

Introduction

Fiji is the most urbanised state in Melanesia. Its main city, Suva, is facing many challenges of rapid growth. With more than 50 per cent of its population now living in its cities and that number set to increase to about 60 per cent in the next decade (UN-Habitat 2012a), Suva officials and residents are working to address the pressures of urbanisation and to capitalise on its opportunities.

Rapid growth has given rise to familiar urban problems in Suva, including unemployment, poverty, informal settlements and patchy services — about a fifth of the Greater Suva residents live in informal or squatter settlements,¹ many in poverty with poor services and connectivity to the city. Yet despite the inequities and service gaps, positive gains from urbanisation are being made in Suva. The challenge for urban managers and residents is to capitalise on the potential of cities to boost productivity, connectivity and infrastructure coverage while better managing emerging social, cultural and service delivery divides. There are some positive signs. While unemployment in Fiji is high, at about 7.6 per cent, it is declining; Suva remains a strong driver of national economic growth, accounting for about a third of gross domestic product (GDP); and while urban poverty persists, it is falling (World Bank 2014). Moreover, emerging institutional arrangements are attempting to reconcile the impetus for growth with customary values and land tenure.

As part of a broader study of urbanisation by the State, Society and Governance in Melanesia (SSGM) program at the Australian National University, this paper outlines some of the tensions and innovations that have occurred in Suva with respect to urban development and informal settlements over the last decade. 'Informal settlements' is an umbrella term used in this paper to encompass

settlements of 'squatters' (the vernacular term for those who reside on freehold or state land without legal title), and people who have made informal arrangements with owners to reside on customary land. Both situations tend to mushroom in rapidly urbanising contexts, and Fiji's attempts to grapple with this and other urban issues might be applicable across the Pacific region. The research involved reviewing government documents and literature, and conducting interviews with high-level government officials in the Ministry of Lands, Department of Housing, Suva City Council and Nausori Town Council, as well as with key community stakeholders. We consider the lessons that can be learnt from Suva's experiences and the challenges that lie ahead. In particular, we are concerned with addressing issues of exclusion, inequality, and access to urban land and shelter.

Cities as Drivers of Development: Competing Priorities

Globally, interventions to address urban poverty are strongly underpinned by neoliberal ideology which holds economic growth as the central priority and considers the free market and property rights as the most effective means to achieving urban development. When neoliberal approaches address poverty and social marginalisation, they often do so through 'supplements' or incentives that are pro-development and market-friendly (Schilcher 2007). In many cases, mechanisms to tackle rising poverty and social marginalisation involve a further 'roll-out' of neoliberal approaches, as exemplified by Bogaert (2011) in his case study of Morocco. Faced with urban social unrest and rising urban inequalities, 'slum upgrading' programs worked closely with the private sector, supported by international agencies, to integrate



slum dwellers into the formal (economic and property) market, and increase access to finances and low-income housing. While this approach meets the needs of some, the framing of urban poverty in developing countries as largely a technical problem to be solved by market-oriented approaches neglects political hegemony and deeper social or cultural divides (Bogaert 2011; Rigon 2014).

In Fiji, and Melanesian cities in general, neoliberal approaches to urban development must jostle for authority with customary values of mutual obligation and reciprocity, and customary land tenure arrangements. Colonial history also has unresolved land tenure and equity issues, leading to calls from religious, political, ethno-nationalist and non-government organisation (NGO) parties to improve equity, address historical wrongs and alleviate ethnic disadvantage (Sakai 2016). Further complications to the implementation of neoliberal ideologies are encountered in much of Oceania because of customary landownership, particularly in the rapidly growing peri-urban areas. This land is not directly controlled by government, nor do neoliberal frames have particularly strong resonance with many traditional owners. This aligns with the 'moral confusions' found in many Pacific states, as they seek to reconcile good governance with 'continuing loyalties, indigenous modes of production ... complex and long histories, and the quest for better access to, if not a larger share in, global wealth' (Bryant-Tokalau 2012). These 'confusions' are compounded by those that 'capitalise on culture' for personal gain (Rutz 1987; Ward 1995).

Various authors (Jessop 2002; Peck and Tickell 2002; Thibault 2007) have argued that in urban contexts where state reach is limited and social exclusion rising better connectivity between neoliberal and neo-communitarian approaches could boost inclusiveness and harness under-used and undervalued community resources. Neo-communitarianism has particular resonance in the Melanesian context, with its emphasis on the contribution of the 'social economy', customary values and the links between economic and community development (Jessop 2002). In practice, this involves greater support to, and involvement of, multi-sector partnerships and networks by

moving beyond private–public partnerships to engage alliances among communities, NGOs, religious groups and social networks in order to fill national service gaps. This leverages human skills and financial resources in community and harnesses social and economic resources in the informal sector for the co-production of goods and services of value — culturally and materially — to residents (Albrechts 2013; Ostrom 1996). In Melanesian cities, where urban sprawl affects customary land, and a good portion of economic activity is informal, linkages between the formal and informal, and between social sectors, seems inevitable and, arguably, favourable.

Dealing with urban poverty is about creating opportunities wherever they occur — building social and physical assets, managing risk, increasing access to credit, strengthening community empowerment and political governance, and reducing inequality (World Bank 2001b). Achieving these lofty goals will require engagement that spans all living spaces and socioeconomic realms of the city. Importantly, it will mean putting 'community' back into 'community development' — that is, using community development and human resources to deliver socially valued goods, in addition to economic development (Thibault 2007).

The Changing Urban Politics of Fiji

In the past, Fiji's attitude towards the societal problems of urbanisation has been rightly criticised, particularly for its denial of poverty (Khan and Barr 2003) and harsh policies that skirt underlying causes of urban poverty and crime. Those in the informal sector have historically been forcibly removed, with the eviction of squatters or unlicensed vendors such as juice sellers and 'shoe-shine boys' (Connell 2003; Connell and Lea 2002). In 2006, the minister for Housing, Adi Caucau, uncompromisingly advised that:

'the more than 10 percent of the country's population who are forced to survive as squatters are like thieves because they live illegally on someone else's land ... and police should make every effort to round them up and remove them' (Bryant-Tokalau 2010, quoting Caucau 2006).

But such hardline attitudes fail to deal with the underlying drivers of urban problems; they disregard the significance of customary land tenure and values, lack of livelihoods, limited financial accessibility, and growing inequality, all of which combine, on occasions, to fuel social tensions (cf. Simmons 13/7/2016; Moceituba 20/7/2015). Perverse economic incentives, such as extremely high land costs and taxes, and inefficient land administration systems — erratically enforced — make squatting the rational response to land shortages, inequitable land allocation systems, and rising inequity (Chand and Yala 2008; Keen and McNeil 2016). These can be exasperated by ethnic divides, social instability and unemployment resulting from policy frameworks that fail to create linkages between formal and informal sectors. Outside of the Pacific, studies have found that viewing the informal and formal sectors as independent, separate and even antagonistic to each other leads to missed opportunities for development with respect to economic growth, service delivery and inclusion (Jessop 2002; Rao 1996). If cultural tensions and perverse incentives are neglected, programs targeting resettlement or ‘slum upgrades’ might shift urban problems around the city, or create pockets of relief, but will not necessarily stem discontent.

Yet, over the last decade there has been a discernible shift in urban policy in Fiji, both in rhetoric and practice, which is evident in our own research and corroborated by others’ experiences (cf. Bryant-Tokalau 2010, 2014; World Bank 2015). The shift has been partially in response to external pressures and partially a shift in local attitudes. For example, the UN Declaration of Human Rights recognises the basic human right of access to housing and necessary basic services (Article 25), and this is reinforced by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) which produces urban profiles of cities highlighting the extent of urban shelter and service shortfalls and the need for ‘slum’ or informal settlement upgrade programs (cf. UN-Habitat 2003, 2012a). Further external pressure to put urban issues higher on the policy agenda comes from the UN-Habitat push for a ‘New Urban Agenda’ to address entrenched informality and politics of exclusion.

Global and local initiatives to benchmark and improve life in informal settlements — to which the above programs contribute — can help to focus political and policy attention. Urban policy and NGO/government activities were spawned around the globe in response to the Millennium Development Goals: like Target 7c to ‘halve, by 2015, the proportion of the population without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation’, and 7d to ‘achieve, by 2020, a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers’. The most recent UN Sustainable Development Goals sharpen the focus on sustainable cities further; for example, Goal 11 which aims to ‘make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable’. Benchmarking and international frameworks may not determine national policy, or even produce outcomes in all contexts, but they can provide a valuable policy nudge.

Fiji’s shift in attitude to the city has been recognised by the World Bank — in contrast to that of other Pacific islands countries. The World Bank notes that the Fijian national government has ‘a progressive policy perspective to dealing with the challenges of urbanisation, and sees settlers as important contributors to society’ (2015:xi). This attitudinal shift has been reflected in the National Housing Policy of 2011 and the 2013 constitution amendment (section 39.1); the latter enshrines each Fijian’s right to freedom from arbitrary eviction:

Every person has the right to freedom from arbitrary evictions from his or her home or to have his or her home demolished, without an order of a court made after considering all the relevant circumstances.

A senior government official observes that he has witnessed a shift away from evictions throughout his career working on urban issues:

It previously used to happen that we would take informal settlers to court. Now the government doesn’t want to evict people forcefully. Because they also want to comply with the UN charter for human rights. So now the government tries to look for space then asks the squatters to relocate.²

During the last election in 2014, the need to constructively deal with housing for informal settlers was a central election issue (Tuwere 6/8/2014), suggesting citizen as well as official concern. The Bainimarama government placed urban development higher on the policy agenda than ever, likely driven by a desire to appeal to the growing numbers of urban voters, particularly in the Nausori–Suva–Lami corridor, and to harness the development potential of the cities given the stagnation of the agricultural sector (Lal 2014; MacWilliam 2015).

Suva: The Changing Face of the City

Between 2002 and 2010, Suva's urban population increased by 5 per cent to a total of 51 per cent of the Fijian population. The Greater Suva Urban Area (GSUA) comprises Suva City (the capital) and three municipal towns: Lami, Nasinu and Nausori. Suva and Nasinu comprise around 57 per cent of the urban population, with an estimated 244,000 people living in the Suva–Nausori corridor (UN-Habitat 2012a). According to the same report, average population growth hovers at around 1.7 per cent, and approximately 30 per cent of the national GDP is generated in the GSUA — making it the country's economic centre.

The population of Fiji is comprised predominantly of Indigenous Fijians (57 per cent), commonly referred to as iTaukei, and Indo-Fijians (38 per cent) who are mostly descended from migrants forced into indentured labour by British colonisers (FIBOS 2007). Until the 1960s, indigenous migration to urban areas was tightly restricted by colonial administrators across the Pacific (Chung and Hill 2002), virtually confining iTaukei to the villages as a way of 'preserving' indigenous culture and controlling urban development. Since these restrictions were lifted, there has been significant rural-to-urban migration amongst both iTaukei and Indo-Fijian demographics.

The urban drift is caused by a number of socio-historical and politico-economic patterns. The expiry and non-renewal of thousands of sugarcane leases in the Western and Northern divisions between 1997 and 2014 pushed (and continues

Table 1: Projected population growth in the Greater Suva

Municipal Council	2011	2016	2021
Suva City	75,980	77,900	79,470
Lami Town	11,060	11,450	11,860
Nasinu Town	82,980	90,720	98,210
Nausori Town	26,970	29,200	31,610
Total GSUA	196,990	209,270	221,150

Source: Adapted from UN-Habitat 2012a:10 based on Department of Town and Country Planning data.

to push) many farming families and unemployed farmhands to urban areas (Naidu and Matadradra 2014), and fuels much of the current debate over Fijian land (Bryant-Tokalau 2012). Between 1997 and 2007, the number of Indo-Fijian farming families fell by about 25 per cent (Market Development Facility 2013).

While poverty has dramatically decreased by 34 per cent in urban areas since 2002, incidences of poverty in rural areas have increased by 6 per cent during the same period (FIBOS 2011). This may be linked to expiring land leases, as well as to the decline in the sugar industry, both factors pushing people out of rural areas in search of better opportunities in the cities. The perception of better employment prospects and improved educational opportunities for children have pulled many families towards Suva and surrounding areas, as illustrated in Table 1. Thus in just 20 years, Fiji transformed from a predominantly rural to a predominantly urban society — similar trends or rapid urbanisation can be seen throughout Oceania.

In the GSUA, a lack of urban infrastructure has made it difficult for authorities to accommodate the needs of the rapidly expanding urban population. With the urban centre nearly at capacity, the growth is mostly concentrated in the outer informal settlements. Due to the housing shortage, many families have resorted to settling on marginal lands without a formal lease leading to Nasinu being dubbed the 'squatter town' (Fiji Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment 2011). Figures from the Ministry of National Planning (2009) suggest that squatters constitute approximately 7 per cent of the Fijian

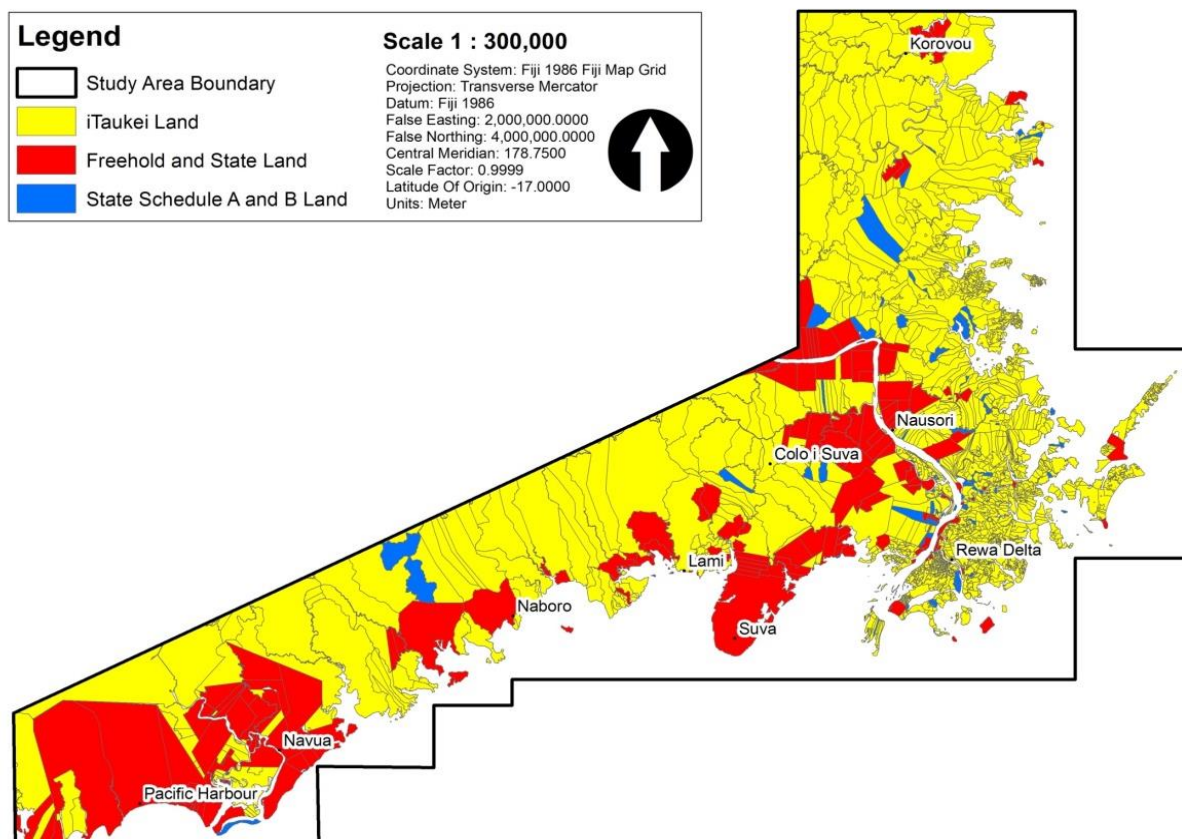
population as a whole and 15 per cent of the urban population. However, accurate data on squatters and informal settlers generally is notoriously difficult to access: social commentator and advocate for the poor Father Kevin Barr argues that socioeconomic surveys inadequately capture this demographic and that the nationwide figure is more like 20 per cent.³

As in many cities, informal settlements in Suva vary in size; they range from two or three households on the side of a road to Jittu Estate in Suva, in which 850 households were counted in the last socioeconomic survey. Most informal settlements are on marginal lands, including flood-prone areas, unstable hillsides, stream banks, and areas adjacent to rubbish dumps or industrial areas (Gravelle and Mimura 2008; World Bank 2001a). The recent devastation of Cyclone Winston was a harsh reminder of Suva's vulnerability to natural hazards, particu-

larly in the informal settlements. Although these residents face insecure land tenure, overcrowding, poor housing and patchy access to services, the situation is improving and is more manageable than elsewhere in the Pacific, as explained further in sections below (cf. World Bank 2015).

In Fiji, little is more important than land — it forms part of Fijian identity and to some extent guarantees indigenous privilege (Ward 1995). Urban sprawl encroaches upon all three types of land that exist in the GSUA: state land, which is managed by the Department of Lands and Survey; iTaukei lands, which are managed by the iTaukei Lands Trust Board (TLTB); and privately held land (UN-Habitat 2012a). The vast majority of land across Fiji is customary, approximately 88 per cent. The land in the GSUA is also mostly iTaukei land, though Crown and freehold land occurs in chunks

Figure 1: Land Tenure in Greater Suva Urban Area (GSUA).



Source: iTaukei Land Trust Board.

Note: This map was last updated in 1986. There have been minimal changes in the percentage of land tenures since then. However, much of the unused 'State Schedule A and B' land—held by the state in trust for indigenous landowners—is in the process of being reverted to customary land through the TLTB.

throughout the city, initially alienated by British colonisers, as illustrated in Figure 1.

While maps like the above neatly delineate landownership, disputes persist. The majority of growth is occurring on iTaukei land for which planning regulations are weak and dependent on cooperation with traditional landowners. Part of Suva's success in urban management has been the densification of urban development on alienated land, and the use of the TLTB to facilitate urban development by the private sector on customary land through long-term leases. But as outlined below, both have not escaped tensions and difficulties, so systems of urban management continue to evolve and officials look for ways to better support development on both alienated and customary land in urban and peri-urban areas. Solutions tend to be hybrid institutions (at least in theory). These hybrids aim to blend neoliberal and customary systems of governance. In practice, the driving motivation leans strongly to neoliberal goals of commercialising land and drawing customary landowners into the market economy.

Planning for Growth: Layering Governance

Across Melanesia the rapid rate of urban growth almost defies proactive and strategic planning. Inevitably, informal settlements grow faster than the plans for serviced settlements, resulting in areas being not only poorly serviced but unhealthy and frequently vulnerable to natural hazards and disease because of poor drainage, housing, road access and services. Because many informal settlements do not officially exist, they become part of a policy and service vacuum with residents having no rights to the land, services or representation. A gulf between formal and informal systems emerges and is re-enforced by the dominant political economy, creating social segregation and disadvantage.

Marginalisation or neglect, however, does not make informal settlements disappear; their permanent nature is well accepted now, as is the need to more strategically manage the mushrooming problem of informal settlements and service shortfalls (Lucci et al. 2015). Because government reach is limited across Melanesian cities, much urban assistance is externally driven by donors, religious

groups and NGOs, often functioning in collaboration with communities. Given the limited capacity of the state, urban institutional safety nets are not systemic, but rather dependent on 'self-care' (Lemke 2001 as cited in Bogaert 2011), or external agents/donors.

The governance of urban growth in Suva is undertaken within a framework of town planning schemes and by-laws (UN-Habitat 2012b), and is predominantly focused on alienated land and the formal sector. The Town and Country Planning Department, which sits within the Ministry of Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure & Transport, regulates land-use patterns and has zoning under its jurisdiction. The municipal councils of Suva, Lami, Nasinu and Nausori towns each use approved town planning schemes as their key planning instrument. Lessees need to seek approval for development from their municipal council, who then gain approval from Town and Country Planning, creating multiple layers of governance.

Competition and gaps between national and local planning agencies also still persist. Each municipal chief executive officer (CEO) oversees everyday operations of the local councils, but the local agencies are also overseen by a 'Special Administrator' appointed by the central government, who is particularly focused on improving rate collection, and thus economic viability of local governments. Suva City Council is self-funding, no longer reliant on central government transfers now that rates and revenue collection is much improved; this is far from the case for other Melanesian cities like Honiara in Solomon Islands. Nevertheless, the fact that the councils are not fully independent from national government agencies causes significant delays in approval processes and jurisdictional tensions. For example, it is claimed that the overlap between the CEO and the Special Administrator leads to confusion and a high turnover of staff (UN-Habitat 2012a). It also has the potential to reduce responsiveness to local values and priorities.

Customary Land: Shared Responsibility

Local councils have much less direct governance powers over customary land, which falls to spe-

cialised national agencies. The iTaukei Land Trust Board sits within the Fiji Department of iTaukei Affairs, and is mandated to protect and negotiate customary landowner rights and manage commercial transactions over the use of these lands. When customary urban land is developed, the power is given to the *mataqali* (see Box 1). Some historians claim that the control of the *mataqali* over customary land management was a colonial 'invented tradition' that enabled easier access to inalienable, customary land, but did not necessarily reflect customary landowners traditions and values (cf. Rutz 1987). While benefit-sharing continues to vary, outcomes favouring customary landowners and priorities may be compromised if *mataqali* act in their own self-interest or do not have the skill-set required to maximise community benefits.

The TLTB's contemporary focus is on facilitating private investment through leases and licences for tenants and managing the proceeds for the *mataqali* beneficiaries. As iTaukei land cannot be sold, the land can only be accessed through leasing. The core tension in iTaukei customary land law is the conflict between inalienability of land and the need for economic certainty to underpin investment (Dodd 2012).

The issue of equitable benefit-sharing when customary land is developed remains a sensitive one. The TLTB officially recoups no more than 10 per cent for administrative costs and the rest flows to the landowning community, though there are allegations of problems with accountability, distribution and rent transparency. In 2010, the Bainimarama government amended the Leases and Licenses Regulations of the Native Land Act to pay TLTB lease income directly to the individual bank account of iTaukei landowners. This decision was aimed at addressing allegations of corruption and inequitable rent distribution within communities. Still, ethno-nationalists argue that the 'capitalist' notion of individual payments undercuts iTaukei communities and values like *solesolevaki* (working together) and *veirogorogoci* (Sakai 2016). They also allege that income earned from communally owned land will not necessarily end up supporting the maintenance or development of the community, or funding community obligations like funer-

Box 1: Vanua and Customary Landowner Rights

Customary landownership is inextricably linked to the iTaukei concept of *vanua*, which literally means land but is a holistic term that also incorporates community, environment and spirit. Each *vanua* is made up of several *yavusa* (tribes) which are in turn constituted by the *mataqali* (clans). Each *mataqali* has a chiefly system within which people inherit their social roles, which come with communal obligations and reciprocity; values that are inherent in iTaukei culture. Although each *mataqali* is represented in the *vanua*, chiefly rivalry remains strong, particularly at the local level (Norton 2007). As chiefs inherit their titles, accountability and equity are variable from community to community, and are often criticised because of the high rates of abuse (Delaibatiki 17/3/2015).

The concept of a native land trust was established by the colonial government which recognised *mataqali* (clan) landownership and glossed over the multilayered and complex forms of ownership predating colonialism (Sakai 2015). Chiefly landownership was once fluid and contestable, but European administration grafted particular *mataqali* to particular lands. There is also a long-standing gender bias to Fijian leadership: women, while typically well-represented in informal community politics, have historically benefited less than their male counterparts in the chiefly system and remain under-represented in contemporary national politics (Spark and Corbett 2016).

So, there remains contestation over the ongoing legitimacy and authority of the chiefly system in the current political climate, as well as who should rightfully represent customary community interests. While it has lost some authority at a federal level, the traditions of family obligation, reciprocity and hierarchy remain socially and locally powerful, all of which complicates contemporary urban issues

als (admittedly an expensive affair) or recovery from natural disasters. However, there was never any legal obligations for chiefs to redistribute lease monies, or spend them on traditional obligations to begin with (ibid.). While this is true with respect to 'black letter law', arguably there remains a social expectation on chiefs to help meet the needs of their people.

The hybrid TLTB system aimed at creating a linkage between neoliberal and neo-communitarian urban systems often falls short of meeting legal and customary expectations, and of controlling rent-seeking. Outcomes and implications of the system can differ between land-owning units, influenced by divergent traditional leadership structures, shifts in power within the community, and community expectations. Even so, state control over leasing regimes is likely to tighten to achieve dominant economic/formal sector objectives; this will increase financial accountability but decrease control for landowners (Dodd 2012). Once landowners lease their land to the TLTB the terms of the investor's lease is largely out of their hands, including, in some cases, the returns to the community. The lack of control of land management and land rents once customary landowners lease the land through the TLTB remains a sensitive issue (Rawalia 30/7/2015; Sakai 2016).

Another, more recent, pro-development initiative encouraged by the National Housing Policy of 2011 has been to establish the Land Bank (Box 2). Benefit-sharing arrangements under the Land Bank are far from assured and interest has been low. The Lands Department is concerned that too few owners are aware of the benefits of land development, and sees one of its principal ongoing objectives as increasing awareness amongst iTaukei landowners of the development options open to them.⁴ The reluctance of landowners to engage with the Land Bank model was predicted when the Land Bank was first established (Prasad 2012). It is not clear whether the problem really is a lack of understanding of long-term economic benefits; or a higher prioritisation of communitarian values. The Land Use Decree restricts the jurisdiction of the courts

Box 2: Establishment of the Land Bank

The Land Bank — administered by a Land Use Unit within the Department of Lands — was established by the 2010 Land Use Decree for the purpose of generating economic activity through proper land use. The decree controversially reduces the powers of the Land Bank's competitor, the TLTB (McDonnell 2015).

Native landowners or *mataqali* (see Box 1) lease their land to the government through the Land Bank, after which the land will be subleased to investors (mostly foreign) or farmers for a period of no more than 99 years. If the proposed development is on the portion of iTaukei land categorised as 'reserved', it requires consent from over 60 per cent of the *mataqali*. The Land Bank does a feasibility survey of the registered land, puts it on the market for tender and works with Investment Fiji to secure investors for the development of the land. The Land Bank brokers the development deals between the landowners (represented by the TLTB) and the private investor. While landowners can state their preference for the land's use, they have little control over who the land is subleased to once it has been registered. For example, if a construction firm undertakes the development on a block of apartments, premiums and rental are determined at market rates after land valuation by the Ministry of Lands, and a royalty is then paid to the landowner.

Unlike the TLTB, the Land Bank is not bound by customary obligations, allowing for quicker processes to finalise leases. Although customary land title holders retain ownership of the land, they do not retain authority over it. The establishment of the Land Bank was an effort to encourage development on iTaukei land, particularly in rural areas, which has underutilised development potential or which is lying fallow. But it has also been applied in the city; for example, in Wailekutu in Lami. By 2014, 64 landowning groups in both rural and urban settings who deposited their land leases with the Land Bank had successfully rented out to investors, bringing in around AU\$470million worth of business to Fiji (Chand 7/7/2014) — generating much needed income but sacrificing customary control.

and therefore limits the ability of landowners to seek protection and redress. Moreover, while the decree states that leases will be issued in the ‘best interests’ of landowners, this is balanced ‘against the wellbeing of the economy’ and there have been some controversies over the extent to which landowners rights are protected, and whether they are receiving their ‘fair share’ of revenues from development leases on their lands (McDonnell 2015).

Frustration with the inadequacies of formal institutions has led to a rise in *vakavanua* arrangements, which enable informal access to native land granted directly by customary landowners in response to traditional requests or in exchange for offerings (Kiddle 2009; Ward 1995). Landowners pursue these arrangements because the economic returns are higher than through the TLTB arrangement, and because they are able to maintain greater control over the use of, and the terms of access to, the land. While the informal arrangements are less secure for those leasing the land, the shortage of urban land and high costs of access assures that there are plenty willing to accept these informal arrangements.

At the moment when iTaukei landowners lease their land to developers or settlers directly through unofficial means, significant problems can arise for tenants who may have unregulated payment schemes levied on them, be evicted, have poor or no access to basic services, and be forced to live in substandard housing (Naidu and Matadradra 2014). Landowners are also vulnerable to unscrupulous investors and may not get contractually enforceable fair rents. *Vakavanua* arrangements are likely to persist despite insecure tenure and little (if any) legal recognition, so it may pay to consider how these arrangements can be recognised and made more secure without eroding the advantages they provide to the community.

While Fijians have not resolved the vexed issues around urban land development on both alienated and customary land, they are experimenting with models and options to better enable landowners to develop their land, facilitate interactions between investors and title holders, increase revenues, and maintain customary control over land and its diverse social, as well as economic, values. The suc-

cess of the solutions being implemented for both national and communal development is dependent not only on legal frames, bureaucratic competency and economic efficiency, but also on the sociocultural values and frames that shape behaviour. To a large extent, the models in place aim to facilitate economic growth and investment and improve accountability, but are less strong on protecting customary and community values and benefit-sharing. The latter, if neglected, has the potential to fuel social resistance to private investment and to urban newcomers.

‘Regularising’ Land Tenure: Linking Formal and Informal Systems?

Suva was one of the first Pacific islands countries to recognise the rights of informal settlers and extend services to them — in essence creating a policy bridge between the informal and formal sector. One reform it has established is to regularise land tenure, which means granting squatters a title to the land at low cost, allowing them to enter the formal housing sector. The rationale behind regularisation on state land — though sometimes expressed in pro-poor rhetoric — is largely about neoliberal economics: it is considered better to have a property market, in which authorities can be aware of land-use and ownership, collect rates from known owners, and provide basic services to improve public health and security, than to ignore informal settlements or risk the political fallout from mass evictions.

A rigorous study of the costs and benefits of regularisation has not been done, but even though less revenue may be earned directly on individual lots by lowering land tenure fees, the lower costs may well provide greater overall revenue through compliance and rate payments — this is an area where more data would be valuable for decision-makers. Holding the costs of legally obtaining leases at extremely high rates can result in low legal compliance and foregone revenues from squatters. For example, in Honiara, fixed-term estate leases were allocated to flood victims but very few were purchased when the costs of leases were high, resulting in informal settlement of the allocated site (Keen and McNeil 2016).

Land regularisation in Fiji happens through a government leasing system under the Crown Lands Act. The Department of Housing has a memorandum of understanding with the Ministry of Lands and is thus given the lease at no cost. The Department of Housing then engages consultants to prepare subdivision scheme plans and eligible 'sitting' tenants are issued with approval notices, after which they are required to start paying rates to the municipal council. Engineering then begins for the subdivision, with contractors employed to undertake civil construction works and the relevant authorities engaged to organise services such as roads, electricity and water. Although services are technically required to meet the relevant authority's standards, in an effort to make the lease more affordable for squatters, some of the building requirements are waived in this context. For example, instead of 10 metre easements for roads, 6 metres will be permitted and instead of a 2 metre yard clearance between houses, 1 metre may be permitted.⁵ There are obvious benefits in these shortcuts, because they enable greater affordability and density of housing. However, a reasonable concern is that substandard housing may disadvantage tenants and create long-term vulnerabilities.

Once the civil works are completed, the government subsidises 50 per cent of the land premium and the sitting tenants in the settlement collectively pay the remaining 50 per cent, equally shared amongst the community. Residents are given a six-month grace period to save and pay for the premium, and the Department of Housing also provides a support letter for each resident to the Fiji National Provident Fund (NPF), the superannuation fund, so they can be eligible for housing assistance to help them pay for these costs.

Those without regular income, particularly those engaged in the informal sector, are still likely to be disadvantaged in accessing finances and securing land/housing; they may ultimately be forced to move if they cannot raise funds by the end of the grace period. And, it is not just lease financing that is needed. Following upgrading, each resident must also pay land registration and stamp duty. For example, in the case of Bangladesh squatter settlement in Nasinu, purchasing the

title and stamp duty cost residents a total of approximately FJ\$2500 or AU\$1600. Thereafter, each resident continues to pay ground rental to the Ministry of Lands (or the TLTB, if the settlement is on iTaukei land), which equals approximately FJ\$200 (AU\$128) per annum, depending on the premium, and is reassessed on a five yearly basis. Annual rates continue to be paid by each resident to the relevant municipal council. According to the Fijian Islands Bureau of Statistics the median household income in urban areas in Suva was FJ\$17,037 when last calculated in 2009 (about AU\$10,800) (FIBOS 2011).

Due to the heavy government subsidisation involved and the need for full servicing, land regularisation is costly and can face delays. In the words of one senior government official, 'one of the key challenges is the non-availability of serviced housing lots. Our construction of those are slow'.⁶ Further funds are being sought from international aid organisations, like the World Bank, to finance this subsidisation program, but that can come with its own conditions and constraints. In addition, property speculation is recognised as an ongoing problem. As a result, there is a restriction in the lease conditions which dictates that residents are unable to sell their title for 10 years. If they do so, they will be required to pay back the whole of the development costs. However, translating policy from paper to practice can be fraught and enforcement is difficult, so there remains the potential for sales to continue to happen informally.

The dominant approach followed to date assumes that investment will only occur when land rights are secured through formalised legal frameworks, but there is evidence that this hardline dichotomy between legal (good) and illegal (bad) is not shared by all in the city. In his study of Fiji settlements, Kiddle (2010) found it was far more informative to focus on a perceived security-of-tenure framework which took into account actual settlement perception and behaviours. 'Good enough security' may allow for housing upgrades and a feeling of community security and belonging in the city, and the way to achieve this is to put in place institutional arrangements which remove the fear of eviction (see Box 3).

Box 3: Regularising land tenure: 'Bangladesh' squatter settlement case study

Mr Didar (pseudonym) moved his wife and three children into a semi-permanent house on Crown land in the Bangladesh squatter settlement in Nasinu in 1990. He purchased the house from his brother for FJ\$2800 (about AU\$1800), and he had been working night shifts in a chicken factory in order to finance it. With a leaking roof, pit toilet and holes in the floor, Mr Didar says the house 'was not safety [sic] for the children', and they were scared of eviction.

In 1992, Mr Didar formed a volunteer committee, which advocated for land tenure security and services for the settlement. They held meetings directly with the Ministry of Lands and frequently lodged complaints about blocked drains with Nasinu and Nausori town councils. The Bangladesh land was eventually surveyed in the mid-1990s and lots were allocated to families. Because the squatter houses had been built in an ad hoc way and sandwiched together, there were some houses that overlapped on each other's lots, and certain people were made to demolish their houses and relocate to other lots within the community, or relocate to another settlement close by. After struggling to provide all of the documentation to prove their eligibility, temporary 'approval notices' were granted for most of the Bangladesh squatters in 1999. Mr Didar felt '50–70 per cent security' after receiving the approval notice, and built a permanent concrete section at the front of his house in 2000 (which now houses 12 members of his extended family).

Disputes over lot ownership, as well as the need to provide fully approved sewerage, water, electricity, telephone, sealed roads and fire hydrants before the titles were formalised, caused delays. However, 19 of the squatters were eventually granted a 99-year lease on 14 December 2010, with a further 38 having their lots reserved until they could pay. Mr Didar's lease cost FJ\$2085 (AU\$1340) and stamp duty totalled FJ\$440 (AU\$283). The announcement just before Christmas in 2010 was met with great celebration amongst the residents, some of whom had been there for 35 years (Swami 17/12/2010). As Mr Didar said,

When we received the title we were so happy, so happy. At least it was something for our kids' future. You die? Never mind, no problem, at least your kids have got something there. They're going to strive for their daily needs, daily bread, to put something on the table, but they will be happy to have the shelter.

There are also initiatives that attempt to assist squatters to regularise their claims to customary land, such as The Town-Wide Resettlement Program. This is a native land leasing system in which the housing department consults with the TLTB and the concerned landowner. Under the leasing agreement on Crown and private land, the developer is usually required to pay 100 per cent of the land premium before the TLTB will issue a lease, but in informal settlements on customary land, the premium may be negotiated at a significantly reduced price — often by 50 per cent per acre. Those settlers with allocated lots will collectively share the cost of the premium for that piece of land. While this program has been implemented in Nadonumai in Lami town, and Waka Ni Sila in Nasinu, this formalisation process is lengthy and involved. The attractiveness to customary landowners is not strong, rents and control are higher under informal (*vakavanua*) arrangements (Kiddle 2010).

An Alternative to Urban Living? Rural Resettlement

A second program to manage urban growth in the GSUA is a rural resettlement program, which ultimately tries to move urban migrants back to rural areas. The program was developed by the Department of Housing, Ministry of Agriculture and TLTB in collaboration with an NGO, and is heavily funded by NZAid. Its first iteration involved relocating families who were squatting in the Suva Jittu Estate squatter settlement to rural areas. So far, squatter families have settled on 30 acres of land in Lomaivuna in the interior and 200 acres in Vanuakula, Naitisiri.

The families have been trained in farming skills, and provided with agricultural tools — the cost of which they repay from the revenue from farming their newly acquired land.

This can, however, be a slow process that struggles to meet demand: when a notice about the resettlement program was posted in Jittu Estate asking for expressions of interest, it had to promptly be removed because it was filled so quickly.⁷ Further, success is difficult to measure and the program can be costly. Of the 16 families who initially took part in the relocation, 11 of them left for various reasons. Since the initial phase, a total 40 families have now been relocated but it is too early to say how many will remain (Tokona 8/9/2015).

In some ways this policy is reminiscent of past (value-laden) Pacific policies, in which it was believed that people would lead more fulfilling lives if they returned to rural areas (Connell 2003; Khan and Barr 2003). The high demand from squatters themselves for this rural resettlement program suggests that many of them also hold these views, but, equally, the large number of leavers from the first phase suggests expectation of rural life may be misconceived, especially if social networks are not strong. Costs may well be high for long-term outcomes, and there is no guarantee the children of those who choose to stay in rural areas will not migrate to the city.

The Mediated Urban Response

A third initiative designed to manage informal settlements is to hold negotiations with settlers, relevant private or customary landowners, the TLTB and other relevant government agencies in order to come up with a mutually beneficial and socially negotiated relocation scheme. One example of this exercise is in Nanuku, Vatuwaqa, where there is 64 acres of freehold land owned by an Indo-Fijian family. Over decades, 381 squatters had informally settled on their land, which the owners (who reside overseas) now wish to subdivide into industrial estates. The Department of Housing successfully negotiated with the TLTB to access 31 acres of available customary land for the relocation of these families. In addition, it was agreed that the Indo-Fijian owners would contribute to the reloca-

tion, providing \$1000 compensation per family. A further request, still in negotiation, is that the landowners also concede a portion of their property; in this case 10 of the 64 acres, which will be used to house some of the squatters.

While better than eviction, there were some concerns raised about whether the families will be disconnected from their sources of income and subsistence as well as their social networks once relocated, and that the sheer numbers involved make it unlikely all families will be adequately resettled (Bryant-Tokalau 2012). There is also the potential for rent-seeking if families sell their new lots and resettle in other informal settlements. Yet another concern is that this approach sets in place an incentive to squat. While these are all legitimate concerns, it appears the government feels the potential perverse incentives are outweighed by the benefits of developing the urban land and avoiding evictions and legal wrangles. This social tangle of rights and relationships to urban land opens a small window on the complexity of applying a rights-based approach to urban development; it is very unclear whose rights should be the basis of urban development frameworks. The solution may only be found through context-specific and flexible social negotiations that bridge neoliberal and neo-communitarian governance values.

Finding Shelter and Meeting the Bills

Access to shelter and housing is a cornerstone of livable cities and thus an indicator of sustainable development, as noted above. While accessing housing is related to land availability and affordability, the two are not the same — as evident in rental properties and housing upgrades. In terms of housing governance in Fiji, this sector is managed by the Department of Housing, which sits within the Ministry of Local Government, Housing, Environment, Infrastructure & Transport. One challenge in Fiji's governance of housing has been to develop a legal and institutional framework that can efficiently meet the demand for housing by a rapidly growing urban population. Prior to the National Housing Policy of 2011, urban housing development was regulated by over 25 different Acts covering finance, lands, environmental planning, infrastructure, ser-

vices and construction; a conglomeration that often confused matters and delayed approvals.⁸ In informal sectors, full compliance is rare.

One of the major recommendations in the 2011 Housing policy was to try to bring the administration of the informal settlements, emergency housing and private housing under the one framework, and thus reduce overlapping approval processes, remove delays, and enable faster housing and land development with higher levels of compliance. Although this policy has brought about some positive integration, budgetary constraints have restricted the implementation of some of the recommendations and an overarching legal framework is still in progress. Moreover, a senior official in the Department of Housing expressed concern that his office is charged with the responsibility of rolling out programs and regulating settlements, without the sufficient authority to do so effectively: 'We are enforcing the programs but don't have the legal power ... we're having to be reactionary rather than proactive.'⁹

The People's Community Network (PCN), a national advocate for informal settlers and the poor in Fiji, has coordinated government agencies and Catholic aid to build Lagilagi, a high-rise, low-cost housing estate that is being built in several phases to gradually rehouse residents of Jittu Estate squatter settlement. The PCN has a system in which long-term informal settlers of Jittu undergo social and economic empowerment workshops and are encouraged to save over time, after which they can access a strata title to one of the houses to be paid

off at a reduced rate over 12 years. Residents can also contribute 'sweat equity' toward the cost of the shelter — reducing the financial burden and tapping into considerable human resources within the community while building skills. Like many projects, this venture has faced rumours about nepotism and bias in allocation (Rika 2016). Since nepotism relates to the favourable treatment of relatives expected within social structures of reciprocity and obligation, tackling this issue, and the need for greater accountability, may be seen as a challenge of neo-communitarian urban governance. Nevertheless, over 70 households have successfully been relocated with a further 70 to follow.

Another key player in the housing sector is the Housing Authority of Fiji (FHA), which is a commercial statutory authority that began by providing affordable accommodation for those unable to secure a home, but has since expanded its reach to include mortgage financing for middle- to high-income earners. The interest rates of an FHA loan, after the first 12 months, are comparable to a bank loan. However, the requirements are more flexible with the authority than with the banks, and the authority will not assist high-income earners, whereas the banks — obviously — will. The required deposit amount is also less (10 per cent versus 20 per cent) and may be drawn from the Fiji National Provident Fund.

According to the FHA website, the general requirements to obtain a loan through the authority are Fijian citizenship, proof of employment,



Jittu Estate residents — [Left]: six people live in this one-bedroom, corrugated-iron semi-permanent house. They are scheduled to move to Lagilagi house once phase two is built; [Right]: Fully serviced Lagilagi houses.

to be aged at least 21 years and to earn less than FJ\$50,000 per year (increased if it is a joint application). The FHA offers refinancing (bringing an existing home loan under their scheme) or new mortgages. It contributes to the goal of the Fiji Housing Policy aimed at 'affordable and decent housing for all communities by 2020', launched in 2011. The home loan rehabilitation policy implemented as part of this strategy was aimed at helping people struggling to repay their mortgages which includes those who have paid more than the principal amount, customers who are unemployed, and any customers facing financial difficulty. Prime Minister Bainimarama said at its launch:

This is a social policy and is in line with the government's commitment to ensuring the Housing Authority plays a key role in empowering our people and promoting home ownership. This policy is not a hand-out but is a social desire to assist the marginalised and those most at risk of losing their homes. (Fiji Government 22/1/2011).

Here we see a dual discourse which, at one level, is a communitarian leg-up for the disadvantaged and, at another, a market-friendly supplement to promote ongoing participation in the neoliberal economy. Yet the existence of the housing authority is in contrast to other Melanesian countries; like the Solomon Islands who do not have such an entity to provide housing finance for home buyers, and is instead reliant on banks, Solomon Islands NPF or

private lenders — all of which can be costly, putting home ownership out of reach of the majority (Samuel 2016).

Recognising that not all in Fiji can buy homes, Fiji has also established a Public Rental Board. On recommendation by the World Bank, the Public Rental Board is separate from the housing authority and managed by a separate Board of Directors, although there is continuity with the same chair sitting on both. The Public Rental Board acts as a commercial statutory authority that seeks to monitor rental flats for underprivileged tenants, and provides government subsidies when a disproportionate percentage of a tenant's salary is allocated to rent. It currently manages 20 rental estates with approximately 1550 rental flats. However, the agency self-reports that it struggles to keep up with the demand for affordable housing (Public Rental Board 2016) and there is an extremely long waiting list.¹⁰ The current calculation for subsidies is listed in Table 2.

Officially, all can access this assistance: rents are subsidised for those who can prove their low income (or no income) by producing their pay slips or a recommendation from the Social Welfare Department. However, simultaneously, there is strong sociopolitical concern that undeserving people are being granted assistance in a number of these programs, giving rise to a push for better surveillance over applicants for assistance. A cabinet submission is currently being debated that increases the threshold of proof of eligibility. As a senior

Table 2. Public Rental Board Subsidy Criterion, 2010

	Weekly Gross Income (WGI) Range (\$)	Criterion (% of Income)	Tenant Contribution (% of WGI)
1	0–80	5	5
2	81–100	8	8
3	101–125	11	11
4	126–150	14	14
5	151–175	17	17
6	176–200	20	20

Source: Public Rental Board.

Note: All PRB properties undergo a property valuation to determine market rent charges. The 2010 subsidy is applicable to the estates where general renovation has taken place and rent has been reviewed.

official in the Ministry of Lands stated: ‘We have to ensure only the genuine qualify. We conduct a socioeconomic survey and they must provide proof. Then we conduct a search of all landowners’ other holdings. They can’t hide from us.’¹¹

However, for those who are very poor or earning a living in the informal sectors, income can be largely undocumented and irregular; thus making access to this system almost impossible. Most street vendors, for example, live in informal settlements rather than formal public rentals.¹² Thus, while these policies go some way to increasing accessibility to shelter and finance, and thus improving urban equity, there are those who remain marginalised.

Servicing the City: Connecting Places and People

The provision of services to settlements such as water and waste collection is a challenge faced by all Pacific islands countries, due to both geographic and technical barriers. In some, service-providers require legal land tenure before they provide access to urban services. However, the water authority of Fiji has established an arrangement whereby they accept government-issued identification credentials and will provide ‘temporary water connections’ if the tenants have formal permission from the Department of Housing and/or the landowners — creating a subtle recognition of the dual formal/customary tenure systems in operation. Fiji is recognised as a ‘clear leader’ in providing piped, treated water services for urban households, including in customary and informal settlements (World Bank 2015); 94 per cent of Fiji’s urban population has access to clean water (ADB 2014b). Though, in some cases, residents may have a connection but only intermittent, and sometimes unhygienic, supply (UN-Habitat 2012a).

Water theft is still a problem in many informal settlements and water agencies throughout Melanesia, resulting in large losses of revenue and water. In Fiji, though, the water authority has sought to place customer meters at the edge of a settlement rather than at each household, and the community must then install distribution piping to each household and collect fees; an acknowledgement that leveraging social capital may work better than centralised

regulation and individual pricing mechanisms. This approach places more responsibility on the household and community to monitor water theft (World Bank 2015). A challenge for many poor settlements, however, is that they are expected to pay for, and establish, their own pipes.¹³ This has the potential for unequal service access, and poor plumbing which may lead to contamination.

Waste management has been an ongoing problem in Suva, as well as all other Melanesian cities. However, in Suva collection and management has markedly improved over time and it leads Melanesian cities in service delivery. Suva City Council has significantly increased the budget for waste collection and contracted out the services for organic waste. Due to issues with contractor non-compliance or inefficiency in the past, the council has stringent, binding contract conditions and the waste collection contractors are monitored closely. Garbage collection now happens efficiently three times a week, which is facilitated by Suva City Council’s substantial rate base.

The media often echoes the voice of local ‘rate payers’ who are concerned about the ‘eyesore’ of informal settlements and particularly the perceived ‘indiscriminate dumping of rubbish’, which is deemed to cause environmental damage and reduce surrounding property values (e.g. *Fiji Sun* 3/12/2008). However, there are a number of structural constraints that contribute to waste problems in these settings — informal settlements have fewer roads and infrastructure making waste collection harder than in other areas of the city —



Skip bin for waste outside Jittu Estate squatter settlement.

a situation that could be exacerbated by lowering infrastructure standards to reduce social and community costs of upgrading (see earlier remarks). In response to mounting waste complaints but limited roading, the Suva City Council has installed skip bins at the edge of squatter settlements, which is a strategy to allow settlement residents to dispose of waste at any time and for the community to take greater responsibility.

Conclusion: Policy Implications

The quest for sustainable urban development is ongoing in the GSUA, but there have been some notable keys to policy success. While sometimes at odds, communitarian and neoliberal approaches to urban growth need not be binary. Policy-makers have necessarily straddled the two systems of governance, arriving at policy solutions which — though not perfect — are making some headway in better facilitating the inexorable march of urbanisation in a uniquely Fijian sociocultural context. The mix of land tenure types — state, customary and private — will persist, as will tenure arrangements like *vakavanua* which are rooted in custom and spread the benefits of urban land access more widely. To boost urban equity and justice, these arrangements need to be nested in legal systems that can enforce the rights of landowners and tenants when disputes arise. Ideally, this will involve an arrangement which draws on both neoliberal and communitarian values now entwined in the Melanesian city.

Although the GSUA has no single mechanism for coordinating services to manage urban growth, it has a good level of multi-sectorial and multi-layered cooperation, which has led to a number of successful initiatives that go some way to addressing the shortage of affordable housing and services. The rural resettlement program and the regularisation of land tenure have involved collaboration between the TLTB, Public Rental Board, Housing Authority, Ministry of Lands and Department of Housing, Town and Country Planning, municipal councils and NGOs. Regularising land tenure has been a particularly crucial aspect of Suva's experience. As demonstrated in the case of Bangladesh squatter settlement, being granted tenure can give people a stronger sense of security as well

as increase their sense of civic pride. When done across a community it can also build social capital.

In terms of challenges ahead, Suva authorities still struggle to fully support different land tenure types and to spread access to customary land more equitably across landowners. Building well-serviced, low-cost housing fast enough to cater for the rapidly expanding urban population also remains a challenge. In the words of the Director of Housing, there are five pressures on the housing sector: 1) security of tenure, 2) sanitation, 3) overcrowding, 4) water and 5) decent housing. If any one of these is not adequately addressed, the squatting problem will potentially grow. Moreover, successful management and recognition of the informal sector remains crucial to ensuring the equitable distribution of benefits and effective roll out of assistance policies to those in most need. But, there are the very vexed issues of who has rights in the city and how trade-offs between those claiming rights are resolved. Suva at least is trialling the facilitation of mediated solutions for land claims, involving a range of stakeholders.

Given the cultural context, it is likely that sustainable urban development will be a blend of neoliberal and neo-communitarian approaches, but getting the mix right is a real challenge. There is a palpable, progressive momentum with regards to urban governance in Suva at the moment, but ongoing political commitment and genuine financial backing must be sustained to maintain and progress successes to date, and to reach an equitable sharing of the city.

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Endnotes

- 1 Father Barr, personal communication 2/6/2016 about

Suva's informal settlement population and the work of the People's Community Network. UN Habitat (2012a) put the figure at about 17 per cent, Barr's estimate takes into account population growth in informal sectors and personal experience.

- 2 Senior Government Official 1, personal communication 26/5/2015.
- 3 Barr, personal communication 2/6/2016.
- 4 Senior Lands Officer, personal communication 28/5/2016.
- 5 Senior Government Official 1, personal communication 26/5/2016.
- 6 Senior Government Official 3, personal communication 27/5/2016.
- 7 Senior Spokesperson for Jittu Estate, personal communication 6/6/2016.
- 8 Senior Government Official 3, personal communication 27/5/2016.
- 9 Senior Government Official 3, personal communication 27/5/2016.
- 10 Senior NGO Representative 1, personal communication 6/6/2016.
- 11 Senior Government Official 2, personal communication 26/5/2016.
- 12 Senior NGO representative 1, personal communication, 6/6/2016.
- 13 Informal Settlement Worker, personal communication 22/6/2016.

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