

## **Informal settlements and social Inequality in Fiji: Evidence of serious policy gaps**

*Vijay Naidu, Anawaite Matadradra, Josaia Osborne and Maria Sabib.*

### **ABSTRACT**

*The proliferation of informal or squatter settlements in Fiji reveals several issues that relate to social inequality. Issues such as economic, social and environmental conditions are inextricably linked to one another and they manifest inequalities that exist within, and between residents of the 200 informal settlements and other socio-economic groups in Fiji. Market oriented policies have increased the difficulties faced by low income earners. This paper seeks to highlight a number of social inequalities which have given rise to such settlements and their prevalence. Most prominent among the social inequalities that exist is the lack of access by residents of informal settlements to security of land tenure and adequate housing. Using a Rights based approach, the paper will examine income inequalities between households; land tenure inequality; spiraling property prices; and inequality in access to infrastructure, utilities and services (roads, electricity, and water supply, and health and education). The post-2006 government's policies relating to squatter upgrade and relocation will be considered.*

**Key words:** urbanisation, social inequality, informal settlements, poverty

## INTRODUCTION

The new millennium continues to see massive changes in the patterns of human settlements that began some 300 years ago in Europe. There is accelerated urbanisation on a global scale. Globally, three types of urban development are discerned: in the North, urban centres are not characterised by large demographic increases but require regeneration in response to changing communication and transportation technologies, rising energy costs and social and economic conditions. In the Global South, however, the huge demographic pressure of rapid rural-urban migration requires significant expansion of infrastructure, utilities, employment opportunities as well as social services. The phenomenal growth of informal settlements in cities of the South reflects the failure of both local and central governments in promoting rural development, urban policy making and planning, and implementation.

The presence of large informal housing areas has been a long-standing feature of rapidly urbanising areas, particularly the mega cities of the Global South (UN Habitat, 2003). The then Executive Secretary for UNESCAP, Mr Kim Hak-Su had stated, "Recent studies indicate that urban poverty is increasing in many Pacific countries. Many cities in the Pacific have large areas of squatter communities" (ESCAP, 2004). These sentiments were also clearly outlined in the AUSAID Pacific social protection series whereby PICs are said to be "urbanising rapidly and much growth is in squatter settlements" (AUSAID, 2012, p. 5). The Pacific is becoming increasingly urbanised. In PNG, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu more than 40 per cent of adults are still engaged mainly in subsistence agriculture. However, in the Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji and Tonga, the urban population is already above 50 per cent and increasing. Even in Vanuatu, it is projected to reach 40 per cent by 2016 (Chand & Yala, 2008, p. 99; Chung, 2007). Informal residential areas have grown especially on marginal land such as steep hillsides, land in closed proximity to swamps and coastal areas characterised by poor quality soils with limited opportunities to cultivate crops (ADB, 2012, p. 10). Challenges of housing, roads, water and electricity supply, waste disposal and sewerage, employment and access to services such as education, and health arise in the context of equity, social justice and environmental sustainability.

Powerful factors such as the market, the state, and urbanisation affect and mould people's responses which can vary significantly depending on their individual and group capabilities (See Sen, 1999). The movement to urban areas is integral to peripheral capitalist development combined with declining quality of life in rural areas. Social inequality, landlessness, poverty and social exclusion are seen as the primary social forces that compel people to live in informal settlements. The 'Rights Based Approach' used in this paper is predicated on all citizens of a country having access to food and safe water, shelter, clothing, education and health care as well as decent work and livelihoods (UNICEF, 2004, p. 1). The 'Right to Development' has been accepted as a Human Right whereby duty bearers or state power holders are responsible for the provision of this right (UNDR n. d). This epistemological standpoint informed the choice of research methods, which are mainly qualitative.

Poverty in Fiji has been an ongoing issue for thousands of poor people; life continues to be a struggle with minimal assistance from the government. People who live in informal settlements tend to be among the poor. Social inequality is characterised by both income inequality, and

unequal opportunities and rewards for different social positions and statuses of individuals and groups in society. It exhibits structured and recurrent patterns of unequal distributions of goods, wealth, opportunities, rewards, and punishments. There are two main ways to measure social inequality: inequality of conditions, and inequality of opportunities. Inequality of conditions refers to the unequal distribution of income, wealth and material goods. Inequality of opportunities refers to the unequal distribution of “life chances” among individuals and groups. This is reflected in access to education, health, housing, and the criminal justice system.

Since the late 1980s, Fiji has experienced severe post-coup economic downturns which have seriously affected lower income households. Political instability, land tenure insecurities and the changing international trade environment have contributed to the decline of the sugar, garment and tourism industries, job losses and increased social inequalities. In the late 1980s and much of the 1990s, there were housing shortages, and growth in numbers of squatters in both new and old settlements, unemployment and underemployment and widespread poverty (Government of Fiji & UNDP, 1997; Naidu, 2009). The lack of income earning opportunities in rural areas also caused more and more families to move to urban areas. Natural disasters such as cyclones, floods and drought which affected rural livelihoods together with the non-renewal of agricultural land leases have contributed to a large number of disadvantaged families migrating to urban localities. Following the non-renewal of agricultural leases under the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (1967) since the mid-1990s, there has been an especially large increase in informal settlement inhabitants (Reddy et al, 2003; Naidu & Matadradra, 2014).

The Fiji 2007 Census Director, Epeli Waqavonovono noted that “Fiji’s urban population has increased as much as 12 percentage points over a 20-year period” (Fiji Times Online, 2007). During the 1986 census, 39 per cent of the total population lived in urban areas. The figure went up to 46 per cent in 1996 and 51 per cent in 2007. The population in rural areas declined from 61 per cent in 1986 to 54 per cent in 1996 and to 49 per cent in 2007 (UNESCAP, n.d retrieved 14 October, 2013). The continuation of present urbanisation trends implies that by 2030, 61 per cent of the population will be urban.<sup>1</sup> This has been a feature of Fiji’s recent development.

According to Chantelle Khan, the then Director of the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECEA), “12 -15% of Fiji’s population are living in over 182 squatter settlements around the country and further that in Suva alone it is estimated that 16.4-18% are now squatters” (Chung, 2007). Kiddle’s extensive study indicated that around 140,000 people were living in approximately 185 informal settlements in the country (2011, p.102). The estimated number of informal settlements varies due to their rapid growth and also because of definitional differences but it can be safely said that by 2014 there were around 200 such settlements in the country. These are located mainly in the Lami-Suva-Nausori and Nadi-Lautoka-Ba corridors, and Labasa town area. A scoping mission report by an NZAID consulting team estimated that informal settlements were growing by 5 per cent each year (NZAID, 2007).

Father Kevin Barr, of Peoples Community Network (PCN), a Suva-based informal housing NGO, has described the conditions that have given rise to the mushrooming of informal settlements:

- “Rural-urban migration whereby people look for better employment and better education and health care for their children;
- Government, over the years, have not provided an adequate supply of affordable low cost housing
- poverty, unemployment and low wages and have allowed too many workers to be paid wages well below the poverty line;
- many people have lost land leases and been forced to find some sort of informal housing for themselves and their families;
- difficulty of obtaining land through proper channels;
- The rapid escalation in the price of land, housing and rents in urban areas” (2007a, p. 34).

The social issues relating to social inequality, poverty, rapid urbanisation, access to land and housing are not new (see Walsh, 1978; Bryant & Khan, 1990) but over the last three decades these have intensified posing serious challenges to policy makers. The current government’s ‘Roadmap for Democracy and Sustainable Socio Economic Development’ (2009 – 2014), has aligned its policies to bring about a “Better Fiji for All.” Governments efforts at some informal settlement up grading, and squatter resettlement are welcomed, as are its partnership with NGOs working in support of residents of informal settlements, as well as its promise of providing secure tenure to them. As this road map is still being implemented, many of the issues raised in this paper remain to be addressed. However, it can be said that recent governments have largely failed to address income inequality; indeed taxation reforms including value added tax (VAT) have increased the gap between the ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ in the country.

### **INCOME INEQUALITY IN FIJI**

The concentration of Fiji’s urban poor in squatter settlements has arisen because of both the shortage of residential land and reasonable priced housing (Hassan, 2014). The Government of Fiji and UNDP Poverty report (1997) stated that “there is a clear link between poor housing and poverty”. As Storey has noted, “housing is often a barometer of people’s income, their level of security and their access to resources (including land)” (2006, p. 15). There are households that do not have enough food and clean water, or access to a well-constructed house. The poor, however, is not the only group that inhabits informal settlements. People live in such settlements for reasons such as expiry and non-renewal of land leases as well as to utilise ‘free’ available land while saving for a better future. Most poor households have someone in paid employment, but

the jobs they have, do not pay enough to keep them out of poverty (Barr, 1993a, p. 6).

Poverty is multidimensional; it is social, economic, political and psychological. It constitutes poor people's experience of deprivation and is reflected in inadequate housing, food intake, lack of income, poor quality of work, threat of violence, lack of education, health and life expectancy (OPHI, n. d). Most accept that there are two principal definitions of poverty. The first relates to absolute poverty where there are inadequate resources to meet basic needs including sufficient daily calories intake for human wellbeing; the second relates to what is regarded as acceptable standard of living, and those that are not able to meet this standard are in relative poverty (UN, 2010). Both absolute and relative poverty exist in Fiji. The mal-distribution of incomes is evident by the country's Gini Coefficient of over 40% (Quandl, 2013). There is a huge gap between the rich and poor in Fiji with the top 20% taking more than 40% of national income and the bottom 20% less than 10% (Government of Fiji and UNDP Poverty Report, 1997, p. 31; Narsey, 2006; Narsey, 2008). The poor are unable to obtain sufficient food, water, shelter, clothing, education and health care to meet their basic needs. Those in the relative poverty category are comparatively deprived and are close to the BNP line. They may be able to obtain the basic necessities but are unable to maintain the standard of living that is considered normal or decent in society (ibid, 1997, p. 32). A large proportion of Fiji's people lives close to the poverty line and are vulnerable to poverty.

Those in poverty comprise residents of informal settlements, depressed rural areas, the unemployed, the disabled and aged, irregularly employed, low wage earners, artisan, and small stall and shop vendors. Poverty pervades iTaukei, Indo-Fijian, and other minorities with possible exception of European and Chinese Fijians and expatriates. According to the Poverty and Household Incomes in Fiji in 2008-09 report, the gap between the rich and the poor increased between 2002 and 2009 (Narsey, 2012).

In recent years, there have been many discussions about growing poverty, vulnerability to poverty and heightening inequalities between different groups in Fiji (Barr, 1993 and 1993b; Bryant, 1992; Kumar & Prasad, 2006; Naidu et al, 2009). Despite Fiji's assertions about meeting the UN's Millennium Development Goal targets, the level of poverty in Fiji has increased significantly (PIFS, 2011). The Household Income Expenditure Survey (HIES) by the Fiji Bureau of Statistics (FBoS) in 2010 indicated that the decline in the sugar industry and declining proportions and amounts of loans to agriculture could have contributed to declining income opportunities available to families. Recent estimates place 4 out of 10 people living below the poverty line (FiBoS: Fiji Facts and Figures 2012, p. 12).

HIES (2008-09) report showed that 19% of Fiji's population are in urban poverty while 43% are in rural poverty (PIFS, 2011, p. 9). The highest rate of poverty is among agricultural labourers and construction, tourism and finance workers (FBS, 2013, p. 12). According to Baleinakorodawa et al. (2011, p. 129) "squatters and high unemployment are interrelated in Fiji." Naidu (2009, p. 9) also indicated that there are limited employment opportunities available for many of the residents in the squatter settlement. This is closely intertwined with lack of education and qualifications. In addition, various studies have confirmed that a majority of informal settlement residents are engaged in informal economic activities or low status occupation (Reddy et al, 2003). Varman

(2012) has shown that 88% of employed residents of Wailea settlement in Suva are in low status occupations.<sup>2</sup> The range of work that the residents are involved in is summarised in Table 1 below:

**Table 1:** Types of low status occupations of informal settlement residents

GENDER	OCCUPATION
Male	Cleaners, gardeners, grass cutters, unskilled laborers, wheel barrow boys, shoe shine boys, street vendors, bottle collectors, taxi drivers
Female	Garment factory workers, retail outlet attendants, domestic workers, self-employed (tailor – dress makers, food, snacks or canteen business), sex workers.

**Source:** Naidu et. al (2013, p. 5)

A majority of the poor in Fiji are low wage earners (Government of Fiji & UNDP, 1997; Narsey, 2007a). The 1997 Fiji Poverty Report indicated that “though people have jobs, their incomes are insufficient to meet their basic needs. The challenge is not just to create jobs but to provide remuneration enough to enable the workers to live decent lives” (1997, p. 112). People end up in poverty as incomes were insufficient to meet their basic needs. In early 2014, the Government of Fiji instituted a basic minimum wage of F\$ 2 an hour which is well below the hourly pay wage (of F\$ 6.50) to meet the weekly poverty line income for a household of 4-5 persons (2 adults and 2-3 children) of F\$ 260. <sup>3</sup>Although there are other factors which contribute to poverty, wages are recognised as a key factor in the alleviation of poverty. The absence of just social wages generally impacts on households negatively, but there are gender and age dimensions within households that adversely affect women and children (Chattier, 2011; Kumar, 2007; Naidu et al, 2007, p. 295).

More than 60 per cent of Fiji’s population earn below the tax threshold of \$15,000 a year. Seventy per cent of workers earn below \$20,000 a year. According to Father Kevin Barr “so many people in Fiji today are being forced to accept low wages because it is either that or nothing. A just living wage means that a worker, if employed full-time, should be able to earn a wage that will enable him/her to support the family in their basic requirements of food, clothing, housing, education and health care. It should also provide some security for the future” (2007a). Currently, security guards in Fiji are paid \$2- \$3an hour for what is considered to be hazardous work. Barr further states that “wages provide access to goods (such as nutritious food, clothing, and decent housing) and services (such as education, and health care) which are the material components of our quality of life. In addition, wages provide workers with the means to care for their extended families, contribute to the *vanua* and the church, find rest and recreation for themselves and save for the future” (2007a).<sup>4</sup>

A 2011 survey of Namara Tiri settlement near Labasa indicated that 80 per cent of the households in Namara squatter settlement were low-income families, with 50 per cent of the people being seasonal workers. To supplement seasonal employment, residents in Namara were engaged in low income generating activities such as fishing, crabbing and prawning, planting vegetables in large drums, rearing goat and chicken (Naidu & Matadradra, 2014). Some families collected onions and potatoes disposed by supermarkets at the nearby Labasa rubbish dump and used them for their meals. Thirty per cent of the children of Namara Settlement whose parents are seasonal workers were underweight, malnourished and suffered from skin diseases. In 2013, it was reported that for Fiji as a whole, 420 children of 5 years and below died because of malnutrition (Gibson, 2014).

Besides low wages, tax reforms have affected those below and near the poverty line. Fiji has undertaken major tax reforms since 1992 mainly to reduce both personal and corporate taxes and to lower the fiscal duties applied to some imported products. These were replaced by the Value Added Tax of 10 per cent which has been raised twice to 12.5 per cent and then 15 per cent (Naidu et al 2007, p. 301). In 2012, personal tax for high income earners was reduced from 31 per cent to 20 per cent and corporate tax was reduced from 28 per cent to 20 per cent. Meanwhile, VAT which seems non-discriminatory impacts the poor more than it does high income earners as the poor are likely to spend proportionally more of their income (Naidu et.al 2007, p.102). Although some basic food items such as cooking oil, tin fish and flour are VAT exempted, the increase in VAT has adverse consequences as price of other essential goods and services have been raised. The distribution of income among households has important implications for consumption and for low income earners generally, food constitutes a larger percentage of their total consumption expenditure. The tax reform also had a positive element in poverty alleviation which was raising of the minimum income tax threshold of FJD 9,000 ten years ago to nearly FJD 16,000 in 2013 (FRCA, 2013).

The Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS) which replaced the Family Assistance Programme (FAP) assists the very poor families (including those individuals with disability, who are chronically ill, elderly who do not have pensions and single parents). Non-contributory payments are made depending on the size of the household with a maximum monthly allowance of \$150 which is inclusive of a \$30 Food Voucher (Government of Fiji, 2014). Currently 26,000 individuals receive PBS and they constitute less than 6 per cent of those living below the poverty line (Government of Fiji, 2014).<sup>5</sup> The failure of redistributive measures with the absence of an efficient social security system has resulted in a larger number of individuals and families being unable to meet the basic necessities of life.

## **LAND AND SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN FIJI**

Although land and natural resources are largely under customary tenure and belong to iTaukei; there is a great deal of inequality in ownership, access and control over land. According to Brookfield (1978), land ownership and inequality is of Latin America proportions.

**Table 2:** Land Tenure in Fiji.

Land Classification	Proportion by Area	Details
Native Lands	87.9%	Formal leases administered through Native Lands Trust Board <sup>6</sup> (under Native Land Trust Act legislation), some through the Agricultural Landlord and Tenant Act (ALTA), and others through informal <i>vakavanua</i> lease arrangements.
Freehold Lands	7.94%	Over 20,000 titles under Torrens system
State Lands	3.91%	Approx. 7,500 state leases for varied specific land uses
Rotuma Lands	0.25%	

**Source:** (Boydell, Small & Sheehan, 2007, p. 88)

As can be seen in Table 2 nearly 88 per cent of land under customary tenure system cannot be alienated, whether bought outright by individuals or corporations. Native leases are either granted or licenses are required to use these lands. Although the term 'communal' ownership is sometimes used for 'native' land proprietorship, ownership and control hitherto have been far from equitable. First, customary land owning units (*mataqali*) own varying amounts of land. Some large *mataqali* may own very little land whereas some smaller *mataqali* own larger tracks of land. The land is also of varying quality, and depending on location have great differences in terms of their commercial value. Therefore, communal ownership of land does not mean equitable ownership among such groups. Second, chiefs and male elders made all the decisions about land use and until recently, the earnings from the land. Thirdly, people of other ethnicities especially Indo-Fijians do not own much land and are reliant on native leaseholds. Many *iTaukei* no longer reside in their 'vanua' and most of them living in other 'vanua' are also landless. However, as access to customary land for small holder peasant farming is based on kinship group membership, poverty has been mitigated in many ethnic Fijian communities, and where such communities are leasing land to commercial ventures, rental incomes are more equitably distributed.<sup>7</sup>

Freehold land lots are not only less than 8 per cent of the total land area, but are also very unequally owned. On the one hand, there are whole islands and large plantations (such as former coconut estates) as well as large residential land that are in the hands of individuals (including Hollywood stars), families (mostly mixed race), wealthy individuals and private companies. On the other hand, urban residential plots have become smaller and smaller and more expensive.

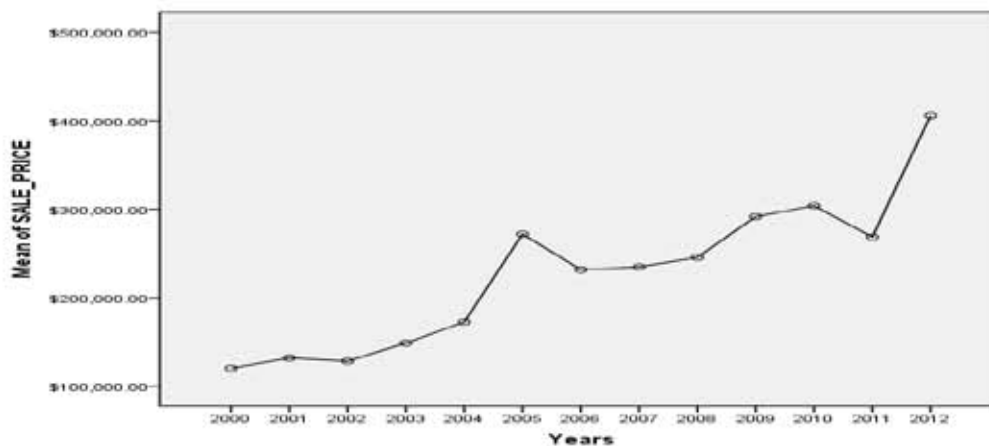


Because of their relative scarcity and perceived greater security of ownership, they are relatively more expensive, and indeed the prices of such residential land in and near urban centres are beyond the reach of average income earners in the country.

#### Land Values in Urban and Peri-urban Areas

A study by Hassan (2005) clearly indicated that rapid urbanisation has greatly increased the demand for affordable housing in urban centres. This has been reinforced by the evidence provided in his doctoral thesis *"Sustainable development of low cost urban housing in Fiji: a case study of Fiji Housing Authority"* (2014). Housing for high-income earners is provided by the private sector but the lower income groups depend on public housing institutions for buying or renting accommodation.

Figure 1: Graph showing Mean Price of Properties



Source: Lands Department, Valuation Section, 2013

Figure 1 shows the trend in average price of land properties in the Suva area for the period of 2000-12. These prices are averages of native, state and freehold properties. The average price of the properties increased from a little over FJD100, 000 in 2000 to over FJD400, 000 in 2012. The graph shows that prices have increased fourfold in the last 12 years. If only freehold property is taken into account the price increase would be much higher. The supply of freehold urban land in Suva has virtually been exhausted thus native land which falls largely outside of the Suva boundary has become the focus of development. However the subdivision of native land has been rather slow. Therefore the lack of supply of land for housing development has significantly impacted property prices in the urban land market. Consequently, low income to average income earners have fallen out of the 'affordable housing' category (Hassan, 2014).

The lack of affordable housing amidst the increasing property prices has led to the proliferation of informal settlements. Social inequality is manifested by housing inequality and "reflected in...



## LAND POLICY GAPS

Although there have been reforms to land use in Fiji by the current government, access to land for all citizens is still elusive. The Land Use Decree of 2010 states that native leases that are 'voluntarily' given to the State for maximum benefits to the owners, are only for agricultural or commercial development (Government of Fiji, 2010). It is apparent that the main objective of the leases "deposited" to the Land Bank is to make the land available for larger investors including foreign investment. The longer term leases which favour investors may cause disquiet among land owners in the longer term.

The key agency that looks after housing for low income earners in Fiji is the Housing Authority of Fiji (HAF). But this agency has deviated from providing access to housing at affordable price for low and average income families by selling properties for between F\$70,000FJD - F\$130,000 (Government of Fiji, 2012). The HAF has made submissions to the government for land acquisition for residential use at affordable prices to sustain its vision "set goals and determine strategies that would tangibly establish a better living standard for all Fijians by the year 2020 and to ensure economic and social security, the right of every Fijian family to a decent home" (Government of Fiji, 2012).

In addition, a local newspaper in 2009 revealed that building materials had increased as much as 100% from 2007. An increase in tariff for building materials from 27 per cent to 32 per cent was a contributing factor. The survey indicated that even the construction of a simple tin shack had become unaffordable (Fiji Times, 2009). The FIBOS further reiterated that the building material price index 2013 for all items registered an increase of 0.9per cent for each month with high prices recorded for wood, cement, roofing iron, paint and glass, floor and wall tiles (FBS, 2013).

Furthermore there is no law in Fiji that prevents a foreigner from buying properties. A significant factor in the large increase in property values is that expatriates have been purchasing properties at prices that most locals cannot afford.<sup>8</sup>

## SOCIAL INEQUALITY IN OPPORTUNITIES TO ACCESS EDUCATION, HEALTH AND BASIC SERVICES.

Social inequality in opportunities for education, health and other basic services is also evident in many informal settlements. Connell (2009, p. 298) highlighted that access to education is hindered by 'lack of finances.' The International Labour Organisation report on Child Labour in Fiji, stated that 66 per cent of children from the squatter settlements in the survey drop out of school due to financial difficulties (2010, p. 96). Many children simply leave school to help their parents in earning an income (*ibid*). An earlier report by the 'Save the Children Fund Fiji' (1998, pp. 19-20) also mentioned that financial pressure was one of the major reasons for the lack of access by children from informal settlements to education. The Namara study showed that older children worked in shops and factories to supplement family income (Naidu & Matadradra, 2014).

Even though government policies/schemes<sup>10</sup> have sought to ensure access to education, it must be noted that there are still costs that are incurred. The submission of the Consumer Council of Fiji to the Ministry of Education (MoE) indicated that the exorbitant levies charged by individual schools can be a deterrent for parents to send their children to school.<sup>11</sup> These levies vary from extra tuition (building, enrollment, caution, sports fees etc) to book hire costs.<sup>12</sup> There are also significant differences in the quality of schools that children attend in the country as a whole as well as in urban and peri-urban localities. In 2012, school zoning policy was implemented to provide more equitable access to educational opportunities but it is rather early to evaluate the impacts of this policy.

There is also inadequate access to health services by residents of these settlements. According to the Fiji National University Centre for Health Information Policy and System Research (CHIPSR) Report (2013, p. 3), the Out of Pocket (OOP) spending in Fiji on health care is the largest in the Pacific due to the “existence of private health sector and an <sup>13</sup>advanced public health system”. The report indicated that richer households are more able to pay for such health services and as such; the poor households incur further financial burden. How the poor cope with user pay charges is a matter of further research. However, it is known that many poor persons defer going to health centers’ until their health severely deteriorates. Many low income earners rely on traditional medicines and self- medications. These have varied consequences for their health.

There is also a need to take into account the impact of the local government system on health services provision on these settlements. Some of these urban informal settlements do not access urban sanitary services since they are located on land belonging to customary landowners under the iTaukei Affairs Act Cap 120 (2006). Storey (2005, p. 2) highlighted that peri-urban areas where informal settlements are located are known as ‘grey areas’ or ‘negotiated territory.’ Thus, they are marginalised from services such as access to refuse collection, proper drainage and roads. An example highlighted by Asian Development Bank (2013) was how garbage is strewn carelessly at night in Caubati settlements since most of the squatters lived further in from the main roads where the three rubbish bins provided by the Nasinu Town Council are located. Moreover, the drains being dug by the squatters in Caubati settlements pose serious health risks<sup>14</sup>.

Lack of access to reticulated water supply and proper sanitation in many of the informal settlements is still prevalent. The study of seven such settlements in Suva by Mohanty (2006) showed that there is lack of access to reticulated water supply. In addition, settlements such as Valenicina in Lami are still relying on wells and rainwater. Moreover, the access to piped water by many informal settlements is a daunting task given the various requirements of the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) for water connections. Since they do not own the land in which they dwell, approval from landowners or a letter from the Squatter Resettlement Unit is needed.

The lack of access to water in some settlements also means that households do not have proper sanitation. The recent ‘Squatter Upgrading Project’ carried out by the Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment (MLGUDHE) indicated that improper sanitation such as pit latrines and water sealed toilets still exists in many settlements (Fiji Govt. Press Release, 2013).

Electricity supply is also an issue for many residents of informal settlements. The assessment by Asian Development Bank (ADB, 2013, p. 3) indicated the high costs borne by households in Caubati informal settlement to connect to main road electricity. Due to no legal tenure, the services by Fiji Electricity Authority are limited only to the main road leading to the settlement (ibid). Households have to make private arrangements which require often exorbitant items of materials (eg. electricity cables) and labour costs. Other settlements such as Veiraisi in Nadera have yet to access electricity even though they are located in the Suva-Nausori corridor.

Social inequality leads to forms of structural violence (inadvertent and deliberate social exclusion and denial of access to opportunities and life chances, as well as the existence of oppressive structures and processes), and structural violence often reinforces social inequality (Galtung, 1990). Those in authority stigmatise residents of informal settlements, often referring to them as illegal and a nuisance (Barr, 2007a). Residents feel disempowered, fragmented and marginalised when dealing with local government officials, the police and other government departments. They can be forcefully relocated and their livelihoods can be abruptly curtailed. The case of Clopcott settlement upgrading project in Yalalevu, Ba was one such an example. The residents could have been evicted by the Ba Town Special Administrator as he embarked on the Upgrading Project. To compel them to leave, the Ba Special Administrator tried to cut off the supply of water and electricity. The violation of the rights of families to their own homes is ever present for in such settlements (Pratibha 2013).

The increasing periodic reports of incidences of crime in many informal settlements has led to stereotypes by the public at large and law enforcement officers about those residing in these settlements (see Mohanty, 2006; Naidu, 2009; Naidu et al, 2013). Many such settlements are perceived to be hotspots for crime and criminals. A classic example was the media hype about Nanuku Settlement in Suva recently where it was claimed that the 'crime rate has shot up in the last three years' (Fiji Times, 2013, p. 5). Other settlements regarded as centers' of crime such as Nadonumai in Lami tend to be the first to be targeted by law enforcement officers for suspects of crimes committed in Suva.

## **POLICY IMPLICATION**

Social inequality affects disadvantaged groups in many adverse ways and ultimately has negative consequences for society as a whole. Market driven policies with little consideration of social costs have contributed to the growth in inequality in Fiji. Policies that reduce the extent of inequality contribute to individual well-being and social cohesion. At the heart of social inequality are the huge income differences in Fiji's society.

It is incumbent on government to ensure a social wage for all workers. This means not only establishing a minimum national wage (which requires an immediate review) but also higher wages in more profitable sectors. The following are some possible measures and discussion points that can address social inequality in the country:

- Progressive taxation with the wealthy paying the highest rate of taxation
- Just living wage on par with the rising cost of living
- Encourage microfinance business and skill training for the unemployed
- More credit schemes for the poor and low income earners to assist them develop enterprise and livelihoods.
- Social welfare reform and better redistributive measures for the most needy in society.
- Reform of institutional governmental structures to enhance their inclusiveness and responsiveness to residents of informal settlements and those who are in the lowest stratum of society.
- More effective rural development measures (including infrastructure and market access for produce) to enhance the quality of life for rural people.
- Review of land use policies to obtain the appropriate and optimum usage of available land.
- More funding should be made available for housing of low income earners, education and health care
- The increase focus and funding of education and health services are supported as they enhance 'social wage' of Fiji's workers

## CONCLUSION

As highlighted by Jones (2012), the Pacific Island region will be unable to meet the Millennium Development Goals Target 7D which is to "improve the lives of a hundred million slum dwellers." A key feature of many Pacific Islands countries is the absence of coherent social development policy. The proliferation of informal settlements in urban and peri-urban localities in contrast to the plush residents of the wealthy with their swimming pools and gated communities provide visibly stark evidence of growing social inequality in Fiji. They are clear evidence of the failure of public policy and of duty bearers. Much work is needed to address social inequality in the country. The government has a social responsibility towards providing equal opportunities and access to basic services for its citizens.

The current primarily market oriented approach to development which has included among other measures, increased value added taxation (VAT) and reduced taxation for the wealthy and corporations have simply increased the tax burden on the poor, and income inequality. These have affected the ability of ordinary citizens to afford a simple house. The influx of foreigners with the capacity to pay relatively very high prices for the purchase of houses and to rent accommodation has meant that many more citizens are being pushed to seek alternative lower cost housing including those in informal settlements. The policy implication that have been identified require

debate and discussion so that Fiji can arrive at a more effective set of policies to address social inequality as manifested by its rising informal settlements.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *There are issues about definition of urban and rural boundaries in the Fijian context. Increasingly, those living in rural localities such as the Rewa Delta and inland Naitasiri area are commuting daily to towns and cities to work.*
- <sup>2</sup> *However, there is a minority of residents in the settlement who may be employed as public servants, policemen, priests, bus & taxi drivers and nurses. Some residents are relatively successful businessmen. (Naidu & Matadradra, 2014, p. 24)*
- <sup>3</sup> *In contrast to the statutory minimum wage of F\$2.00 an hour instituted in March, 2014, Permanent Secretaries in Fiji's Civil Service had a salary hike from F\$ 80,000 on average per annum to between F\$ 160,000 to F\$ 221,000 (Fiji Times, 2013). The minimum wage will be revised upwards to \$2.32 an hour from 1st July, 2015 per annum.*
- <sup>4</sup> *Father Kevin Barr resigned from being the Chair of the Wages Council in 2012 because of the failure of employers to accept the wages orders relating to the lowest paying sectors and the unwillingness of Government to enforce wage orders.*
- <sup>5</sup> *While a little PBS support does alleviate the hardship for recipients, more than 80 per cent of the poor rely on their own efforts and help from the wider community.*
- <sup>6</sup> *Renamed iTaukei Lands Trust Board (TLTB) in 2011.*
- <sup>7</sup> *In 2012 Bainimarama government reformed rental payments from chiefs of mataqali (land-owning group) receiving the largest proportion of the revenue from leased land to a near equal distribution among all members over the age of 18 years.*
- <sup>8</sup> *On 11th December, 2014 the amended Land Sales Act restricts foreigners from purchasing residential land within town boundaries.*
- <sup>9</sup> *As highlighted in the report, a lot of students who received assistance are from the urban and peri-urban squatter settlement*
- <sup>10</sup> *Some of these government schemes include 'Tuition Fee Free Grant Scheme', 'Free Text Book Scheme', Bus Fare Assistance Scheme and in 2011-2012, Food Voucher was implemented (MOE Annual Report, 2012)*
- <sup>11</sup> *See [http://www.consumersfiji.org/upload/Submissions/Education%20Levies%20in%20Schools%20around%20Fiji\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.consumersfiji.org/upload/Submissions/Education%20Levies%20in%20Schools%20around%20Fiji_FINAL.pdf)*
- <sup>12</sup> *Government has instituted a policy of free text books but it is not clear how many schools have complied with it.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Advanced Public Health System as in the new Health reforms such as the 'Public Hospitals and Dispensary Act of 2012' whereby new payments are required for some hospital services which used to be free.*
- <sup>14</sup> *According to ADB (2013, p. 4), improper drainage can leave an unhealthy stench on dry days; and may become breeding ground for mosquitoes if not continually dredged by the squatters.*

## REFERENCES

- Asian Development Bank. (2012). *The state of Pacific town and cities: urbanization in ADB's Pacific Developing member countries. Pacific Studies Series*. Manila: Asia Development Bank.
- Asian Development Bank – ADB. (2013). *Pilot Fragility Assessment of an Informal Urban Settlement in Fiji*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/pub/2013/pilot-fragility-assessment-fiji.pdf>
- AUSAID Pacific social protection series: poverty, vulnerability and social protection in the Pacific. (2012). *The role of social transfers*. Canberra: Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID).
- Baleinakorodawa, P., Spence, R. & O'Loughlin, M. (2011). Civic education partnerships: Civil society organisations, donors and the state in Fiji, *International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 10(2), 127-139.
- Barr, K. (1993a). *Income, security and Poverty amongst the Elderly*. Conference Proceedings of FCOSS Seminar on the Elderly held in, FCOSS. Suva.
- Barr, K. (1993b). *Poverty and Affirmative Action*. . Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Barr, K. (2007a). Squatters in Fiji: The need for an attitudinal change. *CCF Housing and Social Exclusion Policy (Dialogue Paper No.1)*, Suva: Citizens Constitutional Forum.
- Barr, K. (2007b). *Poverty in Paradise: No Way to Live Stories of Squatter Families and those who work among them*. CCF Housing and Social Exclusion Policy (Dialogue Paper No 1), Suva: Citizens Constitutional Forum.
- Barr, K. (2010). Address of Chairman of the Wages Councils. Presented at JJs on the Park 16<sup>th</sup> September 2010: Suva.
- Boydell, S., Small, G.R. & Sheehan, J.B. (2007). Review of Financial Management of Customary and other Land in the Pacific, access UTS, Sydney, pp. 1-120. Retrieved August 04, 2013 from <http://customarylandssolutions.com/research-2/>
- Brookfield, H.C. (1978). *Taveuni: Land, population and production, Islands Reports No. 3*, UNESCO/UNFPA, Canberra: Australian National University.
- Bryant, J. & Khan, F. (1990). Population and Housing in Fiji. In R. Chandra, & J. Bryant, (Eds.), *Population of Fiji*. Noumea: SPC.
- Bryant, J. (1992). "Poverty in Fiji: who are the urban poor?" *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography*, 13. Wiley. Singapore: J Trop Geog.ens.
- Chand, S & Yala, C. (2008). Informal land systems with urban settlements in Honiara and Port Moresby. *Making Land Work Volume two: case studies on customary land and development in the Pacific*. Canberra, Australia: AusAID.
- Chattier, P. (2011). Exploring the capability approach with the bargaining model: new



methodologies for gender-sensitive poverty measures in Fiji. *The Journal of Pacific Studies*, 31 (1), pp. 13 – 30.

Chung, M. (2007). No Fit State: Housing for the urban poor in Fiji. *Ecumenical Centre for Research Education and Advocacy*. Suva: Fiji.

Connell, J. (2009). Pacific urbanisation and its discontents. Is there a way forward? In W. Narsey, A. S. Robertson, K. Seniloli, E. Jongstra & WordWorks Fiji (Eds.), *Population and Development in the Pacific Islands: Accelerating the ICPD Programme of Action at 15* (pp. 282-311). Suva: University of the South Pacific.

Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. (2004). *Special Body on Pacific Islands Developing Countries. Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries*. Eight Sessions. 20-21 April 2004. Shanghai, China. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from: [www.un.org/special-rep/.../Statement%20by%20ESCAP%20exe-sec.pdf](http://www.un.org/special-rep/.../Statement%20by%20ESCAP%20exe-sec.pdf).

Fiji Bureau of Statistic. (2010). *Fiji Facts and Figures*, Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/Releases/FFF2010.pdf>.

Fiji Bureau of Statistics. (2013). *Building Material Price Index- December 2013 Annual report*, Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/latest-news/318-building-material-price-index-december-and-annual-2013>.

Fiji Bureau of Statistics. (2010). *Poverty and Household Incomes in Fiji in 2008-09 [based on 2008-09 Household Income & Expenditure Survey]*, Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.statsfiji.gov.fj/index.php/social/9-social-statistics/social-general/146-poverty-indicators>

Fiji National University Center for Health Information Policy and System Research (CHIPSR) Report. (2013). *Catastrophic and poverty impacts of health payments in Fiji: Evidence from the Fiji Household Survey 2010*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.fsm.ac.fj/files/Fiji%20HIES%20analyses%20results.pdf>.

Fiji Revenue & Customs. (2013) *Personal Tax-SALARY & Wage EARNERS*. Retrieved on the August 4, 2013 from [www.frca.org.fj/personal-incometax](http://www.frca.org.fj/personal-incometax).

Fiji Times Online. (2007). *More than half in towns: Census*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.fjitimes.com/story.aspx?ref=archive&id=73466>.

Fiji Times Online. (2009). *Building Costs rise*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.fjitimes.com/story.aspx?ref=archive&id=113576>.

Fiji Times Online. (2013). *Pay rise for PS*. Retrieved 15<sup>th</sup> October, 2013 from <http://www.fjitimes.com/story.aspx?id=246389>.

Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural Violence. *Journal of Peace Research*. 27 (3), pp. 291-305.

Gibson, D. (2014). *Save the Children to fight malnutrition*. Retrieved March, 25 2014 from [www.fjitimes.com/story.aspx?id=256693](http://www.fjitimes.com/story.aspx?id=256693)

- Government of Fiji and UNDP. (1997). *Fiji Poverty Report*. Suva: UNDP.
- Government of Fiji. (2010). *Land Use Decree 2010*. 78. R. o. F. I. G. Gazette. Suva, Fiji.
- Government of Fiji. (2012). *Housing Authority of Fiji makes Submission*. Retrieved August 30, 2013, from <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Press-Releases/HOUSING-AUTHORITY-OF-FIJI-MAKES-HOUSING-SUBMISSION.aspx>.
- Government of Fiji. (2013). *Health and Sanitation Priority in Squatter Housing* [Press Release 25]. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Press-Releases/HEALTH-AND-SANITATION-PRIORITY-IN-SQUATTER-HOUSING.aspx>
- Government of Fiji. (2014). *Poverty Benefit scheme ensures objectivity in selection criteria*. Retrieved August 4, 2014 from <http://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Center/Press-Release/Poverty-BENEFIT-SCHEMES-ENSURES-OBJECTIVITY-INSELE.aspx>
- Hassan, A. (2014). *Sustainable development of low cost urban housing in Fiji: a case study of Fiji Housing Authority*. Unpublished Phd Thesis. University of the South, Suva.
- Hassan, A. (2005). A Preliminary Study on the Supply of Low Cost Housing in Fiji. *Pacific - Rim Real Estate Society*. The University of Melbourne & The University of the South Pacific.
- International Labour Organisation – ILO. (2010). *Child Labour in Fiji - A survey of working children in commercial sexual exploitation, on the streets, in rural agricultural communities, in informal and squatter settlements and in schools*. International Labour Office, International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) - Suva: ILO.
- Jones, P. (2012). The Challenges of Implementing Millenium Development Goals Target 7D in Pacific Island Towns and Cities. *Asia-Pacific Development Journal*, 19(1), 139-162.
- Kiddle, G. L. (2010). Perceived Security of Tenure and Housing Consolidation in Informal Settlements: Case Studies from Urban Fiji, *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 25, pp. 193–213.
- Kiddle, G. L. (2011). *Informal Settlers, Perceived Security of Tenure and Housing Consolidation: Case Studies from Urban Fiji*. Unpublished Phd Thesis. Provide name of place and university.
- Koto, N. (2011). *Earthcaching Project: Exploring informal urban settlements in Suva - its growth and environmental implications*. Suva, University of the South Pacific.
- Kumar, S. (2007). Poverty and Affirmative Action Policies in Fiji: Paradigmatic Fault Lines, *Fijian Studies*, 5(2), 14-21.
- Kumar, S & Prasad, B. (2006). Poverty in Fiji: analysis, trends and causes. In *Indian development review*.4 (2), 339 – 365. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- Ministry of Education, National Heritage, Culture and Arts. (2012). *Annual Report*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.education.gov.fj/index.php/resources/ministry-2012-annual-report>.

- Mohanty, M. (2006) . 'Urban squatters, the informal sector and livelihood strategies of the poor in Fiji Islands'. *Development Bulletin*, No. 70, April, Australian National University, Canberra: Australia. pp. 65-68.
- Naidu, V, Barr, K, & Seniloli, K. (2007). Poverty Reduction Policies for Fiji. *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji*, 5 (2), 100 – 121. pp. 100-121.
- Naidu, V. (2009). *Fiji Islands Country Profile on Excluded Groups*, draft report, United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific.
- Naidu, V., Matadradra, A., Osborne, J. & Sahib, M. (2013). *Urbanisation, Informal (squatter) settlements and sustainable urban policy development*. AGORA –SHS NC, International Conference. 24-26 April 2013. "Sustainable development in Oceania: towards a new ethics?" Koohe', New Caledonia,
- Naidu, V. & Matadradra, A. (2014). *The Namara (Tiri) squatter settlement in Labasa: An in-depth Study*. (Working Paper Series, No.1: January). Suva: SGDIA, University of the South Pacific.
- Narsey, W. (2006). *Report on the 2002-03 Household Income and Expenditure Survey*. Suva: Vanuavou Publications.
- Narsey, W. (2007a). *Just living wages for Fiji: lifting workers out of poverty*. ECREA. Suva: Vanuavou Publications.
- Narsey, W. (2007b) .*Gender Issues in Employment, unemployment and incomes in Fiji*. Suva: Vanuavou Publications.
- Narsey, W. (2008). *The Quantitative Analysis of Poverty in Fiji*. Suva: Vanuavou Publications.
- Narsey, W. (2012). *Poverty in Fiji: Changes 2002-03 to 2008-09 and policy implications*. Suva: University of the South Pacific.
- NZAID. (2007). *Fiji Informal Settlements Scoping Mission Report*. Wellington: New Zealand Agency for International Development.
- Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI). n.d. *Policy – A Multidimensional Approach*. Retrieved January 15 from <http://www.ophi.org.uk/policy/multidimensional-poverty-index/>
- Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. (2011). *Pacific Regional MDGs Tracking Report*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from [http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2011%20Pacific%20Regional%20MDGs%20Tracking%20Report\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.forumsec.org/resources/uploads/attachments/documents/2011%20Pacific%20Regional%20MDGs%20Tracking%20Report_FINAL.pdf).
- Pratibha, J. (2013, 10 July). Fiji AG Halts Forced Evictions at Ba Settlements: Special administrator allegedly threatened residents. *Fiji Sun*. Suva.
- Quandl. (n. d) *Gini Index by Country*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.quandl.com/demography/gini-index-by-country>.

Reddy, M., Naidu, V. & Mohanty, M. (2003). *Impediments and poverty dimension of urban informal sector: the case of Fiji*. (Working Paper). Suva: Center for Development Studies. University of the South Pacific.

Sen, A. (1999). *Development as Freedom*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Storey, D. (2005). Urban Governance in Pacific Island Countries: Advancing an Overdue Agenda. *Discussion Paper 7*. Australia: State, Society and Governance in Melanesia, ANU.

Storey, D. (2005). Urban governance in Pacific island countries: advancing an overdue agenda. SSGM Discussion Paper 2005/7. Canberra, ACT: ANU Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Program.

Storey, D. (2006). *State, Society and Governance in Melanesia Project - Urbanisation in the Pacific*, UNESCAP.

UNDR. (n.d) The Right to Development at a glance. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from [http://www.un.org/en/events/righttodevelopment/pdf/rtd\\_at\\_a\\_glance.pdf](http://www.un.org/en/events/righttodevelopment/pdf/rtd_at_a_glance.pdf).

UNESCAP (n.d). *Local Government in Asia and the Pacific: A Comparative Study*. Retrieved August 4, 2013 from <http://www.unescap.org/huset/lgstudy/country/fiji/fiji.html>

UNESCAP. (n.d). Local Government in Asia and the Pacific: A Comparative Study. <http://www.unescap.org/huset/lgstudy/country/fiji/fiji.html#top>. Retrieved October 14, 2013 from <http://www.unescap.org/huset/lgstudy/country/fiji/fiji.html#top>.

UN Habitat. (2003). *The Challenge of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements*. London, Sterling: Earthscan Publications Ltd.

UNICEF. (2004). The human rights- based approach. Statement of Common Understanding in *State of World's Children 2004*. Retrieved September 30, 2013, from <http://www.unicef.org/sowc04/files/AnnexB.pdf>.

Varman, S. ( 2012). State of Household Food Security at Wailea Squatter Settlement, Suva: Fiji. *International Journal of Health & Nutrition*, 3 (1), p. 19.

Walsh, A. C. (1978). *The Urban Squatter Question: Squatting, Housing and Urbanization*. Suva, Fiji, Unpublished PhD thesis in Geography, Massey University, Palmerston North.