

Chapter 6

URBANIZATION AND SETTLEMENT IN THE PACIFIC

This chapter contains the keynote paper delivered to the workshop in Port Vila by John Connell. He is Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Sydney. His paper is supplemented with boxes containing other closely related contributions, including the points taken up by participants in discussion.

Introduction

Urbanization is a recent phenomenon in the South Pacific, and there is no historic tradition of indigenous urbanization. There were some towns in the nineteenth century; Koror in Palau was described in the 1830s as “an attractive little town.. a broad road, paved with stone, ran up from the harbor, while stone-lined paths crisscrossed the town in every direction” (Peattie 1988), but this was exceptional. In Polynesia a few townships had emerged by the end of the century, but early urbanization elsewhere was often the effect of German or Japanese colonialism. Even by the second half of the twentieth century most towns were still tiny. Port Moresby had a few thousand, and urbanization in Papua New Guinea (PNG) was still being encouraged on the eve of independence in 1975 as a source of economic growth and a potential crucible of nationhood. Port Vila in Vanuatu had just 1,300 people in 1955 (not even 5 percent of its present size). Urbanization was thus largely a history of alien intrusion on the periphery of the capitalist world—initially of beachcombers, missionaries, and administrators and belatedly of islanders, especially in Melanesia where “urban apartheid” existed into the postwar period. Pacific towns are therefore very new.

Whilst towns are quite new—and some mining towns in PNG are extremely recent—they have already provided social and economic problems and experienced complex problems of urban management. As the President of the Republic of Fiji (Fiji), Ratu Sir Kamisese Mara, has said:

“It does not require any great genius to figure out the consequences of the urban drift. Quite apart from the basic strains placed on limited infrastructure, we have seen an erosion of cultural values, growing unemployment and the attendant restlessness, increased crime and other ills which plague large urban centers. But in our case we have the additional constraints of limited resources, small land areas, isolation caused by distance, and the consequences of the great social and cultural changes wrought by the new realities that our traditional ethos was not equipped to handle.”
(1994:9)

So contemporary Pacific towns are quite different from their organized and regulated colonial counterparts: they are larger, more evidently the homes of Pacific islanders, of greater social and economic importance, constantly changing and not without problems.

Urban Growth

Urbanization is now general and substantial (Table 6.1) and Pacific islanders are no longer solely rural people. There are crude regional differences. In Melanesia urbanization is relatively limited, with neither PNG, Vanuatu, nor Solomon Islands having more than 25 percent of their population in towns. However towns are large; Port Moresby has about 250,000 people and the Suva-Nausori corridor more than 200,000. Rabaul, with around 20,000 people, was wiped out in 1994 volcanic eruptions; 100,000 people were displaced from the area, the regional economy collapsed, and there is still uncertainty about the restoration of Rabaul and the resettlement of those displaced. Other examples of involuntary displacement in the region are quite rare—despite other volcanic eruptions (which, for example, brought Ambryn villagers to Mele-Merat outside Port Vila), the recent tidal wave in west Sepik PNG, and the impact of mine construction in PNG and the Solomon Islands). In Micronesia the extent of urbanization is considerable; both Palau and the Marshall Islands have two thirds of their population in urban centers. There and in Kiribati (and also Tuvalu), urbanization is at very high densities, urban land is scarce (with reclamation in both Kiribati and Marshall Islands), and resettlement has been seen as necessary in Kiribati and Tuvalu. In Polynesia towns are neither large nor growing particularly quickly (except in Tuvalu), though there is peri-urban growth. Problems of urbanization are certainly not concentrated in the largest towns, but are often apparent even in the smallest urban centers.

Table 6.1
Pacific Urbanization—Independent States

Country	Main Center	Urban Population	Total Urbanized Population (percent)	Average Urban Growth Rate (percent per annum)
Fiji Islands	Suva	180,000	45	2.4
Kiribati	South Tarawa	30,000	36	3.2
Marshall Islands	Majuro	25,000	67	5.7
Micronesia, Federated States of	Kolonia	7,000	26	2.6
Nauru	Nauru		100	1.4
Palau	Koror	14,000	72	3.8
Papua New Guinea	Port Moresby	250,000	18	4.4
Samoa	Apia	35,000	21	0.9
Solomon Islands	Honiara	40,000	22	5.3
Tonga	Nuku'alofa	24,000	30	2.1
Tuvalu	Funafuti	4,000	45	4.8
Vanuatu	Port Vila	32,000	24	4.5

Source: J. Bryant-Tokalau 1994: 80-82.

Urban growth rates are highly variable, being much slower in Polynesia. Growth rates are a function of migrations and natural increase. Migration is a response to uneven development, away from distant, remote islands of limited social and economic opportunities, and has increasingly contributed to urban primacy, except in, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) and the Marshall Islands. Internal migration is now primarily a Melanesian phenomenon. Polynesian towns (except Funafuti) have partly been bypassed by international migration to the Pacific Rim. In Micronesia the zenith of international migration was in the 1960s, a period of American centralization (in Palau and the Marshall Islands). In FSM there is now significant international migration. Increasingly, natural increase has become the key element in urban growth. Population growth rates are high in most places (except Polynesia where international migration remains a safety valve) other than Tuvalu. Population growth rates may even be increasing, for example in PNG (where it is presently around 2.3 percent). In Vanuatu and Solomon Islands growth rates are even higher than that (around 2.8 and 3.4 percent, respectively) and in Marshall Islands it is over 3 percent (and was 4.2 percent in 1988 with a total fertility rate of 7.2, one of the highest in the world). Everywhere contraceptive usage is very low, even in the Fiji Islands and Kiribati, once regarded as models of population control, there is no national enthusiasm for family planning (beyond familiar rhetoric) and no obvious indication of real declines in population growth rates. Urban growth rates are likely therefore to remain relatively high.

Outcome

Though urbanization has been essential for service provision, political centralization and so on, and has contributed some economic growth and created new social and economic opportunities, it has also increasingly been associated with development problems. A couple of years before independence, Michael Somare, who became the first Prime Minister of PNG, said: "In all the 700 languages of our country we have never needed words for air pollution, for slum or for unemployment. Do we wish to become the kind of country that needs those words?" (1973). Sadly, if inadvertently, the answer to this has become "yes" and poverty might now be added to this list. It is just as evident that PNG is far from alone in needing those words.

A range of problems has emerged. Perhaps the most important and persuasive of these is unemployment. Employment is concentrated in the bureaucracy—a privileged sector in terms of its conditions of work—but the public sector has now stabilized or declined in most places. The informal sector, unlike in much of Asia, has grown only slowly, partly because of restrictive legislation (and sometimes, direct attacks on participants in the sector), though marketing and also crime and prostitution have grown in recent years. Urban unemployment has increased, with as much as a third of the urban population seeking work in some centers (such as Port Moresby) and no urban centers having unemployment rates less than 10 percent (though figures are rarely accurate and concepts of unemployment vary considerably). Unemployment has contributed to social problems, with a recent study of Port Moresby indicating that some 69 percent of unemployed men earned a living through crime and 38 percent of unemployed women worked as prostitutes (Levantis 1997) and unemployment is particularly prevalent among youth. Youth unemployment has contributed to other social problems.

Poverty has also become both more visible and more significant. While a 1950s book proclaimed that the South Pacific was *Where the Poor are Happy* (Owen 1955) this is scarcely the situation now. In the Fiji Islands it has been estimated that in the mid-1990s a quarter of all Fijian households were below the poverty line with the majority of those being in urban

areas. Many of those households were headed by women. Thus, despite steady economic growth over a quarter of a century there was no reduction in the extent of poverty (UNDP 1997a). Unfortunately there are few other estimations of the extent of poverty elsewhere in the region, in much of which economic growth has been less and population growth greater than in the Fiji Islands. It is certainly reasonable to assume that in many other countries, and urban contexts, poverty is greater than in the Fiji Islands; there is visible evidence of youth unemployment, undernutrition, and the emergence of beggars. There is an urgent need to review the extent of urban poverty and employment (which would enable policies for poverty reduction and employment creation to be put in place), but there appears to be little national interest in recognizing the possible extent of the problem. Newspaper headlines have queried "Will PNG pass its moral test: how does it treat its poorest?" (Post-Courier 31 January 1994) and there is doubt about several governments' concern for the quality of life of the least well-off citizens. Meanwhile urban poverty shows no sign of declining.

In most urban areas there are growing problems of formal housing provision; there is limited private sector housing capacity, formal houses are expensive (to purchase or to rent), and urban governments have found it impossible to provide formal housing for growing populations. Consequently informal settlements have grown in number and size; they are no longer "out of sight and out of mind" even in the most affluent urban centers such as Noumea. In some places, perhaps even in such large cities as Port Moresby, as much as half the population are in informal houses (some of which are on land that is illegally occupied), often in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions. In extreme cases, residential development is at exceptionally high densities, as in Ebeye (Marshall Islands) where the population density is similar to that in Hong Kong, China. Overcrowding has resulted in such diseases as respiratory diseases and tuberculosis, while the combination of overcrowding, limited access to water supplies and health services, and poverty have actually reduced health status and life expectancy in some settlements. Governments have often been unable (or unwilling) to supply services to settlement populations, exacerbating intra-urban socioeconomic inequalities.

The provision of other urban services has also proved difficult, and there have been considerable problems in infrastructure provision, as colonial infrastructures creak into obsolescence. There are problems in water supply, in terms of both quantity and quality (from which even Sydney is not immune), especially in the largest cities and in atoll towns where there is a dependence on lenses that are often polluted. Similar problems affect electricity supply and sewerage provision (and disposal). Only a small population of urban households have access to consistently safe water and sanitation. Supply problems are partly a function of poor cost recovery and mismanagement (simple good housekeeping) in the relevant organization, a considerable reluctance to adopt user-pays policies, and the unwillingness of people to pay for certain services, as in Samoa where water is perceived as a "divine right". This has resulted in pressures for privatization. In some sectors, such as urban "public" transport, there has always been privatization (outside the Fiji Islands) and this has been relatively successful (because of competition—often in excess) despite some traffic congestion. Similarly certain forms of private recycling (such as of bottles in Port Moresby) have worked effectively, on a small and informal scale. In key sectors, such as water supply and garbage and sewerage disposal, the effectiveness of privatization has yet to be demonstrated.

There have also been negative urban environmental outcomes of service provision, including unsightly waste dumps; difficulties in finding sites for new dumps (especially on atolls); polluted water lenses, waterways, and lagoons; air (and sometimes noise) pollution; and illegal dumping and burning off: the complex of "brown" environmental issues that affect much larger towns elsewhere in the world. In some areas coastal erosion has been an outcome of new forms of construction, such as urban causeways (as in Tarawa), the clearance

of mangroves (simultaneously reducing fisheries habitats), or sand mining, all reducing the prospects for achieving sustainable urban development.

Social problems have sometimes followed rapid urban development and overcrowding, including the general problems of social disruption and disorganization that result from families divided between rural and urban areas, and the loss of both urban and rural "safety-nets". This has contributed to higher levels of divorce, single-parent families, and a rise in domestic violence, most evident and most problematic in Port Moresby (Connell 1997). Insecurity, and rapid urban growth, have caused tensions between migrants (even when in urban areas for more than one generation), local landholders, and urban authorities. Destitute groups have appeared, alongside increased inequality between the "haves" and "have nots", which has been one factor in the rise of urban crime. Neither governments nor NGOs have been able to meet the challenges of rapid social change.

Urban planning and management are of limited extent in most cities. In some large urban areas (such as Apia) there are no urban authorities and no distinct urban planning exists. More frequently urban planning (like planning generally) is weak, land use plans do not exist (or, where they do, are obsolescent or ignored), human resources (and planning skills) are scarce, and there is little coordination between agencies (such as electricity and water providers). This has contributed to cities being effectively cities of parts (Connell and Lea 1994), functioning (or failing to function) as a group of urban villages rather than an integrated whole. Some obvious consequences of this are uncoordinated, unplanned and fragmented growth, resulting in more costly (and fragmented) service provision, traffic congestion (as urban layouts diminish the possibilities for appropriate alternative forms of transport), and no (or very little) public open space, for amenity or recreation. All these outcomes of urbanization in the Pacific have been reviewed in some detail elsewhere (Connell and Lea 1993,1995, 1998) and are well-known in the region.

Response

The usual response to urban problems in the region has been to target rural development, partly because of a long-held ideological conviction that rural living is most appropriate in the region (a legacy of colonial times) and because of a belief that resources are concentrated in rural areas. Governments have often stressed the merits of rural development. For example, in PNG in 1981, it was argued by one government minister:

"As the government believes that the major determinant of rural-urban drift is due to rural-urban imbalance of wages, incomes and services, the government believes that one of the most effective means of getting people to remain in rural areas is through rural development. Less developed rural areas are given special attention in this process. Agricultural, forestry and mining projects are intended to create employment opportunities in rural areas, apart from other considerations. Development of rural transport infrastructure, provision of health, education and agricultural services are some of the central areas of the government's rural development strategy. Family planning is another long-term policy where provision of services is exercised in Papua New Guinea...A lower birthrate of course means less pressure on the land and so less of a 'push' for people to migrate to urban areas." (Jacob Lemeki 1981, quoted in Connell and Lea 1993:88)

Broadly similar perspectives, focusing on some combinations of service provisions and income and employment generation, have appeared at some time in every development plan in the region. There is nothing wrong with such perspectives, but they cannot resolve urban development problems. First, it has proved difficult to generate sustained rural employment and income generation opportunities, because of human resource constraints and mismanagement (most evident in PNG in terms of aid relief subsequent to the 1997 drought and the 1998 tidal wave). Few countries have effective rural development policies or extension services, and some of the more successful rural developments (such as of betel nuts in PNG) have occurred without government assistance or intervention. Moreover, rural options are rarely so alluring as cosseted urban wages, and few countries have achieved substantial economic growth purely from rural development. Secondly, successful rural development, in terms of increased income or better education, may still fuel rural-urban migration. Thirdly, urban populations are increasingly urban (and thus may resist opportunities and pressures to return to rural areas) because of urban kinship ties, the lack of effective links to rural areas (in terms of visits, declining remittance flows, a declining appreciation of, or sympathy for, rural cultures, including the loss of language-skill—especially among children—and diminishing, or difficulty in claiming rights to rural land, all evident in the declining rural subsistence safety net). Underlying the difficulties attached to rural development is a situation where South Pacific states are experiencing low levels of economic growth, with limited resources available to restructure development.

Box 6.1

Pacific Urbanization—Some Social Perspectives

Resettlement resulting from urbanization is a vital, but unrecognized, issue in the Pacific. It is not clear how much of the prevalent urban drift is truly voluntary. In many cases, there is no effective choice if the family unit is to survive. However, the belief persists that people come to the urban area “temporarily” and can return to their village “anytime”. In fact there is no evidence that a return to the village will result in economic, social, and spiritual security:

- Going back to the village is only feasible if supporting infrastructure, market outlets, and social services are adequate.
- Land scarcity in rural areas and conflicts as it gains value makes it inaccessible to many including women and youths looking for a livelihood.
- Urban-based families are rapidly becoming alienated from their village roots.
- The wage sector is growing too slowly to absorb all aspirants and greater recourse must be made to the subsistence and informal sectors.
- Urban isolation combined with lack of land for a garden is aggravating poverty.

Urbanization is seen by the community as much more than an economic issue:

- Social needs and the place of custom are of great importance.
- Extended family relations are the main social safety net.
- Communal systems of local life give a sense of social stability to all.

Source: Based on part of a presentation at the Port Vila workshop by Peggy Fairbairn-Dunlop, Head, Department of Continuing Education, University of the South Pacific, Suva.

The second response to perceptions of problematic urbanization is decentralization. There was considerable discussion of decentralization in the 1970s, including the resiting of capitals such as Port Moresby. In the end, despite one new capital city (Palikir in FSM) there have been few attempts at decentralization or the encouragement of secondary growth centers. Decentralization has proved difficult in most countries, there is much less to decentralize in the Pacific, and there is reluctance among the bureaucracy and the private sector to be part of the decentralization process. (In Kiribati, public servants in the Ministry of Line Islands were reluctant themselves to move to those islands). Increasingly, bureaucratic inertia and, more recently, deregulation, have killed off the limited philosophy and practice of decentralization. Where new urban centers have emerged, it has been in PNG, entirely linked to new mine development, resulting in a more balanced structure of urban development (exactly the intent of decentralizations) but unlike anything elsewhere.

Thirdly, there have been some resettlement schemes, but few of these have been targeted at reducing urban development. Some have been designed to stimulate rural development, such as sugar schemes at Seaqaqa in Fiji and oil palm schemes at Oro and West New Britain in PNG. These have largely been curtailed or ended because of land tenure problems and conflicts. Other resettlement schemes have been involuntary, including those that have followed environmental problems, such as the movement of islanders from Ambryn island, following volcanic eruptions, to Maet in Efate island (Vanuatu) and from the Carteret islands, following sea level rises, to Bougainville (PNG). Other environmental changes such as the phosphate mining of Banaba that displaced islanders to Fiji, have resulted from human interventions. The most substantial resettlement scheme in the region, has been that of i-Kiribati from the Gilbert islands chain to the Line islands, 2,000 kilometers to the east. Early resettlement schemes (to the Phoenix islands in the 1930s, and to Solomon Islands in post-war years) were followed in the decade after the mid-1980s with the movement of about 6,000 people to the three northern Line islands, to reduce the extent of overcrowding in the Gilbert islands chain including the urban area of South Tarawa, though the policy was not primarily intended to reduce or stabilize the urban population). The capacity of the Line islands has now been reached, and attention has shifted towards, once again, resettling the Phoenix islands. Generally resettlement schemes have proved to be expensive and inefficient, there are few areas in the region with resettlement potential, and land tenure problems constrain potential schemes.

Finally, some "anti-urban" policies have directly targeted urban populations. Some governments have sought to stimulate urban-rural (return) migration, with a series of incentives, such as Operation Exodus in the Marshall Islands in the 1960s; these have proved extremely costly and inefficient (Connell 1986). Others have sought to reduce employment opportunities for distant folk (as when Kiribati sought to allocate employment of bureaucrats in Tarawa by contract, with restricted opportunities for those from outer islands) or have simply failed to provide services for settlers and, or, restrict the areas where they might resettle (as in the case of Outer Island settlers at Madrich in Yap, FSM). In the most extreme form governments have sought to send settlers "home". In Bougainville (PNG) at least three planeloads of squatters were repatriated in the 1970s and in several coastal provinces a series of subsequent attempts have been made to repatriate settlers. Typical of this was in 1991 when the Premier of Morobe province, seeking to eject settlers from Lae, stated: "My plan to eject settlers is a genuine one for the sake of my people...I do not see why people should move from province to province; I am sure there are better things to do in their own villages or towns" (quoted in Connell and Lea 1993: 85). Needless to say, that was not the migrants' perception. Most such attempts have, not surprisingly, been difficult to put into practice, and are in direct conflict with constitutional provisions for freedom of movement. More frequently urban migrants are simply ignored.

All such policies reflect widespread assumptions that urbanization is excessive, virtually throughout the region, and that it should be reduced. By contrast there have been fewer attempts in recent years to address urban problems *within* urban areas—such as through having provision of informal sector employment creation—as those with employment have tended to ignore (or target) those without, despite different rhetoric. Moreover it has become no easier to solve urban development problems, though it is of increasing importance that such problems be solved.

Urban Development Policies

There is no question that urban development is inevitable (even if efforts at rural development and decentralization were more successful) not least because many people have established themselves as more or less permanent urban residents. Appropriate urban development policies are therefore necessary. There are however constraints to establishing successful policies. Firstly, there is a now familiar set of constraints to development in small states including isolation and small size (and therefore few economies of scale), a small domestic market (and therefore limited industrialization) and few economic resources, dependence on foreign capital (aid and investment), a high and disproportionate expenditure on administration, and so on (Connell 1988). Recently there have been substantial efforts to cut back on administrative costs, stimulated by external intervention, which has produced a new “3 D litany”—deregulate, downsize, and diversify (the economy)—to enable more appropriate development. These efforts and other constraints (as the world economy has become more open) have tended to emphasize the problems of urban development, as human resources have dwindled, and the realistic options for national development have not increased.

Fundamental limitations to national development in island economies, and scarce resources, have contributed to a second basic problem: mismanagement. Island states have limited skilled human resources, so that the overall tasks of development planning are considerable (but urban planning and management, with even more limited resources and a weak fiscal base, and limited national support, is even more difficult). In recent years, and particularly in Melanesia, there have been problems of regime instability, so that long-term development planning is very difficult (hence the Solomon Islands, in October 1998, sought to ban MPs changing sides between elections). There have been movements towards more autocratic structures (as in Samoa); declining interest in equitable development; less accountability, transparency, and openness; increased corruption (and the quest for doubtful sources of income); simple mismanagement (failures of good housekeeping at all levels); political concerns with local rather than national issues; the continued exclusion of women from some areas of public life (thus losing valuable human resources); and some social tensions in multi-ethnic, -religious, -cultural, and -island states. Steps towards public sector reform and deregulation have not substantially reduced these problems.

A third critical problem is land tenure (which is the subject of more detailed discussion in Chapter 8). In most urban areas there is some freehold and government-owned land; in some towns, such as Apia, substantial land areas are church-owned, while in almost all towns some land is held in customary tenure. These varied tenure regimes make planning and management extremely difficult, principally because of the difficulty of regulating land use and service provision in areas of customary tenure. Consequently, in many towns land use is effectively a result of fragmented land tenure, with small group interests prevailing over the collective good, thus emphasizing the manner in which towns function as collections of

urban villages with quite distinct interests and priorities. Urban management is thus more difficult and more expensive.

Fourthly, there is a lack of effective urban governance in most towns, partly because few urban councils exist (despite, in some cases, like Apia, the existence of long established recommendations that such councils be established). Even fewer are effective, because of scarce human resources, conflicts with national (and regional) governments, and inadequate finance. More generally there is little local participation in development; local people are rarely informed, let alone consulted over particular policies and programs. On the other hand, urban populations (or components of them) are often at least as interested as politicians in short-term solutions, while their spatial horizons are even more localized. Involvement is difficult, but it is certainly necessary.

Options and Opportunities

From the previous litany of problems and constraints it is necessary to develop certain options and opportunities. In a wider sense it is necessary to get the context right, that is, create the appropriate underlying structure of development (of which urban development is a component and symptom). Clearly this demands economic growth; in a climate of deregulation that necessitates more private investment (though this has been difficult in recent history) presently encouraged (as in comprehensive reform programs) but difficult to stimulate effectively. This will also require greater promotion of the informal sector (UNDP 1997b). It will also be necessary to achieve a greater degree of population control, through greater recognition of the relationship between population, economic development, and environmental outcomes (in situations where the "genetic lottery" often prevails), which will require greater gender equality and the empowerment of women, and also greater access to contraceptive devices (equally necessary in the fight against AIDS). Both the tasks of increasing economic growth and decreasing population growth will be difficult. Hence urban growth is unlikely to slow in the immediate future.

It is essential therefore to manage urban growth more effectively. There are four elements in this. Firstly, towns require effective urban authorities (and appropriate institutions for delivery services) and organizational structures that work (that is, there are adequate human resources and finance). That this does not now exist is partly a result of the unwillingness of national governments to recognize the gravity of urban problems (especially the rise of poverty and unemployment), the limited finance and resources to deal with these problems, and the preference for confronting issues of economic growth rather than social development.

Secondly, as towns get larger, urban plans are increasingly necessary to coordinate and integrate development proposals, ranging from land use to service provision (to prevent costly one-off crisis "solutions" such as urban motorways). Lack of coordination between government departments has raised the cost and inefficiency of urban development (and made cost recovery more difficult). In some towns urban plans have long existed, some dating back more than 20 years, but the absence of effective urban governance and the difficulty of overcoming land tenure constraints, have prevented their implementation.

Implementation of plans and policies represents the third central element in urban development. There are a number of reasons why plans do not get implemented (beyond issues of urban governance and land tenure, themselves dependent on human resource and capital constraints). Governments have other priorities, and plans are not targeted to particular implementing authorities and they are, in any case, difficult to implement (especially

if they conflict with national priorities, or existing land tenure arrangements). Governments are often distrustful of integrated planning authorities, in case they become too powerful, and are reluctant to decentralize and delegate power, especially in capital cities, when this might conflict with their own authority. Prominent urban landowners are similarly reluctant to cede and delegate power. Finally both planning, and the implementation of plans, are difficult, without adequate data on needs and issues; urban data are lacking in many places. Institutional strengthening of planning agencies and line departments is necessary, but this will be particularly difficult in a period of downsizing and deregulation—effectively the retreat of the state. Conceivably this may strengthen the conviction of some that planning is not a South Pacific activity, at a time when it is most required. It is possible that urban development planning and management in the Pacific has been particularly weak since no regional organization in the Pacific has focused on urban issues, or even components of this, such as housing or water supplies—as, for example, exists for health or fisheries. This has meant that there is no forum for discussing common development issues—and these are more similar than in many other areas, where such forums do exist—or sharing appropriate developments and solutions. For example, the Kiribati experience of urban planning is of some value for other parts of Micronesia, but there are few means through which extending and understanding that experience might occur (Connell and Lea 1998b).

Box 6.2

Urbanization: Issues Raised in Workshop Discussion

The lively discussion that followed Connell's presentation touched on many issues including the following:

- Foreign and other private sector investments have an important role in encouraging urban development and rural-urban drift.
- It was noted that there is usually a lack of social organization to help vulnerable groups, particularly squatters, to establish a more acceptable place in urban society.
- On the issue of squatters, it was also noted that the resolution of their problems requires a fully participative process that would involve the customary owners of land adjacent to the towns, the town or municipal authorities, and the representatives of the distant or offshore groups from which the squatting communities are drawn.
- One innovative approach is to establish more small rural town centers to provide basic services in rural areas.
- It was emphasized that one had to remain very conscious of the reasons why people are attracted to urban areas in the first place—primarily to escape an increasingly difficult economic situation in rural and remote areas.

Finally, in order to achieve sustainable urban development it is necessary to involve local people in planning. Participation and empowerment are central to all facts of development, requiring improved education, workshops, and the involvement of NGOs including churches and also the private sector. Given hierarchical government structures (often inherited from colonial times) and scarce human resources, this will be particularly difficult to achieve.

The foregoing has reflected on a wide range of problems and constraints, stressed the need for change but recognized the difficulties attached to that. However, South Pacific towns are generally relatively small, and without the extent of poverty that exists in cities in other parts of the world. Planners, politicians, and people are more familiar with urban problems than they are in other parts of the world. Urban planning may be difficult and demanding but it is not yet too late to put effective systems in place throughout the region.

References

- Bryant-Tokalau, J. (1994). "Pacific Urban Environments," *The Courier*, 144, March-April, 80-82.
- Connell, J. (1987). "Migration, Rural Development and Policy Formation in the South Pacific," *Journal of Rural Studies*, 3, 105-121.
- Connell, J. (1997). *Papua New Guinea, The Struggle for Development*, London, Routledge.
- Connell, J. and J. Lea, (1993). *Planning the Future, Melanesian Cities in 2010*, NCDS, Canberra.
- Connell, J. and J. Lea, (1994). "Cities of Parts, Cities Apart? Changing Places in Modern Melanesia," *The Contemporary Pacific*, 6, 267-308.
- Connell, J. and J. Lea, (1995). *Urbanisation in Polynesia*, NCDS, Canberra.
- Connell, J. and J. Lea, (1998a). *Island Towns—Managing Urbanisation in Micronesia*, Center for Pacific Island Studies, Honolulu.
- Connell, J. and J. Lea (1995b). "Urban Management in Micronesia: Learning from Kiribati," *Development Bulletin*, 45, Autumn, 27-31.
- Levantis, T. (1997). Urban Unemployment in Papua New Guinea—It's Criminal, *Pacific Economic Bulletin*, 12 (2), 54-72.
- Mara, Ratu Sir K. (1994). *The Pacific Islands in the Year 2010: A Vision from Within*, East—West Center, Honolulu.
- Owen, R. (1955). *Where the Poor are Happy*, Collins, London.
- Peattie, M. (1988). *Nan'yo: The Rise and Fall of the Japanese in Micronesia, 1855-1945*, Honolulu, The University of Hawaii Press.
- Somare M. (1973). New Goals for New Guinea, *Pacific Perspectives*, 2, 1-4.
- UNDP (1993a). *Fiji Poverty Report*, UNDP, Suva.
- UNDP (1993b). *Sustaining Livelihoods. Promoting Informal Sector Growth in Pacific Island Countries*, UNDP, Suva.