

# **The Namara (*Tiri*) squatter settlement in Labasa: An in-depth Study.**



(Namara *Tiri* squatter settlement homes)

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## **Introduction:**

This working paper is based on an in-depth study of the informal settlement of Namara situated near the town of Labasa in Vanua Levu, Fiji's second largest island<sup>1</sup>. Vanua Levu (referred to as the "North") in many ways is one of the least developed parts of the country. Poverty levels are highest on this island (Narsey 2012) and the post-2006 coup government has adopted a 'look north' policy to stimulate economic development. The choice of Namara *Tiri* over numerous and bigger settlements of this nature on the main island of Viti Levu was because the latter have been regularly researched on issues such as poverty, housing, informal economy, women's empowerment, and tenure; and residents have become tired of being subjects of research. They have been over-researched. Being much smaller than the settlements on Viti Levu, the Namara *Tiri* squatter settlement was more manageable and amenable to a comprehensive in-depth study<sup>2</sup>. This working paper begins with a discussion of the research approach and methods of the study, followed by an outline of the contextual background of urbanisation and informal settlements at the global level, and in the Global South. It then considers urbanisation in the South Pacific and the emergence of informal settlements in Pacific island countries (PICs). This in turn will be followed by an outline of urban trends in Fiji and the very significant recent increase in squatter settlements. These four contextual parts provide the backdrop to the multifaceted Namara case study. The settlement's geography, history, demography, land tenure, housing, economy and socio-cultural characteristics are examined in turn.

## **Research approach and data collection**

The research approach used in this study is social constructivist which identifies the social context of structures, processes and human agency that constitute the world in which the subjects of this study live, and indeed we all live (Creswell 2008). Powerful factors such as the market, the state, and urbanization 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. This epistemological standpoint informed the choice of research methods, which are mainly qualitative.

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<sup>1</sup>The rationale for the research is that there is no readily available in-depth study of informal settlements in the Pacific or in Fiji.

<sup>2</sup> The study was initiated and supervised by Professor Vijay Naidu and in the beginning was a joint project involving Dr.Miliakere Kaitani and Ms. Anawaite Matadradra, a SYLFF fellow and MA in Development Studies student. Dr. Kaitani left USP shortly after the field research started in 2011. Ms. Matadradra has been primarily responsible for the field research component of this study.

A wide reading of the literature on urbanization and informal settlements was undertaken. Internet source materials and official documents were also accessed and perused. The Fiji sources included the most informative Citizens Constitution Forum documentary, *Struggling for a better living: squatters in Fiji* (2007). The study included interviews and participant observation.

## **Interviews**

The field research work was conducted for a period of 8 weeks, 5 weeks in August 2011 and another 3 weeks in January 2012. An interview schedule with topics for open-ended discussions was used. The data gathered related to demography (age, household size and membership), number of children in each household, nutrition (daily intake of food and its composition), housing and environmental conditions, ethnicity of residents and religious backgrounds, livelihoods of residents and their incomes and expenditure, social relationship, community based social support, problems faced by the Namara *Tiri* squatters, access to opportunities and services, and cultures in the squatter settlement (Refer to Appendix 1 for the interview schedule). The average duration of interviews was 45-60 minutes. The language used varied depending on the preference of the respondents; Bauan Fijian<sup>3</sup>, Fiji Bhat<sup>4</sup>, Macuata Dialect<sup>5</sup>, and for a few English was the preferred language.

Interviews with Government officials, community leaders, and school principals were also conducted to supplement and triangulate the information gathered from Namara residents. Again mostly unstructured interview questions on the Namara *Tiri* settlement as well as issues, challenges and future plans were discussed. The respondents included the Commissioner Northern, a Labasa Town Council Officer, a Lands Department official, two nurses and two doctors from the Labasa Hospital, two Education officers from the Ministry of Education Labasa office, two Social Welfare officers, a FENC<sup>6</sup> Fiji officer, two Health Inspectors, a Fiji Bureau of Statistics Labasa officer and four Labasa business and community leaders.

Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of the information being shared. To ensure ethical principles were followed, each interviewee was assured of the confidentiality of her/his

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<sup>3</sup> Bauan Fijian is the lingua franca for Itaukei or Indigenous Fijians.

<sup>4</sup> Fiji Bhat or Fiji Hindi is the lingua franca for Indo-Fijians.

<sup>5</sup> Maucata Dialect is one of several dialects spoken by the Itaukei.

<sup>6</sup> The Foundation for the Education of Needy Children in Fiji (FENC Fiji) provides holistic support and assisting needy children in Labasa. It was formed in 2009 serving as a voluntary, non-political, cause-oriented organization that would provide educational and related support to the children of the poorest of poor families in Fiji. FENC Fiji currently supports children from the Namara squatter settlement.

responses. Fictitious names for respondents have been used to ensure anonymity. All interviews were digitally recorded following the interviewees' consent. To facilitate the process, the respondent was provided with a research proposal outline and a copy of the interview schedule, which were referred to during the course of the interview session.

### **Participant Observation**

Daily unobtrusive observations were made as families set about their routine each day. Beginning with seeing children and adults waking up in the morning and getting ready for school and work, spending the day with family members at home and helping with cooking dinner for the family, telling stories, playing, watching television, eating, fishing and going to church with families. The field researcher became directly involved with settlement families. Joint activities included helping mothers prepare meals, eating and conversing with them and later washing and drying dishes with their children. On some occasions the researcher went with the respondents fishing and observed mothers catch prawns and fish.

Namara *Tiri*<sup>7</sup> settlement is of relatively recent origins but as one of the many mushrooming settlements in virtually all urban localities in Fiji, it represents shifts in settlement patterns and housing pressures being expanded in much of the Global South.

### **Global Urban Trends and Informal settlements.**

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. Urban renewal is also on the agenda of countries in transition. 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.

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<sup>7</sup> *Tiri* means mangrove swamps in Bauan Fijian.

With Europe, North America, Japan, Australia and New Zealand already urbanised with generally more than 90% of inhabitants living in towns and cities, and pursuing non-agricultural livelihoods, the most significant contributing countries to urbanisation are those in less developed regions. It is estimated by Davis (2004) that in the coming generation the inhabitants of towns and cities in the South will double to nearly 4 billion. More generally, the most dramatic feature of this trend will be the growth of new megacities with populations in excess of 10 million, and, even more spectacularly, hypercities with more than 20 million inhabitants. The United Nations report, *The Challenges of Slums: Global Report on Human Settlements* (2003) has also pointed out that significant portions of the urban population will be almost completely excluded from the 'formal' sectors of the economy (UN-HABITAT 2003). Hundreds of millions of new urbanites will be involved in the peripheral economic activities of personal service, casual labour, street vending, rag picking, begging and crime (Davis 2004: 2006).

Cities are popping up across the globe at a faster rate than was ever imagined. According to Davis (2004), "in 1950 there were 86 cities in the world with a population of one million; today there are 400, and by 2015 there will be at least 550". Cities grow at such rapid rates due to the large decrease in the number of people who want to live in rural areas. After 2020, the rural population will begin to shrink (Davis 2004:2). It was anticipated that about a billion more people would be added to towns and cities compared to 125 million in rural areas. Moreover, urban centres increasingly impact on rural hinterlands in terms of their social, economic, environmental and political wellbeing (UN Habitat 2003). There is increased urban sprawl. Indeed, "in many cases rural people no longer have to migrate to the city; it migrates to them" (Davis 2004: 9). In developing countries urbanisation trend is not necessarily accompanied by industrialisation and the expansion of the formal sector economy. Instead, in tandem with the rapid growth of towns and cities, there is spiralling of slums and the informal economy. Far from planned urban settlements, informal settlements have grown in a haphazard fashion, and often account for 20% to 80% of the urban inhabitants.

The key feature of the 'classic' socio- economic models of the so-called 'Third World city' are the presence of large areas of low status squatter settlement housing by the edges of the city, with higher status enclaves remaining in the core of the city often as gated residential developments (Pacione 2009). This division stems from the stark socio- economic inequalities, high rates of immigration from poorer rural hinterlands, and the lack of housing provision in economies that are still relatively poor in global terms (Hall and Barrett 2012).

Slums, shanty towns, squatter and informal settlements have long been identified as 'staging places' for migrating poor. The diversity of 'squatter settlement' profiles ranges from inner city slums to vast, peripheral settlements. The physical characteristics of each individual settlement vary enormously. On a broader scale, informal settlement growth reflects the shortage of affordable housing in urban areas. When census data is matched with housing approval records, there is a big difference between the large increase in the urban population and the much smaller number of officially approved new dwellings. This suggests that many urban households have been pushed into informal housing by both the unavailability and high cost of formal housing. Informal settlements are characterised by sub-standard housing and the lack of basic services such as water supply, electricity, rubbish collection, public transport; unsatisfactory living conditions and unhealthy surroundings, particularly from lack of sewerage, and drainage; and residents have difficulty in meeting their basic needs for food, clothing and money because of insufficient incomes and jobs.

Slums are assumed to be the worst places for people to live in, and it is often taken for granted that the livelihood situations of slum communities are also uniform and homogenous. So pervasive is the latter idea that most studies examining the livelihood situations of slum communities do not compare the socio-economic and cultural differences within such communities (Owusu et.al 2008: 180). The complexity and variety of livelihoods in Nima, a slum in Accra, Ghana were revealed in a recent study (Ibid: 186). Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya is said to be a microcosm of a large city with 'hotels', 'restaurants', 'hairdressers' and other services (The Economist May 3<sup>rd</sup> 2007).

Charles Stokes developed a descriptive theory of slums (1962). His conceptual framework is characterized by the slum dwellers' positive attitude towards moving up the social strata. Distinction is made between slums of "hope" (or employability) and slums of "despair" (unemployability). This distinction based on job-securing ability. The slums of hope and the slums of despair were viewed as homes for the in-migrant and the poor respectively. The theory portrayed slums as places where all the residents aspired to move out for a better life. Stokes (1962) originally characterized these areas as either 'slums of despair' or 'slums of hope' reflecting opposing views as to whether squatter housing is a burden or a benefit to the urban poor. In contrast, Marris (1981) depicted slums as places where people live either by choice (failing to cope with the harsh business competition of the non-slum world) or for the opportunities the slums provide. While Stokes saw slums from the point of view of the slum



dwellers' psychological response to their environment, Marris viewed them as providers of opportunities and services. He suggested the following three characteristics as typical of slums: a neighborhood of small, poorly built houses, surviving within the inner-city; or intruded illegally into patches of public space, people living by small trade, crafts, casual labour, and manual work with strong internal organization providing both support and control; a neighbourhood of tenement housing with absentee landlords, people remaining poor, because the more fortunate move elsewhere, replaced by new immigrants attracted by the city's opportunities. Like Stokes, Lewis "culture of poverty" (1961) and Lloyds "slums of hope" (1979) provide opposite views of such settlements and residents.

Globally, the scale of the problem of informal housing is enormous with the United Nations estimating that over one billion people reside in sub-standard and insecure accommodation with no services (UN Habitat 2003). The presence of large informal housing areas has been a long-standing feature of rapidly urbanizing areas, particularly the mega cities of the Global South (Gilbert 2000; UN Habitat 2003). The limited and precarious income earning opportunities in these cities mean that many poorer households are unable to obtain enough income to afford formal housing. In many countries a sizeable proportion of urban residents actually reside in slums. These include Neza-Chalco-Itza one of Mexico City's many barrios with roughly four million people living in it; Orangi in the township of Karachi, Pakistan; Dharavi in Mumbai; Khayelitsha in Cape Town, South Africa and Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya (International Business Times 2013). A similar pattern of urbanization is taking place in several Pacific island countries (PICs).

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 2012:5). The Pacific is becoming increasingly urbanised. In PNG, Solomon Islands, Tokelau 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: 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 2012:10). Often, urban growth rates in the capital exceed population growth rates, for instance the Solomon Islands (6.2% per annum for Honiara), Vanuatu (7.3% per annum for Port Villa), and Papua New Guinea (4.8% per annum for Port Moresby). Urban infrastructure cannot cope with this rate of expansion and serious issues of sustainable urban policy development have emerged. Numerous issues such as 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.

## **Emergence of informal settlements/ squatter settlements in PICs**

Informal urban settlements are a growing and permanent feature of Pacific towns and cities. Paul Jones (2012) provides a comprehensive but succinct account of the impact of this explosive growth on the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target 7D, ‘improving the lives of a hundred million slum dwellers’. The growth of informal/squatter settlements and rapid urbanization is an intertwined process (Connell 2009:298). While urban areas are seen as places of economic growth, opportunities and hope; the benefits do not trickle down to all urban dwellers. The lack of urban infrastructure to absorb these urban residents, especially those relatively newly arrived have led to the proliferation of informal settlements. These are regarded as cost efficient places to reside given the high cost of living in cities. Connell (2011:121) argued that many Pacific Islanders view impoverished areas such as informal settlements as ‘slums of hope’, and that the proliferation of these settlements is directly related to poverty (Connell 2009:298).

Most of this growth is taking place on land with limited value, disputed title and or customary title. Informal arrangements continue to evolve to provide some security of tenure for settler housing. The arrangements are not equally binding, and in fact residents are ‘tenants at will’. As elsewhere in the world, settlements are characterised by overcrowding and inadequate basic services. Informal settlements in Melanesian cities and towns are largely a post-independence phenomenon. Colonial administrations had placed tight restrictions on the migration of indigenes from rural to urban areas until the 1960s (Chung & Hill 2002). Towns in Melanesia were created principally for Europeans on the assumption that the strong attachment to the land of the indigenous populations would be sufficient to ensure they remained predominantly rural (ibid 2002)<sup>8</sup>. These historical considerations explain the highly restrictive policies on informal settlements, which continue today, and are the foundation of the belief that informal settlements are a temporary phenomenon. There are several complex statutory requirements for establishing a formal settlement in major urban areas such as Port Vila, Honiara, Port Moresby and Suva (Chung & Hill 2002: 10)<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> In Fiji, a system of ‘pass law’ existed which severely restricted the movement of indigenous Fijians without a written permit until the 1960s.

<sup>9</sup> In Vanuatu leases for housing cannot be issued until the plots have been ‘adequately’ serviced. This means that all of the following statutory instruments that apply to residential settlements must be complied with: Municipalities Act 1980, Land Leases Act 1983, Physical Planning Act 1986, Decentralization Act 1994, Public Health Act 1994, Customary Land Tribunal Act 2001 and several others still in the pipeline.

## **Squatter settlements in Fiji**

The growth in squatter settlements in Fiji's town and cities has been labelled alarming (Mohanty 2006). Epeli Waqavonovono, the Fiji Census Director mentioned that "Fiji's urban population has increased as much as 12 percentage points over a 20-year period" (Fiji Times Online 2007). In 1986, 39 per cent of the total population lived in urban areas. This 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 to 49 per cent in 2007 (UNSECAP). The continuation of present urbanization trends implies that by 2030, 61 per cent of the population will be urban. A 2011 study indicated that around 140,000 people were living in approximately 185 informal settlements around Fiji. These are mainly in the Lami-Suva-Nausori, Nadi-Lautoka-Ba corridors and Labasa town area. (Kiddle 2011:102). A scoping mission report done in 2007 by the NZAID estimated that informal settlements were growing by 5 per cent each year (NZAID 2007). Increased urbanization has put pressure on existing urban areas particularly in providing adequate housing and infrastructure to all residents. Consequently, many new migrants have resorted to obtaining and building shelter in squatter settlements in Fiji. According to Donovan Storey, 80% of all new housing built between 2001 and 2006 were informal settlement.

The concentration of Fiji's urban poor in squatter settlements arises not solely because of housing shortage, but also because of the lack of affordable housing. It is true that in the squatter settlements there are many households that face absolute poverty with not enough food and clean water, a well-constructed house, children unable to attend school and household members cannot access basic health services. The poor, however, is not the only group that inhabit the squatter settlements. People live in squatter settlements for reasons such as loss of land lease or to utilize freely available land while saving for a better future (Bryant 1992). The "common perceptions of squatter settlements are that people are lazy, do not contribute to the economy, are thieves living illegally on other peoples land. Squatter settlements are an eyesore and they do not pay rates and taxes. However, most people are forced into squatting because previous governments have failed in their obligations to the people" (Barr 2007: 12). Two decades ago it was recognized that in the informal settlements there were "squatters [who may hold] good jobs such as bus driving or civil servants" (Bryant 1992:4). Similar observations have been made about occupants of such settlements in Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu<sup>10</sup> (Jones 2012).

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<sup>10</sup> It should be pointed out that the relatively better off category constitute a minority in most settlements.

The growth of these informal settlements poses numerous challenges to their inhabitants as well as local and national authorities. Many households do not have access to land and sea resources, and even for those that do, subsistence does not provide a good livelihood. Approximately 35 per cent of Fiji’s population is in poverty with Fiji being off track in achieving a number of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including poverty reduction and maternal and child health indicators (AUSAID 2011). Mohanty (2006:10) also observed that residents of these settlements are exposed to “environmental and health hazards”. Like elsewhere, informal settlements often occupy marginal land, such as riverbanks and flood plains. Some are regularly flooded even in moderately heavy rain. Un-channelled water washes across the ground and into houses, bringing with it the uncollected garbage and the contents of pit toilets. Many residents aspire to have electricity, mainly for lighting purposes, but very few houses are connected to the main supply.

Most settlements are on state land, road reserves, foreshore locations, native land and also freehold land. Insecure tenure underlies the poor living standards in the informal settlements (Kiddle 2011). Government will not allow leases over Government-owned land until plots are adequately serviced with water, electricity, drainage and sewerage (ibid). Municipal councils however have insufficient resources to provide these services. As a result, the process of legalizing housing plot leases is too slow to keep up with demand. This restricts people from investing in better housing, even if they could.

**Table 1: Expiry and Renewal of ALTA Leases 1997–2010**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Leases Expiring</b>	<b>Leases Renewed (and %)</b>
1997	100	50 (50)
1998	213	107 (50.2)
1999	1529	721 (47.2)
2000	1949	1068 (54.8)
2001	467	164 (35.1)
2002	673	280 (41.6)
2003	428	196 (45.8)
2004	351	100 (28.5)
2005	375	131 (34.9)
2006	477	143 (30.0)
2007	666	183 (27.5)
2008	384	106 (27.6)
2009	370	183 (49.5)
2010	461	223 (48.4)
<b>TOTAL</b>	8443	3655 (43.3)

Source: Ministry of National Planning 2010:11

Table 1 shows that between 1997 and 2010 only 43.3% of expired sugar cane farm leases were renewed, forcing many families to search for alternative livelihoods. Mckinnon et al (2007) concluded that from 2011 to 2016 a further 2538 ALTA leases will expire. This is likely to further contribute to increased urban drift and rise in informal settlements. Kiddle (2011) observed that lease expiry is a direct factor behind the recent rapid growth of squatter/ informal settlements in Fiji as ex-cane farming families and their dependents urbanizes. Chung and the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECEA) agreed that, “these people have little other choice than to live in the burgeoning, poorly-serviced informal settlements” (2007:14).

In Fiji’s context, “a widely used definition of a squatter is “a person who is in occupation of State, Freehold or Native land illegally or without any form of security or without any consent from the landowner” (Lingam 2005a: 2). This definition is however not entirely correct as many Indigenous Fijian squatters on native land are living with landowner consent under informal *vakavanua* or customary arrangements either under conditions requiring rent payment or alternative forms of exchange (Kiddle 2011: 87). In Namara *Tiri* settlement, a number of settlers mentioned that they formally approached the paramount chief of Labasa and made a customary presentation, *sevusevu* requesting land to settle in Labasa<sup>11</sup> (Ministry of Health 2006). This type of residents have been referred to by Walsh as “*Vakavanua* settlers” who use traditional practices such as the presentation of *tabua* (whales tooth) and *yaqona* (kava, piper methysticum) to the local *mataqali* in the urban area to gain access to a settlement (Walsh 1979a). Mckinnon et al reiterated Walsh’s observation, “to gain access to native land, settlers are required to get permission and make payment to traditional landowners. Payments may include customary gifts such as *tabua*, *yaqona*, drums of kerosene and increasingly cash. Ongoing ad hoc contributions to the landowners’ events like weddings and funerals, fundraising for the church are also expected (2007:18).

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<sup>11</sup> The request was welcomed but differences have since occurred after some landowners raised concerns about squatters’ accessing their ‘*qoliqoli*’.

## **The Namara *Tiri* Squatter Settlement Study**

### **Location and Geography of Namara *Tiri* Squatter Settlement**

Namara settlement is the largest squatter settlement in Vanua Levu, located nearly 3.6 km from Labasa town on a marginal strip of land partly reclaimed on the northern bank of the Labasa River alongside a band of mangrove swamp (See Satellite Map of Labasa, Appendix 2). It is situated on the river delta formed by the Wailevu, Labasa and Qawa rivers. Houses in Namara *Tiri* squatter settlement are neatly laid out along this swamp<sup>12</sup>. Most houses are built on stilts and at high tide the water reaches underneath most of the houses. The settlement has a mixture of Indo-Fijian and iTaukei residents. The Namara Sewerage Plant and the Labasa rubbish dump are located south east of the settlement. A track on the top of an embankment in front of the houses provides access to the residents. This track demarcates the land on which the informal settlement residents live and rice and sugar cane fields that separate their settlement from the rest of Namara. The settlement itself extends over two kilometres and is divided in two—Stage 1, the earlier settled locality and Stage 2, the more recent part of the settlement.

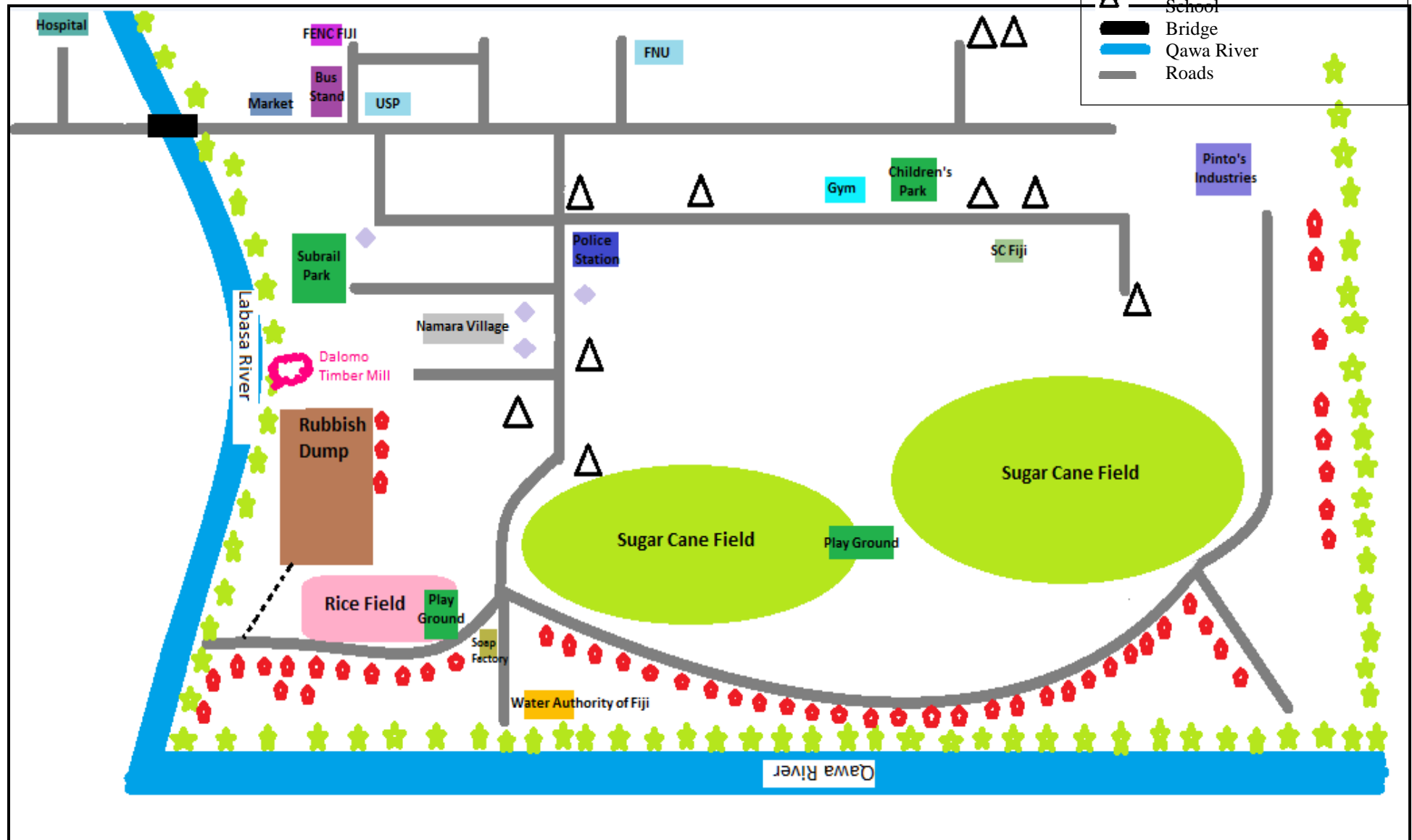
The Namara area is a suburb of the greater Labasa town. Others are Nawadamu, Nasea, Nasekula, Nakoroutari, Vakamasuamasua, Covata and Siberia. Namara itself has an iTaukei village (the Namara village) whose residents' claim immediate ownership of the land on which the squatters reside; and middle to high-income residential areas. The settlement is situated close to four primary schools and four high schools, three tertiary institutions, the Subrail Park, the Labasa Police Station, the Raman Dayal Hindu temple, the Methodist Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church and the Mormon Church, the Ice Plant Factory, the Dalomo Timber Mill, the Old Soap Factory, the Water Authority of Fiji Sewerage Treatment Plant, Labasa Rubbish Dump and Pintos Industries (See Stylised Sketch Map of Namara squatter settlement: 13).

Namara squatter settlement is one of a few squatter settlements in Labasa that has water and electricity sourced to each home, except for two recently established homes. Basic services like health checks, public amenities and transportation are accessible to residents in the settlement. The Labasa Hospital is located about 5 kilometres away and to get to the hospital residents either catch two buses, or walk. The Namara bus is operated by the Dalip Bus Company and provides daily hourly service from 6am to 6pm. However due to poor road conditions the bus routes ends at the intersection at the edge of the settlement (See Figure 1: 13).

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<sup>12</sup> This pattern is very unlike the more background housing the large and crowded informal settlements in and around Suva.

**Figure 1: Stylised Sketch Map of Namara *Tiri* Squatter Settlement**





## History of the settlement

Namara *Tiri* squatter settlement was established more than 30 years ago on reclaimed land belonging to the state<sup>13</sup>. A report by the Ministry of Health in Labasa confirmed that a number of settlers in the Namara area formally approached the Chief of Labasa (the '*Tui*'Naseakula)<sup>14</sup> and presented a *vakavanua request* for land to settle on and to be near schools. In the mid-1990s onwards, with the expiry of land leases there was a large increase in residents. The population in the settlement increased as people took advantage of freely available land. Information about the availability of land was through word of mouth among friends and relatives, co-workers, and members of religious denominations. Only a few people in the settlement are descendants of the earliest residents of the settlement.

The increase in population has meant rising demands for land and for new settlers' permission from the Labasa town council, the Tui Labasa<sup>15</sup>, the Roko Tui Macuata<sup>16</sup> and the settlement executive committee members were required before gaining access to plots of land. Other families sought advice from the Ministry of Land (Labasa) as to whom to seek permission from to reside in Namara. A few iTaukei families followed the *vakavanua* form of arrangement and sought approval from the head of the Namara village *mataqali*. The head of the Namara *mataqali* later asked for money and material goods as payment from them for residing in Namara *Tiri* settlement.

The earliest families to settle in Namara opted to squat on the land, reclaiming it for their own use with old tyres buried under the soil. Reclamation of land in Namara began in the 1980s with the first two families which established houses in the swamp, this number increasing to 70 houses by 2012. Residents do not have legal titles to their house sites. Many of the houses are painted pink, a number of them have little flower gardens in their frontage, and some have a little garden in the back if the land is above the high water mark.

Rural migrants established the settlement for a variety of reasons, one of which included the search for localities in close proximity to Labasa town that did not cost too much in terms of

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<sup>13</sup> Up to the high tidal watermark all land belongs to the state.

<sup>14</sup> There are 3 provinces in Vanua Levu, Cakaudrove, Bua and Macuata. The '*Tui Naseakula*', is the District Chief of Labasa, in the Macuata province. The current holder is Adi Salanieta Tuilomaloma Qomate Ritova of the Qomate clan, who has been officially declared by the Native Land and Fisheries Commission (NLC) in Suva, as the rightful holder of the Tui Labasa title.

<sup>15</sup> 1975- Tui Labasa was Ratu Tevita Qomate Ritova.

<sup>16</sup> Following the death of Ratu Savenaca Erenavonu in the 1980s the Roko Tui Macuata title was passed to Ratu Soso Katonivere (his nephew since he did not have any children). After the death of Ratu Soso, Ratu Aisea Katonivere (his son) became the titleholder till his death in April 2013 and was then succeeded by his son Ratu Wiliame Katonivere.

land. Such a locality also provided access to opportunities for employment and business as well as to education and health services. Some sought to move to the settlement to distance themselves from disputes and conflicts in their villages or settlements of origins. Among the first settlers were two Indo Fijian men cohabiting with ethnic Fijian women who sought to live in the swamp away from prying and gossiping relatives. They settled in Namara *Tiri* in early the 1980s, and later the number of squatter houses gradually increased until the mid-1990s. Table 1 (9) showed, the number of non-renewal of leaseholds which resulted in a spike in the number of people living in squatter settlements in Fiji. Table 2 shows that the expiry and non-renewal agricultural leaseholds in the mid-1990s resulted in a large flow of Indo-Fijian farming families in Namara.

**Table 2: Year of Settlement in Namara by Ethnicity**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Indo-Fijian</b>	<b>Itaukei</b>	<b>Mixed (Indo Fijian/ Itaukei )</b>	<b>Total Number of Households:</b>
<b>1980s-1990</b>	6	3	2	<b>11</b>
<b>1990s-mid 1990s</b>	1			<b>1</b>
<b>Mid 1990s-2000</b>	27	3		<b>30</b>
<b>2000- 2011</b>	16	9		<b>25</b>
<b>TOTAL:</b>				<b>67</b>

In the earliest batch of settlers was the family of Sera and Kishore who made their home in Namara in 1982. The couple mentioned “we heard about Namara during our cane-cutting days, during that time land was subdivided. We had children who grew up here and have moved to other parts of Fiji with their families”. Another respondent who resided in Namara from 1983 recalls, “we used to live close to town before we heard about Namara and free land and decided to move into the settlement. Back then there was only one house in the swamp; it belonged to an Indo-Fijian and an iTaukei woman. He has passed away but we know that his children are teachers now and are living in other places in Labasa”. According to other residents, the first people who settled in Namara *Tiri* have either died or moved to other suburbs of Labasa or to Suva and even abroad. Some of the current residents of Namara settlement are descendants of the earliest settlers who have chosen to stay on in the settlement.

Later settlers simply heard that ‘free land’ was available in Namara prompting their move to the settlement. There was chain migration (Refer to Appendix 3) as some heard from relatives about land availability and chose to build their homes next to relatives already inhabiting the area. The survey data show that 67.5% of the residents have been living in the settlement for more than 8 years, 15% have been living in the settlement for more than 19 years while 17.5% of the residents have been living in the settlement for almost 33 years<sup>17</sup>. Asenaca Muanikau reminisced that in the earliest years of the settlement, “there were only three houses, there was no water and electricity and we used to collect water from better-off neighbours and friends who owned land in Namara. Those were difficult times.”

As in other informal settlements, the growing population in Namara has led to overcrowding, with sub-standard housing conditions and increasing social and sanitation problems. Government recognized the overall health implications on squatters residing on swampy and water-logged areas like Namara. It has responded by providing both water and a road. Namara has a 3-meter wide gravel track through the settlement. The Public Works Department (PWD) maintains the roads leading to the settlement. Initially, <sup>18</sup>the area was not serviced by the PWD water supply so residents had to fetch water from a nearby standpipe connected through Labasa Sangam College and shared the bill with the meter owner, a local resident. Many problems arose whilst the community applied for reticulation after landowners from the Namara *mataqali* and the drainage board stopped the PWD from digging and pipe laying. Respondents in the settlement said that then Roko Tui Macuata generously assisted them in ensuring that water was connected to their homes. Today, more than 98% of households have connection to water and electricity.

### **People of the Settlement**

A total of 67<sup>19</sup> households were surveyed. As indicated in Table 3 below the residents of Namara squatter settlement are mostly from the three provinces in Vanua Levu, which are Cakaudrove, Bua and Macuata. The majority (38 households) of Namara *Tiri* residents were from the Macuata province, where both Labasa town and the Namara squatter settlement are located (Refer to Figure 1:13), while the rest of the households were from the Bua (14 households) and Cakaudrove (15 households).

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<sup>17</sup> Most are children of the earlier settlers.

<sup>18</sup> Since the mid-1990s the Government started looking into the needs of the people.

<sup>19</sup> At the time of the household survey, there were 68 houses however one house was vacant for almost a year at that time and the field researcher was informed that the household occupants had gone to the village.

**Table 3: Places of Origin of Namara residents.**

	Province of Origin			Total
	Cakaudrove	Bua	Macuata	
Number of Households	15	14	38	67

Itaukei household comprised 23% of the settlement, Indo-Fijian Households made up 75% of the settlement and 2% were of mixed ethnicity. There were 40 households in Namara squatter settlement with children between the ages of 1-18years old, 17 households have grown up children while 10 households have middle aged couples and elderly persons. Table 4 below shows that there are 32 households with nuclear families (27 Indo-Fijian, 5 iTaukei), 22 extended family households (13 Indo-Fijian, 9 iTaukei and 2 of mixed ethnicity); 10 single parent families (8 Indo-Fijian and 2 iTaukei), while 1 family is overlapping with another household (a man with two partners and their children). Nuclear families have either a parent or both parents working in low-income jobs. A few single-parent families are recipients of the Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS), some mothers work as house maids, waitresses in restaurants or are garment factory workers. Families may have both parents and a few other family members working. Children of the families which overlap have two households looking after their needs in terms of food, clothing, shelter and education.

**Table 4: Household Sizes and Structures in Namara *Tiri* squatter settlement.**

Ethnicity	Nuclear Families <sup>20</sup>	Single Parent families <sup>21</sup>	Extended Families <sup>22</sup>	Overlapping households
Indo Fijians	27	8	13	1
iTaukei	5	2	9	
Mixed (Indo-Fijian/iTaukei)			2	
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>1</b>

Families in the settlement generally comprised of 4–6 persons, 2 adults and 2–4 children. Table 5 below shows that a majority of households (32 households) comprised 4–5 members. These

<sup>20</sup> Nuclear families comprise of parents and unmarried children.

<sup>21</sup> Single parent comprise families of single adult (generally women) with children.

<sup>22</sup> Extended families comprise of parents and children some of whom may be married with children and other relatives.

were either nuclear or single parent families. Shakuntla Deo and Indo Fijian female said, “we have two happy and healthy children and based on our income our family is big enough”. A few families have households that range from 6-10 people. These larger households are usually extended families or have relatives living with them. Samuela Roko, a head of one such household said that, “I have my nephews from the village living with us, while they attend tertiary school in Labasa. Namara is walking distance to town and this is of great convenience to them”. It is noteworthy that the pattern of household sizes in Namara *Tiri* settlement is not dissimilar to poor households in the country. The UNDP Fiji 1997 Poverty Report stated that “the size of poor households was just over four people, compared to around six in the highest income households” (49).

**Table 5: Family Size/ Number of people in Namara households.**

	Number of people in each Households:										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10		
Number of Households:	6	8	9	20	12	7	3	1	1	67	
				32 households							

**Housing types in Namara *Tiri* squatter settlement**

All houses in Namara are either corrugate iron, wood or both wood and corrugated iron buildings. The variations in house structures reveal the income inequality among households in the settlement and the extent of poverty in a majority of them. Some houses are just dilapidated shacks. (See Figure 2: Shacks and corrugated iron houses in Namara). Families with corrugated iron roofing and walls with wooden flooring are usually those that could afford sheets of corrugated iron or those who were evicted from their former dwellings, and have rebuilt their houses (using material from their former homes) in the settlement. Many of the corrugated iron roofs are re-used, old and rusted. These houses can be built very quickly in a matter of a day or two with extensions made over time. Some houses have leaking roofs and holes in the floors which provide easy access to household pests such as cockroaches, mice and rats. Most wooden houses in Namara are made of waste timber materials or rejects from the Dalomo Timber mill located about 2 kilometres from the settlement and also from other timber mills within the Labasa area.

**Figure 2: Shacks and corrugated iron houses in Namara**



**Table 6: House types by Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Indo-Fijian	iTaukei	Mixed (Indo Fijian / Fijian)	Total number of houses:
Corrugate iron roofing & walls and wooden flooring	29	4		33
Wooden walls & flooring/ corrugate roofing	14	8	2	24
Shacks and pieces of wooden/cardboard material and corrugate iron	7	3		10
				67

Table 6 shows the house types by ethnicity, providing a breakdown of the different types of houses in the settlement. Survey data shows that there are 33 corrugated iron roofed and wooden flooring houses, 24 wooden houses and 10 houses are shacks of pieces of wood, cardboard material and pieces of corrugated iron. The majority Indo-Fijian settlers own corrugated iron houses and shacks. Most iTaukei residents own wooden houses with corrugated iron roofing. The Mixed Indo Fijian/Fijian households own wood and corrugated iron roof houses. The wooden materials are usually discards collected from the nearby timber mill and “borrowed” through relatives and friends working in timber mills near Labasa. The run down shacks are



made of wood, cardboard and corrugated iron gathered from the rubbish dump or other Labasa people’s waste dumped along roadsides. In these homes, cardboard and sacking materials are used to cover the ground. Indo-Fijians predominate in all 3 categories of homes.

Table 7 below shows that 16 houses in the settlement have just a room, 15 have 1 bedroom, 30 have 2 bedrooms, and 6 have 3 bedrooms. The differences in the house size and the number of rooms in each house depict both significant variations in household incomes and levels of poverty. The six houses that have 3 bedrooms are of relatively good standard, are more solidly built and allow for privacy and some comforts of life (See Figure 3).

**Table 7: Number of rooms in each house:**

Number of rooms:	No separate bedroom	1 bedroom	2 bedrooms	3 bedrooms	Total:
Households:	16	15	30	6	67

**Figure 3: Better standard houses in Namara Tiri squatter settlement**



The thirty houses that have 2 bedrooms are not that well-built and are homes of middle level income earners, while the remaining 31 homes that have one bedroom or no bedroom and are

substandard and have little space<sup>23</sup>. Those with no bedrooms use curtains of cloth material to partition their small living room and the bedroom. Households with one bedroom have a small sitting place and a small bedroom. The bedroom however is visible from the entrance of the house. While a majority are low-income earners, those in the last two categories of houses have the lowest incomes. This pattern of houses with a majority being in the range of a single room, one bedroom and two bedroom residences replicate Walsh's (1998) analysis of the 1996 Census housing data.

Survey data indicate that 15% of the houses are fully furnished, 65% of the houses partially furnished, while 20% was barely furnished (See Table 8). Fully furnished house had furniture such as table and chairs, settee, beds & beddings, a television set and radio, refrigerator, washing machine and other electric appliances. Partially furnished houses possessed a bed with few furniture items and appliances such as chairs, washing machine, refrigerator, television set and a transistor radio. The amount of possessions depended on family income. Appliances generally were of less expensive variety. Barely furnished houses on the other hand, had very little or nothing at all except mats, sacks or cardboard sheets to lie on.

Table 8 summarises information on house size and furnishing, the livelihoods of residents and the situation of children<sup>24</sup>. In Namara, as in the case of many other informal settlements, households are not uniformly poor. There are degrees of deprivation and relative well-being. The variations in home furnishing reveal in more details and even starkly, the inequality among households in the settlement and the extent of poverty among a majority of the families. It is evident that not everyone at the squatter settlement is poor and is living in unsatisfactory conditions<sup>25</sup>. The majority of the houses have external kitchens (a smaller building). The makeshift shacks are the lowest grade of houses in the settlement. (Refer to Table 6:18). The President of the Namara squatter settlement committee (an informal association of the residents)

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<sup>23</sup>In many homes as mentioned by a parent, "the boys sleep in one corner, the girls sleep in another corner and the parents try to squeeze somewhere else". On the other hand, the close proximity of easy built house makes people living together more tightly bonded and everything that children and parents do is visible. Activities by parents and children are open to be scrutinized, as there is no space for intimacy and privacy in the household. Close interaction and bonding amongst the parents and children of Namara squatter settlement provides a basis for families to maintain relationships, learn from one another, boost well-being, and people look out for each other.

<sup>24</sup>Information pertaining to the situation of children of the settlement has been used in Anawaite Matadradra's MA in Development Studies thesis, "Child Poverty and well-being: A case study of Namara squatter settlement, Labasa, Vanua Levu, Fiji.

<sup>25</sup>The well-to-do categories of people live in squatter settlements close to urban areas because of the conveniences and not having to pay city/ town rates. They live in these settlements because they cannot afford to rent neat accommodation or to purchase houses in other suburbs. The conditions of the poorest of the poor are not all that different from a good proportion of other people. Disadvantage people are not necessarily those that live in squatter settlements but also those who live in, low cost housing, HART, villages and tenements. These groups of people are extremely poor and struggling like many of the residents in squatter settlement.



said that, “most families in the settlement prioritise meeting their family needs rather than adorning their houses with material things”. A clear majority of the residents were below the Fiji BNPL and some were desperately poor. A minority appear to have the comforts of houses and furnishing found in better placed communities.

**Table 8: House structure, furnishing and livelihoods of residents and situation of children**

Categories	House Structure and Furnishing	Livelihood of Residents	Situation of Children
Very low income	No separate bedroom; house in dilapidated condition, made out of pieces of wooden or corrugate iron; do not have flooring—cardboard & sacking materials used. House are not furnished at all; outside pit latrines and rough enclosures for ablution.	Deprived, with most residents being unemployed. Few families are recipients of social welfare assistance or a pension. Most residents are seasonal employees (sugar-cane cutters, fishermen, vendors who supplement their income with –prawning and fishing).	Materially deprived and worse off; often malnourished and often absent from school; sometimes scavenge in the rubbish dump for food and other items that they may be deemed useful; parental support low; sometimes stigmatized in school by children from well-to-do communities.
Middle income	1 –2 bedrooms, houses partially furnished (settee or dining table; radio, refrigerator, television set); pit toilets and bathroom located outside. Most houses are wooden with corrugated iron roofing.	Includes people with some skills. Self-employed largely engaged in informal activities; few are seasonal employees (sugar-cane cutters, fisherman, vendors–prawning, fishing).	Partially deprived; a few children are malnourished; sometimes absent from school; some children doing very well in school, older siblings in University/ some working.
High income	2-3Bedroom houses that are fully furnished; belongings include motor vehicle, bicycle, television, radio, refrigerator, settee, washing machine, other electric appliances.	People with formal employment / salary earners with relatively higher standard of living; those who receive remittances from children abroad and a few residents own farms within the Macuata province.	Rarely absent from school; nutritionally healthy; parental support high; do not do exceptionally well as children from the middle category.

Survey data also indicates that a majority of families in the Namara squatter settlement do not have suitable housing, bedrooms, toilets, bathrooms, and kitchen and are either exposed to a cold or hot environment. Families squatting along the Namara mangrove swamp are deprived and have limited access to basic amenities like adequate sanitation, or garbage disposal, proper latrines and sewerage. These families are the most deprived as they are exposed to the ill effects of the environment and the weather. Furthermore, they reside in very unhygienic surroundings where the high tide washes up garbage disposed by a few of the residents and by those living along the Qawa River. Plastic bags and other non-decomposable waste, scavenged from the nearby dump, were thrown into the mangrove swamp. A Public Health respondent stated that “it is important to carry out health awareness issues on these simple but critical issues”.

Figure 4 and Table 9 below show the different types of lavatories used by residents in the

settlement. At the two extremes are eleven homes in Namara that have flush toilets and the other eleven that do not have toilets at all. Defecating in the open is not unusual in the settlement<sup>26</sup>. Two houses have water-sealed toilets while the majority (forty three) have pit latrines. Sixteen per cent of the households have toilets located inside homes while eighty-four per cent have toilets located outside. Excreta in the fields and swamp as well inadequately covered pit latrines contribute to the unhealthy surroundings, attracting flies and cockroaches, among other disease carriers.

**Figure 4: Types of lavatories in Namara squatter settlement.**



**Table 9: Types of toilet in Namara squatter settlement**

	Toilet				Total
	Flush toilet	Pit toilet	Water-sealed toilet	No toilet	
Number of Households	11	43	2	11	67

Defecating in the open and excreta in poorly covered pit latrines endanger the health of all residents especially children. Diarrhoeal diseases and hookworm transmission may escalate from pit latrines as high tide washes waste and disposed rubbish inland where houses were located. Poorly built latrines can lead to an increase in flies. Namara settlers have also been using old tyres in reclaiming land at the edges of the mangrove swamps but the delay in filling in soil creates breeding ground for mosquitoes.

In the next section, the paper examines the data on livelihoods of residents in the settlement.

<sup>26</sup> In Fiji using the outdoors for relieving oneself is common place in squatter settlements and in villages.

## Making a Living

The majority of households in Namara squatter settlement (80%) reported a weekly income of less than \$100 (See Table 11:27). This is well below the national poverty line weekly wage of \$260 for households with 2 adults and 2 children. The highest rate of poverty is among agricultural construction, tourism and finance workers (FBoS 2011:12). The 1997 Fiji Poverty report stated that, “people have jobs; their incomes are insufficient to meet their basic needs and provide for some security for the future”. Income inequality is a major reason for poverty in Fiji and the basic minimum wage of \$2.00 an hour, which is below the poverty line, has just been instituted. Although there are other factors which contribute to poverty, wages are recognised as a key factor. The Fiji Poverty report had stressed that overcoming poverty was not just a matter of providing more employment; it was a matter of making sure that all those in full-time employment received wages above the poverty line (UNDP 1997:112).

In Namara squatter settlement, a majority (70%) of women were housewives, with the rest working as house maids, or in the sugar cane fields as labourers earning \$1-\$3 per hour. Men’s occupations on the other hand ranged from daily labour—often seasonal, wage work, and small business or trade. A majority of adults in the settlement are casual workers who also earn a living through farming and fishing. Most poor households have someone in paid employment, but the jobs they hold, do not pay enough to keep them out of poverty (Barr 2003:16). The survey found that many family members were employed either on a full-time or a part-time basis. Most of them were in low paid jobs. 80% of residents employed in Namara squatter settlement are in low status occupations<sup>27</sup>. The types of employment are summarized in Table 10:

**Table 10: Types of occupation of Namara male household heads.**

Fish boat laborers/Seasonal Workers	Unemployed/Social welfare recipients	Industrial Workers	Security Guards	Government Workers	Drivers	Priest	Total
30	10	13	6	2	3	3	67

Table 10 shows that thirty household heads or members were labourers, fisherman or seasonal

<sup>27</sup>Male- Cleaners, gardeners, grass cutters, unskilled labourers, wheel barrow boys, street vendors, bottle collectors, cane-cutters, fisherman, farmers, taxi drivers, bus drivers, security guard. Female- Garment factory, retail outlets attendants, domestic workers, self-employed (selling prawns, fish, crabs, food, snacks or canteen business).

workers, with ten being unemployed and were recipients of the social welfare poverty benefit scheme. The Poverty Benefit Scheme (PBS), which replaced the Family Assistance Program, is for the very poor with no income support. The precise amount of support provided depends on the size of the household. The maximum allowance for a month is \$150, which is inclusive of a \$30 food voucher. When seen in the context of the cost of living in urban areas, the PBS support, which ranges from \$60 to \$150, is rather meagre, but for the desperately poor, it is critical. Fourteen of the residents work in low skilled positions in household product manufacturing and garment factories. Six security guards from Namara squatter settlement did shift work, two household members were government workers and served as stock men, three were drivers, and three household heads were priests- a Christian, a Hindu and a Muslim. There were others who supplemented their household income by cultivating crops on land in their rural villages; their farm produce were used for consumption as well as for sale in Labasa.

As observed by Walsh (1998) and Bryant (1992), households in informal settlements tend to rely on multiple streams of income or sources of livelihood. High cost of living and increasing fuel prices have compelled many low-income earners doing two or three different low-income jobs. Manasa Tuibua, a household head mentioned that, “I work during the day in a supermarket and during the weekends I work as a security guard. This way I am trying to supplement the income for the family so that I can send my children to school. Family time is always limited and it is quite frustrating. However in the long run it is for the benefit of my family”.

To supplement seasonal work, families in Namara were engaged in income generating activities such as fishing, prawning, crabbing, planting vegetables in large drums, and goat and chicken rearing. An Itaukei resident, Sakiusa Boila mentioned that, “access to land is very limited, so I plant in the village and bring produce back to Namara for our daily family consumption”. Another woman, Mereani Tiko said that, “my husband is a security guard. His wages are not enough for the family. I had saved up and bought big pots, which are loaned out to households who have ceremonies, functions like birthday celebration or deaths. I also used to run a small canteen before but had to close it since it is not legal to have canteens or shops in informal settlements”. Some older children work in shops and in manufacturing industries nearby and they assist in providing for their family needs.

The proximity of the Labasa rubbish dump (an open dump) to the settlement is hazardous<sup>28</sup> to

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<sup>28</sup> Flies, mosquitoes, cockroaches, mice, rats breed in the dump.

the people due to the unpleasant smell, the presence of flies and other pests, and also because a few poor families scavenge from the dump for food, scrap metal and cans to sell and support their families. For some really poor families, onions and potatoes disposed by supermarkets were collected from the dump, washed and dried and later used in meals (See Figure 5). According to families living close to the rubbish dump, it is busiest with scavengers when trucks from supermarkets dump food items not considered fit for human consumption. Observations showed that people from nearby houses, Namara village as well as those from other informal settlements (Siberia, Nakoroutari, and Vakamasuamasua Sub-division) further afield in Labasa came to collect disposed foodstuff and other items from the rubbish dump. Some cycled on their bicycles with big sacks to retrieve usable items such as potatoes and onions; canned products including tinned fish and meat; and, containers, plastic bags, and sacks.

**Figure 5: Pictures of Labasa Rubbish Dump with disposed supermarket onions and assortment of rubbish, and two scavengers returning to the settlement with their bags.**



### **Household Incomes**

It is apparent from the description relating to types of houses, and livelihood of residents that there was a considerable variation in their monthly income. As shown in Table 11 below, a majority of the settlement households earned between \$100 to less than \$40 a week<sup>29</sup>. This is taking into account cash income and subsistence food/ prawns, crabs and fish together with farm produces from villages. A majority of households in Namara that earned \$100 and less were usually PBS recipients or seasonal labourers. A few others that earn more than \$100 to over

<sup>29</sup> Seasonal income particularly for cane cutters and seasonal laborers vary for all categories.



\$200 a week were usually full time employees or own fishing boats, civil servants, and businessman who own sugar cane and rice farms within the Macuata area.

**Table 11: Weekly Household Incomes**

	\$101-\$200	\$50-\$100	\$40 or less	TOTAL:
<b>Households Numbers:</b>	14	30	23	67

Poverty in the settlement placed enormous constraints on the ability of many families to afford a nutritionally adequate diet. In the settlement (as in other parts of Fiji), a large quantity of carbohydrates such as rice and flour, *dalo* and cassava, sweet potatoes and yam and breadfruit (when in season) was consumed. Noodle was becoming a regular ingredient in meals and as a snack food. Vegetables that were easily accessible like *rourou*, *bele* and *tubua* were usually part of their diet. For many households, dhal, fish, crab, and prawns were the main sources of protein. For those who fished, if there was enough catch for the day, the surplus was sold. Some families relied more on canned food (fish and meat). Insufficient and inadequate nutrition and poor sanitation all have a major impact on residents' health and well being. There was some evidence from Namara of underweight and malnourished children, periodic bouts of diarrhoea and dysentery among residents and even stunted growth among children.

**Table 12: Average Expenses of Namara Tiri families**

Consumption Expenditure	%	Non-consumable Expenditure	%
Food	70	Church giving/Tithe (Esp. for iTaukei families)	10
Water	1	Wedding gifts	
Energy	10	Birth donations	
Transportation (Bus fare)	3	Death Contribution	
Entertainment	1	Loan Payment	4
Health	1	Hire Purchase	
		Lay-Buy	
	<b>86</b>		<b>14</b>

As shown in Table 12, a large portion of family income was spent on food for nearly all households; a good proportion of the food budget was spent on imported or manufactured food items namely rice, flour, and tinned stuff such as canned fish and mutton. Most families in

Namara bought groceries on specials in the supermarket, not knowing that the goods self-life was coming to an end. For some families staple food items such as vegetables, taro and cassava were supplied by relatives, while others buy these at the Labasa market. A few families had small gardens in front of their yards.

The survey showed that 32% of the households in Namara had kitchen cupboards stocked with food while the other 68% hardly had anything to show. In the latter case adults or children may run to the shop for a litre of kerosene, matches, bread, rice, salt, sugar, onions on a daily basis. Few families in Namara budget their income on selected basic needs such as food, clothing, health services, electricity, cooking gas, kerosene and transport while the majority have budgets that are just enough for food. A majority received hand me down clothing’s from family friends, NGO’s and church organizations. Households were also found to have expenses such as electricity, telephone, cooking gas and kerosene however not all households use cooking gas and not all households had landline telephone service though this service is available in their locality. For many households electricity was a privilege and consumption was strictly controlled to avoid large bills.

**Table 13: Different Energy Sources for cooking used by Households:**

	Firewood	Kerosene Stove	Firewood & Kerosene Stove	Cooking Gas/Firewood/Kerosene	Total
<b>Number of Households</b>	19	4	39	5	67

Table 13 shows variations in energy usage by households in Namara. The majority used firewood and kerosene stoves for cooking while the relatively well-to-do families in Namara used cooking gas. An Indo-Fijian woman respondent stated that “if it rains then only do I use my kerosene stove but if it does not then I cook with firewood”. Another person from a higher-income earning household indicated that, “the gas cylinder usually takes us about 6-7 weeks of cooking so it’s convenient and around the same price as a gallon of kerosene which is about \$7.20 a week while a gas cylinder refilled is \$43/6-7 weeks”. For a majority of families in Namara, cooking using firewood from the mangrove swamps and the waste timber from Dalomo timber mill was more affordable. A few families also bought firewood for \$1 a bundle

from nearby convenient stores. Preshila Prasad opined that, “the food is really tasty when cooked using the firewood when compared with food cooked on the kerosene stove, so most of us prefer cooking using open fire”. A majority of the families had easy built small open fire cooking sheds outside their houses.

**Figure 6: Namara resident cooking lunch using firewood**





## **Social and Cultural Dimensions**

There was a diversity of social groups and cultures in the settlement. A majority of the residents of Namara *Tiri* settlement were young people below the age of 25 years, and ethnically the majority was Indo-Fijian. Communication in the settlement is in Fiji *Bhat*, Macuata dialect, Bauan Fijian and to a much lesser extent, English and other indigenous Fijian dialects such as Buan and Cakadrove. Nearly all residents are multi-lingual in conversational Bauan Fijian and Fiji *Bhat*. Indo-Fijian inhabitants also identify themselves as ‘north Indians’, and ‘south Indians’ on the basis of which part of India their ancestors had come from. A majority of the settlers belong to the latter group. Although formerly their ancestors’ spoke Dravidian languages such as Tamil, Telegu, Malayalam and Kannada more recent generations have lost their mother tongues and speak Fiji *Bhat*. The differences between north and south Indians extend to differences in rituals relating to marriages and funeral rites but these are generally handled in ways that do not cause undue disagreement.

For both Itaukei and Indo-Fijians, family and kinship relations were pivotal. Kinship terms such as *bhaini*, *bhaia*, *tamai*, *tinai*, *tacina*, aunty and uncle were used within ethnic groups and between them. As noted earlier there were a number of households that have close kinship ties (See Appendix 3), and most often this network of relatives tended to mostly interact with each other. Kinship ties were maintained beyond the settlement through on-going links with villages of origins (especially by Indigenous Fijians) and participating in significant social events. Such events occurred both inside the settlement and beyond, and included births, deaths, graduation, marriages and installation of chiefs. Table 12 (26) showed that gifts and donations during their events constituted significant expenses for households.

Religion also played a significant role in the community’s life. Indo-Fijians were mainly Hindus and Muslims, the former were primarily Sanatan Dharm followers (orthodox Hindus) and the later were mostly Sunni (orthodox Muslims). The Hindus had their *mandalis* and periodic worship at the Ramandayal temple, and the Muslims regularly attend Friday prayers at the nearby Mosque. There were a minority of Arya Samajis (reformist Hindu denomination), Ahmediyas (Muslim denomination) and Indo-Fijian Christians in the settlement. The majority of iTaukei families were Methodist while a few families attended the Assemblies of God church or the Seventh day Adventists church. The places of worship were located close to the settlement (Refer to Figure 1:13). They attended the Namara Village Methodist Church, the Namara Seventh Day Adventist Church or the other Christian Churches in town. A few Namara residents

had religious or family meetings / fellowship in their homes.

Religious events like Easter, Diwali, Holi, Eid and Christmas were usually spent with families and friends in the settlement. An Indo-Fijian woman resident of Namara settlement said that “when we celebrate Diwali, we invite our iTaukei friends and families from the settlement to come home and we share with them what we have. They always remember us when they celebrate Easter or Christmas”. An iTaukei male respondent mentioned that, “we are all related and our ethnicity is not a barrier to how we live our daily lives”.

While girls and women do engage in economic and social activities outside their homes, they were generally responsible for domestic work, and care giving. Men were perceived as bread earners and normally engaged in outside work. Generally, common residence in the settlement was accompanied by a good number of the inhabitants being employed in same types of work. They worked together in shops, manufacturing industries, fishing boats and the sugar cane fields. A young female respondent said that, “we walk together to work, have lunch together and return home together”. A strong sense of community and social solidarity emerged out of these daily patterns of living and working together. In the view of the President of the settlement association, “we are all people from different ethnicity, culture, background, religious groups and walks of life, but we live together in unity and peace”.

However, relationships do turn sour from time to time and there were long standing disputes between individuals and families in the settlement. One such unresolved source of tension was between a former community leader and the current leadership which arose out of allegations that he had unduly profited from funds raised by residents for the laying of water pipes. This person denied that he fraudulently appropriated any money raised by the community and has since (2000) refused to have anything to do with the other residents. Other disputes among residents arose from thefts (chickens, goats, clothes, fishing gear), perceived insults, noise making, fights among children, and allegations relating to persons engaging in sex work and homosexual activities. While both kava and alcohol were consumed by some residents, the outskirts of the settlement was often used during weekend nights by outsiders for drinking parties. A long time woman resident who was also a member of the executive committee of the residents’ association and nick-named ‘police woman’ said that such intruders were the people who give the settlement a bad reputation by their noise making, swearing and fighting. The situation was not helped when some young men and women of the settlement join the party.

Disputes among residents are largely settled on an informal basis by recognized community leaders. More serious offences such as the case of incest have been referred to the police.

### **Community Solidarity**

Family and community bonds in Namara helped to ensure that close relatives and neighbours had a strong sense of belonging and sense of security. Family life crisis events not unusually become community events, as observed by the President of the residents' association, "we attend gatherings around the settlement that vary from weddings, birthday, deaths and religious meetings". Besides contributing in cash, and in kind on such occasions there is also informal social protection for those who were especially disadvantaged. An older female resident declared that, "I don't have family here with me, I am all alone but I don't worry because my neighbours and friends are my family. They are caring and helpful and provide me with meals and some of my needs". *Kerekere* ("to request") is a way of life among residents. Families usually *kerekere* from their neighbours for items such as salt, matches, sugar, flour, tinned fish, and curry powder, which are most often than not, given freely with the understanding that those who have asked today will reciprocate in the future. However for some families giving to others can become burdensome.

**Figure 7: A family in Namara, enjoying the company of friends over a bowl of kava.**



Social life in the evenings for men in the settlement was over a basin of kava as evident by the grog pounding each evening along the only feeder road that links the settlement to the main road. Card games also provide an important past time. The availability of television in some houses served as an important source of entertainment. A female respondent indicated that 'we

love watching soap opera series like Shortland Street, Filipino, Korean and Hindi soaps and movies and will never miss an episode”. The Namara *Tiri* youths have cleared a patch of grass in front of their houses to create a volleyball court. There is no proper playground therefore the children use the empty rice field near their houses to play games such as volleyball, soccer, rugby and ‘*pani*’.

**Figure 8: Children of Namara squatter settlement playing rugby after school**



A youth from the settlement stated that “we have recently started an initiative whereby the older working children are levied fees of \$2.00 every month to help pay for soccer balls, rugby balls and a goal post and better sporting facilities”. The President of the settlement association kept the money collected which was to be used to purchase sporting equipment for the children. The children also go swimming and fishing in the river. Those who had tin boats paddle these in the river. The smaller children roll old used tyres and also played marbles and “*gulli danda*”.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Slums or squatter settlements have become widespread in the countries of the Global South because of the immense change in residential patterns from rural areas to urban centres. This large influx of people has put tremendous pressure on housing, roads, water and electricity supply as well as on employment, and on educational and health services in towns and cities. A similar transition has been occurring in PICs and in Fiji with very similar outcomes of urban facilities not being able to cope with the rapidly increasing population growth as a result of internal migration. The Namara *Tiri* settlement research provides an in-depth case study of an informal settlement that has emerged in the outskirts of Labasa Town.

The study shows that lack of affordable land and housing together with possibility of employment and access to services such as education compelled a majority of the residents to settle in Namara mangrove area. The non-renewable of agricultural land leases contributed to a spike in the number of residents and to over-crowding in the settlement. Far from being an eyesore and a parasitic community, the inhabitants of Namara *Tiri* are generally hard working and law abiding citizens who do the more menial and low status work needed in Labasa. The research findings also revealed that in this settlement as in many other such settlements in the country, nearly all residents were in the lower income brackets but they were not all desperately poor. A very small minority was relatively well to do. A good proportion was depended on social welfare and community support.

People in the settlement were mainly Indo-Fijian and indigenous Fijian who were all from within Vanua Levu. They exhibit a diversity of languages, cultures and religion but were able to easily communicate with each other because of their familiarity with conversational Bauan Fijian and Fiji *Bhat*. Households in the settlement had multiple livelihoods to survive. This applied especially to those that have seasonal and casual work. Prawning, crabbing and fishing are important sources of protein for the families but also provided cash income to them. The family, religion and community were very important for individuals in the settlement. Social activities revolved around these institutions. Children and youth had their peer groups and engaged in a range of sports and leisure activities.

While the Namara *Tiri* settlement has many prominent aspects that it shares with informal settlements elsewhere in Fiji and the Pacific, it is also fairly unique. A feature common to all such settlements is that they are places where many of the urban poor reside, and Namara is no

exception. The residents also share with other informal settlements their lack of security of tenure; the reality is that they are tenants at will. However, the settlement has access to public water supply and is connected to the power grid which is not always the case in other such settlements. Namara also has relatively easy access to health and educational services that are often much more difficult to access for slum and squatter settlements elsewhere. The settlement's immediate environment is not especially healthy being located in close proximity to the mangrove swamp, and a majority of the houses are substandard, nevertheless, the study shows that residents do live complex and diverse lives which they see as being much better than that available in rural localities. In this sense Namara *Tiri* settlement is a slum of hope.

### **Recommendations**

The Namara *Tiri* settlement reflects several quintessential characteristics of squatter or informal settlements. The first of which is the absence of secure tenure; second, the relative poverty of some residents, and the desperate poverty of other residents; third the substandard housing of the latter; fourth, the inadequate sanitary conditions given that 11 of the 67 of households do not have latrines, and many of those that do, have pit latrines that are not covered; fifth, the settlement is on marginal swamp mangrove land that is affected by tides that bring garbage from further upriver; sixth, there proximity of the Labasa rubbish dump raise issues of public health which includes not only pests, but also scavenging by the poor; seventh, the need for improved road access to the settlement; eighth, the absence of recreational facilities, especially a park for children to play in. In light of these characteristics the following recommendations are being made to the national and local governments:

1. Steps be taken in the near future to clarify both the ownership of the *Tiri* land (whether state-owned or *mataqali* owned) and secure tenancy arrangements be made.
2. Government has provisions for individual and family support under the 'Poverty Benefit Scheme' for the poorest of the poor. This provision should be enhanced further and also extended to all those who fall below an agreed percentage below the poverty line.
3. Initiatives and programmes of squatter settlement upgrading and relocation have been underway. The availability of both public water supply and electricity to the Namara settlement residents reflects actions relating to upgrading of the settlement. However, more targeted actions are needed to provide the desperately poor with improved housing. Collaboration between government and civil society organisations are proving beneficial in this regard in Suva and Lautoka.

4. The Ministry of Health officials and their local government counterparts need to carry out sustained public health education campaigns in the settlement, and assist residents in constructing proper latrines.
5. The pollution of the rivers in general and Qawa River in particular has been a long standing issue and this is a matter for the Ministry of Environment to take up urgently.
6. Scavenging rubbish dumps by poor people has increased in all such landfills near urban areas. This again is a matter for health officials at national and local government levels to address.
7. The road that runs through the settlement needs more regular maintenance than it is currently.
8. The makeshift park in front of Stage 1 should be expanded and upgraded.

In providing free education, free bus transport and textbooks the government has relieved the financial burdens of family's whose earnings are below the poverty line. Given that malnutrition is becoming an issue for children from such families, it is timely to introduce a school meal programme.

## **Postscript**

A draft of this working paper was taken back for discussion with community leaders and residents of Namara *Tiri* squatter settlement, representatives of pertinent Government departments and Non-Government organization. The findings in the report were generally accepted by the community. Government Officials and NGO representatives found the research report a useful resource document that will be important for policy information.

However a young male tertiary student at the settlement mentioned that having discussed Table 11 (26), which shows the weekly household income of the residents with his father, they felt that income of those in the highest income category was underestimated. It was reiterated by discussants that there are seasonal variations in the earnings of fish boat owners and their employees, taxi and bus drivers, sugar cane cutters and seasonal labourers. Another resident expressed her disquiet about the number of youths who are school dropouts. Young men hang around in groups, engaging other younger school boys in truancy; encourage the consumption of alcohol and smoking while young females are vulnerable to teenage pregnancy.

It is noteworthy that the information recorded in the report is valid for 2011-2012. Houses and size of households have increased since then. More houses have been erected in Stage 2 of the settlement. Currently (in January 2014) they number 74 altogether. A number of residents complained that some new residents were 'rich people' who could afford to reside in well-to-do suburbs. More than 60% of the residents have reclaimed land and several homeowners have started small gardens and chicken and goat rearing on their small allotments (approximately an average 180 sq. metres).



## Glossary

**Ahmadiya-** An Islamic reformist denomination.

**Arya Samaj-** Is the Hindu reform movement founded by Swami Dayananda.

**Bele-** A spinach like fern.

**Bhaini-** sister, a term for an Indo-Fijian woman.

**Bhaia-** brother, a term for an Indo-Fijian man.

**Dalo-** Taro

**Fiji Bhat-** Hindi spoken by Indo-Fijians.

**Gulli danda-** The game is played with two sticks: a large one called a *danda*, which is used to hit a smaller one, the *gulli*. A sport similar to cricket.

**Holi-** A Hindu spring festival celebrated in February or March.

**Itaukei-** Indigenous Fijians

**Kerekere-** The verb from which the term derived meant “requests,” or, in economic contexts, “solicit”: Kerekere involved soliciting goods, resources, services, or use rights in goods or resources.

**Mandali-** Hindu religious club

**Mataqali-** Indigenous land owning group/ unit

**Moca-** Bauan Fijian Spinach

**Pani-** A game played by two teams of equal number of players using used cans and a small ball.

**Qoliqoli-** Indigenous Fijian customary owned marine area.

**Ratu-** Chiefly title

**Rourou-** Taro leaves (often cooked with coconut milk)

**Sanatan Dharma-** Orthodox Hindu denomination; most Hindus belong to this denomination.

**Sunni-** Orthodox Islam denomination to which a majority belong.

**Tabua-** whales tooth (used predominantly for ceremonial exchange).

**Tacina-** Bauan Fijian, for brother or sister

**Tamai-** Bauan Fijian, for father of

**Tinai-** Bauan Fijian, for mother of

**Vakavanua-** Cultural values, customary practices and institutions of indigenous Fijians that reflect the ‘way of the land’. *Vakavanua* agreements are informal arrangements used to allow the use land.

**Veitiritiri-** mangrove swamps in Bauan Fijian. *Tiri* is the shorter version.

**Yaqona-** kava made from piper methysticum plant, the roots of which are prepared and used as a ceremonial and social drink.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview Schedule for Namara Research**

### **Introduce yourself.**

**Confidentiality of interview/use of information and purpose of research made clear to respondent. Also indicate that ‘report of research’ will be shared with his/her community.**

### **Observation**

Location of house, materials with which house has been made, number of rooms and location of kitchen and toilet. Furnishing etc.

### **Personal Information**

Position in Community. Gender, Age, Level of Education, Place of Birth and Current Residence, Employment. Assets – bank a/c, savings, land, home, car, pc, etc

### **Oral history**

Year of settling in Namara  
Reasons for moving to Namara  
What challenges, if any during and after settlement

### **Family Information**

Marital Status, No of children/grandchildren  
Children’s education  
Children’s employment/livelihood

### **Community Information**

Number of households in the settlement  
What do community members do for a living? – Employment and livelihoods.  
Community members’ economic situation – income levels/ access to land and other assets, financial and other obligations  
How many are managing to look after family?  
How many having difficulties?  
Level of unemployment  
Religion (s) –faith/spirituality  
Language spoken among members  
Who do you mostly relate to in the community?  
Inter-ethnic relationships  
Social occasions  
Marriage patterns and intermarriages

### **Access to Resources**

Land tenure arrangement for house  
Access to land for farming  
Cooking fuel  
Connection to water and electricity

### **Leisure/Entertainment**

Cultural events, sports, playing card games, videos/movies, partying –kava, beer, talanoa, church activities

### **Difficulties and challenges**

Access to land  
Access to credit/finance  
Access to education  
Access to health services  
Employment and livelihood opportunities

### **Meeting challenges**

Actions taken to deal with difficulties and challenges  
Accessing government services/departments (which ones?)  
Accessing church authorities  
Working with landowners  
Working with NGOs  
Micro-finance initiatives



**Appendix 2: Satellite Map of Namara squatter settlement, Labasa. Vanua Levu**



Source: <http://oceania.world-towns.net/melanesia/fiji/northern/vanua-levu/labasa>

**Appendix 3: Namara Chain Migration and Kinship relationship patterns in the settlement.**

