high. Other Solomon Islands figures, for example, show that in Honiara 63% of households have their own or shared flush toilet, and that 14% of households own or share a pit toilet. The ADB data may mask some realities of access to sanitation. For example, in Honiara pit toilets common in informal settlements are often shared by upwards of 20 people (UN-Habitat, 2012, p. 14).

<sup>9</sup> *Unsettled: Water and Sanitation in Urban Settlement Communities of the Pacific* (World Bank, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> For example, distribution may be at a community level via a single outlet or water meters may be at the edges of the settlement thus requiring household arranged and funded further distribution.

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In summary, the challenges to improving WASH services in informal settlements are considerable. Solutions need to be context-specific, and may need to be implemented with limited technical and financial resources. Clear national mandates, and clarifying organisational authorities between utilities, local government, and other actors is essential. Service level targets, particularly for informal settlements, need to be set. Innovative partnerships between utilities, local government, NGOs, and development partners are needed (World Bank, 2015, p. xi). Overall, utilities need to be actively encouraged to service informal settlements. Accepting the permanence of informal settlements is the requisite starting point here. Development partners can also play an important role in advocating for improving coverage in informal settlements – potentially through funding arrangement conditions in partnerships with utilities and government.

### Addressing Climate Change

In addition to urbanisation, climate change has also defined modern times. It hardly needs to be stated that PICs and other SIDS are particularly vulnerable to climate change and extreme weather events through their size, geography, and relative remoteness. In addition, PICs generally lack sufficient capacity to respond and recover in the event of major extreme weather events; as Cyclones Pam and Winston and the Guadalcanal flooding in the last two years have so devastatingly exemplified. Certain communities within PICs, particularly informal settlements on environmentally-marginal areas, are also especially vulnerable. Highly populated, and often dense<sup>11</sup>, urban areas bring additional risks and challenges. Indeed the cities and towns of the Pacific are highly exposed to natural hazards and climate change extremes (ADB, 2013, p. 23).

The PUF recognised the criticality of responding adequately to climate change and called for five related and coalescing actions: (i) beginning and intensifying climate change vulnerability assessments; (ii) developing integrated climate change action plans; (iii) integrating these plans into specific urban policies and plans; (iv) accelerating action; and (v) ensuring all of the above feature in global climate change negotiations (CLGF, 2015, p. 9). Strategies and tools are numerous here; but should all be considered as efforts intensify to adequately build Pacific urban resilience to climate change. The PUF referenced the importance of: climate risk planning; preparedness, response and recovery planning; improving the resilience of urban infrastructure; adequately enforcing laws and regulations; reducing the carbon footprint of urban areas; improving water and waste management; and strengthening the enabling environment and generally building capacity to do all of the above (ibid, p. 8–9). Effective early warning systems are also desperately needed (ADB, 2013, p. viii). All of these, and probably more, are necessary.

UN-Habitat has been supporting selected PIC cities and towns to prepare comprehensive climate change vulnerability assessments. These have now been completed for Port Moresby, Honiara, Port Vila, Lami (Fiji), and Apia. These assessments aim to provide national and local government decision makers, and community leaders, with a basis of comprehensive information to enable

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<sup>11</sup> Density is very high in certain urban areas of the Pacific including South Tarawa in Kiribati, Ebeye in the Marshall Islands, parts of Port Vila, and in Suva. The ADB has commented that these areas rival Asian cities in their density (2012, p. 8).

adaption priorities and plans to be set, ideally ultimately as part of a much larger strategic urban planning process (UN-Habitat, 2014, p. 1). The Honiara assessment, for example, analysed vulnerability across the three key determinants of exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. The assessment was able to graphically illustrate residential areas, as well as critical infrastructure, particularly exposed to extreme weather events. Notably the residential ‘climate change hotspots’ identified were largely informal settlements. Within the city<sup>12</sup>, for example, the assessment revealed that around 28,500 people (44% of the formal 2009 urban population) were exposed to flooding and 2,200 (3.5%) were at risk from storm surges.

The vulnerability of Honiara to extreme weather events was devastatingly exposed during the Guadalcanal flooding of 2014. The flooding resulted in the deaths of 22 people, most from the Koa Hill<sup>13</sup> informal settlement on the banks of the Mataniko River in central Honiara; destroyed or badly damaged hundreds of homes; and caused thousands of people to be relocated to evacuation centres for many weeks. The flooding also caused the country’s sole international airport (sited on vulnerable flood prone land) to close for five days, destroyed a key bridge over the Mataniko River, and reduced the principal crossing to one lane before urgent repairs reopened the bridge to two-way traffic a week or so later. This damage to critical infrastructure severely affected the initial national and regional response to the disaster.

### Recognising the Importance of Pacific Urban Economies

It is now well recognised that urbanisation and economic growth are positively correlated (McGranahan & Satterthwaite, 2014, p. 19). Indeed cities are drivers of economic growth. Globally, this view has received increasing prominence and recognition – particularly since the publication of the *2009 World Development Report*, subtitled *Reshaping Economic Geography* (World Bank, 2009). In the Pacific data shows, for example, that services (which are concentrated in urban areas) account for over half of GDP in most PICs (ADB, 2012, p. 11). The importance of urban economies to national economic growth was recognised by the PUF which highlighted “the strong links between *well managed* urbanization and improved economic growth prospects” (CLGF, 2015, p. 6, emphasis added).

However, despite the importance of Pacific cities and towns to national economic growth, many regional leaders believe that the Pacific is, and should remain, largely rural. As Keen and Barbara write “few Pacific leaders have come to terms with the reality of an urban Pacific and the need to manage cities (2015, p. 1). This rural bias, or ‘anti-urbanism’ as it was termed in early Pacific urban research and writing, is in part a hangover from colonial days when urbanisation was seen as something to avoid, indeed to actively discourage. In the colonial era, particularly in Melanesia,

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<sup>12</sup> The official population of Honiara – within Honiara City Council boundaries – was approximately 65,000 people at the time of the 2009 Census. However, the population of greater Honiara which sprawls into Guadalcanal Province is probably more than 100,000 people.

<sup>13</sup> Koa Hill is a large informal settlement and is one of the most densely populated areas of the city. 2009 Census results show that it had a population of 1,166 people. The settlement spreads over approximately 16 hectares of low-lying areas close to the river and steep slopes further back that are prone to soil erosion (UN-Habitat, 2014, p. 25).

policies were put in place to actively discourage the movement of indigenous populations to the towns (Connell & Lea, 1994 & 2002, p. 43). There is some irony in the fact that anti-urbanism<sup>14</sup> remains evident across the region – forming a peculiar colonial legacy (Connell, 2006).

Bias may contribute to the general neglect of the urban in the Pacific. However, correlations between urbanisation and GDP growth through expanded services and manufacturing sectors may not be as strong in the Pacific as in other areas of the globe. UN-Habitat, for example, highlights the special case of SIDS and writes that “in the case of some SIDS, urbanization has not brought the expected formal increase in GDP” – attributing this to their typical reliance on agriculture, tourism, and the informal sector (ibid).

The informal economy is often critically important in Pacific urban areas. Research by Union Aid Abroad in Honiara<sup>15</sup>, for example, revealed a hugely diverse range of informal livelihood activities that are utilised by individuals and households across the city. These range from, among others, selling produced goods such as vegetables, baked goods, and handicrafts, to trade in tobacco and betel nut, to more illicit activities<sup>16</sup>. Overall, the research showed almost all informal sector livelihood activities had a higher return than casual or low paid employment (Union Aid Abroad, 2008, p. 66). The PUF highlighted the importance of informal sector activities for livelihoods and urban economies in the Pacific, arguing “[t]here should be increased acknowledgement of the influence and contribution of the informal sector to the national and urban economy including in sustaining livelihoods (CLGF, 2015, p. 9). Developing local economic approaches that are based on *Pacific* opportunities (ibid, p. 10, emphasis added) is one of the logical starting points here for harnessing the value and vitality of the informal sector.

Improved urban-rural linkages are critical for leveraging countrywide benefits from the strength and importance of urban economies. These links are improving across the Pacific through advances in mobile phone technology, more accessible finance, and improved transport connections (Keen & Barbara, 2015, p. 2). These links act to underpin new economic activity and also financial transfers between urban and rural areas (ibid). Urban markets are increasingly important for both urban and rural livelihoods (ibid) and efforts to improve market infrastructure and connections are needed more than ever. In Solomon Islands, for example, although data is scarce, income earned at Honiara Central Market reaches back into Honiara’s hinterland in Guadalcanal but also to many – if not all – of the nation’s dispersed provinces.

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<sup>14</sup> This played out in Honiara after the Guadalcanal floods of 2014. Malaitans, for example, living in informal settlements in Honiara were among the worst affected by the flooding, and many Malaitan households were displaced to evacuation camps for many weeks. Eventually the government tried to encourage evacuees to move from the camps – but to home provinces, not previous locations, through the provision of one-way boat fares and basic relocation kits.

<sup>15</sup> *Stayin’ Alive: Social Research on Livelihoods in Honiara* (Union Aid Abroad, 2008).

<sup>16</sup> Perhaps not surprisingly the average weekly returns from illicit activities were relatively high. The average returns from producing and selling the local homebrew *kwaso*, for example, were six times higher than the average waged work (Union Aid Abroad, 2009, p. 60).

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In PICs, and in SIDS generally, rural and urban areas are becoming increasingly blurred. This is due to a number of factors including the small size of some PICs, improved rural-urban links as discussed above, and the increasing sprawl of Pacific urban areas out of traditional (and often static<sup>17</sup>) town boundaries into peri-urban areas. Ultimately, urban and rural development is linked through in-country flows of goods, people, and money. However, unfortunately, rural and urban development, and their institutions, are often seen as two quite distinct sets of issues by policymakers (ADB, 2015, p. 4). Indeed, in the Pacific, rural development policies are often seen as a means of promoting rural people to stay in rural areas. More integrated thinking, amid the recognition that rural and urban areas are interlinked, is needed.

### Improving Urban Governance

Overall, across the Pacific, strategic approaches to managing urbanisation have been patchy. Indeed arrangements for urban governance across PICs are generally fragmented and often politicised (ADB, 2012, p. 21). Some nations, such as PNG, Fiji, Samoa<sup>18</sup>, and Tonga have developed national urbanisation policies or are in the process of developing one (Solomon Islands) – although, in some cases such as PNG, action has been limited (Keen & Barbara, 2015, p. 1). Only PNG, Fiji, and Samoa have dedicated government ministries for housing and urban development (ibid). As the PUF recognised, it is critical that the managed growth of cities and towns be enabled through local strategic policies and legislative frameworks and suitably capacitated institutions, leaders and professionals (CLGF, 2015, p. 2).

There are considerable challenges to effective land governance in PICs. The very nature of land tenure is perhaps foremost here. Most PICs have dual land tenure systems – where typically a formal system, often inherited from the colonial era, exists alongside various forms of customary/traditional systems linked to family or land-owning groups. These dual systems typically exist in parallel, and overlap and intersect to varying degrees of effectiveness (ADB, 2012, p. 22). All PICs are unique in their particular mixture of inherited and traditional land tenure systems. With regard to urban land governance specifically, approaches also differ. In some PICs, such as Fiji, Vanuatu, Kiribati, and Tuvalu, local urban governance is dominated by formal state institutions, whereas in others, such as Samoa and Tonga, traditional structures play a prominent role in urban governance. In other PICs urban governance comprises a combination of both

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<sup>17</sup> In many PICs formal town boundaries have not increased correspondingly with the growth of urban areas. In Honiara, for example, given much of the urban area extends into Guadalcanal Province, there have been periodic calls and efforts to extend the formal Honiara city boundary. Always, however, this has been stymied by land tenure complexities and the lack of useful dialogue between Honiara City Council and the Guadalcanal provincial administration. National level engagement, and political champions, are probably both needed for this important discussion to gain proper traction.

<sup>18</sup> Samoa, for example, has recently produced a City Development Strategy (CDS) to address urban management concerns in greater Apia. The CDS forms a vision for greater Apia's development and feeds from a Climate Change Vulnerability Assessment, a spatial plan, and the Apia Waterfront Development Report. Samoa's dedicated Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA) is the lead agency charged with implementation of the CDS. Outputs of the CDS include the Apia Urban Profiling Report, a Local Area Infrastructure Plan, and an institutional review of PUMA (UN-Habitat, 2016, p. 1).

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systems working in tandem (ibid). Overall, in almost all PICs, customary systems of land governance are under increasing pressure (FIG, 2016, p. 7) from a diverse set of factors. Urbanisation is one of the strongest of these. In many PICs access to land has been a source of conflict (ibid); both localised and more encompassing<sup>19</sup>.

In general, land governance is typically weak in PICs. This is due to a diverse set of capacity constraints, including, among others: (i) inherited colonial systems out of step with modern times and Pacific realities; (ii) insufficient financial resources; (iii) insufficient human resources (particularly trained planners); (iv) limited cross-functional government coordination; (v) the complexities and sensitivities around land ownership and tenure issues; (vi) inadequate enforcement; and (vii) limited mainstreaming of urban issues at the national level (ADB, 2012, p. 22 & 23). In addition, many land administration reforms across PICs – typically project approaches – have failed for a variety of reasons to make a critical difference.

Honiara presents an illustrative, but unfortunately largely negative, example of urban land governance. In Honiara urban elites and native and non-native entrepreneurs have captured much of the public land by securing – often cheaply and sometimes corruptly – opaque and uncompetitive long, fixed-terms leases of state perpetual estates which are then developed or simply left idle (Williams, 2011, p. 2). The latter practice also acts to restrict the supply of land, in-turn inflating urban land prices typically beyond the reach of poor and middle-income earners (ibid). Unfortunately this has also meant that much of the public space in Honiara has gone – the previous central, beautiful, and incredibly popular Town Ground park a case in point (now a poorly constructed and unsightly shopping mall and hotel).

So what is required to strengthen urban land governance across PICs? The 2015 PUF outcomes document specified the importance of the continuation of the process of developing and implementing national urban policies which can act to coordinate the work of different sectors and tiers of government, allocate resources effectively, and establish incentives for sustainable practices (CLGF, 2015, p. 10). The PUF also called for: (i) continued work to fill policy and legislative gaps; (ii) capacity building across national and local government and for land professionals, policy-makers, and political leaders alike; and (iii) multi-stakeholder partnerships to produce innovative and scalable solutions and appropriate financing mechanisms to address urban challenges (ibid, p. 10 & 11).

### Taking the Agenda Forward

The PUF resolution and outcomes document has effectively highlighted the challenges that continued urbanisation brings for PICs. Critical actions are identified for housing upgrading, building resilience to climate change, harnessing the strength of urban economies, and strengthening urban governance – although these actions are at times light on detail and of course progress can only be seen via action. The PUF identified a number of avenues, partners, and forums for raising awareness of Pacific urban realities. The PUF also emphasised the need for

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<sup>19</sup> As was seen in the ‘Tensions’ in Solomon Islands, for example.

building a regional community of practice and knowledge repository on sustainable urbanisation. Clearly UN-Habitat can play a critical role here, although currently Pacific representation and resourcing is relatively limited. Clear country focal points – particularly in PICs without dedicated government agencies for urban development – are also necessary. The proposed Regional Coalition of Small Island Developing States on Sustainable Urbanisation (CLGF, 2015, p. 12) could play a key role here – although it appears too early to see what exact shape this may take, and what traction it may gain. Overall, clear roles and responsibilities, particularly within individual PICs, are needed.

## Conclusion

According to current trends and projections much of the Pacific's future is an urban future. The twin challenges of urbanisation and climate change present an opportunity for a renewed urban focus (UN-Habitat, 2015, p. 1). Indeed urban areas are vital for building resilience (Hornweg & Freire, 2013, in *ibid*). What seems essential is raising awareness of the urban reality facing the Pacific, and the 2015 PUF was very clear about the importance of advocacy and momentum. Ultimately, political will is needed to adequately address the challenges of an increasingly urban Pacific. Prevailing attitudes must adjust. Informal settlements, for example, are highly likely to be permanent. Recognising that Pacific cities and towns are engines of growth is essential, and reinforcing this – in ways that reflect Pacific realities such as the importance of the informal sector – is perhaps one of the biggest opportunities for moving towards a 'new urban agenda' that can be embraced by all.

As the PUF so rightly recognised, partnerships – between national and local government, and with NGOs, the private sector, and external development partners – will be needed. Critically, these partnerships will need to be led by PICs themselves. Land governance projects and agendas driven by donors have typically failed across the Pacific. As the PUF recognised, PIC-led efforts to strengthen land governance and confront urban realities need to start from comprehensive urbanisation policies and guiding strategic frameworks – preferably spearheaded by dedicated government agencies. Reaching out to development partners – typically nervous about land tenure sensitivities and past failed projects – may be necessary.

Continued urbanisation in the Pacific is inevitable. However, the continued unplanned, uncoordinated, and generally haphazard growth of Pacific cities and towns does not have to be so. It is time to embrace urbanisation, and its positive aspects, and to adequately plan for much larger – and more liveable – Pacific cities and towns.

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