



URBAN HYMNS

Managing urban growth

Key messages:

- » Urbanisation needs to be seen and managed as a national priority, and a new mindset is required that looks positively, not negatively, at the urban process.
- » Urbanisation is happening in the Pacific at increasing rates; and in most cases we are simply not well enough prepared to cope with the challenges and opportunities that presents.
- » The study of urbanisation is not new in the Pacific - what has been missing is the political will to acknowledge and tackle the problems, and the coordinated effort across government agencies and non-government actors that is required to address these issues.
- » There is a need to gain a better understanding of the relationships between urban and rural areas to better inform policies to define how we want our urban centres to evolve, and how we can better serve remote outer island populations.

“
Our towns and cities are growing because of natural increase in urban population, rural to urban migration, and the incorporation of formerly rural areas to urban areas.
 ”

Sarah Mecartney, UN-HABITAT
 Pacific Programme Manager (2011)

Discussion
 paper:

18

JULY 2011

Most people thinking about the Pacific picture a tranquil rural setting, surrounded by coconut trees, the serene ocean and living an agricultural life that is plentiful in fruit and root crops with a sea teeming with fish. That postcard perfect landscape is changing. The population numbers are not as dramatic as the world’s mega cities, but the Pacific is facing simultaneously high population growth and rapidly accelerating urbanisation. In most cases we are simply not well enough prepared to cope with the challenges and opportunities that presents. Urbanisation needs to be managed, and urban management needs to be viewed as a national priority. It requires governments to give serious consideration to housing, health, education, investment and employment policies; it requires people to think about how they want to live - to define what it means to be a Pacific islander in the 21st century.

The Pacific’s population is booming, with estimates indicating it now exceeds 10 million and is expected to reach 15 million by 2035. According to a recent report of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community ‘the growth rate means that another 188,000 people – equivalent to the population of Samoa – are being added to the total each year’¹. In every country of the Pacific, urban population growth is exceeding the national growth rate. Yet, with a few exceptions, urbanisation has been ignored or viewed as a negative trait to be stopped, as governments and development agencies have tended to focus their attention on rural development. Trying to keep people out of cities and towns is futile, and stands in the way of initiatives to ensure growing populations have access to the services and facilities required to sustain and improve people’s quality of life.

We are increasingly an urban species, and since 2008 more than half of the human population, 3.3 billion people, are living in urban areas. By 2030, it is expected that almost 5 billion people, or 60 per cent of the world’s population will be city dwellers². In its 2008 report, the United Nations Population Fund stresses that:

Urbanisation—the increase in the urban share of total population—is inevitable, but it can also be positive. The current concentration of poverty, slum growth and social disruption in cities does paint a threatening picture: Yet no country in the industrial age has ever achieved significant economic growth without urbanisation. Cities concentrate poverty, but they also represent the best hope of escaping it.

For too long, there has been policy paralysis on urbanisation. But a combination of high unemployment, climate change and a looming energy crisis means radical new thinking is needed about how to best evolve our cities and towns for the future.

.....
 1. SPC, 2011. ‘Pacific Islands’ population tops 10 million’. Secretariat of the Pacific Community Statistics for Development Programme, published in *Islands Business*, June 2011
 2. UNFPA, 2008. *State of World Population 2007 - Unleashing the Potential of Urban Growth*, United Nations Population Fund - <http://www.unfpa.org/swp/2007/english/introduction.html>

Urban growth in the Pacific - by 2030 there will be another 1.3 million people living in our urban centres

Country	Urban growth rate 2010-15	Total growth rate 2010-15		% Urban population	Urban population	Total population
Solomon Islands	4.11	2.08	2010 estimate	18.6	98,000	531,000
			2030 forecast	29.2	223,000	762,000
Vanuatu	4.05	2.18	2010 estimate	25.6	62,000	243,000
			2030 forecast	38.0	135,000	356,000
Papua New Guinea (PNG)	2.50	1.74	2010 estimate	12.5	840,000	6,708,000
			2030 forecast	18.2	1,669,000	9,183,000
Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI)	2.35	1.86	2010 estimate	71.8	45,000	63,000
			2030 forecast	78.8	65,000	83,000
Kiribati	1.99	1.49	2010 estimate	44.0	44,000	100,000
			2030 forecast	52.3	68,000	131,000
Samoa	1.91	0.64	2010 estimate	23.4	45,000	192,000
			2030 forecast	33.2	72,000	217,000
Tonga	1.89	0.35	2010 estimate	25.3	26,000	102,000
			2030 forecast	36.9	43,000	115,000
Fiji	1.43	0.46	2010 estimate	53.4	456,000	854,000
			2030 forecast	64.4	591,000	918,000
Tuvalu	1.38	0.41	2010 estimate	50.4	5,000	11,000
			2030 forecast	61.5	7,000	12,000
Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)	1.36	0.58	2010 estimate	22.7	26,000	113,000
			2030 forecast	30.3	39,000	129,000
Palau	1.32	0.42	2010 estimate	82.7	17,000	21,000
			2030 forecast	91.6	22,000	24,000
Nauru	0.62	0.62	2010 estimate	100	10,000	10,000
			2030 forecast	100	11,000	11,000
Niue	0.2	-1.41	2010 estimate	39.9	1,000	1,000
			2030 forecast	53.7	1,000	1,000
Cook Islands	-0.41	-1.49	2010 estimate	76.3	10,000	13,000
			2030 forecast	87.3	10,000	11,000

Source: Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects: The 2006 Revision and World Urbanization Prospects: The 2007 Revision*, <http://esa.un.org/unup>

Restricting movement - a flawed policy

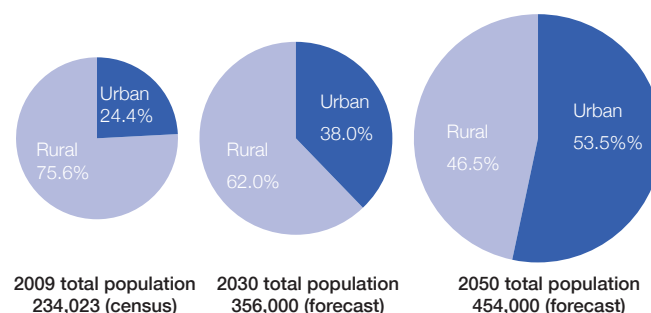
Betio, the main port and commercial centre of Kiribati's South Tarawa capital, has a higher population density than Hong Kong. In the 2009 *City Lights* documentary, the former Secretary to Cabinet, Margarita Baaro reflected that 'in the past there was a dedicated effort to limit the movement of people from the outer islands to Tarawa'³. Despite national constitutions enshrining freedom of movement, the policy of restricting urban drift has been all too prevalent in many island countries. In acknowledging the commitment of recent coalition governments to developing a national urban policy, Vanuatu's former prime minister, Edward Natapei recalled:

Historically the migration of people from rural to urban areas in Vanuatu was regarded as an undesirable trend that needed reversing, mainly because most of those arriving at urban centres usually find low wage employment, become poverty stricken, do not have access to land, live in fast growing squatter settlements, do not have access to basic services and often become embroiled in anti-social and illegal activities. Of utmost concern in Vanuatu is the tendency of those moving to towns to become alienated from their culture and traditional values and practices⁴.

3. *City Lights Are Calling - Urbanisation in the Pacific*, 2009 [DVD] Noumea: Secretariat of the South Pacific, Commonwealth Local Government Forum and the Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific International

4. Opening statement by Hon. Edward Nipake Natapei, Prime Minister, at the National Urban Policy Dialogue, 6-8 October 2009, Mele Village

Vanuatu population and urban growth 2009 - 2050



Sources: Vanuatu 2009 Census and the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat (2007)

Population densities - some comparisons

LOCATION	PEOPLE PER SQ. KM.
Ebeye, Marshall Islands	38,600
Seaside, Port Vila, Vanuatu	31,000
Betio, South Tarawa, Kiribati	10,400
Hong Kong	6,040
Singapore	5,880

SOURCE: Haberkorn, G., 2008. 'Population and Development: Facts, Fictions and Follies' in *New Zealand Population Review*, 33/34: 95-127. Population Association of New Zealand

An urban generation

The practice of 'sending people back' to rural areas is no longer tenable. Despite the prevalence of urban poverty, people are voting with their feet. Moreover, there is a new generation of urban Pacific islanders, who have no island base to return to.

Traditionally, communal living and subsistence economy has been the Pacific way. It is that sense of belonging to community that draws people together. Thirty years ago, urbanisation was a foreign concept for Pacific island countries, far from the thoughts of ordinary villagers. Island life for many was abundant whether they were living in remote inland areas or large coastal villages. But fast-forward to the present day and projections of the movement and growth of people in urban areas is at an unprecedented rate in the capitals across the Pacific. A range of factors bring people to urban areas, including more work opportunities, access to basic services and the variety of town life. Interviewed in *City Lights*, Dr. Paul Jones of the Urban and Regional Planning Program at the University of Sydney says

people move for a variety of reasons, such as health, education and the excitement of the bright lights of the bigger towns and cities. People see urban areas as an alternative to rural life. Sadly, for many, people, they are moving from one situation of poverty to another - that is, to towns and cities. In other words, urban poverty is seen as a better option than staying in rural poverty⁵.

The majority of people in Fiji, RMI, Tuvalu, Palau, Nauru and Cook Islands already live a predominately urban life (see table opposite). While PNG has the lowest urbanisation rate (12.5%) in the Pacific, which reflects the country's comparatively vast population and land mass, it has the highest numbers of people living in cities and towns. According to the PNG Office of Urbanisation (2010) currently 1 million Papua New Guineans are urban dwellers, and that figure is estimated to rise to anywhere between 1.7 and 3 million people by 2030. The Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have the region's highest growth rates, with their urban populations forecast to increase by approximately 4 per cent per annum between 2010-15. If this trend continues the urban population will double every 17 years. Looking ahead, sustained growth at this pace will result in over half of the Vanuatu population living in urban centres by 2050 - in numbers this will be the equivalent to the entire current population of the country.

The challenges of urban growth in the atoll states (RMI, Kiribati and Tuvalu) and micro island states (Palau, Nauru and Cook Islands) is further compounded by economic and spatial limitations, the impact of sea level rise associated with climate change and the changing social and cultural dynamics attributed to such high levels of urbanisation and migration. Outward emigration from the Polynesian countries of Cook Islands, Samoa and Tonga, and the Micronesian countries of FSM, Palau and RMI has also had an effect on the urbanisation experience. According to Dr Gerald Haberkorn, the director of SPC's statistics for development programme:

the lower incidence of urbanisation across Polynesia, with only Cook Islands featuring [a] sizeable urban population, does not mean that urbanisation is absent from their demographic landscapes - in the cases of Samoa and Tonga, it simply means that urbanisation is taking place elsewhere, largely in neighbouring New Zealand and Australia⁶.

5. In *City Lights Are Calling* - op.cit.

6. Haberkorn, G., 2008 - op. cit.

Inside Fiji's settlements

Lakena is a settlement just outside Nausori town. Pina^{}, a 45 year old housewife living in Lakena, lives with her husband and four children. The family moved to Lakena 20 years ago where her husband now works as a mini-bus driver. 'We have a corrugated iron house with one living room and two bedrooms and we have a pit toilet. We just connected electricity two years ago. We used to use kerosene lamps. When we first arrived in Nausori we lived with some relatives before we managed to save some money to build our house. Land is very expensive so we were happy we could find some space here. It has become easy for me to do many things living here because I am near the town and it's easy to find transport to go to other places. We used to live in the village in Tailevu but when our son was 5 we decided to move to Nausori so we can send him to school. Now the other three children are attending school in Nausori and I'm happy about it. My eldest son now works as a salesman in town and he studies at the University of the South Pacific part time. Life here is hard because it is expensive. It floods almost every year and we lose our belongings. It is difficult to buy everything back after a major flood so now we have built our house a bit higher but it was very expensive for us because timber is so expensive. I still think it is better to live here near town than the village because its close to the hospital, the schools and I can also sell some of my vegetables in the Nausori market to help my family'.*

* Not the interviewee's real name.

SOURCE: From personal interview translated from Fijian.

Understanding the rural-urban relationship

The prevailing urban settlement patterns and distribution of political power in the Pacific reflects the strong connections people have to their home islands, villages and communities.

We know from national census data, household income and expenditure surveys (HIES) and other studies that poverty in the Pacific is increasingly concentrated in urban areas, and occurs predominately in the squatter and informal settlements. These settlements are typically overcrowded and under-serviced (water, sanitation, electricity). The substandard living conditions are a consequence of location (mostly on the outskirts of towns and cities - often referred to as *peri urban* areas, which is a more palatable term than slum or shanty town - they fall outside of municipal boundaries and responsibilities); insecure land tenure (which deters investment in housing and other infrastructure); and the absence of alternative forms of affordable housing (even though rents in settlements are often highly over-priced).

Urban settlements continue to flourish despite the lack of planning and services, and have become a permanent feature of the Pacific landscape despite the prevalence of temporary dwellings and the informal nature of the relationship between land owners and occupiers. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP) has identified that 'the extent of informal and squatter development in Pacific island countries indicates that land availability and housing affordability are problematic'⁷. Urban growth adds another dimension to the complexity of customary land ownership and development in the Pacific. The absence of clear land policies contribute to the confusion over jurisdiction for 'urban issues' (e.g. defining who is responsible for managing peri-urban areas) and tenure security for urban residents.

7. UN-ESCAP, 2004. *Review of Pacific Sustainable Urban Management and Poverty Issues*. Presentation to the eight session of the Special Body on Pacific Island Developing Countries, 20-21 April 2004, Shanghai, China.

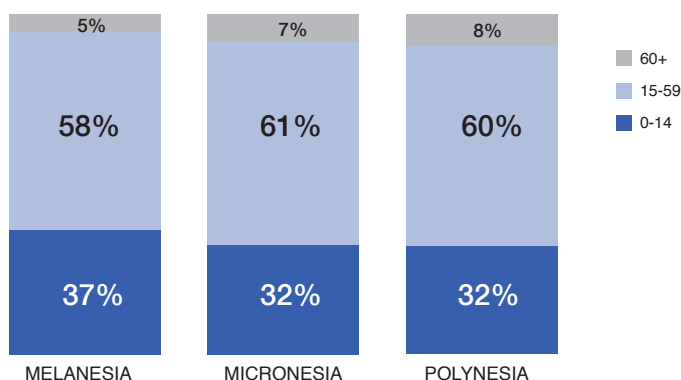
We also know that urban areas are by and large the main contributors to national GDP⁸ and are therefore critical for a country's economic growth. While disparities clearly exist, the populations and economies of rural and urban areas are increasingly interconnected. Continuing advances in transport and communications technologies are facilitating the growing movement of people, goods, capital and information between urban and rural areas.

Since independence many governments have attempted a policy of decentralisation of government functions. Often with little success. Part of the problem is that policy-makers often do not take the rural-urban linkages into account and divide their attention along spatial and sectoral lines. In his most recent assessment of Pacific urbanisation, Dr Jones observed

an increasing share of national wealth, (GDP), has been produced in urban areas. Urban economic activities have strengthened the viability of rural economic development by providing markets, processing centres and trans-shipment points for rural produce and goods. In this context, urbanisation can be viewed as the spatial translation of the production structure of their economies across varied geographical island settings. In some [cases], this has been characterised by a relative declining share of primary (rural agricultural) production sectors, and an increased share of secondary, industrial, and tertiary service sectors, all primarily located within urban areas. As both rural and urban areas remain economically and socially connected it is not possible to understand the situation in urban areas without understanding the economic and social underpinnings of rural areas, and vice versa.⁹

A better understanding of the social, cultural, economic and political relationships between urban and rural areas will better inform policies to define how we want our towns and cities to evolve, and how we can better serve remote outer island populations. While the Pacific's urban centres are driving increasingly service orientated economies, declining agricultural productivity and limited formal sector employment growth means we are increasingly feeding ourselves on imported foods, and have created few job prospects for our young people. This is particularly the case in the three countries with the highest population growth rates - Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and PNG - countries that also have the youngest Pacific populations and do not have access to the migration channels afforded to their Micronesian and Polynesian neighbours.

Population by broad age group by region 2010



Source: Secretariat of the Pacific Community Statistics for Development Programme, 2010

8. Gross domestic product (GDP) is one of the primary indicators used to gauge the health of a country's economy. It refers to the market value of all final goods and services produced within a given period.

9. Jones, P., 2011. 'Urbanisation in the Pacific Islands context' in *Development Bulletin*, No. 74, June 2011. Canberra: Development Studies Network, Australian National University.

Managing urban growth - the way forward

We cannot say that urbanisation policy has stagnated because few Pacific nations have integrated urbanisation policies to begin with. Only Fiji, PNG and Samoa have government ministries dedicated to housing and urban development. Yet the study of urbanisation is not new in the Pacific - the issues of mounting urban poverty, unemployment, escalating inequality and shifting social norms have been well documented since the 1990s. The *Pacific Urban Agenda* (PUA) was identified in the *Pacific Plan* as a priority concern in 2005. UN-HABITAT and UN-ESCAP continue to work closely with a range of other regional organisations to assist Pacific island countries to implement the PUA, and the Pacific has a small but talented pool of urban planners and development specialists. With a few notable exceptions, what has been missing is the political will to acknowledge and tackle the problems.

Urbanisation will continue to intensify. Recognising this reality will help focus the efforts of national and local governments on the practical urban management measures. As would changing the tone of discussions and viewing the process of urbanisation as an opportunity to enhance the general well-being of Pacific peoples - with better access to jobs, housing, health and education.

Prioritising urban management doesn't mean abandoning rural development or traditional cultural practices. The opposite is true: planned urban growth is needed to develop the national economic engine. Developing the productive capacity of the agricultural and fisheries sectors to feed growing urban centres will revitalise rural economic opportunity. Investing in education and skills training will help align a growing services based work force. Reducing the threat of poverty, unemployment and access to basic services will enable people to care more about their environmental, social and cultural obligations.

There are a number of steps that can move the urban agenda in the right direction and ensure we can benefit from urbanisation.

1. National political leadership to accept the reality that urban populations will continue to increase, and that the option of 'sending them back' is no longer legally, economically or morally viable.
2. We all need to understand that 'poverty' in the Pacific is now predominately an urban phenomenon and 'hardship' a rural one - policies need to reflect this reality, and governments and donors no longer need to fear investing in urban areas.
3. None of us can avoid the hard discussions and decisions in relation to land. If land issues are not put on the table and resolved there will be conflict.
4. Embracing the foundations for successful cities of the future - those that promote socially inclusive development, co-ordinate urban policy across all areas of government, adapt to climate change, move boldly to renewable energy, sustainable consumption and production, and where communities are linked with good communications.

So far the issues surrounding urbanisation have been ignored, perhaps in the hope that the next generation will deal with it. Well the next generation is here, and its time to act.