FIJI
NATIONAL URBAN PROFILE

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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME

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FOREWORD

According to research published in UN-Habitat's flagship report, The State of the World's Cities 2010-2011, developing regions including Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, will have more people living in urban than rural areas by the year 2030. With half the world's population already living in urban areas, the challenges we face in the battle against urban poverty, our quest for cities without slums, for cities where women feel safer, for inclusive cities with power, water and sanitation, and affordable transport, for better planned cities, and for cleaner, greener cities is daunting.

But as this series shows, there are many interesting solutions and best practices to which we can turn. After all, the figures tell us that during the decade 2000-2010, a total of 227 million people in developing countries moved out of slum conditions. In other words, governments, cities and partner institutions have collectively exceeded the slum target of the Millennium Development Goals twice over, and ten years ahead of the agreed 2020 deadline.

Asia and the Pacific stood at the forefront of successful efforts to reach the slum target, with all governments in the region improving the lives of an estimated 172 million slum dwellers between 2000-2010.

In sub-Saharan Africa though, the total proportion of the urban population living in slums has decreased by only 5 per cent (or 17 million people). Ghana, Senegal, Uganda, and Rwanda were the most successful countries in the sub-region, reducing the proportions of slum dwellers by over one-fifth in the last decade.

Some 13 per cent of the progress made towards the global slum target occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean, where an estimated 30 million people have moved out of slum conditions since the year 2000.

Yet, UN-Habitat estimates confirm that the progress made on the slum target has not been sufficient to counter the demographic expansion in informal settlements in the developing world. In this sense, efforts to reduce the numbers of slum dwellers are neither satisfactory nor adequate.

As part of our drive to address this crisis, UN-Habitat is working with the European Commission and the Brussels-based Secretariat of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group to support sustainable urban development. Given the urgent and diverse needs, we found it necessary to develop a tool for rapid assessment and strategic planning to guide immediate, mid- and long-term interventions. And here we have it in the form of this series of publications.

The Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme is based on the policy dialogue between UN-Habitat, the African, Caribbean and Pacific Secretariat and the European Commission which dates back to the year 2002. When the three parties met at UN-Habitat headquarters in June 2009, more than 200 delegates from over 50 countries approved a resounding call on the international community to pay greater attention to these urbanization matters, and to extend the slum upgrading programme to all countries in the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group.

It is worth recalling here how grateful we are that the European Commission's 9th European Development Fund for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries provided EUR 4 million (USD 5.7 million at June 2011 rates) to enable UN-Habitat to conduct the programme which now serves 59 cities in 23 African countries, and more than 20 cities in six Pacific, and four Caribbean countries.

Indeed, since its inception in 2008, the slum upgrading programme has achieved the confidence of partners at city and country level in Africa, the Caribbean and in the Pacific. It is making a major contribution aimed at helping in urban poverty reduction efforts, as each report in this series shows."

I wish to express my gratitude to the European Commission and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Secretariat for their commitment to this slum upgrading programme. I have every confidence that the results outlined in this profile, and others, will serve to guide the development of responses for capacity building and investments in the urban sector.

Further, I would like to thank each Country Team for their continued support to this process which is essential for the successful implementation of the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme.

Dr. Joan Clos
Executive Director, UN-Habitat

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

In 2007, for the first time, over half of Fiji's population resided in urban areas. All of its ten towns and two cities were experiencing growth, and with growth comes challenges. Today, Fiji's urban population is growing faster than its rural counterpart. This is due to both natural population growth in urban areas, and migration from rural zones as more and more people come in search of work and education.

Some municipalities are urbanizing more quickly than others, but all are confronting challenges related to growth. These include urban poverty and employment, environmental risk, land administration and infrastructure provision and maintenance. In order to effectively engage these challenges, and seek solutions to them, this national urban profile documents and analyze six key components of Fiji's urban context. These key themes include urban governance and finance, urban planning and management, land development and administration, urban infrastructure and services, urban housing and shelter, and climate change and disaster risk reduction. This is followed by an analysis of the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) presented by these components of the urban system.

Together these different analyses produce an urban profile for Fiji. Urban profiling consists of a set of assessments of urban needs and capacity issues at the city level. It employs a participatory approach where priorities are agreed on through consultative processes. Urban profiling is currently being implemented in over 20 countries in Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean and the Pacific. Urban profiling in Fiji includes an overall national urban profile and urban profiles of three urban areas, namely the Greater Suva Urban Area, Lautoka City and Nadi Town. Each profile will be published separately.

BACKGROUND

Fiji is a group of over 330 islands, of which approximately 30 per cent are inhabited. The main island is Viti Levu, which hosts the main towns and cities of Fiji. Being mountainous in its interior, these urban areas are located on the coast. As a result, Fiji's towns and cities are particularly exposed to seaborne natural hazards, such as cyclones (November – February), storm surges and projected sea level risk due to climate change.

The largest urban area in Fiji is the Greater Suva Urban Area, which actually includes four municipalities including Suva City, the national capital. In 2007, when the last census was undertaken, Fiji's total urban population was approximately 420,000 people, of which some 57 per cent, or about 240,000 people lived in the Greater Suva Urban Area.

URBAN GOVERNANCE AND FINANCE

Fiji governs its 13 municipalities through the use of municipal councils, headed by Special Administrators appointed by the central government. In this way, the running of municipal government is closely overseen by central government. In addition to the Special Administrator, everyday council operations are undertaken by a Chief Executive Officer. Both posts answer to the Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment. The performance of the Special Administrator is evaluated often, and the position has clear objectives such as improving rates collection and shifting from cash to accrual accounting in council operations. Nevertheless, overlap between the Chief Executive Officer and the Special Administrator posts is leading to confusion requiring ministry level intervention.

Many municipal councils find themselves severely under-resourced, usually due to shortages in budget, but also due to limitations in available, qualified staff. This is particularly an issue in two core functions of the councils: urban finances and urban planning. Shortages in capacity and technical understanding in matters of financial management are becoming more obvious as municipal councils begin handing increased revenues following sustained efforts from Special Administrators to ensure high levels of rate collection.

URBAN PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

All municipal councils in Fiji have approved town planning schemes, as required under the Town Planning Act. Some of these schemes are now in need of revision. Town planning schemes are the principle planning document used by the councils to guide long-term growth. However, only Suva City Council has been able to secure a town planner. Other municipal councils rely or building, engineering and health staff to implement and enforce town planning schemes. However, many of these professionals are not trained in planning and lack required technical knowledge for full realization of the planning schemes.

As a result, there is an overt tendency amongst municipal councils to focus on development controls, rather than strategic, long-term physical planning for growth. While the approval of town planning schemes confers power of determination in development decisions upon municipal councils, the general limitations of council technical staff mean that councils routinely rely upon the national Department of Town and Council Planning for advice and decision-making.

LAND DEVELOPMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

There are three categories of land ownership in Fiji: state land which is managed by the Department of Lands and Survey, iTaukei (indigenous Fijian) lands managed by the iTaukei Lands Trust Board, and individually-held private land. Administration and management is framed by relevant national acts including the Crown Lands Act and the iTaukei Land Trust Act.

Land is developed following formal channels and through informal means. Much of previous informal land development has occurred following the release of land by iTaukei landowning units to developers, or to settlers directly. However, a proactive, innovative stance from national and local bodies on the subject of land development has successful raising the awareness and understanding of landowning units on the need for formal development. As a result, there has been a marked increase in the number of landowning units pursuing land development projects through formal mechanisms.

Nevertheless, informal settlements occupy a significant amount of land across all urban areas. Administration of these settlements by municipal councils is difficult. These settlements are often located in peri-urban areas, or just beyond the municipal boundary, placing them beyond the jurisdiction of the municipality. Similarly, iTaukei villages are except from municipal council regulations as per the Local Government Act. This means that such villages are not permitted to access urban services. In both cases, urban services are nonetheless tapped. In informal settlements, basic services are often essentially stolen – pirated water and electricity connections are common. And in iTaukei villages, pirated connections do occur, but so do formal arrangements with the council under which, for example, the council delivers solid waste management services to the village in return for a small fee.

URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

The responsibility for the provision of infrastructure and basic services in urban areas in Fiji is shared between local and central governments. The latter provides water supply and sewerage services, roads and electricity, amongst others. The municipal councils are tasked with managing drainage systems, solid waste, street lighting, and sports and community facilities.

Water is supplied by the Water Authority of Fiji. According to World Bank data, 100 per cent of the urban population and 95 per cent of the rural population have access to improved drinking water. This rate, especially in rural areas, may in fact be lower, and different agencies provide conflicting data. Whatever the exact percentage, many urban areas are subject to regular water shortages and water cuts, even if they technically have access. As a result water sharing programmes are in place and there is growing interest in harvesting rainwater for household use – with the added benefit of flood management during heavy downpours.

Sanitation is also provided by the Water Authority of Fiji. The World Bank estimates that 94 per cent of the urban population and 71 per cent of the rural population is connected to improved sanitation systems in 2013. As of 2006, there were 11 public sewerage systems operating in Fiji, most servicing urban populations. There were 8 major sewerage treatment plants, including one in the cities and major towns. In 2005, approximately 40 per cent of the total population relied on septic tanks for sanitation, a further 37 per cent on direct disposal (either to land or sea) and only 23 per cent via reticulated sewerage systems. Over the intervening years, these numbers are expected to have shifted, with a far greater percentage now being connected to the sewerage network. However, septic tanks and direct disposal remain an issue.

Solid waste management is the responsibility of municipal councils who contract the provision of this service to private companies. Collection take place through neighbourhood collection routes with dump truck. Waste disposal involves either the two landfills or the many open dumpsites – there were 11 of these in 2007, seven of which were located in mangroves leading to pollution of water bodies.

Electricity is provided by the Fiji Electricity Authority and urban areas are well-serviced. The authority continues to install substations across urban areas

in order to growing demand. Many of these new substations draw from recently established small hydropower stations. In addition, the authority is pursuing rural electrification projects and alternative energy sources, such as wind farm projects.

The Fiji Roads Authority was established in 2012. It combined the functions of the previous Department of Roads, which was tasked with the management of national arterial roads, and the functions of the municipalities who were previously assigned to operate all roads within municipal boundaries (except the arterial roads). The Fiji Roads Authority thus centralizes the management of all roads in the country. Upon its formation, the state of many municipal roads was very poor and the upgrading of these roads has involved major work.

URBAN HOUSING AND SHELTER

Housing in Fiji varies widely in terms of type, structure and standard, ranging from detached houses to multi-unit apartment buildings and lodges. Permitted typologies for a given area are usually defined by the residential zonings in place in the town planning scheme. There is a high demand for housing in most towns and cities, but housing provision is impeded by shortages of available land. This is leading to the overall densification of urban areas, especially in inner cities. For example, tall apartment buildings are increasingly common in Suva City, as are multi-unit rental flats. Similarly, many residences are undertaking extensions.

There has been a noted increased in the number and density of informal settlements in many cities. For example, the 2006 Greater Urban Management Plan records 50 informal settlements in the Greater Suva Urban Area. This number had risen to over 100 by 2011. Various schemes and initiatives are in place to attempt to deal with rising levels of urban poverty, informality

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Towns and cities in Fiji are coastal or riverine. Natural hazards to which these urban areas are exposed include cyclones, hurricanes, coastal and riverine erosion, landslides, floods and projected mean sea level rise. Mangrove deforestation and coral reef extraction in order to accommodate urban development and for reasons of income generation are increasing the vulnerability of urban areas to coastal hazards. Both mangrove forests and coral reefs provide effective barriers against storm surges and cyclones. Of particularly critical concern are the residents of informal settlements in towns and cities as many such settlements are located in highly vulnerable areas, such as riverbanks and pockets of coastal land. Lami Town Council has begun incorporating climate change adaptation initiatives into its development operations. Such initiatives include a mangrove nursery and mangrove replanting schemes in order to reforest the coast.

However, town planning schemes elaborated by the municipalities contain very limited consideration of climate change or disaster risk management. Rehabilitation and rebuilding following disasters have been very costly to the central government. Similarly, disasters have caused substantial damage and losses to municipal, iTaukei and private property, and negatively impacted on local economies. Due to projected increases in climate-related hazards and extreme events, as well increased size and density of urban areas, such costs are likely to increase unless municipalities being to consider climate change and disaster risk as a component of their urban planning and development operations.