

Perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation in informal settlements: case studies from urban Fiji

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Squatter or informal settlements are an ever growing feature of the Fijian urban landscape. This study investigates the nature of perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation in seven informal settlements across Fiji. Understanding of the security of tenure needs to move beyond a legal/illegal dichotomy and focus on perceived security of tenure, which accepts that a much wider continuum of land-use rights typically exists. Housing consolidation or 'self-help' housing improvements are also linked to security of tenure but have not been sufficiently investigated through a perceived security-of-tenure framework, especially with respect to the use of customary land. The study finds that both perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation are greater than might be expected. Policy implications are discussed and interventions are encouraged that look to increase perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation in existing settlements.

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The Pacific is a rapidly urbanising region. About 40 per cent of the Pacific's population lives in towns—and this share is expected to increase to more than 50 per cent by 2020 (Storey 2006:5). Fiji provides an acute example of some of the challenges that rapid urbanisation causes in Pacific island countries. As elsewhere in the Pacific (particularly in Port Moresby, Port Vila,

Honiara and South Tarawa), in Fiji, continuing urbanisation has contributed to a rapid increase in informal settlements. An urban, low-income housing crisis looms. Policy responses that look to improve conditions in existing settlements and increase the supply of alternative, low-income urban housing are urgently needed.



What characterises all informal settlements in Fiji is insecurity of legal land tenure. Emerging land and shelter policy, however, reflects that understanding of security of tenure needs to move beyond a legal/illegal dichotomy. It is now recognised that a continuum of land-use rights exists, influenced by a myriad of variables and shaped particularly by perceptions of whether eviction is thought to be likely or not—or, in other words, shaped by perceived or *de facto* security of tenure. Additionally, as discussed in more detail below, shelter policy over the past 30–40 years has understood that self-help housing investments (dwelling improvements financed and made by settlers themselves)—or what is sometimes termed ‘housing consolidation’—is a useful process to facilitate in the face of rapid urbanisation and the growth of informal settlements. The literature also recognises that legal or *de jure* security of tenure is often a precondition for housing consolidation. Only recently, however, has the theory recognised that perceived/*de facto* security of tenure also plays a key role in influencing housing consolidation.

This study looks to improve understanding of the nature of Fijian informal settlements, including the process of housing consolidation, through a perceived security of tenure framework. It also aims to identify the factors influencing perceptions of tenure security and the extent of housing consolidation in informal settlements. First, the article describes the growth and nature of Fijian informal settlements. Second, it summarises the theory shaping the research. Third, the case studies and research methods are outlined. Fourth, key results concerning the perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation are detailed along with additional basic data highlighting the nature of the case-study settlements. Finally, the results are discussed and policy suggestions flagged.

The growth and characteristics of Fijian urban informal settlements

Informal settlements are becoming a dominant feature of the Fijian urban landscape. What are known as ‘squatters’ in Fiji can be divided into two broad categories. First, there are those settlers living at will on state or freehold land¹—‘squatters’ in the more traditional sense of the term. Second, there are groups of settlers who reside on native land² under informal arrangements with customary landowners. This second group is sometimes called informal settlers, and the practice is also known as *vakavanua* settlement.³ The two broad categories of settlements are, however, both characterised by poor-quality housing, absent or inadequate service provision, and insecurity of legal land tenure. Thus, both groups are often bundled together under the broad label of ‘squatters’ (Chung and ECREA 2007; McKinnon et al. 2007)—although ‘informal settlers’ is the more appropriate umbrella term to encompass all groups of settlers (the terms ‘informal settlers’ and ‘informal settlements’ are used in this article).

Fiji is an urbanising country. The 2007 Census results show that close to 51 per cent of the population (approximately 421,000 people) lives in urban areas (Government of Fiji Islands 2007). Increased urbanisation has meant that urban areas have been unable to cope with corresponding increases in housing, infrastructure and employment needs. Consequently, many new urban migrants find or build shelter in informal settlements. It has been estimated that total informal settler numbers in Fiji increased by 73 per cent between 1996 and 2003 (NZAID 2005:51), and it has been recently suggested that approximately 140,000 people (or about 15 per cent of Fiji’s population) are living in 190–200 informal settlements across the nation—predominantly in the Suva–



Nausori corridor, Lautoka, Nadi, Ba and Labasa (McKinnon et al. 2007:i-ii). Within the greater Suva area, about 16.5 per cent of the total population (approximately 8,900 households of 58,500 people) is estimated to be informal settlers (Barr 2007; McKinnon et al. 2007). In the past, the majority of informal settlers in Fiji were to be found on state land (Gounder 2005:8)—particularly in central areas. Recently, however, it appears that many urban migrants are settling—often through various *vakavanua* arrangements—on tracts of native land on the urban fringe; and these are the areas that are now growing particularly fast (McKinnon et al. 2007:ii).

Fijian informal settlements are often quite different from one another in nature. Some communities have existed for many years, are large, and comprise both indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian residents.⁴ Some communities are much smaller or are dominated by a single ethnic group. Some communities, including urban villages or newer settlements, are sited on the urban fringe and pose challenges for governance, management and service provision (as these types of communities are often outside municipal town boundaries). Barr (2007:10) writes that Fijian informal settlements are also characterised by: 1) substandard housing; 2) unemployment and low wages; 3) health problems associated with overcrowding and unsanitary conditions (particularly respiratory, skin and gastrointestinal diseases); and 4) generally poor environments for children.

A number of factors combine to influence the growth of Fijian informal settlements. Barr (2007) argues that the growth of informal settlements is caused by: 1) continued rural to urban migration and associated lack of rural development; 2) an inadequate supply of affordable, low-cost housing in urban areas; 3) poverty, lack of employment opportunities and low wages; 4) expiring

land leases (a very significant contributor since the mid 1990s); 5) difficulties in obtaining land through formal channels; 6) rising rents and real estate prices in urban areas; and 7) negative, insensitive attitudes towards informal settlers from the government (for whom informal settlements are seen as something to be discouraged), and general lack of political will to improve conditions for low-income, urban residents.

It is clear that a large and growing percentage of Fiji's population is living with insecure legal land tenure in informal settlements. It is also increasingly evident that Fiji is facing an emerging housing crisis—and that the implications of further settlement growth are simply staggering (McKinnon et al. 2007:31). In even more alarming fashion, Storey (2006:16) writes that: 'Fiji may only be at the edge of a significant and potentially chaotic urban demographic explosion for which it is barely prepared.' Clearly, much needs to be done to provide adequate shelter for the whole population.

Key theory and international housing policy

Stokes (1962) proposed that informal settlements in developing countries have the potential to be gradually incorporated into the formal, built environment through a process of incremental housing improvement—initiated and completed by settlers themselves. Later, Abrams (1966) suggested that urban housing policy could facilitate this gradual improvement of housing by settlers themselves—in what became known as 'self-help' housing improvement. The most influential, early advocate of self-help housing in squatter settlements was Turner (1968, 1969, 1972). Turner (1972:x) argued that in squatter settlers a 'great unused resource exists in the desire, energy, and initiative of families to house



themselves'. Turner (1969:522) argued that self-improving squatter settlements acted as 'bootstraps' by which low and insecure-income families could 'pull themselves up'—particularly if provided with security of tenure (p. 528). He said that households should be free to choose their own housing, to build and direct its construction, and to use the housing in their own way (Turner 1972:154).

With the emerging proliferation of informal settlements parallel with, and unregulated by, the formal system, it was also about this time becoming increasingly clear that conventional housing strategies were not coming close to meeting demand for low-cost housing (Beall 2000:436). Thus, international donor agencies and development banks began to support self-help housing schemes—particularly funding 'sites and services' schemes that looked to provide vacant tracts of urban and peri-urban land, divided into plots and provided with basic services, which were sold or leased to those who wished to build upon them (some limited settlement-upgrading schemes were also funded in this era).

Despite almost half a century of major housing projects and programs, it was clear that low-income housing provision was failing to keep pace with demand in many developing countries (Beall and Fox 2007:20). Quality shelter was fast becoming a very expensive item for the urban poor and rapid increases in the number and scale of informal settlements globally were still occurring. Within this international context, conventional belief in most housing policymaking has now come to reflect that the best approach to improving security of tenure in informal settlements is through the provision of legal title—or land-tenure legalisation. It is hoped that titles and thus security of tenure will encourage residents to upgrade their housing and settlements through their own efforts. Significant

debate, however, surrounds the tenure legalisation approach. For example, critics argue that a regularisation approach (which focuses on physical interventions such as infrastructure and service provision), without the provision of legal title, can be sufficient to encourage residents to upgrade their housing and settlements through increases in perceived or *de facto* security of tenure.

The security-of-tenure debate, which has come to dominate discussion of urban upgrading, was kick-started by Hernando de Soto (2000). In *The Mystery of Capital: why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else*, de Soto claimed that the poor in developing countries possess huge resources but hold these resources in defective forms as 'dead capital' that cannot be used to create wealth. De Soto (2000:6) argued that because these possessions are not adequately recorded, they cannot be turned into capital, cannot be traded outside local circles, cannot be used as loan collateral, and cannot be used as a share against an investment. In turn, de Soto argued that formal property rights, and the security of tenure that these property rights present, are essential for mobilising such 'dead capital', encouraging home improvement and upgrading, and obtaining formal credit. In practical terms, de Soto advocated the legalisation of property ownership by providing legal title throughout the 'extra-legal' sectors (Mooya and Cloete 2007:156)—including in the urban informal settlements of the developing world. According to de Soto and many others who support his approach, within these settlements 'dwellers without titles are assumed not to enjoy a high enough level of tenure security to invest significantly in their housing' (van Gelder 2007:220).

The perceived general benefits of land titling—and the views of de Soto in particular—received widespread support



from donor agencies and policymakers (Musembi 2007:1,458). This encouraged attempts by many developing-country governments to provide titles—and hence land-tenure security—to the poor in major land-titling programs. As Galiani and Schargrodsky (2006:29) summarise, these programs are generally premised on the belief that formal titles will allow the poor to access credit, thereby transforming their wealth into capital, and, hence, increasing their labour productivity and income. The views of de Soto have, however, received widespread criticism—focusing particularly on rebutting the link between legal title and access to credit (for example, ‘The mystery of capital deepens: economic focus’, *The Economist*, 26 August 2006:62; Galiani and Schargrodsky 2006; Home and Lim 2004). In addition, Gilbert (2002), in a study of titled poor settlements in Bogotá, Colombia, showed how house sales were actually more common when people lacked formal title, how informal credit was often available from the beginnings of settlement, and how little formal finance was available after formal titling. Gilbert (2002:7) claimed that land titling makes very little difference to the lives of the poor, and that now ‘it is widely recognised that security of tenure does not require the issue of full legal title’.

The key assumption in debates about informal settlement upgrading is that security of tenure is associated with improved housing conditions in informal settlements (facilitated by self-help housing improvements). As Varley has written, however

The basic problem with the argument concerning legalization and housing improvements is that security of tenure is not a fixed, objective concept, and that it is affected by a variety of other considerations: not only the legality or illegality of tenure. Changes in residents’ assessment of their security of tenure can also, therefore,

be produced by other means (Varley 1987:464–5).

Residents’ assessment of their security of tenure is key—more frequently referred to in the literature as perceived security of tenure. The perceived security of tenure approach has now come to label a literature that questions the necessity of full legal title in facilitating housing consolidation. Authors who support the perceived security of tenure approach argue that perceived security of tenure can be achieved particularly if eviction is thought to be unlikely (de Souza 2001; Payne 2001, 2004). In such a climate, informal settlers will invest in their dwellings even in the absence of formal title.

Leading shelter policy, including that emanating from the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (UN-Habitat), is reflecting the importance of perceived security of tenure. Additionally, upon the recent realisation of the continuation of the urban housing crisis and self-help housing remaining a vital strategy for millions world-wide (Bredenoord and van Lindert 2010a), self-help housing has enjoyed renewed academic and policy attention—particularly in supporting ‘aided self-help’ (for example, by housing finance and enabling policy frameworks). Recent writing has stressed the continuing importance of self-help housing and has made a plea for re-evaluations of its role in housing policy (Bredenoord and van Lindert 2010b).

In the Pacific, little research has been done on the nature of perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation in informal settlements. An exception is the study by Chand and Yala (2007) on settlements in Port Moresby (which looked at ways to improve access to land). In relation to housing consolidation, the study identified that ‘[m]ost of the homes in the settlements of Port Moresby...are under continuous



upgrading...often undertaken with family and clan labour' (Chand and Yala 2007:5). Chand and Yala were also among the first regional authors to recognise that security of tenure in settlements was not simply a legal/illegal dichotomy, but was influenced by perceptions and a security-of-tenure continuum. Specifically, they stated that

[m]uch of the research thus far has assumed that a property with formal title is secure and those without not. Our work suggests that such demarcation is artificial and settlers and landowners, knowing the value of secure property rights, negotiate some level of security that falls in between the binary extremes used in the literature. Settlers choose the longevity of their investment in houses depending on their perception of the degree of security to the land on which the building takes place. The dynamics of savings, investment, and continual exchange with the owner of the land settled upon and with neighbouring settlers influences the levels of ongoing investment (Chand and Yala 2007:7).

Chand and Yala also found that urban settlers in Port Moresby had higher levels of perceived security when settling on customary land compared with state land—and thus had more stable ownership rights. They found that security of tenure on Port Moresby customary land was maintained and improved through traditional systems of reciprocation and token exchange, clan/tribe group occupation, the attainment of statutory declarations on the right to settle, and the involvement of established intermediary organisations in dialogue between settlers and landowners. On the other hand, they found that (lower) security of tenure on state land was facilitated mainly by political patronage.

In Fiji, analysis of informal settlement security of tenure and housing consolidation has not been undertaken using a perceived security-of-tenure framework. Walsh (1978) found evidence of housing consolidation in his early case studies of Suva settlers.⁵ In addition, Bryant (1990) and Wilkinson (2002:18) saw evidence of housing consolidation in Fijian informal settlements in the absence of legal security of tenure. None of these studies, however, was undertaken with the explicit recognition that security of tenure can be fluid and that it often comes down to perceptions influenced by key variables.

Case studies and methods

Seven urban informal settlements from across Fiji were chosen as case-study sites for the research. These included Lagilagi (part of the wider Jittu Estate) in central Suva, Caubati Topline in Nasinu, Lakena Hill Two in Nausori, Vunato and Tomuka in Lautoka, Tauvegavega in Ba, and the small settlement of Bouma in Labasa. This range of sites was selected to reflect the diversity of informal settlements in Fiji and to ensure a nation-wide focus.

The Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECEA) facilitated case-study selection in greater Suva by providing key initial contacts in Lagilagi, Caubati Topline and Lakena Hill Two. ECREA also suggested individual contacts in Lautoka, Ba and Labasa who were able to introduce gatekeepers in Vunato, Tomuka, Tauvegavega and Bouma. In the six larger case studies, participants were a mixture of initial contacts, introduced contacts and more random informants met during community visits. In the smaller case study of Bouma, sampling was more representative as it was possible to interview 15 of the 16 households in the settlement.



Four of the research case studies are located on state land (Lagilagi, Caubati Topline, Lakena Hill Two and Bouma). Vunato, Tomuka and Tauvegavega are located on native land, and the first two of these settlements are accessed via informal, *vakavanua* arrangements with landowners. All communities, with the exception of Vunato (which is 100 per cent indigenous Fijian), are ethnically diverse, with sizeable indigenous Fijian and Indo-Fijian populations. With respect to factors such as community size, length of occupation and the level of government and civil society intervention, the case studies were, in general, differentiated and diverse. Key data for each case study are displayed (Table 1).

Field research was completed over six months in 2008. In-depth, semi-structured household interviews were conducted with 135 respondents.⁶ The interviews aimed to gather basic demographic and socioeconomic data to help form community profiles, information highlighting the nature of perceived security of tenure and data revealing the extent of housing consolidation occurring. Participants' perceived security of tenure was explored in a variety of different ways—including investigation of eviction threats, problems with land and house owners, and conceptions of security and security of tenure. Housing consolidation was investigated in interviews by exploring all dwelling improvements that had been made after arrival in the settlement, the motivation behind any improvements (or the reasons no improvements had been made), and participants' planned and desired improvements. Overall, interviews extracted a mix of quantitative and qualitative information—although the key quantitative data are presented in this article.

Basic data, tenure status, movement and access to communities

We can show that the average household size across the research sample was 5.2, the average indigenous Fijian household size was 5.8 and the Indo-Fijian household size was 4.6 (Table 2). Across most of the research sample, the average size of indigenous Fijian households was larger than that of Indo-Fijian households (with Lakena Hill Two as the exception).⁷ Also shown is that the average household monthly income across the sample was F\$592 (Table 2). Across all communities, the average monthly income for indigenous Fijian households was F\$652 and for Indo-Fijian households F\$566.⁸ Because indigenous Fijian households tend to be larger than Indo-Fijian households, however, the more pertinent figures are average household incomes per person per day. For indigenous Fijian respondents, this figure was F\$2.56 and for Indo-Fijian respondents, F\$4.08. The variation in household income per person per day across the case studies ranges from F\$2.70 in Bouma to F\$4.77 in Caubati Topline.

By far the majority of households (89.5 per cent) can be classified by tenure status as 'land occupying, dwelling owners' (Table 3). As informal settlers, these householders clearly have no legal ownership rights to the land they reside on, but they do hold much stronger rights to the dwellings they live in. This majority group can thus be labelled 'occupying owners'. The dominance of occupying owners can be compared with renters (6 per cent) and 'others' (4.5 per cent). The group 'others' comprises mainly occupiers who are looking after dwellings for absent owners (usually family, who are often offshore).

The nature of movement to informal settlements is diverse. The largest category



Table 1 Case study summary information

	Lagilagi	Caubati Topline	Lakena Hill Two	Vunato	Tomuka	Tauvegavega	Bouma
Primary land tenure	State* 1940-	State 1987-	State 1975-	Native 1964-	Native 1960-	Native** 1974-	State 1990-
Approx. length of community occupation	Inside	Inside	Outside	Inside	Both	Outside	Outside
Inside / outside town boundary	63	38	67	47	256	11	10
Total households	33	103	117	0	303	149	5
Indigenous Fijian	2	7	4	0	26	1	1
Indo-Fijian	98	148	188	47	585	161	16
Other/Rotuman							
Total	342	240	344	..	1349	66	55
Total population	92	455	521	0	1240	650	16
Indigenous Fijian	16	37	19	0	128	3	3
Indo-Fijian	450	732	884	..	2717	719	74
Other/Rotuman	79:21	35:65	40:60	100:0	52:48	9:91	77:23
Approx. ethnicity ratio (Indigenous Fijian:Indo-Fijian)							
Average household size	5.4	6.3	5.1		5.3	6	5.5
Indigenous Fijian	2.8	4.4	4.5		4.1	4.4	3.2
Indo-Fijian	8	5.3	4.8		4.9	3	3
Other/Rotuman	4.6	4.9	4.7		4.6	4.5	4.6
Total							

* Transferred from freehold tenure in 2000

** Transferred from state tenure in 2002

Source: Field data and 2007 Census information



Table 2 Average household (HH) size and monthly income (F\$), all case studies, research sample

	Ave. HH size			Ave. HH income			Ave. HH income per person per day		
	Indig. Fijian	Indo-Fijian	All	Indig. Fijian	Indo-Fijian	All	Indig. Fijian	Indo-Fijian	All
Lagilagi	4.7	3.5	4.6	570	365	547	4.5	2.89	4.32
Caubati Topline	5.5	4.3	4.7	479	638	596	3.88	5.08	4.77
Lakena Hill Two	4.8	5.4	5.1	434	496	448	3	3.47	3.11
Vunato	7.2	n.a.	7.2	965	n.a.	965	4.65	n.a.	4.65
Tomuka	6.5	5.1	5.5	751	714	725	4.27	4.36	4.33
Tauvegavega	8	4.3	4.7	310	502	483	1.29	3.83	3.58
Bouma	5.2	4	4.8	434	291	380	2.95	2.23	2.7
All communities	5.8	4.6	5.2	652	566	592	2.56	4.08	3.92

Source: Field data

Table 3 Household tenure status, all case studies, research sample

	Occupying Owners		Renting		Other*
	Occupying Owners	Renting	Occupying Owners	Renting	
Lagilagi	19	1	1	0	0
Caubati Topline	18	2	2	0	0
Lakena Hill Two	18	0	0	2	2
Vunato	17	2	2	1	1
Tomuka	16	2	2	2	2
Tauvegavega	19	1	1	0	0
Bouma	14	0	0	1	1
% whole sample	89.5	6	6	4.5	4.5

* Largely those occupying dwellings for absentee family members

Source: Field data



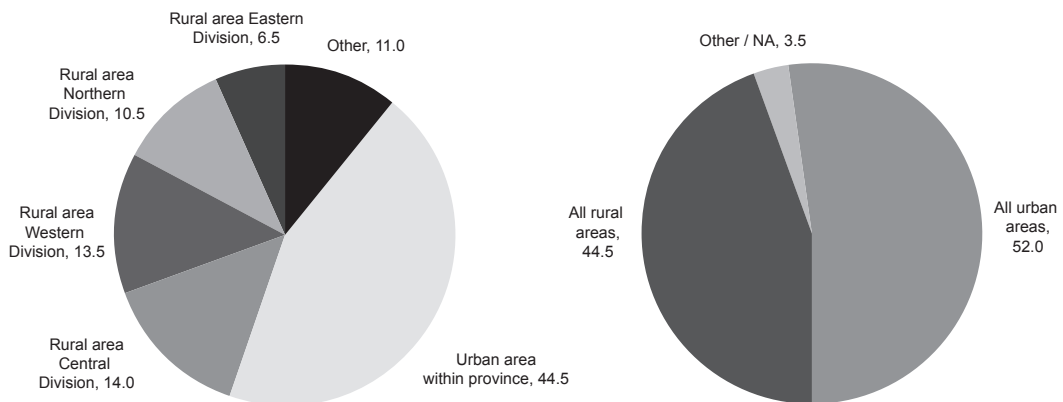
(44.5 per cent) of all research respondents had previously resided in other urban areas of their current province (Figure 1). This category was followed by rural areas in the Central Division (14 per cent), Western Division (13.5 per cent), Northern Division (10.5 per cent) and Eastern Division (6.5 per cent). We can reveal that 52 per cent of respondents had previously resided in an urban area (either in their current province or elsewhere in Fiji) (Figure 2). This figure compares with 44.5 per cent of respondents previously residing in a rural area. When identifying the previous tenure status of respondents, major categories included: 'renting' (30.5 per cent), 'village' (26 per cent), and 'rural lease' (12.5 per cent). Only 6 per cent of respondents had previously resided in another informal settlement.

We can reveal information on the principal reason that respondents chose to locate to their current site of residence (when respondents were asked to name what of the four categories was the single most important factor in influencing their location decision) (Figure 2). The chart shows that

the single most important category selected was 'proximity to education and other services' (32.8 per cent of respondents) followed by 'opportunity for continued residence' (30.9 per cent). The categories 'proximity to employment opportunities' (18 per cent) and 'availability of adequate shelter' (13.9 per cent) were of secondary importance. When unpicking motivations for movement a little further, additional research shows that major categories included: 1) 'forced from previous location' (20 per cent of respondents) (usually associated with rural lease uncertainty and/or expiration and forced moves from rental properties); 2) 'the chance or need to get one's own place' (19.5 per cent); and 3) 'rent saving' (15 per cent).

Original access to the case-study communities occurred in a number of often quite context-specific ways. The majority (65 per cent) of all respondents had existing connections prior to moving into a community—particularly family links, but also friendship and church connections. New entrants to a community first either

Figure 1 Location of immediate previous residence, percentage of respondents, all research sample



Source: Field data



built a dwelling or otherwise obtained a dwelling; 67.5 per cent of respondents built on arrival (usually building a new dwelling or reassembling a transported dwelling) and 32.5 per cent obtained a dwelling. The smaller group of respondents who obtained a dwelling on arrival did so in various ways. These included purchasing a dwelling from departing residents,⁹ renting or inheriting a dwelling from a family member or looking after a home while the owner was absent.

For most respondents, access to communities was freely available, facilitated through family linkages, obtained via informal *vakavanua* approaches (where land-use rights have been purchased¹⁰ and/or customary presentations have been made to facilitate access), and through dwelling purchases. Access to communities can normally be differentiated by category of primary land tenure; accessing a state land area may not necessarily require permission, but accessing a native land area, when the landownership is clear, always requires permission. For the communities on state land, the land is perceived as freely available

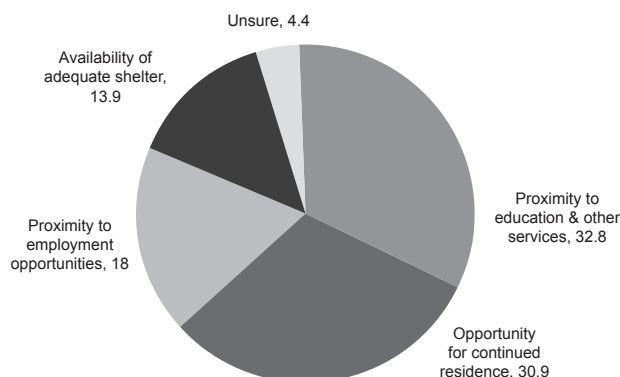
in some cases, but access may need to be approved by a government agency—such as the Department of Lands and Surveys or the Housing and Squatter Resettlement Unit.¹¹

Perceived security of tenure

In the interviews, it was necessary to explore security of tenure in a number of ways: by investigating possible eviction threats and other pressures to leave, by discussing security broadly, by discussing possible meanings of security of tenure, and by asking participants if they felt secure or insecure. The results are displayed in Table 4. In this analysis, it is necessary to include the category ‘uncertain’—which is applicable when there are contradictory responses to different questions about security and security of tenure and/or when respondents focus on alternative dimensions of security—both making it difficult to make a call on the perceived security of tenure.

We can reveal that 43.5 per cent of all respondents indicated positive perceived

Figure 2 Principal reason for location decision, percentage of respondents, all research sample



Source: Field data



security of tenure; in 24.5 per cent of cases perceived security of tenure was not secure and yet not insecure; 16.5 per cent indicated negative security of tenure; and in 15.5 per cent of cases responses were uncertain (Table 4). When comparing the perceived security of tenure of the two major ethnic groups, while similar percentages of respondents indicated positive security of tenure (44 per cent for indigenous Fijians compared with 43.5 per cent for Indo-Fijians), much higher percentages of Indo-Fijian participants than indigenous Fijian participants indicated negative security of tenure (26.5 per cent compared with 8 per cent).

The table also highlights differences between communities—for example: 1) revealing positive perceived security of tenure as strongest at Bouma (53.33 per cent of respondents indicated positive security of tenure), Caubati Topline, Lakena Hill Two and Vunato (all 50 per cent); 2) revealing negative security of tenure as strongest at Tomuka and Tauvegavega (in both communities, 30 per cent of all respondents indicated negative security of tenure); and 3) showing the category ‘not secure or not insecure’ as significant at Tomuka (40 per cent of all respondents).

The influence of primary land tenure on perceived security of tenure across all ethnic groups in the sample is highlighted (Table 5). It shows that positive security of tenure is

higher in the state land settlements (48 per cent of the state land sample shows evidence of positive security of tenure) than in native land areas (38.3 per cent of the sample). Correspondingly, the table shows that negative security of tenure, for all ethnic groups, is higher in the native land settlements (23.3 per cent of the sample) compared with the state land areas (10.5 per cent of the sample).

The perceived security of tenure by major ethnic group and primary land tenure is shown (Table 6). The table reveals that for the indigenous Fijian sample: 1) positive security of tenure is relatively equal in the state land sample (44.5 per cent) compared with the native land sample (43 per cent); and 2) negative security of tenure is higher in the native land sample (14.2 per cent) than in the state land sample (only 4.5 per cent). For Indo-Fijian participants, the table shows negative security of tenure as higher in the native land sample (31.2 per cent) than in the state land sample (21.5 per cent). The table also shows that more than half (53.5 per cent) of the Indo-Fijian state land sample revealed evidence of positive security of tenure.

Table 5 Perceived security of tenure by primary land tenure, all ethnic groups, research sample

	Positive	Negative	+/-	Uncertain
% all state land sample*	48	10.5	21.5	20
% all native land sample**	38.33	23.33	28.33	10
% whole sample	43.5	16.5	24.5	15.5

* Lagilagi, Caubati Topline, Lakena Hill Two & Bouma (n=75)

** Vunato, Tomuka & Tauvegavega (n=60)

Source: Field data



Housing consolidation

The 2007 Fiji Census included a section on households and housing—collecting information on, among other things, principal wall construction materials. Wall construction data across all households in Fiji officially recognised as squatter settlements at the time of the census are shown (Table 7).¹² The table shows that 59.2 per cent of the 15,455 officially counted squatter/informal settlement households nationally had walls constructed principally of tin or iron, followed by wood (21.6 per cent) and concrete (18.5 per cent) as other major categories.

It is perhaps surprising that census results show that 18.5 per cent of squatter/informal settlement dwellings nationally had walls constructed principally of concrete, which is a long-lasting building material (compared with tin/iron or wooden dwellings, concrete constructions are more difficult to dismantle and relocate—a necessary contingency option for some informal settlers with precarious tenure situations). The relatively high percentage of concrete squatter/informal settlement dwellings nationally suggests that a significant proportion of informal settlers feels secure enough to invest in building materials that make their dwelling largely permanent. It could also suggest that housing consolidation is occurring nationally (assuming that most dwellings are first built with more temporary building materials such as tin/iron and/or wood).

We display data from the sample on housing consolidation (Table 8).¹³ The table reveals that: 1) across the whole sample, 55.5 per cent of households showed evidence of housing consolidation; 2) by ethnicity, 52 per cent of indigenous Fijian households and a higher 58.5 per cent of Indo-Fijian households showed evidence of housing consolidation; and 3) housing consolida-

tion ranged from a high of 70 per cent of households in Lagilagi and Tauvegavega to lows of 35 per cent at Tomuka and 45 per cent at Vunato.

We can also show data on housing consolidation by primary land tenure (Table 9). The table shows that housing consolidation for all ethnic groups is more apparent in state land areas than in native land areas (60 per cent of the state land sample showed evidence of housing consolidation compared with 50 per cent of the native land sample). This trend is reflected across all ethnic groups. As the table shows: 1) 58 per cent of the sampled indigenous Fijian households on state land showed evidence of housing consolidation compared with 43 per cent of the sample on native land; and 2) 60.5 per cent of the sampled Indo-Fijian households on state land showed evidence of housing consolidation compared with 56 per cent of the sample on native land.

Additional analysis looked at the 44.5 per cent of cases where there was no evidence of housing consolidation. The lack of finance/competing cash demands was the principal reason cited for lack of housing consolidation (25 per cent of the 60 households not involved in housing consolidation). This reason was followed by the explanation that dwellings were regarded as adequate in size/quality (20 per cent of the sample of 60 households). Often in this case—particularly in Tomuka and for long-established residents—dwellings had been completed to an acceptable standard originally or incrementally many years previously. The third most cited category encompassed tenure situations where renters and occupiers did not have strong incentives to invest in extending or improving dwellings that they did not own (15 per cent of the sample of 60 households). Other major categories included: 'house just built/acquired (in the past two years)' (8.5 per cent)—often situations where new households had not yet



Table 7 Principal wall construction material, all national squatter households, by Division, 2007 census information

	Concrete	Wood	Tin or iron	Bure materials	Makeshift	Other	Total
Central Div.	1572	2301	6522	15	48	8	10466
Western Div.	1205	692	2350	14	20	0	4281
Northern Div.	70	337	196	0	0	1	604
Eastern Div.	9	5	80	0	0	0	94
All Fiji	2856	3335	9148	29	68	9	15455
%	18.5	21.6	59.2	0.2	0.4	0.1	100

Source: 2007 Census data

Table 8 Housing consolidation, 2003–2008, all case studies, research sample

	Indigenous Fijian		Indo-Fijian		All ethnic groups			
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No		
	n	n	n	n	n	%	n	%
Lagilagi	12	6	2	0	14	70	6	30
Caubati Topline	4	2	7	7	11	55	9	45
Lakena Hill Two	6	5	6	2	13	65	7	35
Vunato	9	11	0	0	9	45	11	55
Tomuka	2	4	5	9	7	35	13	65
Tauvegavega	1	1	13	5	14	70	6	30
Bouma	4	6	2	2	7	46.5	8	53.5
Total	38	35	35	25	75		60	
% sampled ethnic group	52	48	58.5	41.5	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
% whole sample	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	55.5	n.a	44.5

Source: Field data

Table 9 Housing consolidation (2003–2008) by primary land tenure, research sample

	Indigenous Fijian		Indo-Fijian		All ethnic groups	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
% all state land sample*	58	42	60.5	39.5	60	40
% all native land sample**	43	57	56	44	50	50
% whole sample	52	48	58.5	41.5	55.5	44.5

* Lagilagi, Caubati Topline, Lakena Hill Two & Bouma (n=75)

** Vunato, Tomuka & Tauvegavega (n=60)

Source: Field data



made housing improvements; and 'insecure tenure' (5 per cent).

Discussion

Informal settlements in Fiji are growing quickly (McKinnon et al. 2007:i). Policy responses are needed to ease the growing housing crisis but must be informed by full understanding of the growth and nature of informal settlements. Investigation moving beyond a legal/illegal dichotomy, using a perceived security-of-tenure framework, can begin to do this. The informal settlements of the research sample are diverse in nature, making it difficult to generalise about the character of Fijian informal settlements. But it is clear that informal settlers have to cope with less than adequate infrastructure and service provision, environmentally marginal locations, and insecurity of legal land tenure.

Fieldwork data show that the nature of movement to informal settlements is mixed, coming from both rural and other urban areas, and voluntary and involuntary—but generally looking to benefit from the advantages of informal settlements (particularly central locations and the housing cost savings on offer). Access arrangements are also mixed and are particularly influenced by primary land tenure. For example, permission and often payments are required to access native land areas, but on state land permission may not be necessary.

Table 4 highlighted that 43.5 per cent of the research sample indicated evidence of positive perceived security of tenure. But differences in perceived security of tenure were evident between the study sites. Positive perceived security of tenure was greater than the full sample average at Bouma, Caubati Topline, Lakena Hill Two and Yunato, while negative perceived security of tenure was pronounced at Tomuka and

Tauvegavega. It is also clear that primary land tenure is a key variable affecting perceived security of tenure. Table 5, for example, revealed that positive perceived security of tenure was higher in state land communities than in native land areas, while negative perceived security of tenure was greater in native land areas. Ethnicity was also an important variable. Tables 4 and 6, for example, revealed that higher proportions of Indo-Fijian than indigenous Fijian respondents showed evidence of negative perceived security of tenure (particularly in native land areas).

Perceived security of tenure seems to be influenced by a number of often context-specific variables: 1) the category of land tenure; 2) the length of residence in the community (particularly without any pressure to leave); 3) the presence of infrastructure and utilities; 4) the prospect of titles/leases; 5) support and advocacy from civil society; 6) continuing evictions from other settlements; and 7) perceptions of government policy. Additionally, for those settlements on native land accessed via *vakavanua* arrangements, it appears that the nature of the relationship with the landowner is the key determinant of perceived security of tenure.

Results from the 2007 Census, particularly the surprising amount (18.5 per cent) of squatter/informal settler dwellings nationally with walls constructed principally of concrete—a long-lasting building material—suggest that housing consolidation is occurring in Fijian informal settlements. Fieldwork results subsequently showed that 55.5 per cent of the households surveyed showed evidence of housing consolidation—specifically, significant housing investments in the period 2003–08. Differences between the major ethnic groups were also evident—with slightly higher percentages of Indo-Fijian households than indigenous Fijian households showing evidence of housing consolidation. Differ-



ences between the case-study sites were also clear, with housing consolidation more pronounced at Lagilagi and Tauvegavega (and in general in state land areas) and least pronounced at Tomuka and Vunato (and in general in native land areas). Housing consolidation also appears to be inhibited by several factors, including lack of finance, not being the house owner, and the dwelling already being adequate in quality/size.

The level of housing consolidation occurring in the case-study informal settlements suggests that, despite not owning the land they reside on, many settlers feel sufficiently secure to invest significantly in improving their dwellings¹⁴—a process recognised as the crucial first step in improving informal settler livelihoods and communities. These findings also suggest that improving perceived security of tenure in Fijian informal settlements could be a way to facilitate increased housing investment consolidation in these areas.

A perceived security of tenure approach aimed at improving the conditions of existing informal settlements could thus present a useful theoretical framework for the Fijian context. The predominance of customary land also means that the provision of full legal title (often the ultimate objective of many land-tenure programs) might not be feasible. Rather, perceived security of tenure approaches can suggest a wider variety of initiatives aimed at improving security of tenure—such as improving rights to use land and increasing the range of tenure options available (Payne 2001).

Perhaps the single most important means to increase perceived security of tenure is to remove residents' fear of eviction (UN-Habitat 2007:139). Announcing a stop to forced evictions and relocations when part of government policy is absolutely crucial (Payne 2004:175). Often a simple statement by the relevant government minister is enough to reduce uncertainty about eviction

and stabilise situations for informal settlers (Payne 2004:175). Political will to improve conditions for informal settlers is absolutely essential in implementing a pro-poor urban shelter strategy that will increase perceived security of tenure. Unfortunately, however, evictions from informal settlements on state and freehold land, in particular, have continued in Fiji.¹⁵ Further, recent rhetoric from senior figures in the interim administration has escalated eviction pressure for informal settlers on state land ('Church faces lawsuit', *Fiji Sun*, 8 April 2009; 'Housing authority orders squatters to vacate land', *Fiji Sun*, 7 June 2009; 'Court rejects authority's application to remove squatter settlers', *Fiji Sun*, 25 May 2010; 'Jittu "tenants" face the boot', *Fiji Sun*, 11 June 2010; 'Squatters put on notice', *Fiji Sun*, 13 June 2010; 'Warning to squatters', *Fiji Sun*, 21 June 2010; 'No payout for Nasinu squatters', *Fiji Times*, 9 May 2009; 'City raises alarm over squatters', *Fiji Times*, 7 September 2009; 'Housing comes down', *Fiji Times*, 18 February 2010; 'City to relocate squatters', *Fiji Times*, 18 June 2010).

Informal settlements on peri-urban native land, where much of the growth of informal settlements occurs, also pose great challenges to intervention. Councils have little incentive to intervene in areas outside their municipal boundaries and little drive to increase the size of these boundaries (which would only increase servicing obligations to a reluctant rate-paying base). Central state agencies are also unlikely to intervene in settlements on native land, limiting their involvement to more central, older settlements on state land (particularly in central Suva) and continuing, unpopular resettlement schemes. Suggestions have recently been made that informal settlements on native land could be formalised (Barr 2009:7; NCBBF 2008:24). Such a move would, however, be inhibited by the fact that landowners can obtain greater rents and control over the land with existing



vakavanua arrangements than if the land was formally leased via the Native Land Trust Board.¹⁶ Basically, security of tenure in informal settlements on native land rests on the whims of landowners.

Improving perceived security of tenure, particularly by reducing eviction threats, is key. What would facilitate this (in addition to positive, not threatening, rhetoric from the State) is ending the continuing focus on resettling informal settlers—usually far from central areas and thus far from most employment opportunities. For those settlements on state land, it would be better for the government to focus on improving conditions in existing settlements through *in situ* upgrading schemes and increasing perceived security of tenure. The recognition that these areas will one day be vibrant city suburbs supporting urban growth and development is, however, crucial here. This awareness is, unfortunately, currently lacking in Fiji.

Notes

- ¹ State land and freehold land make up about 6 and 7 per cent, respectively, of Fiji's total land area (Prasad 2006).
- ² Native land makes up about 87 per cent of Fiji's total land area (Prasad 2006).
- ³ *Vakavanua* can be loosely translated as 'in the way of the land'. Both rural and urban *vakavanua* arrangements are informal agreements that provide land for use. Requests are traditionally accompanied by a ceremonial presentation of *sevusevu* (gift), *yaqona* (kava) or *tabua* (whale's tooth), although the more modern trend is to offer cash (Eaton 1988:24).
- ⁴ Gounder (2005:8) claims that indigenous Fijians account for almost 60 per cent of squatters in the Suva–Nausori corridor and 40 per cent of all squatters across Fiji. The remaining 60 per cent of squatters in Fiji are mainly Indo-Fijians plus a small number of ethnic Melanesian workers (largely descendants of Ni-Vanuatu and

Solomon Islanders originally brought to Fiji for plantation work).

- ⁵ In his survey of 333 households, Walsh (1984:193) found that 68 per cent of households had built their own dwelling and 64 per cent had made some improvements since construction or occupancy. He argued, however, that despite the evidence of self-help activities, these improvements were generally too insufficient and involved too few households to improve the condition of settlements generally, and that only 7 per cent of the housing being improved in his survey could be considered adequate in terms of structure, size, water supply and sanitation (in Bryant 1990:182).
- ⁶ Twenty interviews were conducted in each of the six larger case-study communities and 15 interviews were completed in the smaller settlement of Bouma in Labasa.
- ⁷ Fieldwork data on household size compared with the national figure, from the 2007 Census results for all Fijian squatter/informal settlements, of 5, and the national figure for all household types, of 4.75 (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics 2008).
- ⁸ Fieldwork data on average monthly incomes compared with a figure from the 2002–03 Household Income and Expenditure Survey of F\$1,272 for average monthly income for urban households (Narsey 2006:3).
- ⁹ House purchase prices averaged F\$3,250 across all communities and ranged from an average purchase price of a few hundred dollars in Bouma and Lagilagi to more than F\$7,000 in Caubati Topline.
- ¹⁰ Transactions used to access native land areas often involve the initial purchase of a house-block site (of up to a few thousand dollars) and continuing annual land rentals (of up to a few hundred dollars).
- ¹¹ The Housing and Squatter Resettlement Unit—responsible for settler resettlement and settlement upgrading schemes—is part of the Ministry of Labour, Industrial Relations, Employment, Local Government, Urban Development and Housing.
- ¹² The official 2007 Census count of squatter households nationally—of 15,455—is likely to be an underestimate of total squatter households in Fiji.



- ¹³ The analysis defined housing consolidation as housing investment in the five years preceding interviews (2003–08). The following investments were classified as housing consolidation: room extensions; new immediately adjacent buildings for immediate or extended family use; total dwelling rebuilds; small dwelling relocations (often accompanied by improvements); improvements to exterior walls (such as ‘double walling’—usually adding wooden interiors to tin/iron exteriors); adding interior walls; improvements to toilets/bathrooms (such as installing flush toilets and/or bringing toilets/bathrooms inside dwellings); permanent power connection and wiring; and other significant dwelling improvements beyond small cosmetic improvements and materials replacement.
- ¹⁴ A key objective of the research was to investigate the relationship between perceived security of tenure and housing consolidation in Fijian informal settlements. Ultimately, however, it was not possible to make strong assertions about the nature of this relationship. Overall, the relationship is likely to be complex and subtle, influenced by a number of additional variables including length of residence, income and natural hazard risk.
- ¹⁵ For example, from 2008 to mid 2010, reported forced relocations occurred from: Kilikali Settlement in Nepali, Nasinu, to Sasawira (to make way for land development); Masimasi in Sabeto, Nadi (to make way for a planned school); Namara in Tacirua, Nasinu (due to planned Housing Authority developments); and from freehold land at Naivitavaya, Laucala Beach, Nasinu. As reported in the media, strong eviction pressure has also continued for families at: Muanivatu in central Suva (the Suva City Council, holding a lease for the land, wishes to use the land for a recreational park); Wailea in central Suva (the freehold owner, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, desires to use the land for an educational institution); Villa Maria in Suva (the Catholic Church of Fiji and Rotuma wants to use the land for a school); Vitoga and Drasa in Lautoka (issued with eviction notices by the Housing Authority); Nuvutu in Lautoka (Lautoka City Council wants to develop the land for an industrial estate); and Tavakuba in Lautoka (issued with eviction notices by the Housing Authority) (Chand 2010; Delaivoni 2008; Elbourne 2008; ‘Church faces lawsuit’, *Fiji Sun*, 8 April 2009; ‘City raises alarm over squatters’, *Fiji Times*, 7 September 2009; ‘City to relocate squatters’, *Fiji Times*, 18 June 2010; ‘Court rejects authority’s application to remove squatter settlers’, *Fiji Sun*, 25 May 2010; ‘Housing comes down’, *Fiji Times*, 18 February 2010; ‘Housing authority orders squatters to vacate land’, *Fiji Sun*, 7 June 2009; ‘No payout for Nasinu squatters’, *Fiji Times*, 9 May 2009; ‘Relocated squatters find no comfort’, *Fiji Times*, 11 August 2008:11).
- ¹⁶ Some informal settlements are also located on native reserve land, which cannot easily be leased (it would require de-reservation with majority support from the landowning *mataqali*) (Ward 1995:241).

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