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# State Society and Governance *in* Melanesia

DISCUSSION PAPER

Discussion  
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## URBAN GOVERNANCE IN PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES: ADVANCING AN OVERDUE AGENDA

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Over the past decade there has been an evident shift in the attitudes of Pacific peoples, governments and donors to the continued urbanisation of the region and the serious challenges emerging as a result. While not denying the obvious needs of rural development, and the connection rural poverty has with the pace and character of urban development, the region's cities are clearly, and belatedly, on the policy map.

Pacific urban regions are both typical and unique. Like many cities of the developing world, housing, services, infrastructure, poverty and the environment are all significant issues. Marginalisation, conflict and growing inequalities also threaten to undermine social cohesion and the building of urban societies in complex cultural environments. A 1996 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) summary of the key issues facing urban areas still holds value:

- Land shortages and conflicts, where traditional systems came into contact with modern ones;
- Rapidly increasing informal settlements, and a lack of affordable and relevant private housing;

- Incomplete, inadequate, and failing infrastructure and services;

- Inadequate institutional capacity and human resources to deal with issues.

In addition to these almost overwhelming challenges Pacific urban regions present further exceptional aspects. These include an acute shortage of available and affordable land; limited material and human resources; fragile environmental contexts; often ethnically diverse populations; and ominous crime statistics. There are obvious and significant variations in the urban issues facing the region. However, if we were to track recent changes and future projections the following observations hold:

- Populations are set to grow, with limited out-migration opportunities (see Table One);
- The vast majority of population growth will be in the form of peri-urban and 'squatter' settlements, they will constitute the future Pacific city and must be considered permanent;
- Housing will be primarily self-help, and squatter settlements will become a more significant part of the urban landscape;

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The contribution of AusAID to this series is acknowledged with appreciation.

- Inequality and poverty will grow. Employment will be predominantly in the informal sector;
- Environmental conditions will worsen, and both organic and toxic waste will present significant and growing threats to health;
- Infrastructure and services will only reach the minority of urban population;
- Crime and violence will increase and undermine attempts to create urban unity.

## FINDING EFFECTIVE RESPONSES

These problems will not surprise those who deal with urban issues in the Pacific. But it is important to take stock of the scale and breadth of the challenges facing towns and cities in the region. The urgency of problems and pressure on policy vary, but the costs of inaction everywhere are dangerous.

Appropriate, affordable and relevant forms of governance are yet to be found, but must be if the above needs and tensions are to be effectively

managed in a context of rapid demographic growth and change coupled with globalising economies which are vulnerable to external shocks. The capacity to deal with such demands is limited, which has led many to claim that the Pacific faces an urban nightmare. But some states and cities have succeeded in arresting decline and others are successfully negotiating innovative paths forward, from which much can be learned. In the island states of the Pacific are to be found a unique set of circumstances. In some ways, these exacerbate the problems; in other ways they may point the way forward to their amelioration.

*Who* drives this future direction of cities is also important. Central government, a significant part of Pacific urban development, municipal councils and local government, Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), community or clan-based associations and donors all vie for dominance. Without a degree of balance, mismanagement and confusion prevails. Finding the best form of governance for the region's cities is thus critical.

From this paper three main themes emerge: the importance of peri-urban areas, the emergence of conflict as a result of weak government and stressed traditional systems and finally, the need for new and more inclusive systems of governance.

**Table One: Pacific Urban and National Population Figures**

	Last census	Population	% urban	Annual urban growth rate % / (national rate)
<b>Melanesia</b>				
Fiji Islands	1996	775,077	46	2.6 / (0.8)
New Caledonia	1996	196,836	60	2.8 / (2.6)
Papua New Guinea	2000	5,190,786	13	2.8 / (2.7)
Solomon Islands	1999	409,042	16	4.3 / (2.7)
Vanuatu	1999	186,678	21	4.2 / (2.8)
<b>Micronesia</b>				
FSM	2000	107,008	21	-2.4 / (0.2)
Guam	2000	154,805	93	n.a / (1.5)
Kiribati	2000	84,494	43	5.2 / (1.7)
Marshall Islands	1999	50,840	65	1.6 / (1.4)
Northern Mariana I.	2000	69,221	90	3.4 / (3.3)
Palau	2000	19,129	81	2.2 / (2.1)
<b>Polynesia</b>				
French Polynesia	2002	244,830	52	1.6 / (1.8)
Samoa	2001	176,710	22	1.3 / (0.9)
Tonga	1996	97,784	32	0.8 / (0.3)

Source: *Pacific Island Populations 2004, Secretariat of the South Pacific Community*

Increasingly both material (infrastructure, housing, services, etc.) and nonmaterial (state-society relations, governance, etc.) needs are seen as complimentary to sustainable urban development. This working paper will primarily focus on what can be achieved in terms of creating more inclusive and effective forms of governance, building on international and Pacific perspectives and experiences.

## **NEW FORMS OF URBANISM – THE PERI-URBAN INTERFACE**

It has been an opening assertion of almost all donor and academic literature on the Pacific for over a decade that in less than two generations more Pacific Islanders will live in or near cities than in rural environments. In the largest state, Papua New Guinea, the total urban population is set to reach four million in the year 2030, nearly half of whom will live in informal settlements (PIR, September 8, 2003). In Fiji there are now projected to be 82,000 people living in 182 informal settlements. By 2006 the Suva-Nausori corridor alone will be home to an estimated 90,000 squatters (PIR, August 19 & October 18, 2004). A World Bank (1995) study estimated that the peri-urban proportional population of Honiara, Port Vila and South Tarawa would be in the order of 30%. Even in one of the smallest states, Kiribati, population growth in South Tarawa is causing problems of overcrowding and conflict over land. Similar urban problems of overcrowding and associated health and environmental threats are faced by other microstates such as the Marshall Islands (Connell and Lea, 2002: 119-121). All Pacific Island states are undergoing an urban transformation.

However, these facts mask a much more complex reality which will require a fundamental shift in the way we see and plan for cities. To some extent, in the Pacific, it is problematic to define what, or where, a city lies. Nowhere are the limitations of the urban boundary more symbolic, in terms of residence, livelihood or 'belonging'. Subsequently, the region is witnessing 'new forms of urbanisation', for which new and innovative responses and structures are urgently needed (see Table Two).

If we briefly look outside the region, there is also a significant re-evaluation of peri-urban areas and the 'boundaries' between urban and rural areas. Recently there has been much debate about the relationships between urban and rural areas and this is highly relevant to Pacific Island states. In almost every significant

city in the region there lies synergies between the urban and rural, to the extent that it is no exaggeration to claim that much of the current (and future) shape and development of the regions cities is taking place in peri-urban environments. 'Rural' residents depend upon the city for paid employment, schools, access to health care, credit, services and infrastructure. Likewise, the urban economy is dependent upon 'rural' or peri-urban populations for food supply, labour, and land-based livelihoods. This co-dependency is likely to continue, and even grow in importance.

It is also apparent that peri-urban areas have emerged as critical sites of conflict in the urban Pacific. They are in practice 'grey areas' of 'negotiated territory', overtly urban in terms of their economic function and, often, of their physical form. Yet they are still rural, for municipal councils are kept at arms length, the state frequently has limited legitimacy and village-based structures of leadership and social organisation often continue. This mix of urban lifestyles and aspirations with rural social structures and customary leadership is often volatile for whilst forms of customary social control operate, not all members of a settlement will have a kin or even ethnic connection to the society at the centre. Where the affiliation is purely economic (through the paying of rent), social cohesion and adherence to customary law may be highly problematic and forms of direct action (either to force compliance or to rebel) will not be uncommon. Similarly, those economic relationships, often involving the leasing of land and the building of dwellings frequently occur outside the jurisdiction of state law, thus providing a high degree of insecurity and continual renegotiation. In such circumstances, tenants' rights receive little prominence. In addition urban areas in the Pacific reflect a meeting point between traditional and modern law, with regard to tenure, resource management, planning and ownership (Chung and Hill, 2002).

Peri-urban growth is likely to continue well into the future. There are few signs of the pace of urbanisation slowing and, given the inflexibility of urban municipal boundaries, the vast proportion of future growth will be in these peri-urban margins (unless there are measures to increase significantly the density of the core of urban centres). They will continue to be both 'borderless places' – places where expansion continues and the bounds of authority are unclear – and sites of conflict, where the urban poor, recent arrivals, existing landowners, new entrepreneurs and politicians battle for land, jobs and housing.

Land tenure is a further major theme. The maintenance of customary land ownership is a political reality in most Pacific Island states. There is little if any prospect of conversion of customary title to freehold – even if such was held to be desirable – and, if anything, there is political pressure to reverse land alienation and return land (such as Crown leases in Fiji) to communal title. This is a barrier to the advance of conventional forms of urban governance, for strong customary title means that both state and local governments are severely limited in extending their influence beyond their present limited margins. Even in countries where there are legal powers to expand urban boundaries, such as Vanuatu, it has been politically impossible to do so. Urban planning and urban services will remain restricted. Yet the continuation of customary tenure, in itself, should not pose a barrier to further urban expansion. Whilst not without some major problems to be faced, the leasing of customary land for agricultural and tourist development – often with secure and long-term leases – has proven that communal tenure can adapt to handle commercial land uses. What is critical here, in learning from the experience of agricultural leases, is that there are mechanisms which ensure that the actual landowners (rather than their supposed agents) maintain a stake in their land as well as a fair economic return whilst tenants are assured of security and a degree of certainty (Ward and Kingdon 1995).

## THE LIMITS OF FORMAL AND INDIGENOUS INSTITUTIONS

It is apparent that existing forms of governance are inappropriate for peri-urban areas and their future. The models that are available – managerial, neoliberal/entrepreneurial and customary – all have something to contribute but none gives a complete answer. Peri-urban growth creates a key problem of governance: who is responsible for management of growth (housing, services, land use, environment etc)? The central state may have putative power but this is often weak and contested at the local level (by customary landowners or local power brokers for example - Huffer and Molisa 1999); city councils are usually poor and urban expansion now extends well beyond their limits; and local rural systems of governance are proving incapable of handling major urban issues. In the Pacific, the World Bank (2000:15) outlines the problems as such:

national government planning and control that does not involve local authorities in a coordinated manner; poor communication among municipal government, rural local authorities, and urban villages in the same metropolitan area; a tax burden to support urban development that falls unevenly on beneficiaries in the urban region; and a lack of capacity to address the needs of the population, which vary greatly across jurisdictions

**Table Two: The Relationship between local governance and rural-urban (peri-urban) development**

Negative:

- Where local government/governance is unaccountable;
- Resources and capacity are inadequate;
- There is a lack of legislative and financial autonomy and;
- Insufficient integration with national planning.

Positive:

- Accountable and responsive;
- Adequate resources and capacity;
- Clear identification of local needs and priorities and how these can best be met;
- Facilitates economic and social linkages;
- Regulates local natural resource management;
- Decisions and resources are integrated with national government;
- Partnerships with local representative and community-based groups.

*Adapted from Tacoli (2003:9).*

Equally, traditional forms of governance are also unlikely to adequately respond to these pressures. In the Melanesian states tenure is fluid and contested. Such a situation, combined with steady rates of urban migration, has encouraged many chiefs and/or self-appointed 'landowners' to seek rent in terms of demanding cash for housing and land. At times, this has met these immediate needs of both parties – recognition of landowner rights as well material needs of migrants. Such a situation though is potentially explosive, as the case of Honiara demonstrated in 1999 and parts of greater Noumea in recent years. There is little hope of a return to the singular managerial model when the very extent of the city has spread well beyond the spatial limits of any one management system.

## THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE AND INCLUSIVE LOCAL GOVERNANCE

We have seen, in the case of the Solomon Islands, the most dramatic consequences of urban mismanagement and peri-urban conflict leading to national conflict and collapse. In this case the municipality's inability to control peri-urban growth, provide services and manage the emerging conflict between landowners and migrants directly led to conflict which spread well beyond the city. Likewise conflicts in peri-urban Noumea between Wallisian migrants and Kanaks led to a civil emergency in 2002 and there have been similar crises in Port Vila and Port Moresby. These experiences should act as a warning siren throughout the region. They resulted from rapid population movements, scarce resources (especially land), poverty and weak governance, with 'responsibility' for informal peri-urban settlements often falling between

financially-strapped and disempowered municipal authorities (or uncoordinated government departments) and provincial (rural) authorities with little capacity or interest to act. In each case this created a vacuum of authority in which tensions escalated.

Empowering local authorities and communities will be an important part in a more sustainable urban future for the region. Recently UN-HABITAT (2002:7) has stated that:

Without the participation of those at the local level – local authorities and the urban poor – sustainable city-wide strategies cannot be achieved.

It has been argued that a key challenge for development in the 21st Century is the building of new relationships between citizens and government; the apex of this is the local, and particularly, local government and governance (Gaventa, 2001). This calls for a wider engagement of the state with a range of other stakeholders affected by urban development. It also calls for greater local ownership of the decision-making process, and increased institutional and technical capacity (UN-HABITAT, 2002:7). These relationships, with a broad array of organizations and individuals, are increasingly seen as the key to effective urban governance and the realization of important development targets, such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

This is also reflected in the shift from thinking about urban or local government to urban/local *governance*. The latter reflects a more fluid and diverse set of relationships, less about hierarchy and regulations and more about alliances and partnerships with non-state actors (Stren, 2003:17). Successful, local governance then needs to be cross-sectoral, collaborative, non-hierarchical, local, and reflecting its context (Stren, 2003: 26) (see Figure One)

Figure One: A traditional State-centred model

Central Government  
Provincial Councils  
Local Government  
Municipal Councils  
Customary Councils  
Traditional Authorities

Derived from: Dayaratne and Samarawickrama, 2003: 104

We should therefore be talking more about local governance in the urban context than local government – but local government can play a key role. Cities are becoming more complex over time, in terms of their social and cultural diversity and development needs. We need to connect the space that lies between formal state structures, and civil society (McCarney, 2003: 33). Local government, and forms of local governance occupy the pivotal space between global demands, states and increasingly poor, marginalised urban spaces and are in a position to reconcile the tensions between them (McCarney, 2003:39).

## POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF DECENTRALISATION

In many cases municipal authorities must tackle these significant and growing challenges with stagnant or declining per capita income sources which undermine their ability to respond to needs (Devas, 2003; Connell and Lea, 2002:108). Local governments are often ill-equipped and under-resourced to deal with increasing demands of basic services, shelter, land and greater representation (UN-HABITAT, 2002: 6). This is especially difficult as the poor are now making up a greater proportion of urban populations. Local urban governments throughout the developing world are finding themselves facing demands that outstrip their material and nonmaterial capacities.

Local government, in the past, has been the neglected tier of governance (McCarney, 1996:3). Recently, though, the Forum Secretariat has reaffirmed its role, stating that ‘local governments are the key change agents in urban management’ (PIFS, 2004:29). However, decentralisation in itself is not the answer: it offers no panacea for an under performing central government and its departments. In bringing local government into the picture we should act to ensure that efforts are made to sustain the ‘legitimacy and the capacity of local institutions to carry out their new functions’ (Tacoli, 2003:6). This may mean a combination of legal, financial and administrative reform.

We should also be aware of the dangers of fragmentation as a result of answers being sought through devolution, privatisation or abandonment. It is the *relationships* between institutions, and between these institutions and other authorities and communities (particularly the most marginalised) which is as important, if not more important. Communication, facilitation,

partnership and an ability to respond, rather than lead, are all building blocks of effective local governance. In almost all cases throughout the Pacific, it is not possible for one actor to determine the urban agenda and drive through the policy objective. Local governments have neither the resources, capacity nor, sometimes, the legitimacy, to implement policy. Partnerships then become critical, as does facilitation. There needs to be much more work done in the region in terms of building effective partnerships between local government, and other key actors such as traditional councils, NGOs, and so on. In short we need to move from exclusive governance, to inclusive governance (McCarney, 2003: 40). Cities may have been planted in the region as European structures, but they can no longer survive in this form.

While this poses great challenges for all stakeholders there is now much greater support and interest in innovations to improve on past strategies. In the following pages I will outline some examples from regional and national perspectives.

## REGIONAL AND NATIONAL INITIATIVES

At the regional level there is now far more interest in urban issues and a greater willingness to engage with the region on urban issues. The number of recent reports on the region’s cities and peri-urban areas attest to this. It is an opportunity to be capitalised upon.

Reports on the region’s cities have evolved from an early concern with services and infrastructure delivery toward a focus on creating sustainable cities through consensus rather than conflict. Most recently donors have been concerned about conflict resulting from rapid urban growth and weak management and there has been more of a focus on relationships. One of the current goals of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) is to find ways to mainstream the roles of local community leaders in municipal and provincial governance processes (UNESCAP, 2004). The World Bank has lamented a ‘lack of voice’ in terms of the lack of appropriate policies, poor urban management and weak service delivery (World Bank, 2000:x). Instead the World Bank sees the idea of national and regional ‘urban summits’ as benefiting from a collective approach to urban issues. At these summits policymakers should share initiatives which are working, especially in regard to inclusive

and cross-cutting programmes which successfully draw upon and benefit a range of government and non-government stakeholders (World Bank, 2000:21). These programmes should be tracked, modified and shared both within and outside the region through a website.

These concerns have also been picked up by regional organisations which have also expressed a concern over social tension brought about by failing urban governance. In 2003 the Pacific Regional Workshop on urban management in Nadi stated that the rural-urban interface 'should be recognised as a critical and mutually reinforcing element in national economic development, and considered in the formulation of development strategies'. Significantly, governments also endorsed the important role of both national and regional strategies in developing better urban management and the critical role partnerships – involving community, private sector and government – have to play in urban development (PIFS, 2004:25-6). A recent UN Development Programme - The Urban Governance Initiative (UNDP-TUGI) project in Suva, part of a wider effort of the UNDP to support creative urban governance efforts globally, brought about two stakeholder workshops, training sessions for key staff and councillors, and initiated structural reform of the city council in order to improve its effectiveness, quality of service delivery and accountability in infrastructural development (UNDP-TUGI, 2003).

At the national level, in response to both the pressing issues I have outlined as well as shifts in donor priorities, there have also been some innovations that are worthy of discussion.

The Fiji Local Government Association has recently produced a 'White Paper' on the relationship between government and civil society as well as a Squatter Settlement Assessment undertaken in conjunction with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat. The goal is to create more inclusive governance structures and relationships at the municipal and local government level which will strengthen local governance. The programme's aims are to:

- improve service delivery and planning;
- enhance community participation through community-planning consultations;
- create a strategic vision of community-development priorities; and
- strengthen partnerships with civil society (UNESCAP, 2004:6).

In addition it is working to build consensus

with traditional landowners on the crucial issue of land tenure, to involve urban landowners in the provision of services, and to encourage land registration including the titling of land.

Papua New Guinea, in 2003, created a Ministerial Committee and National Consultative Committee on Urbanisation to formulate urban policy, which will also consider an Urban Social Charter. The Charter discusses both the responsibilities and rights of urban citizens (PIFS, 2004:28-9). However, PNG demonstrates the dangers of incomplete decentralisation. Even when opportunities have arisen to generate stronger and more locally-responsive local authorities (such as the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments 1995) these have not been taken up. Part of the problem is that while the ability to make laws was increased the capacity and financial independence of such authorities were not (Filer, 2004:2).

## **PUMA: A NEW PARADIGM FOR THE REGION?**

Efforts to develop inclusive planning models for Apia (Samoa) provide some evidence of approaches that should also be recognised. The Urban Planning and Management Project (2001/2) represented a desire to move away from individual components of urban development and towards effective institutional arrangements which addressed urban management holistically. Apia, too, faces issues of peri-urban development taking place on land beyond town boundaries (Storey, 2000). The acceptance by the Samoan government, after many years of procrastination, of the establishment of a Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA) to deal with urban and peri-urban issues (including urban land use and environmental planning) represented a significant step forward in urban governance.

The success of the project has been put down to an extensive consultation programme undertaken by government and involving all urban stakeholders over a six month period which focused on their acceptance of responsibility for core functions and institutional arrangements. These were:

- Developing plans and policies;
- Regulating development;
- Coordinating urban services; and
- Disaster management

Progress was achieved by working at multiple levels, in terms of creating more effective and relevant institutions that were inclusive of both urban management needs and *fa'a Samoa* (Jones, et al., 2002). The project also builds upon a two-way consultative model between village council representatives and the Ministry of Home Affairs where government policies are discussed and village concerns are also expressed (Schoeffel and Turner, 2003: 7).

Bottom-up, or participatory, planning models, where communities themselves are invited to define their own priorities through consultation with government, the private sector, donors and NGOs also have a role to play. This has been successfully pursued in Tafea Province, Vanuatu where a technical assistance group made up of various government departments and community members jointly plan for provincial development (World Bank, 2000: 30). Palau and Kiribati have also, in recent years, developed more inclusive models of urban planning (UNESCAP, 2003:19). These examples need greater scrutiny as alternative experiences from which to draw upon. Clearly there are a number of initiatives under way in the region. More information needs to be shared on policy and the experiences (both positive and negative) that result from these policy innovations.

### **LINKING PATHS: BUILDING MORE EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE PACIFIC CITY**

Lessons from the Pacific and beyond suggest we should be cautious in terms of adopting 'quick-fix' solutions to governance through new political systems, structures or even partnerships. Better urban governance will depend as much on a shift in the cultures of governance and partnership, especially those between the institutions of government and marginalised populations.

Local government has a crucial role to play in several respects: in bridging populations with the state; in the effective delivering of key services to marginal populations; and in acting as a conduit of citizen concerns and needs. Local government can, and needs to play a role in supporting positive links between rural-urban interactions. However, while local government is better placed to identify local needs and priorities and provide an adequate response to them there is still an important role to be played by central government in terms of resourcing meaningful links between national planning and local administration.

Partnerships range from an ad hoc or one-off arrangement between a small number of actors to deal with a particular issue or may represent a long-term strategy which is inclusive, enduring and oriented toward significant change over time (Elander, 2002:192). Partnership is often argued to bring many benefits to urban administration. Elander (2002:193,198) has summarised these as including:

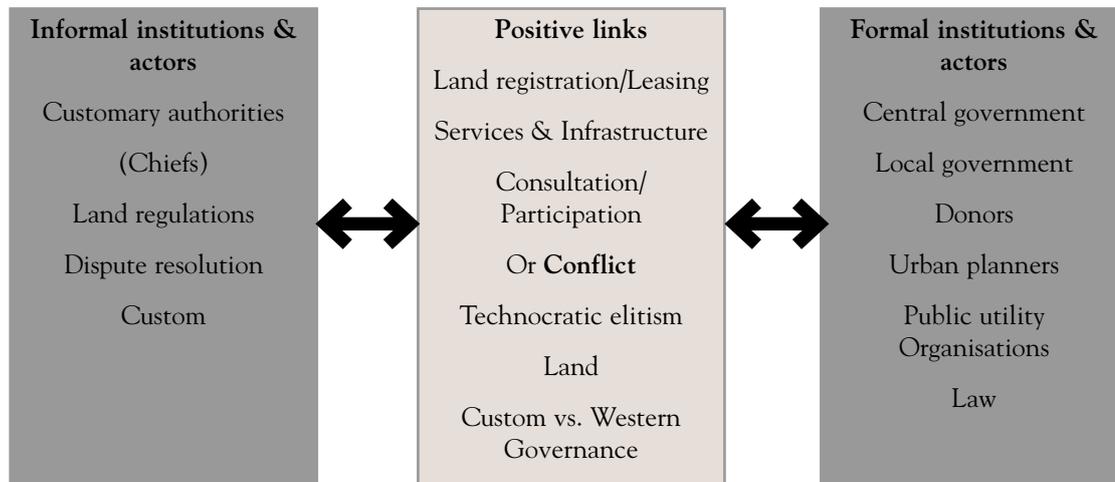
- Greater synergy among key actors, including government departments, local government, NGOs, chiefs, donors etc;
- Forming partnerships may aid in changing perceptions and behaviours of one or more actors. (For example, involving chiefs in planning for infrastructure development on customary land may lessen resistance and increase understanding of wider needs outside of one's *wantok* or *'aiga* system);
- Interests may become more mutually shared through greater communication and partnership. This may lessen potential conflict between groups;
- Partnerships also pool resources – these may be financial resources or physical ones. Risks may be shared.

The benefits of partnership are of potentially great relevance in terms of Pacific urban governance, particularly given the dispersed nature of power among government, traditional authorities and donors which I noted above (see also Figure Two).

But the *nature* of partnerships, and the relationships that are built are of critical importance. Partnerships are rarely equal (Overton & Storey, 2004). Partnerships should not be pursued on the basis of dissolving responsibility or making some other person or community 'pick up the tab'. Accountability must also not be forsaken through partnership and it should not be used as a crutch for a financially-strapped government seeking to divest its responsibilities. Real partnership will only come through a shared desire for change, and through building the capacity of each of the actors individually and in concert with one another. They will also be of greater value if the needs, priorities and responsibilities of the partners are clearly spelled out at the outset.

We need to know more about what urban partnerships (both positive and difficult) are taking place in the region, and what can be learnt from these for other cities and states. Below I will outline some initiatives taken towards these goals.

Figure Two: Possibilities for conflict or partnership



Some are practiced in the region and deserve greater debate and discussion on their worth, and their possible application in other cities.

### **PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE & COMMUNITY-BASED PLANNING**

Creating governance which is inclusive of groups marginalized or discriminated by urban development (for example, women, the poor, migrants living on customary land) is perhaps the most important challenge facing governments in the region today.

Participatory governance goes further than a commitment to governance in that it places particular emphasis on relationships with the most marginalized and poor.

It emphasizes the need to introduce mechanisms to encourage the involvement of those who do not find it easy to participate in state structures and processes because they are generally far removed from their own cultures and practices (Mitlin, 2004: 4).

Recently, the World Bank has encouraged a community-based urban planning approach in the Pacific (World Bank, 2000:16). This builds from a philosophy that management should reflect the culture and values of people rather than institutions. Where institutions are divorced from the people, they struggle to develop relevant policy and become strangers to the people. Community-based approaches include public forums on significant issues, access to resources for communities to encourage mobilisation and organisation and recognition of decision-making processes and representatives, such as Matai in Samoa

The 2004 Forum Secretariat meeting also encouraged the adoption of community action plans, whereby residents of informal settlements should be organised and supported in order to identify the needs of their communities and how they are best addressed (PIFS, 2004:26). This included an emphasis on integrating sometimes competing governance systems:

The challenge is to effectively articulate and integrate traditional governance systems, and traditional social; capital, into the modern governance context. This empowerment can be promoted through constructively building partnerships between communities and other stakeholders (PIFS, 2004:29).

There is a strong base from which to develop such a philosophy. Achieving an inclusive process between policymakers, public sector institutions, customary landowners, citizens, with an emphasis on building dialogue with the poorest and most marginalised, can be achieved through both new innovations but also by making the most of communal decision-making and consensus traditions. More communication and participation would also both strengthen planning as well as traditional authorities – it can provide a win-win situation that moves peri-urban development away from conflict (World Bank, 2000:20; Storey, 2003).

### **WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?**

The growth of formal and informal cities across the Pacific poses serious and significant challenges for those concerned with stable and sustainable development in the region. For the

region's governments urban issues are moving increasingly to the fore of domestic concerns. For donors and regional institutions this shift has been only recent and is yet to leave any significant impression. The issues are clear and pressing. And while urban disorder is the logical consequence of inaction, urban conflict has also demonstrated a capacity to spark national instability particularly in Melanesia. Weak governance structures open the door to rent-seeking, corruption and ultimately frustration and conflict. The peri-urban interface is characterised by a contest for space, changing social structures and fragmented institutions. Above all, there is an urgent need for greater partnership, negotiation, collaboration and participation between states, customary authorities and civil society. In terms of the state's own agencies, local and municipal governments need to develop means to engage with and respond to collectively expressed needs, and the alternative structures of governance they might imply (Prior et al. cited in Jones and Gaventa, 2002: 21).

The mechanisms through which to achieve this (enabling citizen engagement) are context specific but include, for example, integrating traditional decision-making structures and community groups in the wider decision-making processes of Pacific towns, through ongoing consultation and participation (World Bank, 2000: 21). For many years an attitude of 'plan what you can - forget the rest' has prevailed in terms of urban, and especially peri-urban governance. But, as the examples show, this is a clearly unsustainable position with consequences for stability and, ultimately, conflict. To do nothing in a period of rapid change is to invite chaos.

While local and municipal government is in a pivotal position to meet needs, and in so doing build sustainable and inclusive urban environments, it is not simply a matter of decentralisation being the answer. Decentralisation can open doors to elite capture and will, in itself, not reduce marginalisation (Gaventa, 2001:5). What is critical is the creation of new relationships and synergies which are innovative and relevant to specific places. The recourse to the local should also not be seen as a negative reaction to the failures of central governance and limitations of traditional society, which cannot cope with the rapid change which is transforming peri-urban areas (UNESCAP, 2003: 12). To become a meaningful shift to a more positive urban future local authorities need to be resourced sufficiently and have central government support in developing more effective policies and partnerships as 'there is no point decentralising functions for which there is inadequate capacity

either in terms of human resources or physical assets' (Schoeffel and Turner, 2003:13).

The growth and development of many Pacific Island towns is preceding faster than planners can formulate plans and is beyond the capacity of traditional authorities and structures to effectively react. Even when plans are produced they often completely ignore peri-urban populations and their needs, as well as the co-dependency between urban and rural areas. This is causing both a loss of faith in government agencies and the seeds of conflict among those competing for space and employment in and around the city as well as opening the door for conflict with the state, as was seen in the Solomon Islands and in African cities (Gough, 1999). Urban management needs to shift from a static planning model and towards governance which is a dynamic and interactive process (Leaf, 1999).

In moving forward there is a need to share what is working here and around the region we could start with the following questions and issues:

- There is a need for better data on peri-urban growth and development. We have comparatively little understanding of these critical places and their populations.
- How do marginalised urban populations interact with local government and other organisations? What are the best instruments for marginalised communities to articulate their concerns in urban decision making?
- What are the most productive forms of institutional strengthening and dialogue between central government, local government, traditional authorities and communities in the region? Can examples such as PUMA be replicated elsewhere?
- In what ways could outside agencies and expertise best respond to peri-urban growth in terms of institutional strengthening and building the capacity of marginalised populations to most sustainably meet their needs?

## AUTHOR NOTE

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