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SOLOMON ISLANDS: AUKI URBAN PROFILE



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United Nations Human Settlements Programme publications can be obtained from
UN-Habitat Regional and Information Offices or directly from:

P.O. Box 30030, GPO 00100 Nairobi, Kenya.

Fax: + (254 20) 762 4266/7

E-mail: unhabitat@unhabitat.org

Website: <http://www.unhabitat.org>

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This report was also managed by Kerstin Sommer, Alain Grimard, David Kithakye, Mathias Spaliviero, and Doudou Mbye in Nairobi.

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UNITED NATIONS HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PROGRAMME

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FOREWORDS



According to research published in UN-Habitat's¹ flagship report, *The State of the World's Cities 2010-2011*, all developing regions, including the African, Caribbean and Pacific states, 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 to 2010, a total of 227 million people in the 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 and 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 (ACP) 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 ACP 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 ACP Group.

It is worth recalling here how grateful we are that the European Commission's 9th European Development Fund for ACP 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 ACP 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joan Clos". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Dr. Joan Clos
Executive Director, UN-Habitat

¹ UN-Habitat - United Nations Human Settlements Programme

Urbanization in the Solomon Islands is a relatively recent phenomenon, taking place in little over 50 years. However, its share of population has been growing rapidly. The 2009 census revealed that almost 20 percent (102,030) of the country's total population lived in urban and peri-urban areas. With an annual urban growth rate of 4.7 percent, it is projected that by 2020, about 26 percent of the country's population will be living in urban areas if the present trend continues.

Urban growth is often negatively perceived due to challenges that come with it such as widespread unemployment, high crime rates, environmental degradation, and poorly serviced informal settlements that continue to thrive. These trends have been exacerbated by weak planning, management and governance and the tendency for national policies to prioritize rural over urban. Forty-five MPs in the fifty member national parliament are representing rural areas. It is hoped that this Urban Profiling study will assist in educating policy makers and members of the public at large of the dual and supporting relationship between urban and rural.

Auki, the provincial headquarter of Malaita province, serves as the main administrative, educational and economic centre for the province. It has a population of just over 5,100 with an average density of 468 people per square kilometre. The last National Census (2009) registered the town's growth at a rate of 11.6 percent per annum between the two censuses. This rate is alarming when considered together with the peri-urban areas of the outskirts of Auki and poses a critical concern for the Malaita Provincial Authority (MPA). This is due to the fact that Malaita Provincial Authority lacks the technical and administrative capacity and resources to effectively manage the increasing rapid urban growth and related issues it presents.

The Urban Profiling executed by UN-Habitat through the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey is timely as the Malaita Provincial Authority begins to reassess and introduce policies on improving service delivery in towns and embarks on a regional growth centre policy. The Auki Profile will no doubt assist the Malaita Provincial Authority to identify key urban issues to be included in the overall provincial plans. The ultimate aim is to highlight issues of critical importance to making Auki a liveable town, alleviate urban poverty at the town level and improve service delivery, particularly through the provision of better solid waste management, sanitation, public amenities, education, health, and informal settlement upgrading. The Urban Profile has identified a number of key institutional and capacity issues, which the Malaita Provincial Authority through its own resources as well as the Solomon Islands' Government and donors can support.

The Malaita Provincial Authority Executive is currently designing a programme to embark on designing its town development strategies and activities to promote and improve urban management and planning.

On behalf of the Malaita Provincial Authority, all residents of Auki and the province as a whole, I hereby fully endorse the Auki Town Profile and look forward to further intervention from UN-Habitat, donors and the Solomon Islands' Government to support the efforts and improve the image and development of Auki.

Edwin Suibaea
Province Premier
Malaita Province

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

Urbanization has improved the standard of living for many people in the country as it often brings in greater wealth and economic opportunities for the national population. But, unless these opportunities are well managed through balanced growth policies, it can lead to an increase in urban poverty, a rise in socio-economic inequality and informal settlements poorly served with basic services. In recognition of the need to better address these issues, the Ministry of Lands and Survey (MLHS), has requested UN-Habitat for support to undertake the urban profiling in the Solomon Islands.

Urban Profiling embraces a sequence of actions taken to assess development needs and capacity issues at national and local levels. It employs a participatory approach where priorities are agreed on through city consultation processes and has been implemented in over 30 countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, under the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP).

The urban profiling consists of three parts: (1) the use of localised questionnaires to collect information and to seek opinions from senior representatives of public, private and popular institutions at national and city levels, examining structures and processes in selected thematic areas in order to suggest priority interventions and to develop brief proposals through broad-based city consultations, (2) undertake prefeasibility studies on selected priority projects, and (3) project implementation, linking them to potential capital investment opportunities.

PSUP in Solomon Islands encompasses a national profile as well as profiles for Honiara and Gizo, each published as a separate report. This is the Auki Urban Profile, which following provincial level discussions, it was agreed to focus on five key areas; governance, informal settlements and housing, urban-rural economy, urban safety and resilience, and land and planning.

BACKGROUND

Auki was set up in 1909 by the British administration and is located approximately 100 kilometres from Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands. Auki serves as the main economic link between Honiara and the rural villages in the highlands of Malaita. It has been growing rapidly over the recent decades to become the third largest town after Honiara and Gizo. Auki is the provincial headquarters for Malaita province and had a population of 5,105 in 2009. The town is always busy during the day as people from the rural areas come and access services provided in Auki. Auki town is the home of four traditional villages and a number of scattered pockets of informal settlements poorly served with water, garbage collection, sanitation, and power.

Basic urban service provision is a major challenge in the town. Public transport infrastructure also needs to be improved in the town.

The key challenges for Auki authorities are; good governance, effective urban planning, management of the informal settlements, land mobilization to match the demands of the growing town population, and the provision of basic urban services to all residents of the town.

GOVERNANCE

The Provincial Government based in Auki comprises of 33 elected members who make up the Malaita Provincial Authority¹ acting as the national government agent responsible for the Province and its towns. It is mandated to provide a range of basic services, including education and health. The Malaita Provincial Authority is responsible to the national government through the Ministry of Provincial Government (MPG). The Malaita Provincial Authority has historically had weak technical and administrative capacity and weak public sector planning and financial management to deal with the challenges of rapid urban growth. Political interference in planning, diversion of funds to non-budgetary expenditures and lack of participatory processes also contributed to poor service delivery.

However, recently the Malaita Provincial Authority has benefited from the Provincial Government Strengthening Project (PGSP) under the Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening aimed at strengthening and improving its financial management and institutional capacity. Internal revenue collection has gradually improved, management systems enhanced and a bi-monthly city wide garbage collection has been set in place. Nevertheless there is still a need for the Malaita Provincial Authority to ensure effective and equitable distribution of basic urban services to all suburbs, especially to the informal settlements and improve its technical and management capacity.

INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS AND HOUSING

Auki has a number of scattered pockets of informal settlements within the town and four peri-urban villages located on the edge on the town boundary. They are characterized by lack of planning, overcrowding, poor access to basic urban services such as water, electricity and garbage collection, and poor sanitation. Informal settlement residents rely heavily on informal economic activities for their livelihood. The Malaita Provincial Authority does not have a policy to manage the growth of informal settlements and is unable to meet the

¹ Malaita provincial authority and Auki authority are used interchangeably here and refers to the elected government, which is headed by the Premier.



increasing demand for basic urban services because it is poorly equipped and under resourced.

THE URBAN-RURAL ECONOMY

The Malaita Provincial Authority depends on small, weak and limited economic activities for its internal revenue. The internal revenue collection is poor and made worse by non-payment of fees and inadequate staffing. The Malaita Provincial Authority relies heavily on the national government grant for its budgetary support, which is insufficient to meet the basic operation of the town. The challenge for the Malaita Provincial Authority is to improve internal revenue collection and build a wider sustainable economic base and a political environment that allows the private sector to flourish.

SECURITY AND RESILIENCE

intensity of bad weather and natural disasters (storm surges, earthquakes and flooding). In spite of this threat, people continue to construct houses on steep gradients, along river banks, and in swampy and low-lying areas. The Malaita Provincial Authority lacks data on the number of households living in such vulnerable areas. It is vital that the Authority and the national government conduct a vulnerability assessment in these areas and develop mitigation plans. It is also vital that the Malaita Provincial Authority relocate the most vulnerable settlements and enforces development control guidelines more effectively (which prevents building houses on steep slopes and near river banks and swampy areas).

LAND AND PLANNING

Auki is located on 109 hectares of land, and there is an apparent shortage of land as most developable state land has been allocated, (although much of this remains to

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