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I. Qalo, Ropate Rakuita.

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# 17 Urban or Rural? The Anomaly of iTaukei Urban Villages in Local Government

JOSALIA OSBORNE, MARIA SAHIB AND PROFESSOR VIJAY NAIDU

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This paper highlights the rather peculiar predicament of iTaukei urban villages which are physically located in towns and cities and yet administered as if they were part of rural provincial councils. All around them are wards and zones demarcated as integral spatial components of the urban local government and serviced by infrastructure and services that are considered to belong to the town or city. While only a small proportion of the 1,177 iTaukei villages are currently in Fiji's towns and cities, the on-going urban sprawl and the emergence of inter-linked urban corridors are likely to encompass many more villages over the next two decades. Those villages that are already within the boundaries of urban areas or have precincts that are contiguous to towns and cities (but urban boundaries makers seek to deliberately exclude them) are not included in urban municipal government. Inhabitants of these villages do not vote for representatives in the local government councils, and local government bodies do not take responsibility for their wellbeing. Instead, the expectation is that the relevant provincial council, largely a rural administrative body will serve their interests.

Geographically located in the urban milieu, accessing employment and livelihoods in the urban context, and being governed by rural administrative structures mean that iTaukei residents of urban villages are not bound by the laws and standards that apply to their proximate neighbours in towns and cities, nor do they have any entitlement to the services provided to other urban dwellers such as rubbish collection, sewerage disposal and roads. This paper will examine the anomalous situation of urban villages and raise issues about their governance, and access to services, and urban standards of living, and apparent oversight of their wellbeing and aspirations by local authorities. With climate change and accompanying extreme weather events and sea level rise such villages are especially vulnerable.

## Introduction

Urban governance is a very complex subject in Pacific island countries (PICs) as it has multiple dimensions and issues. Among the many concerns are rapidly growing population, infrastructure development and planning, revenue generation and service provision, managing urban sprawl and urban governance in general (Storey, 2003). A significantly difficult aspect of the latter is the presence of 'traditional' villages that have been physically incorporated in the broadly defined urban milieu, and yet have varying degrees of political and administrative autonomy. In Vanuatu,

the encroachment of urban areas into the customary land and villages is also evident (Storey, 2003). The fact of the matter is that urbanization is a growing phenomenon in many PICs and this process itself has posed challenges to villages that are located near its expanding fringes (Walsh: 2006; Storey: 2003). Moreover, the population and households in urban villages themselves have significantly increased as a result of both natural growth, as well as the influx of 'relatives' from rural areas. Local government in urban areas have to contend with administering businesses, and 'mainstream' residents as well as co-exist, and negotiate arrangements with the more traditional authorities responsible for urban villages.

In Fiji, there are three different governance institutions that oversee urban village representation, administration and the provision of services. These are the provincial councils, the rural authority, and municipal bodies. Of prominence among them are the provincial administration and the urban local government. The areas in which the two administrative bodies intersect or overlap in their governance causes confusion, and results in ineffective delivery of services. This paper will highlight some of these areas, and advocate the need for critical policy changes in the manner in which urban villages are administered. This is especially important at a time when climate change is beginning to affect all residents of urban locations, both inclusiveness and sustainability are at stake.

### Local Governments

According to Hassall and Tipu (2008), the term 'local government' refers to the tier or tiers of government below that of national government. The local government arrangement is a blend of customary governance with western type institutions in PICs. This is very evident in Fiji where local government has historically been ethnically and territorially defined with separate native, then 'Fijian', and then iTaukei administration for indigenous Fijians; separate Rural Advisory bodies for non-indigenous citizens; and municipalities that have become more multi-ethnic overtime (see Qalo, 1984). All nucleated traditional iTaukei villages are governed by the provincial council administration under the Fijian Affairs Act (Cap. 120, 2006). The iTaukei urban village is recognized as a 'native inhabitation' on land declared as native reserve. Native reserves comprise one third of all iTaukei land in Fiji, and on consent by a majority of the landowners may be leased only to the iTaukei. On the other hand, town and city boundaries are declared through legal procedures, and are governed by the Local Government Act (Cap 125, 1985). The provincial administration and municipal authorities are separate forms of local government and come under separate ministries of the central government.

Although the iTaukei have governed themselves traditionally over millennia through indigenous customs and processes, urban local governments have been formed in recent decades to govern emergent towns and cities. Both the supposedly traditional forms of local government, and modern urban administrations have been moulded by nearly a

century of colonialism. The system of village, district and provincial councils at the local level, and the Council of Chiefs at the national level were formally established as part of the system of indirect rule by the British to reduce costs (see Ali, 1980; Routledge, 1985; Knapman, 1987). The emergence of port towns (Levuka, Suva, and Lautoka), sugar mill towns (Nausori, Navua, Labasa, Lautoka, Ba and Rakiraki) and mining towns (Vatukoula and Tavua) required forms of representation and administration that suited European residents.

Many challenges exist for local governments generally and especially those in urban areas. Local governments have inadequate resource to provide amenities and services, mainly because of limited revenue streams and the limited funding support from rate-payers and national government. The continuous influx of migrants from rural areas to towns and cities has exerted added pressure on local urban government. A good proportion of such migrants gain their livelihood from the informal economy, and often reside in informal settlements. As a result they do not pay any town or city rate (a critical source of income for the local council or municipalities). Such migrants may also have implications for urban villages in terms of demands for land for housing for instance, and in turn they can be subjected to extortion of local land owners.

### Governance of iTaukei Villages

There are 1,176 iTaukei villages in the country which are administered by the Provincial Councils through the Village Act (iTaukei Affairs Board official, 2012, pers. Comm). Provincial Councils are part of the administrative structure of the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs. Under this Ministry there is an iTaukei Affairs Board that administers the 14 provincial councils in the country. At the bottom of the formal administrative structure for rural iTaukei are village councils that serve as forums where village level concerns are discussed. Significant matters are then taken up by the village headman ('Turaga ni Koro') to the district (Tikina) council meeting. If considered pertinent the matters are then processed upwards by the Tikina representative to the provincial council meeting. At times, the village headman can present requests directly to the provincial council or to various government departments since district and provincial meetings can be far apart. Overall, the provincial council acts as the primary conduit for the administration and development of these villages.

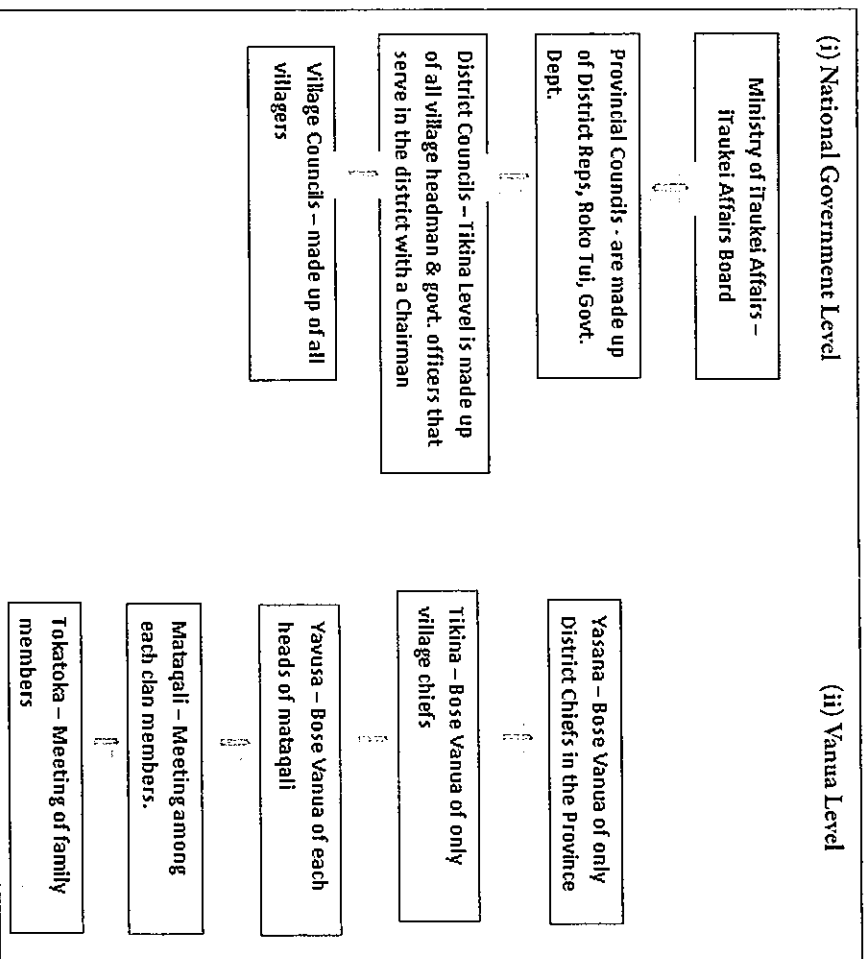
Another dimension in the administration of iTaukei villages relate to neo-traditional structures that run parallel to the provincial administration. This is the 'Vanua' system which is separate and yet linked to the provincial administration. The latter supposedly address 'development' concerns of iTaukei villages, whereas the former covers matters of tradition authority and protocols. Thus, iTaukei villages contain two sets of authority structures. On one hand, there is the central government which is represented by the village, tikina and provincial councils, and on the other hand is the 'Vanua' represented by the traditional authority of chiefs (Talebula, 2009; iTaukei Affairs Board, 2012). The

'Vanua' system basically oversees the preservation of traditional culture and way of life in iTaukei villages. For instance, in a 'Bose Vanua', the chiefs of the villages designate traditional duties such as levying of mats, root crops for traditional ceremonial functions which is known as the 'cola i vanu'. Other examples of the 'Vanua' governance are to instill discipline and maintain order in a village setting. Thus, if someone behaves inappropriately in a village, the task of the 'chiefs' is to discipline them so as order is maintained. During earlier times, some of this punishment may include beating of those who are accused so as to cause shame and to deter others from following in these acts. While beating is no longer supported by law, nowadays most chiefs still rely on traditional methods known as 'vosatuki vakavanaa' which is basically to reprimand the wrong doers; telling them of the implications of their action and directing/counselling them on the appropriate forms of behaviour.

In the 'Vanua' there is a hierarchical authority beginning at the base with the family unit (*tokarokoka*) head, then there is the clan (*maragali*) leader, and then the village (*yavusa*) which is headed by the village chief. At the 'yavusa' level, there is the 'Bose Vanua' which is akin to the 'tikina' level deliberations of only the heads of 'yavusa'. The 'Bose Vanua' deals mainly with traditional observance and developmental matters. In many ways the two structures in a iTaukei village complement each other. For instance, if there are development issues that are brought up at the 'Vanua' level, these would be communicated to the village headman ('*Turaga ni Koro*') who will then relay it to the 'Bose Vanua' where all the government departments that deal with these matters are to present by law. In essence, the village headman/tikina representative acts as an intermediary between the government and the 'Vanua' while the traditional herald ('*mataniavana*') acts as an intermediary between the chiefs and their subjects. The two forms of authority structures are similar to traditional villages in a number of PICs. For example, in Samoa, a '*puleniu*' is the village mayor (similar to the *Turaga ni Koro*) who is the representative of the government to the village 'Fono' or council (UNDP, n.d.). The village 'Fono' is similar to the 'Bose Vanua' since it is made up of chiefs ('*marai*'). The Fono is tasked with overseeing traditional observance (*ibid*). Figure 1 illustrates the two hierarchies found in iTaukei villages.

From Figure 1, it can be seen that an iTaukei formal administrative structure has at its apex the iTaukei Affairs Board which comes under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and is headed by its Minister and Permanent Secretary. At the provincial level, it is led by a chairman who is elected by the various district representatives. The intermediary position between government and the provincial council is that of the 'Roko Tui'. While at the district (*tikina*) level, there is also a chairman of the council however the go-between the *tikina* and provincial level is the district representative. At the village level, the chairman is the village chief while the village headman is the representative of the village to the district council.

Figure 1: Dual hierarchies in authority structures for iTaukei villages.



At the 'Vanua' level, at the apex is the 'Bose Vanua', the meeting of various district chiefs headed by the paramount (high) chief of the province. In some provinces in Fiji where there is no Paramount chief, the district chiefs elect their chairman. From the provincial level matters go down to the district level, which is made up of village chiefs and is headed by the district chief – Luliu Vakavanua ni Tikina. Then at the village level, there is the village chief (Luliu ni Yavusa) leading and the members are made up of each heads of clan ('matagali'). The orientation of these local governance structures relate to rural villages rather than to urban ones, however these structures exist in urban villages, and contribute to the confused state of governance in these villages.

### Governance of Urban iTaukei Villages

There are 31 iTaukei villages within formally defined urban boundaries or very close to such boundaries (FIBOS, 2012). While physically located very much in the urban milieu, they are still governed as a rural locale (Walsh, 2006, p.84). This makes their situation anomalous since in many ways they are subject to urban conditions but are

being governed by not only the two forms of government outlined above, there are other authorities that have jurisdiction over these villages. For instance, while many urban iTaukei villages are administered by provincial councils under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, and yet another governmental entity that oversees these villages, the 'Rural Authority'. According to Connell and Lea (1993: 2002, 123), governance of urban villages are peculiar since there are many forms of governance that are applicable to them. They stressed the complex nature of governing urban areas of the Pacific, particularly traditional villages within town boundaries. To reiterate, in Fiji, apart from provincial councils that have responsibility over urban villages, there are municipalities that govern various towns and cities under the Ministry of Local Government and Urban Development. Then there are the rural authorities under the Ministry of Health that also look after urban iTaukei villages since they are considered as a rural locale (ibid). For instance, Kalabu Village within the Nasinu Town boundary is governed by the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs under the Naitasiri Provincial Council and also by the Suva Rural Authority of the Ministry of Health.

In some instances, villages within urban boundaries are excluded by urban authorities (Walsh, 2006, p. 85). Walsh highlighted the fact that these villages are "caught up in an administrative vacuum" (ibid). In an interview, the Suva City Council Senior Health Inspector (Operations and Administration), Ramesh Narayan reiterated the fact that these urban villages are legally administered as rural entities; yet geographically, they are as much a part of the urban area since most of the urban boundaries have enveloped these villages (pers. Comm, 26 June, 2012). Narayan pointed out that urban iTaukei villages do come under the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs but the relevant provincial councils do not provide urban services to these villages. Services overlooked by the provincial councils include the provision of garbage disposal. These urban iTaukei villages are also excluded from these services by some municipal authorities even though they are physically located in urban areas (Walsh, 2006; Connell & Lea, 1993). However in some instances, municipal councils do provide services to urban villages as in the case of Namoli Village by the Lautoka City Council (Walsh, 2006).

Scholars such as Connell and Lea, Walsh and Storey as well as municipal administrators have pointed to the confusion caused by rural administrative structures being responsible for urban villages. The failure of provincial councils to meet certain basic services for those living in the urban villages means that they do not have equality of treatment when compared to other urban residents. There are also issues of representation and whether the voices of urban villagers are heard by any local government authority. When considered as part of the rural oriented provincial administration, they constitute a minority in the predominantly rural provincial councils. And in the context of the urban municipal authorities, they have no formal representation.

According to Storey (2006), PICs including Fiji will encounter major issues in urban governance in the near future. A significant issue will be that of neo-traditional villages



such as urban iTaukei villages not adhering to urban by-laws as they follow the Village By-Laws stipulated in Section 6, Regulation 27 – Fijian Affairs Act, Cap 120, 2006 rev.

The exemption of these villages from the Town By-Laws (Local Government Act, Cap 125, 1985) reflects serious discrepancy in local government laws. Table 1 below depicts forms of governance in the urban iTaukei villages in Fiji.

Table 1: iTaukei urban villages, location and form of local government

Town/City	iTaukei Villages within urban boundaries	Forms of Local Government that administer these villages:
Nadi Town	Saunaka, Nakavu, Navoci, Namotomoto, Narewa, Nawaka & Vaturu	Provincial Government
Ba Town	Nalaga	Provincial Government
Tavua Town	Tavualevu	Provincial Government
Lauroka City	Namoli	Provincial Government & Municipal Government
Savusavu Town	Yaroi, Nacekoro & Nukubalavu	Provincial Government & Municipal Government (only Yaroi Village)
Levuka Town	Waitovu, Levuka vaka-Viri, Yagadaci, Draiba & Vuva	Provincial and Municipal Government
Labasa Town	Nasekula	Provincial Government
Sigaroka Town	Nasigaroka, Yavulo, Laselase & Nayawa	Provincial, Municipal and Rural Authority
Nasinu Town	Kalabu	Provincial and Rural Authority
Suva City	Tamavua	Provincial and Municipal
Rakiraki Town	Rakiraki	Provincial & Rural Authority
Lami Town	Suvavou & Lami	Provincial and Municipal (Lami)
Nausori Town	Nausori, Vunimono & Nadali.	Provincial and Municipal

Source: Adopted from the FIBOS (2012) and modified by Authors (2012)

Table 1 shows that all urban iTaukei villages fall under the administration of provincial governments; however, there are 22 villages where the governance of urban iTaukei villages is shared by the provincial, municipal or 'Rural Authority'. This shows the overlap that exists in how these urban villages are administered and serviced. The involvement of the 'Rural Authority' in some of these villages is due to their classification as rural. But some of these villages are still thought of as extensions of urban areas, and therefore being part of the jurisdiction of the municipal councils.

The Senior Health Inspector for the Suva Rural Authority viewed the two villages of Lami and Suvavou, as urban and therefore not falling under the jurisdiction of the Rural Authority but under the Lami Town Council (pers. Comm, 26 June, 2012). However, in contradiction, the Health Inspector for the Lami Town Council highlighted that these two villages are still 'rural', and as such are governed as rural locales (Seleima Matroga, pers. Comm, 26 June, 2012). The contrary views expressed by the two health officials show the confusion among responsible public servants about the status of these villages – they almost appear in the eyes of those responsible for them to be neither urban nor rural, and in danger of being excluded from both urban and rural administration.

The predicament of such villages supports the claim made by Walsh that these villagers are in an 'administrative vacuum' (Walsh, 2006). This reinforces Storey's (2003 and 2005) observation that villages within urban boundaries are excluded from most services that are provided for urban areas. While governed as 'rural areas' administered by provincial councils, the urban iTaukei villages have been marginalized in terms of services provided to them because of their location within urban boundaries. Storey (2003) discusses the irregularities in some PICs concerning the governance of periurban areas, for instance there are villages in Vanuatu that are within urban boundaries, yet are governed as rural locales under the SHEFA Council (*ibid*). Storey (2005) stressed that governance of periurban areas in the Pacific will be a "a site of conflict" mainly because these areas are urban in the sense that they enjoy urban economic functions, yet they are considered as rural areas in that municipal councils do not have a say in how the periurban areas are governed. His perception of the lack of alignment in the governance of periurban areas is related to the situation of urban iTaukei villages that experience urban economic functions but are still administered as rural locales under provincial administration.

### **Access of Urban iTaukei Villages to Urban Service Provision: Who Provides the Services?**

Within urban areas, some of the services that are provided by municipal councils to residents include the collection of garbage, maintenance of roads and street lights and the general cleanliness of areas such as footpaths and roadsides. These services are funded by town or city residents paying 'town' rates. As can be seen in Table 2 below, urban iTaukei have very mixed access to some of these basic services.

The list below shows a rather mixed set of arrangements between municipal bodies and urban iTaukei villages. In the municipalities of Ba, Nadi and Tavua there is no provision of basic services for urban villages which then rely on their village councils to provide such services. The provision of these services by the village council is quite a daunting task. In some of these villages, the quality of services such as accessing waste bins for refuse collection totally depends on the levy given by its members. If members do not constantly pay their garbage fees, then accessing garbage refuse through 'Wastecare Bins' will be a complicating task. In Suva, Lami and Savusavu, there are arrangements with a certain village or a number of villages where the latter pay for specific services to the respective municipal councils which then provides these services. More inclusive arrangements can be seen in Lautoka, Levuka, Sigaroka, and Nausori where again the urban iTaukei villages pay an annual sum of money in return for some basic services.

Access of Urban iTaukei Villages to Basic Service Provision by Municipal Councils:

- Nadi Town – Saunaka, Nakavu, Navoci, Namotomoro, Narewa, Nawaka & Vaturu: organize their own garbage collection, and other basic services.
- Ba Town – Nailaga: the village does not organise its own garbage collection and other basic services.
- Tavua Town – Tavualevu: village does not organize its own garbage collection and other basic services.
- Lautoka City – Namoli: village garbage collection; pays Lautoka City Council fees for the provision of general clean-up and maintenance of street lights.
- Savusavu Town – Yairoi Village: has access to basic services and pays the Town Council for the services provided, while Nacekoro and Nukubalavu do not pay.
- Levuka Town – Waitovu, Levuka vaka-Viri, Yagadaci, Yuma, and Draiba: most of these villages have access to urban service provision paying the Levuka Town Council for basic service provision.
- Labasa Town – Nasekula: village does not have access to any urban service provision and has to organize its own service provision.
- Sigaroka Town – Nasigaroka, Yavulo, Laselase and Nayawa: villages are incorporated by the Sigaroka Town Council for general clean-up of their areas. Garbage collection is administered by the Town Council in association with the various village councils. The villages have to pay a contractor for the collection of garbage. However, for the general clean-up of roadsides of these villages, the Sigaroka Town Council has a partnership with the local villages that provide the manpower while the Town Council provides the equipment (e.g. brush cutters).
- Nasinu Town – Kalabu and Tacirua: villages are not provided with garbage collection and other services, but the Nasinu Town Council provides a general clean-up for the village every three months. Services such as garbage collection are by the villagers themselves.

- Suva City – Tamavua: basic services are done by the Suva City Council. These services include garbage collection, general clean-up and maintenance of roads and street lights. Tamavua Village usually pays the Suva City Council \$,2000 a year for these services but annual payments have not been paid since 2000.
- Rakiraki Town – Rakiraki: village has to provide its own garbage collection and other basic services although it's within the town boundary.
- Lami Town – Suvaou and Lami: villages have access to garbage collection services. Suvaou has to organize its own garbage collection disposal, while Lami village pays the garbage collection fees to the Lami Town.
- Nausori Town – Nausori, Yunimono and Nadali: villages have access to urban services. A fee of \$40 per year per household is levied by the Town Council on the villages for the services.

As explained earlier the marginalization of some urban iTaukei villages from urban service provision provided by municipal council is mainly due to their administration by the provincial councils which are geared to serving rural iTaukei communities (Walsh, 2006). Apart from the notion of urban iTaukei villages being rural locales, another factor is the lack of capacity of any particular municipal council to provide these services in the context of the many demands by rate payers in rapidly growing urban areas that inhibit the extension of services to urban villages. According to the Senior Health Inspector for Operations at the Suva City Council the various municipal councils are running on a low budget; thus making urban service provision a complicated task to perform (pers. Comm. 26 June, 2012). He was referring to the fact that many municipal governments struggle with their urban service provision because the revenue they collect is calculated on a 'ward by ward' basis. As such a short fall is to be expected. However, as seen in the previous list, over the years some municipal councils have been inclusive of urban iTaukei villages within their town boundaries. The following case study illustrates an inclusive arrangement between the Suva City Council and the iTaukei urban Tamavua Village.

### **Case Study: Urban Service Provision by Suva City Council (SCC) to Tamavua Village**

Tamavua Village is legally governed by Act 120 as opposed to the City of Suva under Act 125. The former Act 120 governed or administered by the iTaukei Affairs Board under the Naitasini Provincial Council. However, it is encroached by residential areas and other industries making it a part of the urban milieu, since it is within the city boundary. While the village is considered as a rural locale, it is very much a part of the urban boundary. In relation to by-laws, the Suva City Council (SCC) cannot enforce its legislation, laws and by-laws on this village simply because the village is governed by Act 120 under the iTaukei Affairs Board. The contradictions between the two Acts 120

and 125 is the gist of this presentation that was raised by Qalo (1984 and Larmour and Qalo 1985).

However, SCC has over the years managed to provide basic services to the village. These basic services include garbage collection, maintenance of roadsides and roads and general clean-up programmes. In return, the village has to pay the SCC a nominal rate of \$2,000 a year for the provision of basic services such as garbage collection. Over the past six to seven years, the village has not paid the council a single cent for these services; yet the villagers continue to have access to these services. While the logical financial viable option for the SCC is to discontinue the services to the village, this has not been done simply because the council is "thinking in a broad term about the health implications that may arise." The possible outbreak of diseases in the village if they discontinue these services will not only affect the villagers, but the ratepayers as well since they live in close proximity to one another.

Currently, SCC is still providing the services and also trying to pursue options available to recover these costs by liaising with the Ministry of iTaukei Affairs and also meeting the villagers and trying to persuade them to at least pay for the services that are provided to them. At times, they have partnered with the village on some of their services (roadside maintenance and general clean-up). The village provides the manpower while SCC provides equipment, such as brush cutters, rakes and wheelbarrows.

As a matter of fact, the maintenance of the road that runs through the village and its clean-up is the sole responsibility of the Public Works Department (PWD). Yet, the PWD has over the years has neglected this service provision. Thus, it falls on SCC and Tamavua Village to do road works by themselves. (Source: from the interview (26/06/2012) with Mr Ramesh Narayan – Senior Health Inspector for Suva City Council.)

From this case study, it can be seen that Tamavua villages has access to service provision by SCC even though there is the outstanding matter of non-payment of the \$2000 annual fee. This has meant that SCC ratepayers have been paying for the services enjoyed by their non-rate paying village dwelling neighbours.

### **iTaukei Urban Villages and Climate Change**

From the foregoing discussion about the predicament of urban villages which fall between the urban local government Act and the iTaukei Act (of provincial councils), it is evident that affected villages are not the primary focus of either local administration, and often do not have access to basic services. They are both clearly driven by the quality of services that they are able to provide for themselves. There are also critical issues about how well these villages are represented in the local iTaukei administration system given their rural orientation. As they are not represented by elected officials in urban councils, their needs and aspirations are not heard through democratic

processes. Presumably, it is left to the village headmen and concerned villagers to negotiate urban services with the urban councils.

Given the issues between the two systems of local government in the country highlighted above, the urban villages are especially vulnerable as extreme weather events increase in frequency, and as sea levels rise. Many urban villages are near the coast, and together with informal settlements are among the first to face sea inundation. The likelihood of destruction of roads, pathways, homes, and gardens by hurricanes and salt water flooding by rising sea level is high in such villages. This is compounded by housing standards that are not aligned to urban standards. Nearly all village houses do not comply with standard building standards nor are they insurable against damage by cyclones. They are clearly vulnerable to strong wind.

A number of urban villages are especially densely populated and houses are crowded close together. Besides fire risks, the possibility of vector borne diseases such as dengue and even malaria is very real. The latter disease is not present in Fiji but with climate change, there is a distinct possibility of its spread south-east wards from Vanuatu.

It is apparent, that some urgent thinking needs to be done about the predicament of urban iTaukei villages so that the contradictions pointed out above with regard to local government are resolved. Since they have a lot more in common with the urban milieu being physically located in towns and cities, it is best that a process of consultation with village residents, provincial and urban administrators and representatives should begin as soon as possible about their re-designation as urban entities that are represented in urban councils and served by such municipal governing bodies. Similar processes of integrating traditional villages into the direct ambit of urban local governments should be taken in other PICs.

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