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The Virtual Pacific Urban Forum

On Thursday, 26 August 2021, the Pacific Partnership for the New Urban Agenda, regional development partners and eight country delegations held the 2021 Virtual Pacific Urban Forum (VPUF). Building on the progress of the Fifth Pacific Urban Forum (PUF5) held in 2019, the 2021 VPUF aimed to: assess the status of national urban development commitments across the Pacific region; to share updates on key urban priorities, progress and challenges by country representatives; and to formally launch the Pacific Partnership for the New Urban Agenda (PP-NUA).

The forum consisted of four main sessions:

1. A Pacific regional urban development overview.
2. Individual country New Urban Agenda updates, presentations and case studies.
3. The launch of the Pacific Partnership for the New Urban Agenda.
4. Sustainable urban development discussion and panel.

The event was joined by over 100 participants including 20 speakers from across the region. In the last two years since PUF5 the dual challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accelerating impacts of climate change have imposed increasing pressure on Pacific towns and cities. The economic impact of reduced remittances, international tourism and import/exports are pronounced across the region, risking greater inequality and impeding progress towards urban-related SDGs. A long-term and sustainable vision of urban development in the Pacific region is of vital importance.

Country delegations provided updates across five interconnected working areas: social equity and urbanisation, environmental resilience and infrastructure, urban governance, urban economy, and COVID-19 impacts and recovery. National government stakeholders from Cook Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Kiribati, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu and Vanuatu presented updates. This included a wide range of case studies, from new investments in climate resilient infrastructure across the Cook and Solomon Islands, to slum upgrading programmes in Fiji, to the development of new policies and institutions to manage urban development in Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea.
The formal launch of the Pacific Partnership for the New Urban Agenda which brings together 8 organizations with programmes in support of accelerated action on sustainable urban development in the Pacific region. This includes the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN-ESCAP), the Commonwealth Local Government Association (CLGF), Compass Housing Services, Eastern Regional Organization for Planning & Human Settlements (EAROPH), International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI) Oceania, University of Melbourne Centre for Cities, and Monash University Sustainable Development Institute. They seek to rally implementing partners to mobilize resources for regional, cross-country and cross-sectoral knowledge exchange and to foster more effective coordination within the Pacific development community. They are involved in over 30 active development projects across the region with a strong focus on the Environment, Resilience, Infrastructure and Urbanisation (ERIU), and Social Equity and Urbanisation (SEU) working areas.

The Pacific New Urban Agenda is an important tool to guide socioeconomic development in cities and presents a strong framework to achieve progress. Ensuring sustainable governance, cooperation and partnerships is important to accelerate knowledge sharing and action in the Pacific.

Materials from the event are available on the website of UN-Habitat’s Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific. The recording can also be found on the UN-ESCAP youtube channel.

Two Years on from the Fifth Pacific Urban Forum (PUF 5)

Pacific Urban Forum 5 Recap

The Fifth Pacific Urban Forum (PUF 5), was held in Nadi, Fiji in July 2019, bringing together over 200 urban practitioners, including two heads of government and six ministers and delegations from 8 Pacific Island countries, to discuss sustainable urban development. It was an inclusive multi-stakeholder platform for review of progress towards the Pacific New Urban Agenda and knowledge exchange on development and policy approaches. The event was hosted by the Government of Fiji and co-organized by a range of partners, including UN-Habitat, Commonwealth Local Government Forum, Monash University, Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat, UN ESCAP and Compass Housing Services.

The Forum aimed to:

- Catalyze engagement and raise the awareness of all stakeholders to enhance the role of Pacific cities and towns for achievement of national and regional urban policy frameworks and agendas;
- Improve the mechanisms for collection and exchange of knowledge and data on sustainable urbanization in the Pacific through open and accessible platforms;
- Increase action amongst stakeholders for implementation, review and monitoring of the Pacific New Urban Agenda including through concrete commitments from participating countries and institutions;
- Develop new partnerships to support an enabling environment for urban development in the Pacific.

The Forum undertook the following:

- Review of progress towards the Pacific New Urban Agenda based on country consultations and reporting, in light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Habitat III outcomes and emerging issues.
- Adoption of a declaration reaffirming the commitment towards the Pacific New Urban Agenda and its accelerated implementation to achieve sustainable urbanization in the Pacific.
- Development of an Action Plan with concrete voluntary country and stakeholder commitments for the implementation of the Pacific New Urban Agenda along its pillars/goals and related areas.

A summary of the event and resultant report is available on the UN-Habitat website:
The Pacific New Urban Agenda (PNUA)

The New Urban Agenda was adopted at the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III) in October 2016 and it was endorsed by the United Nations General Assembly at the seventy-first session in December 2016. The New Urban Agenda represents a shared vision for a better and more sustainable urban future. If well-planned and well-managed, urbanization can be a powerful tool to drive sustainable development in both developing and developed countries. The Pacific New Urban Agenda and declaration called on all actors at the local, national and regional levels to address issues of social equity, urban economy, environment and resilience and governance and to link Pacific concerns with global processes in the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

The Pacific New Urban Agenda focuses on sustainable urban development across four interconnected working pillars:

- **Social Equity and Urbanisation**
  - Informal Settlements and Basic Services
  - Affordable Housing
  - Public Awareness and Engagement

- **Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation**
  - Climate Change Mitigation
  - Community Adaptation and Infrastructure
  - Ecological Protection

- **Urban Economy**
  - Land Use and Territorial Planning
  - Local Economic Development
  - Connectivity and Productivity
  - Technologies and Innovation

- **Urban Governance**
  - National Urban Policies
  - Urban Data
  - Empowerment of Local Government
  - Tenure Security
### Table 1. Selected PUF5 Commitments

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>Create more public spaces</td>
<td>Ensure climate proofing</td>
<td>Improve overall business environment for urban areas</td>
<td>Establish and implement development controls</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Improve housing conditions</td>
<td>Improve mitigation, adaptation and disaster</td>
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<td>Inclusive policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Raise public awareness of urbanisation issues</td>
<td>response plan to be</td>
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<td>Strengthen traditional and local governance bodies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engage in meaningful consultations with various stakeholders</td>
<td>responsive to existing and future populations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Transform into resilient, safe and sustainable green cities</td>
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<td>Samoa</td>
<td>Create more public spaces</td>
<td>Ensure climate proofing</td>
<td>Improve overall business environment for urban areas</td>
<td>Establish and implement development controls</td>
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<td>Raise public awareness of urbanisation issues</td>
<td>Improve mitigation, adaptation and disaster response plan to be responsive to existing and future populations</td>
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<td>More inclusive policies</td>
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<td>Engage in meaningful consultations with various stakeholders</td>
<td>Transform into resilient, safe and sustainable green cities</td>
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<td>Strengthen traditional and local governance bodies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Upgrade and/or construct new community infrastructure</td>
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<td>Implement development controls and revise legal base</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kiribati</td>
<td>Create more public spaces</td>
<td>Ensure climate proofing</td>
<td>Improve overall business environment for urban areas</td>
<td>Establish and implement development controls</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve housing conditions</td>
<td>Improve mitigation, adaptation and disaster response plan to be responsive to existing and future populations</td>
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<td>Revise legal base</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Raise public awareness of urbanisation issues</td>
<td>Transform into resilient, safe and sustainable green cities</td>
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<td>Develop more inclusive policies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engage in meaningful consultations with various stakeholders</td>
<td>Upgrade and/or construct</td>
<td></td>
<td>Strengthen traditional and local governance bodies</td>
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<td>Nauru</td>
<td>Improve quality of housing stock</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Address issues related to overcrowdedness, extended families, deteriorated housing stock</td>
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<td>Fiji</td>
<td>Upgrade and relocate informal settlements to cater for increasing housing needs and to safeguard Fijians from natural disasters, while at the same time providing better access to basic services</td>
<td>Nationally Determined Commitments (NDCs) of 30 per cent reduction in energy-sector emissions by 2030</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage greater private sector participation in building resilience and infrastructure</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ensure effective and inclusive engagement of communities and stakeholders</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implement principles of accountability to environmental protection standards in Fiji</td>
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### Table 1. Selected PUF5 Commitments (cont.)

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>Leveraging customary land that has been freed up for private sector investment in affordable housing schemes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Strengthen urban governance arrangements by improving institutional coordination and cooperation at all levels.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Raise public awareness of urbanisation issues</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Engage in meaningful consultations with various stakeholders, inclusive of vulnerable groups</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Build capacity of key urban stakeholders on urbanisation issues through a National Urban Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>Continue with Slum Upgrading programme in Jericho</td>
<td>Increasing renewable energy projects and plans</td>
<td></td>
<td>Finalise, submit and effectively implement Solomon Islands’ Draft National Urban Policy</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Upgrade land registration system</td>
<td>Draft/update renewables plan and climate change policy</td>
<td></td>
<td>Take actions to improve urban data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>* Conduct mapping, survey and subdivision</td>
<td>Implementing the Honiara Urban Resilience and Climate Action plan by including the plan in Honiara City Council’s policies and decision-making</td>
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<td>Reclassify peri-urban areas ward mapping</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Actions to improve tenure security</td>
<td>Conduct WB Flood Risk Assessment</td>
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<td>Improve coordination and cooperation between different levels of government</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Bring infrastructure into informal settlements</td>
<td>Supporting Honiara City Council resilience mechanism</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Establish infrastructure and water facilities into informal settlements</td>
<td>Ban plastic bags in Solomon Islands’ western province</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop/update Honiara DRR plan, resettlement policy</td>
<td>Develop/update SPREP Ecosystem project</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Improve housing design and housing &amp; ward profile</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve housing policy (under development)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>Properly resettle those who are displaced rather than evicting those living in informal settlements</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognise and acknowledge those living on customary land as tenants;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Recognise the roles of women across the pillars - in particular the poor &amp; marginalized;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Ensure urban policy language to be inclusive of meaningful contributions by women;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acknowledge and Protect traditional landowners / customary tenants;</td>
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COVID-19 and Climate Change

Five months after PUF5 in December 2019 a novel coronavirus (COVID-19) was first detected in Wuhan, China. By March 2020 the World Health Organisation had declared a global pandemic and COVID-19 had spread to 114 countries. The impact has been truly global with significant implications for national and international economies, public health, travel and trade, and day-to-day life. Common responses to the ongoing disease risk include: stay-at-home restrictions, social distancing requirements, mandated face coverings, public information campaigns, border closures and travel restrictions, testing and contact tracing programmes, income support and debt relief, school and workplace closures, and cancellations of public events and gatherings. In all cases cities and urban areas remain important hotspots for contagion, accounting for over 95% of cases1. A focus on urban formal and informal settlements is required to bring COVID-19 under control and realise a sustainable and transformative recovery.

The Pacific region in general has performed relatively well in reducing the spread of COVID through quarantine, border closure as well as State of Emergency declarations and responses. However, the effect of economic fallout from the pandemic on Pacific countries has been particularly severe. Slumping national economic activity and a collapsed international tourism industry mean many of the socioeconomic gains achieved in recent decades risk being swept away. Disruptions to shipping and other international trade highlighted the risks of food insecurity for island countries that depend heavily on food imports. The impacts are felt most keenly by those already at risk, particularly the urban poor which account for around a quarter of the Pacific population. A focus on residents of informal settlements, daily wage labourers and vulnerable groups (particularly women, disabled people, ethnic minorities, youth and elderly groups) is a priority to safeguard against poverty. As the world moves towards vaccine distribution, continued and sustained support is still needed to ensure an environmentally and socially equitable recovery.

1 https://unhabitat.org/covid-19/key-facts-and-data
During this same period climate change and extreme weather events have continued to accelerate. From the unprecedented 2019-20 wildfire season in Australia, to the increasingly intense South Pacific tropical cyclones and wider sea level rise, the real-world economic, social and environmental consequences of climate change are more acutely felt than ever before. The 2021 IPCC Sixth Assessment Report\(^2\) reconfirms the high confidence of further land and marine warming, ocean acidification, storm surge inundation and shoreline retreat going forward. Trends vary spatially and seasonally with drought risk expected to increase in eastern and southern Pacific regions, while heavier rainfall events are expected in the western tropical Pacific. In all cases urban centres and cities are warmer than their surrounding rural areas, with increased probability of flooding in coastal cities. Future urbanization trends will amplify projected air temperature changes with more hot days and warm nights adding to heat stress in cities. Across the Pacific region continued ambitious action to support urban climate adaptation and resilience is needed. The upcoming COP26 event (October - November 2021) will provide a vital opportunity for countries to step up efforts to tackle climate change.

The United Nations ESCAP and UN partners produce an annual Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) progress report for the Asia and Pacific region. The fifth report released in 2021 shows the region is not on track to achieve any of the 17 SDGs by 2030\(^3\). Looking just at the Pacific region, good progress has been made towards Goals 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 9 (Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) and 13 (Climate Action). Areas of concern and potential regression over the last year include goals 10 (Reduced Inequality), 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production) and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). In general development data is scarce and greater efforts are needed to centralize and collect economic, social and environmental statistics. Regarding SDG 11 there is insufficient data to make regional judgements on progress for 7/10 target indicators. The region is on track to achieve 11.6 targets (Urban Air Quality & Waste Management), needs to accelerate progress to achieve 11.2 targets (Public Transport Systems) and needs to reverse negative trends on 11.5 indicators (Resilience to Disasters).

Pacific stakeholders now face a greater range of cumulative and existential development challenges than ever before. With urban centres playing a vital role in responding to the threat of COVID-19, climate change and ambitions to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development, the Pacific New Urban Agenda has never been more important.

\(^2\) [https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/]
\(^3\) [https://www.unescap.org/ko/2021/asia-and-pacific-sdg-progress-report-2021]
Research Methods

A series of 1-2 hour semi-structured qualitative interviews with government representatives were conducted from May to July 2021. These aimed to assess the status of national PUF5 commitments across the Pacific region and to understand COVID-19 impacts on sustainable urban development and recovery measures being planned and implemented in the Pacific region. Representatives from Kiribati, Cook Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Fiji, and Marshall Islands participated in these calls to share their COVID-19 impacts and responses as well as their new or ongoing projects and longer-term plans to progress action under the four working pillars. In addition representatives from Vanuatu and Papua New Guinea shared their inputs via survey responses. A literature review was also undertaken with a focus on UN-Habitat’s COVID-19 Country Assessments and the SDG Voluntary Local Reviews submitted by individual countries. The projects and programmes highlighted here remain just a selection of all the urban development initiatives ongoing in the Pacific. Though it cannot cover every issue, projects are highlighted based on priorities from national government stakeholders.
II. REGIONAL SUMMARY

COVID-19 and Pacific Sustainable Urban Development

All countries reported that people were experiencing anxiety around COVID-19 impacts on public service provision and longer-term urban and economic development progress. Responses included widespread budgetary changes for local and national governments with a focus on public health infrastructure, preparedness, public messaging and water and sanitation provision. The lack of international tourism was reported as the major driver of economic instability with widely evident job and income losses. Regional economic losses resulted in less incoming remittances from overseas workers. Across the region common policy responses included border closures, remote working where possible, provision of relief grants, food banks and emergency cash support, development of communications and outreach campaigns (particularly targeting informal settlements) and investing in health sector preparedness.

Movement restrictions and quarantine policies have resulted in cases being contained to a large extent. However, the high population densities of Pacific cities and limited healthcare capacity mean that once significant outbreaks occur they are more likely to spread out of control. Limited vaccine access and rollout in the region, plus vaccine hesitancy in some areas (notably Papua New Guinea) means Pacific nations will have to remain vigilant, especially in light of new infectious variants. Widespread urban-rural and then subsequent rural-urban reverse migration was also reported by many countries as residents temporarily moved out of cities to smaller rural villages during the initial stages of the pandemic, but then returned to the larger urban centres as they found a lack of housing and services in the village environment.

Despite the obvious negative impacts of COVID-19, several unexpected positive outcomes were reported. First the emergency declarations and ‘crisis response’ meant countries were required to adopt greater cross-ministry coordination. COVID-19 impacts are multisector and therefore health officials, urban practitioners and policymakers were encouraged to break silos and collaborate for the development and implementation of pandemic preparedness and response plans. Even with the relatively limited spread of COVID-19 investment in health infrastructure and implementation of biological security protocols will mean a more resilient Pacific for future disease events. COVID-19 also catalysed a widespread data collection effort, increased digitization of services and more frequent statistical assessments across the region. This was particularly beneficial for informal settlements, many of which were managed based on outdated mapping and socioeconomic data. Increased data on multidimensional risk presents new resources that will feed into the success of wider urban development efforts.

Ensuring a sustainable urban recovery going forward will require a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder response. Policy priority areas include acting to improve housing and informal settlements; provision of basic urban services; livelihoods and food security; and urban resilience. Sustainable Urban Development by PNUA Working Pillars
Sustainable Urban Development by PNUA Working Pillars

PILLAR 1: SOCIAL EQUITY AND URBANISATION

Social equity and other associated urban issues including affordable housing, basic services (water, sanitation, electricity, shelter, etc.), public engagement, and gender equality have been the topic of much focus in the last two years. Across the region countries have taken ambitious steps to upgrade informal settlements and support housing development. A number of countries have also taken significant steps in promoting gender equality and addressing gender-based violence, creating new task forces and parliamentary committees, however this remains a major social issue in some countries. Surveys suggest in four out of thirteen Pacific Island countries, more than 40% of women have been subjected to physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner in the previous 12 months. Economic instability resulting from COVID-19 has created increased unemployment, with particular adverse impacts for women workers in the informal economy. Loss of incomes has created household poverty, with less food to eat and children being withdrawn from schools. These compounding economic and social pressures have been seen in increasing incidences of crime reported by local government and others.

Sustained long-term rural-to-urban migration, even despite COVID-19, is creating pressure on affordable housing stock. This has led to the continued growth of informal settlements and inadequate housing conditions in many Pacific cities. In response, countries have sought to expand their programs of affordable housing provision and address land tenure security. Policies to support first-time buyers are now widespread, including grants, debt relief and low interest loans, while several more outlying countries are supporting residents to construct their own homes or improve their self-built structures. Ambitious housing development plans alongside foreign investment and public-private partnerships show prospects for accelerating housing stock availability and adequacy, however sustained support and compliance with building regulation is required to ensure the success of these projects. Significant progress has been made in the field of slum upgrading with several major programs being implemented across the region to support at-risk communities.

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5 Escap 2021 sdg report
PILLAR 2: ENVIRONMENT, RESILIENCE AND URBANISATION

Pillar two was commonly reported as the PNUA area which has received most focus in the past few years. Climate change, particularly in regard to sea level rise (SLR) and tropical cyclones, remains one of the greatest threats to Pacific cities. Despite their low-carbon economies, Pacific countries remain highly vulnerable and exposed to the impacts of climate change and associated natural disasters. Long-term planning and investment will be required even as other countries accelerate their action on climate in order to attempt to mitigate the most severe impacts. In recent years many countries have developed resettlement policies planning to relocate at-risk communities as SLR accelerates, while new building regulations present a way to ensure construction and development incorporates resilient design. Public investment in climate resilient infrastructure presents a strong pathway for job creation and economic recovery going forward.

One of the immediate adverse impacts of climate change has been on water supply. Rising sea levels and increasing frequency of king tides has resulted in salt water intrusion into groundwater, polluting shallow wells and deep bores that many island communities rely on. Rainwater tanks have been introduced in some areas but there are problems with roof structures that do not accommodate rainwater harvesting, and the increasing length of dry seasons has resulted in tanks running dry.

Large regional investments in connectivity and infrastructure, particularly major roads and highways, are increasing the ease of movement of people and commercial activities. Yet at a regional level further work to develop new resilient buildings and retrofit existing housing stock is needed. Continued investment and rollout of capacity building programmes addressing disaster risk reduction is required to build resilience in the major centres as well as secondary cities, towns and villages.

Ongoing socioeconomic development trends and population growth pose increasing concerns regarding waste management and environmental pollution. This is especially challenging due to a lack of existing advanced waste processing technologies, with few landfills operating recycling mechanisms or appropriate management protocols for hazardous waste. There are significant opportunities to introduce circular economy solutions and treat waste as a feedstock resource for community-based and private enterprises.
Cities remain focal points for economic activity and growth across the Pacific region and typically maintain a dominant proportion of national GDP. The contribution of the non-cash economy and the informal sector to national and urban productivity should also not be ignored despite limited data for most countries (Papua New Guinea being an exception with a national Audit of the Informal Economy having produced useful data sets).

In the last year COVID-19 has been the dominant influence on economic activity, resulting in widespread recession. Countries highly dependent on international tourism were hit particularly hard, with reduced import/export activity. Similarly many central markets, typically hubs for urban commerce, were reduced in capacity and activity. Workers in both the formal and informal sectors of the economy were often left with reduced livelihoods, and the availability of goods and services in local communities was much reduced.

Concerns about food security increased as COVID-19 led to disruptions of food imports as well as increased shipping costs. Some countries have already taken steps to address this, encouraging urban residents as well as rural farmers to increase production of food crops for local consumption.

Wider development trends, including slow but sure progress towards universal electrification and growing internet use are creating new economic and business opportunities. Many countries have developed support programs for SMEs including the provision of business loans and grants to encourage entrepreneurship and innovation, and a focus on encouraging women into business activity. This is combined with strategic land zoning to create designated commercial areas in cities, supported by tax and other incentives. Regional development organisations and donors have also been actively supporting projects associated with this working pillar. In addition, capacity building programs are supporting local governments in developing their policy response to the new economic reality, focusing on opportunities for building more resilient and self-reliant economies.
PILLAR 4: URBAN GOVERNANCE

Priorities and progress in urban governance are largely concentrated in three areas: (1) the development of national and subnational urban and housing policies; (2) improved standardization and digitization of land and citizen registry, titles and licensing; and (3) capacity building programs and the empowerment and engagement of local government. National Urban Policies are important to establish frameworks through which governments can coordinate a more sustainable urbanization process, formulate multisector plans and approaches and create mechanisms for more effective stakeholder engagement and consultation. Though several countries have now published national plans incorporating a wide range of environmental, social and economic urban priority areas and actions, there is still much work to do before this is achieved throughout the region. Greater resources and financing of enforcement and compliance mechanisms will need to be provisioned in order to ensure these ambitious plans are realised in towns and cities.

Land registration is ongoing in many countries aiming to reduce land conflicts and ensure a common understanding of borders and ownership. Alongside a general trend of service digitization, this now allows for the formation of online land management systems and new mediums of citizen engagement.

Consistent and reliable socioeconomic and urban data collection remains a key priority with measurable progress in relation to 15 out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals hampered by insufficient information to measure on at least half of all target indicators. A robust evidence base is required to effectively guide sustainable urban development and ensure interventions are both cost-effective and impactful.
III. COUNTRY PROGRESS UPDATES

The Pacific region (Figure 2) remains highly diverse with countries exhibiting a range of socioeconomic and urban development capacities. Country progress in achieving their commitments to the Pacific New Urban Agenda are similarly variable and have been assessed independently via the engagement of national urban ministries and stakeholder interviews. An overview of key urban characteristics is provided in Table 2 and urban population projections to 2050 in Figure 3.

Figure 2. Map of the Pacific region (adapted from United Nations, 2017).
### Table 2. National urban characteristics by Pacific subregion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pacific Subregion</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population Characteristics</th>
<th>Capital City</th>
<th>Governance (Responsible Ministry)</th>
<th>Human Development Index (national)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urban Population (% of total population)</td>
<td>Population Density (people per sq. km of land area)</td>
<td>Estimates Based on Census Year</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Polynesia</td>
<td>Tonga</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Nuku‘alofa</td>
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6 Population data sourced from the Pacific Data Hub, World Bank, National Census Data and UN-Habitat.
Figure 3. Urbanisation in Pacific SIDS. Adapted from Trundle, 2020
1. COUNTRY PROFILES - POLYNESIA

Cook Islands

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

Cook Islands has no confirmed COVID-19 cases to date. However, since the onset of the pandemic, a National Health Emergency Task force and a COVID-19 Communication Unit has been established for pandemic related decision making and to raise public awareness on social distancing and protection measures. The nation’s borders remain closed to foreigners, which resulted in economic losses in the tourism sector as a major economic driver for the Cook Islands. The borders are set to reopen for a travel bubble arrangement with New Zealand as the vaccination programme rolls out in Cook Islands, allowing fully vaccinated tourists in New Zealand to enter the country.

In terms of urban basic services, Cook Islands have almost achieved universal access to basic levels of water and sanitation services - 99.9% and 97.6% respectively - which is conducive to combating against COVID-19. Nevertheless, elderly people with underlying health conditions who reside in the outer islands are particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 - exacerbated by the inconsistent provision of healthcare services in these outer islands. A short-lived wave of migration to outer islands was observed at the onset of the pandemic, but many have since returned to Rarotonga. Other social impacts caused by the pandemic include the increase in crime rates.

There is a large number of young and economically active Cook Islanders who reside and work overseas in Australia and New Zealand. Economic shocks as a result of the pandemic meant that these migrants may be incentivised to return home to provide skills and employment capacity locally. This return of these migrants could also lead to the uptake of the current surplus housing stock and infrastructure in some of the country’s islands. Removal of seasonal work and other employment opportunities in Australia and New Zealand due to COVID-19 may mean that income remittances back to Cook Islands are disrupted - undermining an essential source of income for some households. In addition, if the returning population involves those of retirement age, this would exacerbate the existing demographic imbalance of the outer island communities created by outmigration of younger people.

As for risks posed by urban climate vulnerabilities, the Cook Islands’ geographical location within the Pacific’s “cyclone belt” makes it vulnerable to extreme weather events during the cyclone season between May and November. These threats could be compounded by the impacts of COVID-19, exacerbating the damage caused by cyclones.

8 https://covid19.gov.ck/
9 UN-Habitat (2020) The Socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on urban systems in Cook Islands
10 Ibid, p.10
Cook Islands Progress towards the PNUA Working Pillars:

**PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation**

Over many years, the Cook Islands has been combating a ‘Brain Drain’ challenge, with the younger and economically productive cohorts (particularly between the ages of 30-50) of the population contracting as a result of economic migration to New Zealand and Australia for employment (where they can benefit from visa exemptions). A sustainable solution is yet to be found to address this challenge to accelerate sustainable development in the country. As a result of outmigration, there is an ongoing shortage of skilled labour (including young people who could be trained) which particularly affects housing maintenance. This becomes critical after extreme weather events, including cyclones during hurricane season. Thus, providing training to local populations (particularly in housing repairs and climate resilient retrofitting) would appear to be a priority over the construction of new homes.

As an effort to address unemployment as a result of the pandemic, there has been a diversion of national capital to infrastructure investment (e.g. bridges maintenance and flood defences) to create more job opportunities, especially for those who lost jobs in the tourism industry.

Cook Islands’ tourism industry has also given rise to a number of recycling and waste reducing initiatives to address the limited capacity of the existing landfill in dealing with the additional waste generated by this sector. As an effort to further support and institutionalise these actions, the national government has included a “zero-waste” policy objective in the National Solid Waste Management Policy to allocate budget for the expansion of recycling infrastructure and measures.

**PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation**

In order to mitigate against the impacts of climate change, including the increasing threat posed by extreme weather events, disaster risk management policies are being implemented to guide climate adaptation and disaster preparedness measures across the Cook Islands. Even so, the Cook Islands still suffers from environmental degradation as a result of poor land management (for example the use of coral and sand for construction) which continues to threaten local climate resilience and biodiversity.

**PILLAR 3: Urban Economy**

The pandemic has accelerated the rate of the fibre optics construction programme between Rarotonga and Polynesia - with faster broadband speed anticipated. This is likely to increase the efficiency of online and economic transactions in the future. As part of the pandemic economic response plan, grants have been offered to encourage new innovative businesses/ start-ups, and capacity building for businesses (e.g. “Cook Safe App” - contact tracing App developed as a COVID-19 response).

The economies of the outer islands are constrained by poor transport connections, particularly in relation to movement of freight. Different island communities have different natural resources and enterprise activities, and their local economies could prosper if there was a way of facilitating inter-island trade. At present freight movement relies on a very limited service that is focused on outward movement of goods from Rarotonga to the outer islands, with little return movement. The distances involved make air transport prohibitively expensive, limiting the opportunities for tourism as well as trade on the more distant island clusters.

**PILLAR 4: Urban Governance**

Data updates in relation to national population, land use and communities mapping is currently underway in the Cook Islands with surveys carried out at the community level. The pandemic has encouraged the shifting of more traditional governance transactions online, including online employment services. There is also increased trading via Facebook and other social media platforms.

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12 Ibid, p.8
13 Ibid, p.10
Local government in the Cook Islands plays an important role in guiding sustainable urban development across the country, with its Local Government Association potentially playing an especially vital role in supporting different aspects of urban development. Efforts are currently underway to re-establish the Local Government Association in Cook Islands, though this is made difficult as the 2020 Islands governance elections were disrupted by the pandemic.

**Priority urban development issues to be addressed (post-COVID-19):**

1. Tackling ‘Brain Drain’ and outmigration issues, and finding effective ways to attract economically active cohorts of the population in Cook Islands

2. Efforts to strengthen local governance, through the re-establishment of Cook Islands’ Local Government Association which was disrupted by the pandemic.

### Independent State of Samoa

**COVID-19 impacts and responses:**

There have been no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Samoa to date and all borders of the country remain closed to foreigners. Preventative measures are being implemented to protect Samoans and raise awareness on the pandemic by actively promoting essential knowledge about COVID-19 and social distancing practices. The Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD) with the support of WHO organised mass media communication campaigns to raise public awareness about the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, providing training for medical personnel on Infection and Prevention Control of COVID-19 and sensitisation sessions for village representatives, religious leaders and women’s groups to act as stewards in their villages.

Samoa has near universal access to piped water (97.9%) and 97% of Samoan households reported to have access to good sanitation facilities, which allow for effective mitigation against COVID-19. Although there are no formally classified informal settlements in Samoa, its national average household size is 7 and could reach up to 10 for some of the poorer households. This could mean that households are residing in overcrowded conditions where it is difficult to maintain a safe social distance during the pandemic. Furthermore, with obesity being a major cause of poor health in Samoa, which resulted in 45% of the population being affected by non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, the underlying risk of experiencing more severe COVID-19 symptoms is greatly increased. Due to more time spent at home as a result of lockdown restrictions and the surge in unemployment, the Samoa Victim Support Group has reported an increase of 48% in family violence between March and May 2020 - compared to the respective months in 2019.

Due to COVID-19 induced disruption to offshore employment opportunities, Samoa witnessed a 15% drop in remittances, which serves as an important source of income and buffer for most Samoan households from falling into poverty and food insecurity. Although basic needs and social protection for village community members are provided on a reciprocal basis via a traditional systems known as “fa’a Samoa” and “aiga potopoto”, unemployment due to COVID-19 could threaten the viability of this system. As a response to the pandemic, WST $3.5 million (US$1.26 million) was allocated from the national government to the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (MAF), to distribute WST 1 million worth of COVID-19 economic stimulus package to increase local food production by providing fruits and vegetable seeds to local farmers. Food and hygiene support packages have also been donated to Samoa by UNICEF, UNDP and DFAT since the onset of the pandemic. In terms of unemployment support, occupational training has been offered by Pacific Technical College to capacitate the unemployed, business support for SMEs during this period of economic downturn.

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14 Ibid, p.5-6
15 UN Habitat (2020) The Socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on urban systems in Samoa, p.4
16 Ibid, p.6
17 Ibid, p.7
18 Ibid, p.8
19 Ibid, p.5
Similar to many other Pacific Island Countries, Samoa is located within the Pacific cyclone belt and with its cyclone season brings strong storm surges which could cause flooding in urban areas. Many low-income households with poor quality housing that do not comply with the National Building Code are at high risk of being flooded during storms, with the upcoming cyclone season, there are worries that flood events could exacerbate the COVID-19 impacts experienced by these households.21

Samoa’s Progress towards the PNUA Working Pillars:

**PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation**

Samoa prides itself in a strong network of village representatives/community leaders who are actively engaging with the national government to voice out development needs for their village communities. Community leaders are often the national government’s first point of contact when undertaking public consultation during the implementation of any local development projects. To improve the public realm of urban areas and villages in Samoa, the country has undertaken various national beautification programmes where winning entries submitted by villages and local communities are granted with prizes and budget to implement their public realm improvement proposals.

Samoa’s active approach in promoting anti-violence has been especially effective in targeting the rise in gender-based violence, which has been on the rise since the onset of COVID-19. Their successes lie within the active engagement of village leaders and women groups in promoting awareness on domestic violence.

**PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation**

Samoa has developed a number of Community Integrated Management (CIM) Plans, led by the Ministry of Environment, to implement climate mitigation infrastructure development. This includes provisions for sea walls, forest and mangroves conservation and building adaptation measures.

Water management is key to flood resilience in the capital Apia City, where the central business district (CBD) especially is subject to severe flood events, causing costly damage to local businesses. Recent investment in drainage infrastructure has resulted in a 34% decrease in CBD flood incidents and supports a wider program of flood management. This is strengthened through ongoing work to develop a Flood Water Storm Strategy and Apia Integrated Sewage System Feasibility assessment. Flood studies are being expanded to three additional watersheds in the Apia Urban Area under the Economy Wide Adaptation on Climate Change (EWACC programme). Many of the national-scale approaches to climate adaptation and urban resilience in Samoa are financed through the international Green Climate Fund.

**PILLAR 3: Urban Economy**

Since PUF5 several new economic development initiatives have been developed with a focus on gender equality. The 2021 Markets for Change programme, implemented by UN Women, is working with government, local market associations and civil society organisations to support women in informal work and market vendors. Samoa has also taken an active approach in supporting SMEs and local economies during COVID-19 through moratoriums on loan payments and direct support for businesses. This has been especially necessary for the tourism sector which previously accounted for 20-30% of economic activity. The informal sector is highly prevalent in providing employment and therefore greater engagement and formalisation remains a high priority to create a more resilient economy. Similarly affected has been the seasonal international work programme which was developed to support the training of young people who travel to New Zealand and Australia for employment though this is typically biased towards male employment and training opportunities.

21 UN Habitat (2020) The Socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on urban systems in Samoa, p11
PILLAR 4: Urban Governance

A bottom-up approach to urban governance has been championed in Samoa through the development of almost 50 District Development Plans through 2020. These plans keep a record of urban quality of life and outline development initiatives and budgets in alignment with the needs of individual communities. These were a multistakeholder process, developed with local community leaders with support from the national government and international development partners (United Nations and DFAT). This also incorporates local training and capacity building to support implementation. Similarly, the development of the new National Policy on the Informal Economy constitutes a key framework to support local governments act on economic development, and there have been particular programs to encourage women entrepreneurs.

Creating an effective mechanism and body to centralize urban socioeconomic data in Samoa remains a key challenge. Investment in this area has the potential to bring many benefits and support ministries with statistical evidence for decision making.

Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)

1. Addressing climate resilience in more densely populated urban areas (e.g. Apia Urban Area) and establishing longer term mitigation action plans.

2. Developing a centralised national database for key urban datasets that can be used to inform ministerial development decisions.

Tuvalu

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

Tuvalu has had no confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths to date. Government policy responses have included international border closure, a comprehensive alert and response action plan (the Talaaliki Plan), and establishing a COVID-19 Task Force chaired by the Prime Minister. Tuvalu is a small country with a population of approximately 11,800, of which 60% live in the capital Funafuti which is the centre of COVID-19 response planning. The main disruption has been related to air and sea transport and import/exports given that Tuvalu is heavily reliant on imported food and overseas remittances, resulting in significant impacts. However, response strategies aimed at more self-reliance are being progressively implemented, such as reviving local cultivation of traditional foods.

Tuvalu’s Progress towards the PNUA Working Pillars:

PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation

Social, economic and environmental development in Tuvalu is guided by the National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2021-2030, a policy introduced in 2020. Priority Area 3 on social development aims for a ‘healthy, educated, appropriately skilled, spiritual and culture value-based society that is committed, proactive and innovative.’ Regarding specific national targets and policy goals, the results framework addresses three main topics, (1) health and wellbeing, (2) quality education, and (3) civil society participation. In addition, Tuvalu has recently developed a National Strategy for Healthy Local Food Supply, with the aim of improving food security for all groups across the country’s atolls. This includes additional agricultural leases for development on all islands. However, along with existing challenges of groundwater salination, less reliable rainfall and greater heat as a result of climate change, food production is becoming increasingly difficult due to lack of both sufficient space and knowledge on how to grow traditional crops and fishing. Hence the dependency on imported food.
PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation

Long-term urban resilience and infrastructure planning is guided by the recent Tuvalu Priority Infrastructure Investment Plan 2020-2025. Changes include increased application and management of environmental and social impact assessments and a focus on full lifecycle planning, for example supporting remediation of land excavated for borrow pits. Increased investment in outer island harbour facilities is also ongoing to support connectivity and reliability of transport services. In 2021 Tuvalu completed its 4th annual review of the National Integrated Waste Policy and Action Plan 2017 - 2026. This includes 6 specific policy targets supporting effective urban and rural waste management. Continued priorities include provision of basic urban services, particularly water and sanitation access.

PILLAR 3: Urban Economy

The economy of Tuvalu maintained growth during 2020 as a result of COVID-19 related grants and continued leasing of fishery licences. Ongoing trends include the outsourcing of some government services to the private sector, and support for provision of low-interest loans to local farmers. Unlike many Pacific countries, international tourism is not a significant economic contributor for Tuvalu and they have managed to largely avoid the impacts of regional tourism decline and border closures.

PILLAR 4: Urban Governance

Two key urban governance committees have been established in recent years to support sustainable urban development. First the National Climate Mobility Advisory Committee, which supports policymakers on climate-induced displacement, and the National Infrastructure Steering Committee, which advises the Tuvalu Cabinet on major public infrastructure and urban investments.

Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)

1. Due to its small size and concentration of the urban population within the capital city overcrowding remains a growing concern, especially as more islands are at risk from rising sea levels.

2. Renewed investment in urban water and sanitation services is needed for improved public health in Funafuti.

3. Climate Change presents an accelerating threat to Tuvalu’s islands and requires investment to enhance resilience to natural disasters and effective response planning. Mobility and planning for the displaced coastal communities should be a priority as a human rights issue.

4. Need to review issues around availability of arable land and alternate methods for cultivation of traditional crops and strengthening traditional skills in food production, especially among younger people.
Republic of Kiribati

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

Kiribati has remained largely unaffected by the health impact of COVID-19 with only two recorded cases. However it has continued to take the threat of COVID-19 seriously, adopting an ongoing border closure and establishing a taskforce to roll out the National COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan, including establishing quarantine centres, promoting social distancing and awareness raising activities.

This is particularly important in Kiribati due to a range of factors that make the country highly vulnerable if an outbreak were to occur. The capital city, Tarawa, is one of the most densely populated areas in the world where around half of Kiribati’s total population live. Housing in Kiribati is very crowded with extended families and migrants accommodated within a relatively small land area. Especially in South Tarawa this creates considerable difficulties in requiring physical distancing. Compounding this risk Kiribati has among the lowest access to drinking water services and adequate sanitation among Pacific countries. High numbers of residents sharing latrines and practicing open defecation is a major concern in the context of COVID-19 increasing the risk of transmission.

The travel restrictions and border closures imposed due to the threat of COVID-19 has left many I-Kiribati workers stranded abroad especially those working in the hospitality sector in Australia and New Zealand and seafarers. This is impacting the volume of remittances transferred to families which previously accounted for around 10% of national GDP.

Kiribati is heavily reliant on imported foods. Food security was significantly affected during COVID-19 with approximately 83 percent of surveyed households lacking access to basic food items stored at home, and 33 percent worried their food will run out before they have money to buy more. Many are reliant on regular food supplies from stores and traders, with reported delays to some imports that rely on flights from Fiji.

22 https://unsdg.un.org/un-in-action/kiribati
23 Interview with Regina Rotitaake, Local Government Division
24 Interview with Regina Rotitaake, Local Government Division
Kiribati’s Progress towards the PNUA Working Pillars

PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation

In relation to social equity and urbanisation, Kiribati has been one of the partners for the Participatory Slum Upgrading Program (PSUP) which was led by the Ministry of Internal Affairs with the support of UN-Habitat. The initiative has played an important role in improving 5 of the most densely populated informal settlements in Kiribati. A new management team formed by national and local government focal points has been established to provide an entry point for community engagement, as well as delivering training for public participation and to hold an exchange of knowledge between other countries that are also implementing PSUP. Some of the key achievements from Kiribati’s PSUP experience include the establishment of a General Land Use Plan for South Tarawa and Betio, which was informed by spatial analysis and upgrading strategy derived from the PSUP process. More specific upgrading recommendations were provided for two pilot communities in Betio Town Council and Teinainano Town Council (TUC). The project has entered Phase III as of February 2021, where ongoing and planned development initiatives (such as the development of the National Urban Policy) will continue to determine the contribution and type of support that PSUP can offer to accelerate Kiribati’s urban development. Some of this support may include the development of policy frameworks, strategic or site level planning and capacity building for national, local and community level stakeholders to continue improving overall living conditions.

As an effort to achieve better social equity and provide a better social safety net for the unemployed, Kiribati has also been rolling out a series of social benefit schemes including pensions for the elderly and disabled, and more recently the Support Fund for Unemployment (SFU). The SFU is being implemented by the Ministry of Women, Youth and Social Affairs (MWSYA). Although there is concern that these schemes create dependency on handouts, creating separate social problems.

PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation

Due to the country’s low elevation and lack of land area, Kiribati is one of the most vulnerable Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTS) to climate-related hazards. Furthermore, the socio-economic challenges described above greatly influence the country’s capacity to adapt and mitigate climate-related hazards and in many cases they serve as risk multipliers. In the past two years, Kiribati has updated its Joint Implementation Plan for climate resilience to support the implementation of holistic climate resilience approaches in a cross-sectoral manner, supported by development partners. It also aims to provide enhanced coordination to access financial resources and technical support to accelerate climate actions across Kiribati. Some of the programmes implemented include the distribution of water tanks and solar panels to some private households in Tarawa at a subsidised cost. Additionally, disaster risk management committees have been established in three urban councils across Kiribati to better coordinate and implement climate resilience and mitigation programs locally.

In terms of resource management, the Kiribati National Waste Management & Resource Recovery Strategy (KNWMRRS) has been approved by the cabinet, which lays out a 4-year waste management roadmap for the country with the support of MFAT and JICA. Leading up to the establishment of this strategy, a Solid Waste Management Programme for South Tarawa and Kiritimati Island was implemented in Kiribati with the support of MFAT, which introduced the Green Bag collection system for organic waste, encouraged sustainable recycling practices and the better management of landfills, as well as regular awareness raising campaigns on littering.

In South Tarawa, there has also been road rehabilitation underway to better address development challenges as a result of poor rural-urban linkages and road infrastructure.

PILLAR 3: Urban Economy

The private sector has been playing a major role in boosting the urban economy in Kiribati, providing employment and business opportunities. However, the Government of Kiribati has also begun to provide start-up business loan schemes which are being offered by the government’s loan institution - Development Bank of Kiribati, these loans are particularly targeting young people to address the high rate of unemployment. The government has also been putting effort into encouraging innovative entrepreneurship through hosting competitions and providing capacity building schemes to strengthen informal businesses.

PILLAR 4: Urban Governance

To accelerate sustainable urban development in the urban areas of Kiribati, the Ministry of Internal Affairs alongside other government agencies are in the process of drafting and updating the country’s National Urban Policy. This will become a roadmap and provide a key set of policy objectives to guide the national government towards sustainable urban development. There are seven thematic areas covering different aspects of urban development, including urban economy, social welfare, urban housing, urban environment and infrastructure etc.

Overall, there has been plenty of progress made towards enhancing the coordination of sustainable urban development through cross-sectoral and multi-level governance in Kiribati since PUF5, such as through the establishment of the new National Urban Policy. Nevertheless, enforcement of policies still remains as one of the most challenging aspects to Kiribati’s urban governance. The Ministry of Internal Affairs will continue to identify the most effective means to implement and enforce the National Urban Policies with different ministries. For example, to better align the wider National Urban Policy with local planning objectives, the Ministry of Internal Affairs has been supporting the ongoing development and establishment of Island Strategic Plans alongside local councils to maximise policy coherence at different levels of governance.

Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)

1. Mitigating against the impacts of climate change and climate-related hazards, which are exacerbated by the geographical attributes of the island state and the socio-economic challenges it is faced with, whilst managing the risks associated with COVID-19.

2. Continue to seek the most effective means to implement and enforce policies (such as the National Urban Policy) and other legislations through cross-ministry and cross-sector collaboration. This could include strengthening of the National Development Committee to specifically address key priorities such as urban housing, socio-economic and health challenges.

Republic of the Marshall Islands

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

The COVID-19 situation in the Marshall Islands has been largely under control with less than 10 confirmed cases to date. At early stages of the pandemic, an emergency declaration was issued by the president which was quickly followed by the closure of borders to all foreigners (except for workers at the US military base). Despite the very low number of confirmed cases, the national government has made contingency planning to prepare hospitals and urban health infrastructure in the case of an outbreak.

In response, the Marshallese government has been offering assistance for affected local companies and workers, especially those who have lost jobs in the tourism sector. Aside from government subsidies, the Marshall Islands has also been receiving assistance from donors including the US Government’s Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, World Bank, ADB, JICA and MFAT. Funding has been allocated to equip hospitals with adequate equipment to manage COVID-19, as well as sanitation
facilities and water provision. The ADB has offered a US$32.57M support package to the Marshall Islands as part of its wider financial assistance package dedicated to support developing member countries who are encountering health impacts as a result of COVID-19.

To better coordinate decision-making during the pandemic, a National Disaster Committee, in partnership with the local College of the Marshall Islands, was established. The committee commissioned a two-story isolation unit for repatriating citizens to be built. Due to many of the repatriating Marshallese citizens departing from the US, the US military services also provided repatriation arrangements and additional quarantine capacity.

Marshall Island Progress towards the PNUA Working Pillars

**PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation**

Over the past 20+ years, the Marshall Islands Development Bank has been providing three housing support options to citizens, including a self-build rural housing programme with the support of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) which targets low-income and very-low-income citizens. The schemes are planned to continue expansion of services beyond Majuro to 5 more atolls.30

Access to land for development or investment has been a longstanding problem for the Marshall Islands. As outlined in the 2020-2030 Marshall Islands National Strategic Plan31, the government will be prioritising policy measures to introduce long-term land leases and provide timely and updated information on available land for investment to boost the economy and new developments in order to meet urban housing demands. It also outlines existing rural-urban income disparities and ongoing rural-to-urban migration.

Education remains to be an area of improvement for the Marshall Islands, where it is reported that the current education system is lacking a robust roadmap and that many outer island schools are lacking qualified teachers. To address these challenges, the Marshallese government is in the process of drafting an Education Sector Plan which aims to guide reform in the Marshallese education system - such as to introduce an internationally recognised Technical and Vocational Education and Training accreditation system to secure training opportunities for youths and boost their chances of employment, as well as a systematic roadmap for the public school system32. Similar to many Pacific Small Island Developing States, a lot of Marshallese, especially those who are young and educated, are migrating internationally to seek employment mainly in Hawaii, Guam and the US mainland. The increased training opportunities offered through the Education Sector Plan would hopefully help youths seek jobs locally, as a way to retain a larger economically active population in the Marshall Islands.

The islet of Ebeye is home to a particularly disadvantaged community, as a result of forced migration programs in the past arising from testing nuclear weapons. Housing is very poor, as is provision of urban services, and the islet is one of the most crowded settlements in the world. This is currently the focus of a number of improvement projects.

**PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation**

Climate adaptation is a priority for the Marshall Islands and recent work with the Green Climate Fund has helped support the development of climate resilient infrastructure and buildings. Additionally, public training and capacity building on climate adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction is regularly delivered through large multi stakeholder workshops targeting women, youth and outer island communities. Sea level rise remains a major focus of the Marshall Islands and the country continues to highlight this issue at international fora. Training and the development of displacement and relocation policies for communities living on at-risk atolls is ongoing.

30 Marshall Islands Interview with the Ministry of Internal Affairs
32 Ibid, p.8
Towards preserving the natural environment, urban cleanup programmes by civil society and women’s groups in Majuro, and ongoing work to protect, preserve and restrict use of 18 cultural fishing sites are promising steps.

**PILLAR 3: Urban Economy**

The Marshall Islands Mayors Association (MIMA) alongside the Commonwealth Local Government Forum have together led a project to strengthen local economic development and sustainable natural resource use. This supports training and knowledge sharing among policy makers and community groups to support urban and rural economic growth and employment. Investment in connectivity and communications infrastructure is ongoing through the Digital RMI project, funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transport and Communications, and National Telecommunication Authority, to support the development of digital economies. Additionally, greater diversification of economic activities and strengthened human capital in urban areas is a clear priority.

**PILLAR 4: Urban Governance**

Although the Marshall Islands lack a specific national urban development policy, the country has recently finalised a national building code to guide urban development. This was developed by the Ministry of Works Infrastructure and Utilities over a 2 year period and aiming for cabinet approval and implementation by the end of 2021.

In general, data collection by different organisations, government bodies and development projects in the Marshall Islands remains decentralised and non-standardised. Greater efforts to support data collection and centralisation for policy makers is needed, and there are opportunities to integrate these efforts into the periodic national strategic plans. The 2020-2030 RMI plan outlines policy goals for five strategic governance areas including public administration, financial management, judiciary, international relations and security, and law, justice and public safety.

**Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)**

1. Develop clear implementation pathways and actions to achieve the national-level development targets outlined in the National Strategic Plan 2020-2030. Explore options to establish a National Urban Development Policy including provisions for enhanced data collection and secure data architecture for urban public service providers.

2. Support development of human capital including health, education, basic services and diverse economic opportunities.

3. Support continued strengthening of urban resilience to climate change and natural disasters through national, regional and international efforts.

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**Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)**

**COVID-19 impacts and responses:**

Like many smaller Pacific nations, the Federated States of Micronesia (FSM) avoided the direct health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, however were more severely impacted by the regional economic repercussions. This includes significant reductions in economic activity, affecting household incomes and employment rates, alongside drops in government revenue. This was coupled with higher costs for imported commodities creating pressures on food security and widespread delays for international development initiatives. In response the government implemented a range of economic stimulus and social protection programs and ongoing vaccine distribution. This includes community-based grants to fund COVID-19 education and awareness initiatives.
FSM Progress towards the PNUA Working Pillars

**PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation**

A number of development initiatives in the urban areas of FSM are being implemented to support the integration of disadvantaged communities into mainstream economic activities. One example is 2019 reinvestment in the coconut industry in Chuuk with a new processing plant established to promote local economic activities. Although basic services are available in the urban areas there is now a need to progressively expand this provision to more rural and outer island settlements.

**PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation**

In 2018 FSM launched its first ‘State of the Environment Report’. This reviewed existing urban infrastructure, housing and environmental conditions and included a road map for urban development. Similarly the FSM Infrastructure Development Plan 2016-2025 is in the implementation phase, for example, work with the World Bank and Asian Development Bank is now underway to develop climate resilient roads and support urban-rural economic integration.

Although there is no current national building code, a technical working group has been established to implement early consultations and surveying for the existing building stock. The FSM code, when finalised, will provide the legal and institutional framework for urban development and guide the training of local inspectors, builders and contractors in urban and rural areas. This will also mainstream standards of resilience within the built environment.

**PILLAR 3: Urban Economy**

Investment in physical and digital connectivity is creating and strengthening economic linkages in FSM. Alongside a climate resilient primary road network, projects to expand renewable energy generation and access, and investment in digital infrastructure, and water and wastewater services are ongoing. To integrate social equity dimensions FSM has established a new loan programme to support women-led business ventures and promote entrepreneurship.

To mitigate the decline of international tourism incomes, a national tourism mitigation fund has been established to provide economic and social support to the unemployed and most vulnerable households in urban areas. These initiatives have also benefited from the work of the recently established National Tax Reform Commission, who work to expand the public sector revenue base for social and economic programs.

**PILLAR 4: Urban Governance**

Good governance has been key in ensuring the effectiveness of economic and social responses to COVID-19. A wide stakeholder participatory approach has been promoted to improve engagement on infrastructure development initiatives between town councils and municipalities with citizens and affected communities. At a national level, public utility companies are subject to ongoing reforms in 2021 to facilitate the most efficient and cost-effective expansion of services.

**Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)**

1. There is a need for targeted investments, policies and continued public sector reform to address economic and social inequity in urban and rural regions of FSM, particularly in outer islands.

2. Continued expansion of social programmes and climate resilient infrastructure is needed to promote thriving urban economies and ensure basic urban service provision.
Republic of Fiji

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

Fiji experienced a rapid surge in new cases of COVID-19 since April 2021 after nearly a year of having zero cases. The government imposed border restrictions for international travellers from the beginning of the pandemic along with inter-island travel restrictions and curfew remain in place. As one of the more economically developed Pacific nations, Fiji’s international trade and tourism makes it particularly vulnerable to the economic and public health impacts of COVID-19 and public health risks. Fiji’s economy relies heavily on tourism, sugar and agricultural exports, and remittances for revenues. Before the pandemic hit the world, Fiji’s economy was already suffering from underemployment, high levels of informality, gender disparities in employment opportunities and increasing share of young people having limited opportunities in the formal sector.

The advent of COVID-19 and international travel restrictions brought a slump in the tourism revenue and inflicted substantial impact on Fiji’s economy since the tourism sector accounts for 36% of GDP. The impacts were most prominent in the country’s dense cities and informal settlement communities whose poor socio-economic conditions and vulnerability led to disproportionate influence on their livelihoods. Basic urban services including water, electricity and solid waste disposal were disrupted, with 13% of households with shared or no access to potable water. This makes maintaining sanitation and hygiene a challenge for vulnerable households.

The COVID-19 lockdowns forced people to be confined within their homes for longer periods of time and with accruing loss of employment and school closure, families had difficulty in paying the increasing utility bills. There was also an added burden of childcare and household chores for the primary carers who are predominantly women. Fiji’s Women’s Crisis Center and the National Helpline reported that domestic and gender-based violence against women has increased amidst the pandemic and lockdown restrictions. Despite the lifting of the lockdown imposed to curb COVID-19, the economic situation of households is still projected to worsen over time.

33 WHO https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/fj
A COVID-19 SEIA Household Survey and Focus Group Discussions was conducted in fourteen informal settlements in Fiji by UN-Habitat. The results revealed that there was low level of public awareness regarding the symptoms and preventative measures for COVID-19, making the informal settlers particularly vulnerable.\(^{37}\) The findings led to implementation of COVID-19 Community Awareness and Preparedness in Informal Settlements Project (CAPIS), jointly undertaken by UN-Habitat and the Ministry of Housing and Community Development. The project helped to raise awareness and provide hygiene materials to households in 70 communities with a total of over 40,000 people as beneficiaries. It was implemented with substantial and innovative participation from youth, the majority of whom were unemployed, to contribute to raising awareness regarding COVID-19. This engagement strengthened the capacity for self-monitoring and facilitated communication between information settlements and the government.

However, despite the dire situation caused by COVID-19, there were a number of unexpected positive benefits of COVID-19 experience. From focus group discussion, it was found that COVID-19 brought families closer, particularly in the settlements where the families had to work together to cope with inadequate access to land and economic insecurity by engaging in activities like farming and fishing. In addition, COVID-19 also heightened social cohesion as households worshiped together when churches were closed. The most significant benefit is the inter-ministerial collaboration to implement response and recovery measures to control the spread of infection and revive the country’s economy. In order to enable tracking of infected individuals and clusters, informal sector mapping was undertaken. The benefit is not only limited to effective COVID-19 tracking but transcends to effective urban development planning.

According to the SEIA-HHS, 37% of respondents were reportedly worried about running out of food supplies, especially those residing in urban areas who cannot grow their own food with almost 24% of respondents stating that their household members have skipped meals.\(^{38}\) This is a manifestation of the COVID-19 impact on food security. The informal settlements located along low-lying areas are prone to flooding during cyclone seasons, exacerbating the COVID-19 impacts. Tropical Cyclone Harold caused severe damage to life and property in April 2020, forcing 10,000 people to be displaced, compounding the problems caused by the pandemic.\(^{39}\)

In response a wide-ranging package of policies and emergency measures were implemented. The border has remained closed and preventative measures are implemented for businesses. Remote working has been established as the new mode of employment. The Veilomani Food Bank Initiative has been reactivated to provide basic dietary and sanitary needs of people severely affected by COVID-19.\(^{40}\) Civil Servants have been deployed to support National COVID-19 response operations for raising awareness, screening, facilitating isolation and quarantine measures. In addition, a Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on urban systems in Fiji was developed to particularly focus on the state of the informal settlements since the advent of COVID-19.

### Fiji’s Progress towards the PNUA working pillars

#### PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation

Housing and informal settlements have been an ongoing problem in Fiji perpetuating the social and urban divides. In order to ameliorate the situation, Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme was introduced to offer long-term land tenure of 99-year leases for the informal settlers. The Programme aims to enable low and middle income households living in informal settlements to have easier access to affordable and quality housing. Another similar initiative is the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) that focuses on strategic, participatory slum upgrading activities and is aligned with Fiji’s commitment to 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal 11 of “Making Cities and Human Settlements Inclusive, Safe, Resilient and Sustainable”.

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38 See supra note 35, p.
The Programme is currently in its third phase where focus is given to one particular municipality to develop slum upgrading strategies which can be replicated for other municipalities. It aims to facilitate engagement of multiple stakeholders and provide platforms for better learning, cooperation and coordination to address the problems faced by slum dwellers. Various other housing policy and programmes are being implemented by the Ministry of Housing and Community Development to widen the pool of affordable and quality houses include First Home Ownership Initiative Programme (started in 2014 and so far, 2978 households have received assistance⁴¹), Rural Housing Assistance Program (subsidies provided to support housing construction in rural and maritime areas to ensure access to affordable, durable and cyclone resistance homes for those in need) and Social Housing Assistance Policy (to guide implementation of the housing interventions). Debt Relief Assistance has also been initiated to help those who were acutely impacted by the COVID-19 crisis in regards to repayment holiday, extension of loan term, interest only repayment, extended loan terms and reduction in repayment amount.

PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation

Fiji has a tropical climate and is highly vulnerable to climate-related hazards since most of its towns and cities are located in coastal and riverine areas. Given the vulnerability of the urban residents especially the informal settlements to climate related hazards and socio-economic issues, mainstreaming urban resilience into climate related interventions has become a prerequisite in Fiji. Fiji Resilient Informal Settlements (FRIS) is one such ongoing project with an objective to increase resilience of 16 informal settlements across four urban areas to highly vulnerable climate change and disaster risks. The project focuses on working with the vulnerable communities to conduct Vulnerability and Risk Assessments at community, municipal and national level. The Assessment will help map the baseline information required to produce action plans and strategies for implementing climate adaptation actions. Moreover, it will improve coordination and assist with knowledge management and data collection/mapping of informal settlements.

As mentioned in Pillar 1, Phase III of PSUP is ongoing with intention of upscaling in other municipalities in Fiji which will help expand addressing issues concerning increasing the adaptive capacity of the informal settlers across different municipalities. The Ministry of Housing and Community Development launched its upgraded Two-Bedroom House Plan which is the Rural and Maritime Category 4, Cyclone Resilient House Plan to build stronger and cyclone resilient homes for the rural and maritime dwellers. The development of Category 5: Two-Bedroom and Three-Bedroom House Plans for the settlements in the urban and peri-urban areas are in the planning phase. Fiji recently submitted its updated Nationally Determined Contribution in December 2020 that includes two critical provisions highlighting its commitment to accelerate climate action in an inclusive manner: i) multi-hazard risk assessments and “planning and development of climate-resilient human settlements” and ii) strengthened housing stock and “climate resilient upgrading of informal settlements”⁴².

PILLAR 3: Urban Economy

The tourism industry is the driving force of Fiji’s national economy but apart from that, the informal sector also contributes about 20% to the economy and employs nearly 40% of the country’s workforce⁴³. The urban areas particularly with high informal settlements have a large number of workers engaged in the informal sector. The informal sector provides small-scale but essential services to the urban residents and its importance has been recognized by municipal councils. Some municipalities are accommodating informal activities in their strategic plans to provide a platform for trade and promoting micro-enterprise as well as for the government to provide a range of online public services. The effectiveness of these new interventions has been dependent on strong engagement and collaboration between key stakeholders including the Ministry of Land, Ministry of Economy, and Ministry of Rural and Maritime Development.

⁴¹ https://www.fiji.gov.fj/Media-Centre/News/GOVERNMENT-FIRST-HOME-OWNERSHIP-INITIATIVE-ASSISTS
⁴² https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/rdctstaging/PublishedDocuments/Fiji%20First/Republic%20of%20Fiji%27s%20Updated%20NDC%202020.pdf
⁴³ See supra note 37, p.26
PILLAR 4: Urban Governance

Currently the 10-year old National Housing Policy is under review to produce a long-term plan for building resilient homes for all Fijians with provision on upgrading informal settlement. It will provide renewed guidance for national housing developments and housing upgrades to cyclone resilient standards. Moreover, there are concerted efforts directed towards upgrading the informal settlements to provide access to basic utilities and issue lease titles of 99-year to the occupying residents.

Initiatives are also being undertaken to collect data on informal settlements to ensure formulation of strategic and effective action plans for improving their vulnerable state. Among one of the most developed pacific countries Fiji has a higher granularity of data collection and strong governance to allow for the full evaluation, knowledge sharing and identification of its responses to natural disasters and pandemic health risks.

A national land status review is also ongoing in 2021, including assessments of both state and native lands. Leases for development and ownership for land in Fiji are facilitated by the Ministry of Lands for State Land and Itaukei Affairs for native land respectively.

Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)

1. Informal settlements and slums survey/profiling to better inform of the demographics who reside in these settlements, so as to better understand their needs and allocate funding for upgrading to better mitigate against natural disasters and COVID-19 impacts
2. Ongoing National Housing Policy Review to provide renewed guidance for national housing developments and housing upgrades

Independent State of Papua New Guinea

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

As one of the largest pacific countries by population Papua New Guinea, in particular its dense urban centres remains at a higher risk of COVID-19 outbreaks than many more isolated nations. As of October 2021 the country had recorded over 25,000 cases and over 300 deaths. In response the National Pandemic Act 2020 established national and provincial control centres to address and mitigate the risk of further COVID-19 outbreaks. The provincial radio station networks were revitalised to support public health communications and widespread investment is ongoing to upgrade health facility quality and capacity. Alongside border closures, limits on public gatherings, public transport and overnight curfews were implemented to reduce domestic transmission. In addition, the National Capital District issued National Emergency Order No. 16 which effectively put the capital city of Port Moresby into a lockdown.

Controlling COVID-19 and the it’s associated regional impact has come with major economic costs. Across the country 35% of households reported job losses, 75% of micro, small and medium enterprises reported being ‘severely impacted’ by lockdown measures, and the travel and tourism sectors reported up to 97% losses in comparison to regular monthly incomes.

Papua New Guinea’s Progress towards the PNUA working pillars

PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation

Affordable housing and slum upgrading are key priorities in Papua New Guinea. The ‘Settlements to Suburbs’ project is working in informal settlements in Port Morseby, while the Duran Farm Housing development aims to create 2,500 allotments to address the city’s housing shortage. At a higher level the National Housing Corporation is working to crack down on the fraudulent sales of assets and restoring rightful land titles.
Other social developments include the 2021 creation of the Gender-Based Violence Special Parliamentary Committee to guide policy to address domestic and other forms of violence. To build human capital and improve access to higher education opportunities Papua New Guinea has introduced a new Higher Education Loan Program (HELP). Additionally, UNICEF is working with local and national government and healthcare providers to register all children under the age of five for the civil identity registry.

**PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation**

Papua New Guinea has a national target of carbon neutrality by 2030. Green investment in urban areas will be vital to achieve this and the National Capital District Governor provides high level political support for climate change responses. This includes greener forms of energy generation and the PNG national Electrification Programme aims to connect 70% of houses by 2030. The ‘Connect PNG Programme’ builds on this with a wider national investment plan including road, air and maritime infrastructure and connectivity and 100 primary roads to be linked with a trans-island highway. The importance of WASH in response to COVID-19 has contributed to a series of water service reforms with the merging of Edu Ranu and Water PNG with the aim of improved provision.

Deforestation and illegal logging continues to be an issue, however the Papua New Guinea Forests Authority is developing new monitoring and surveillance systems to track illegal activity and plans to ban all log exports by 2025. A similar approach is being adopted with respect to illegal, unreported and/or unregulated fishing with increased surveillance and enforcement of regulation.

**PILLAR 3: Urban Economy**

The informal sector forms a significant part of Papua New Guinea’s economy and policies are developed with this context in mind. By 2029 the country aims to facilitate 500,000 small and medium enterprises, and there is strong interest in promoting entrepreneurship and developing human capacity for local economic development. At a national level the creation of a number of special economic zones aims to create new incentives for foreign private investment. Access to digital technologies remains a key barrier to wider economic growth and in 2020 the National Digitization Transformation Policy was published with the aim of improving nationwide access and uptake of technology and communications. Some government services are already providing digital options, for example the digitization of land titles has allowed the creation of an online land management and payment system to support urban governance.

**PILLAR 4: Urban Governance**

Several national reform initiatives are ongoing in Papua New Guinea. The trending decentralization of urban governance is supporting local provincial institutions to provide municipal services. Towards this goal, three new city authorities have been established since 2019. Similarly, a series of District Facility Audits have been initiated since 2019 to monitor the effectiveness of administrative reforms and track operational efficiency of local government. To guide longer-term urban development, the 2021-2031 National Housing Policy is currently in the draft stages. Other projects include the digital civil identity register which remains challenging to implement, but has so far processed over 2.12 million people. Plans are also underway to re-establish a Local Government Association in Papua New Guinea.

**Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)**

1. Continued investment in water and sanitation facilities and other municipal services is needed to strengthen public health resilience and support development.

2. The digital divide remains prevalent in Papua New Guinea which has among the lowest internet access in the Pacific. Further investment in connectivity and technology access is needed to support local economic development.
Solomon Islands

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

To date, Solomon islands has recorded 30 confirmed COVID-19 cases with 0 deaths\(^44\). Overall, the public health impacts related to COVID-19 have remained low, with the country’s borders closed to foreigners under its State of Emergency Legislation since the onset of the pandemic. In particular, there has been a relocation of government funding to enforce lockdown measures and reinforce the country’s western borders with Bougainville (PNG) which has a high number of COVID-19 cases\(^45\).

Nevertheless, similar to many Pacific Island States, the most significant impacts endured in the Solomon Islands as a result of the pandemic were economic in nature and related to the informal sector. As a result of the State of Emergency imposed in March extending to 25th July 2020, movement restrictions were in place which led to the closure of public spaces and further restrictions on some economic activities.\(^46\) This mostly affected informal food and betel nut vendors which were forced to close. Furthermore, women are disproportionately affected given they comprise the majority of vendors and also face the additional burden of childcare during school closures. All schools and educational institutions had to close for over eight weeks from 30th March 2020 due to the State of Emergency as a precautionary measure to protect against COVID-19, with students being encouraged to return to their home villages. With people being forced to spend longer periods of time at home during lockdown, risk of domestic violence against women and children have escalated since onset of the pandemic. A Learning Continuity Program was established with radio shows covering different topics for different year groups and a digital resource platform for schools, teachers and students to ensure continued education during the period of lockdown.

With movement and transport routes restrictions under COVID-19, residents’ access to imported fresh food has been limited and is exacerbated by price rises as a result of trading disruptions\(^47\). Should this persist, it could affect longer term urban food security and nutrition intake for those residing in Honiara. In response to the economic impacts, the government has issued stimulus packages to assist with certain types of businesses in agriculture and tourism. However, these packages are yet to be inclusive of those affected by the closure of informal markets or temporary gaps in pay. Moreover, a gender disparity in households that received stimulus packages was observed, with male headed households having slightly greater access at 32% compared with 23% for female headed households\(^48\).

To mitigate against food security risks due to import disruptions, the Ministry of Agriculture has been providing free seedlings for urban residents to for their backyards as a way to encourage greater urban agriculture and self-sufficiency. Aside from governmental support, traditional and community-based social support systems provided by churches and the wantok system are recognised to be a lifeline for many vulnerable groups facing job losses and lack of income to buy essential goods and services during the pandemic.

The initial fear of a COVID-19 outbreak in Honiara has led to panic of some people who were eager to return to their villages and provinces, but awareness measures have helped to control misinformation. This initial relocation of people at the start of the pandemic also coincided with TC Harold, where people were encouraged to return to their provinces from the capital. However, this was short-lived due to many villages lacking the food supply and essential services capacity to cope with the sudden increase in population, and many have since returned to Honiara. The limited access to land, formal housing and high rental costs means many middle and high-income earners are also forced to live in informal settlements and makeshift housing. Such high densities prevent natural air circulation, with a lack of space to isolate and cramped living conditions making it virtually impossible to implement measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 if it were to spread within the community. Furthermore, in many informal settlements, pit latrines shared by up to 20 houses are common which becomes a public health hazard and seepages into groundwater places the local water supply at risk of contamination.

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\(^{44}\) https://covid19.who.int/region/wpro/country/sb
\(^{45}\) Solomon Islands Interview with the MLHS
\(^{46}\) UN-Habitat (2021) The Socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on urban systems in the Solomon Islands
\(^{47}\) Ibid
\(^{48}\) Ibid
Water disruption and rationing is common even for those with a formal supply, making it difficult to maintain the levels of handwashing and hygiene required to uphold the WHO standards to combat the spread of COVID-19. UN-Habitat’s household survey found that greater awareness raising is key in addition to the provision of reliable water supplies in order to boost handwashing and hygiene of communities during COVID-19. The same survey also revealed that 95% of respondents didn’t feel threatened by eviction due to COVID-19\(^{49}\).

In terms of access to healthcare facilities, Honiara’s main National Referral Hospital has a rather limited capacity of 300 beds and 50 doctors, meaning any severe cases of COVID-19 would severely overstretch the capacity of the healthcare system. Furthermore, there are significant barriers for those living in informal settlements outside the municipal boundary, with over 80% unable to reach a healthcare facility within 15 minutes\(^{50}\). The lack of transport is a common barrier among women in particular, overcrowding at facilities and being unable to afford healthcare were also common reasons for low accessibility of healthcare services. To raise public awareness of COVID-19 and to encourage better hygiene, handwashing stations in public places as well as direct information campaigns through social media, a radio talk show, weekly statements and briefings from the Prime Minister were rolled out. Radio was also a common source of information on COVID-19 and popular across age groups and settlements.

In terms of urban climate vulnerabilities, high density of informal settlements located with poor access to basic services tend to have lower adaptive capacity to extreme weather events such as flooding and heavy rainfall which impacts Honiara the most. The 2020 TC Harold also heavily impacted Solomon Islands, with areas such as Jericho and Kukum fishing village being the worst hit places. Impacts include damages to agricultural crops, buildings and roads to Honiara. Food crops damaged as a result of the cyclone, compounded by trade disruptions due to COVID-19, affected food supply to Honiara. Although much of the annual governmental budgets have been redirected to prioritise recovery from COVID-19, this redirection policy also includes climate change and resilience as priority areas under national security\(^{51}\).

### Solomon Islands’ Progress towards the PNUA Pillars

#### PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation

Solomon Islands is considered as one of the fastest urbanising countries in the Pacific. With a rapidly growing population in its capital Honiara and other urban centres, urban development and planning capacities are being overstretched which resulted in unplanned growth and informal settlements that lack adequate infrastructure. Solomon Islands has been a participating country in UN-Habitat’s Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) since 2015. As of 2020, the Jericho PSUP led by the Ministry of Lands, Housing and Survey and UN-Habitat has been completed. Some of the key outcomes from the PSUP include 3 Urban Profiles for the cities of Honiara, Auki and Gizo, as well as a National Urban Profile for the Solomon Islands. These profiles cover urban thematic areas such as informal settlements and housing, local economy and employment, urban planning and infrastructure development, informing detailed priority proposals to be implemented that are in line with the aspirations of the Pacific New Urban Agenda\(^{52}\). Furthermore, Solomon Island’s PSUP has been integrated into the Solomon Islands Urban Management Programme of Support, which is a framework established by MLHS to coordinate a growing number of pro-urban management interventions at the national, provincial and Honiara city-level. These projects are gaining support from an increasing number of international development partners such as the World Bank, New Zealand, Australian Aid, UNDP and UN-Habitat\(^{53}\).

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\(^{49}\) UN-Habitat (2021) The Socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on urban systems in the Solomon Islands

\(^{50}\) Ibid

\(^{51}\) Solomon Islands Interview with the MLHS

\(^{52}\) https://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/projects/solomon_islands/detail01_en.html

\(^{53}\) https://unhabitat.org/solomon-islands#:~:text=The%20Solomon%20Islands%20Urban%20Management%20supported%20by%20an%20increasing%20number
The MLHS is also leading the development of a National Housing Policy, which is anticipated to be completed by September 2021. The policy, supported from the urban profiling findings from the PSUP, will provide guidelines and a clear framework for the upgrading of informal settlements and new housing developments. There are 3 major housing projects ongoing in Honiara, one of which is the Mamara Pilot Housing project which aims to provide 1000 affordable houses in west Honiara which will be sold to the government for future public distribution. The new development was originally intended to be developed as a free trade zone, where it will not be legally bound by the Planning and Development Act - which raises concerns for social equity issues. Additionally, construction for the Pacific Games housing is also underway with the support of Chinese aid. Another housing development scheme led by the MLHS and Solomon Housing (company established via National Provident Fund) is intended to provide housing for ministry staff.

Aside from housing developments, a land registration is also underway in Honiara with the support of students from Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. The registry will be mapping existing ward boundaries, formal and informal settlements as well as providing indications for locations of pilot housing schemes.

Local planning schemes in Lata and Tulagi are currently under review, as well as the Honiara Local Planning Scheme where it has been receiving support from ADB which has been providing QGIS rapid screening training to the city council. There have also been efforts to revive the Solomon Islands Planners Association, such as seeking approval for the newly drafted constitution for the association.

PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation

Solomon Islands is amongst the Pacific Small Island Developing States that are vulnerable towards the effects of climate change and extreme weather events. Honiara's coastline is especially vulnerable to rising sea levels and is lacking adequate flood defenses to protect the capital from frequent cyclones and storm surges - making those residing in informal settlements and fishing villages particularly at risk. The Climate Resilience Honiara Project, in line with the Honiara Urban Resilience and Climate Action Plan, aims to enhance the resilience of the capital and its residents to natural disasters, with an emphasis on pro-poor interventions and the involvement of youths, elderlies, women and the disabled. The project, covering interventions at the community, ward and city level, is entering the implementation stage but still needs to receive funding to begin. In Honiara, the University of Melbourne has also been offering support to Honiara City Council to enhance its Climate Resilience Mechanism, and the council is currently coordinating a cross-boundary climate resilience governance mechanism with Guadalcanal Council.55

Aside from the Climate Resilience Honiara Project, the national Climate Change Resettlement Policy will also aim to be presented to the Cabinet by the end of 2021. The policy aims to provide national resettlement guidelines to be piloted in 4 island sites - Walande, Aruligo, Titiana and Nukukaisi. Alongside the government's efforts in building climate resilience, UN-Women has also conducted a gender forum to support community level action on climate change and disaster risk reduction.57

PILLAR 3: Urban Economy

Land rents in Honiara are currently undergoing review with a land valuation roll being drafted to ensure that more affordable housing can be provided to residents. Once completed in the capital, the same process will be done in provinces across Solomon Islands which is being driven as one of the policy objectives under the COVID-19 Redirection Policy.

In terms of connectivity to support the local economy, highway upgrading has been underway for the Kukum Highway to improve connectivity to the airport terminal with work due to start this year and completed by 2023. The West Honiara Highway upgrade scoping has also been completed, which was supported by infrastructure funding from ADB. Furthermore, submarine cabling work has also been completed to enhance internet connectivity for the capital.
PILLAR 4: Urban Governance

As of 2021, a draft of the National Urban Policy has received endorsement by the cabinet which represents a priority shift towards climate change management and resettlement for the Solomon Islands - however the policy is yet to be launched as a result of funding delays.

Furthermore, a reclassification of peri-urban areas via Aerial data collection (LiDAR) is currently underway for Honiara, with the support of ADB which is providing technical training for physical planners. On top of that, Honiara City Council is currently reviewing ward boundaries for 12 wards of varying sizes. This project aims to enhance alignment of current ward boundaries with census data and enumeration areas, however, progress is currently delayed. A UNDP funded and UN Women supported customary land recording is being implemented by MLHS, aiming to document boundaries of tribal groups in West Guadalcanal after receiving over 200 expressions of interest from tribal groups in the area. Legislation is being drafted to amend the current Customary Land Act and related constitutions to incorporate this recording as a registration. Additionally, MLHS is also prioritising Greater Honiara Urban Development plan in their work plan, with support from the Prime Minister - another draft of the plan will be submitted to the prime minister for further review for funding allocation purposes. As a way to empower local government, MLHS is planning to deploy experienced staff and new planning, surveying and land management graduates to local provinces to support urban planning and management outside of Honiara and major cities. This will also present an opportunity for new graduates to receive training and gain employment.

Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19):

1. Finalisation of the National Urban Policy and receiving endorsement from the Cabinet for implementation, UN-Habitat has agreed to provide technical support to MLHS to review the current draft
2. Completing data collection for the reclassification of peri-urban areas for Honiara and beyond, which has been experiencing delays

Republic of Vanuatu

COVID-19 impacts and responses:

Since the beginning of the pandemic, Vanuatu has had a total of only four cases of COVID-19 reported, with three recoveries and one fatality and, as of October 2021, there have been no active cases in the last four months. The three recovered cases were all detected in individuals staying under quarantine and there has been no community transmission. Even though Vanuatu had no confirmed cases of COVID-19 in March 2020, a National State of Emergency (SoE) was declared with restrictions on social gathering, public movements and business operation. The SoE has been extended until 31 December 2021 due to growing concerns regarding emerging infectious variants of COVID-19. The SoE was called with directives pertaining to the SoE regulations and the Council of Ministers (CoM) decision on stimulus packages to be issued. Vanuatu National Disaster Management Office (NDMO) is taking a lead on overall coordination of COVID-19 operation with the Health Cluster leading the medical aspects of the operation. Though the infection is not widespread however, the socio-economic cost bestowed by the SoE has taken a huge toll on issues relating to gender-based violence, child protection, psychological stress, among others. Vanuatu’s economy is largely dependent upon tourism but with the SoE and border restrictions in place, tourism activities are at a standstill. The repercussions of which had to be borne by many businesses and individuals directly or indirectly involved in the tourism sector. At least 2,000 formal jobs were in jeopardy, while 10,000 people engaged in informal sector were affected.

Among the informal workers, women and people with disabilities who are at high risk of being marginalized were the most hard hit by COVID-19 outbreak. About 1,400 bus drivers and 140 taxi drivers in Port Vila, the capital of Vanuatu, saw drastic decline in demand and nearly 1,000 licensed handicraft artisans suffered sharp drop in their incomes, corresponding to near-zero. Furthermore, the imposition of social distancing precautions prominently affected the sales of fruit and vegetable markets. Hence, the border and travel restrictions continue to hinder movement of supplies and trade, disrupt employment opportunities and have a major impact on Vanuatu’s economy.

Republic of Vanuatu’s Progress towards the PP-NUA Working pillar

PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation

About 25% of the total population of Vanuatu reside in urban areas, majorly in the capital of Port Vila and the secondary centre of Luganville and has an urbanization rate of 3.42%\(^{60}\). Though the size of urban dwellers is small but similar to other Pacific Island countries, if the peri-urban areas are categorised as “urban” then the urban growth rate surrounding Port Vila is estimated to have increased by three folds since the 1980s\(^{61}\). However, the capital city has not been able to accommodate growing settlers leading to expansion of squatter settlements in the peri-urban areas with poor housing and unhealthy conditions and lack of basic services such as water supply, electricity, solid waste management among others.

With the vision of enabling national, city and community representatives to map out the urban development needs and mainstream slum issues in relevant policies to address urban poverty through a cross-sector approach, the Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP) is currently being implemented in Vanuatu\(^{62}\). It is being conducted in partnership with the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the three cities of Port Vila, Luganville and Lenakel. To date, the ministry and city government officials have been trained in carrying out participatory urban assessment, result-based management, gender and human rights-based approaches. They have also been acquainted with issues related to slums in urban areas including planning, basic urban services, housing and land issues. The respondents during the interview mentioned that urban profiling has been completed for Port Vila, Luganville and Lenakel which will serve as a baseline to design PSUP and secure additional funds for housing policy dialogue for slum upgrading and prevention.

The national land subdivision policy has been recently launched by the Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources to set the standards for systemizing the creation of subdivisions, ensuring environmentally and socially sustainable development while providing equity for all landowners and residents. The subdivision policy aims to define the rules and guidelines to improve on how subdivisions are developed to benefit all the relevant stakeholders. The National Housing Corporation (NHC) is the statutory body with the mandate to execute government policy on housing. In a bid to accelerate sustainable urbanisation, the Building Act was officially gazetted by the State Law Office to ensure proper quality of the construction of buildings. In relation to provision of basic services, UNELCO, a private enterprise is providing electricity and water supply in Port Vila and partly in Lenakel while another private enterprise, Vanuatu Utilities and Infrastructure (VUI), is supplying electricity in Luganville and water supply is provided by Public Works Department (PWD).


\(^{62}\) [https://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/projects/vanuatu/detail01_en.html](https://www.fukuoka.unhabitat.org/projects/vanuatu/detail01_en.html)
PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation

Vanuatu’s exposure to natural as well as climate change induced disasters has put disaster risk reduction and resilience building on its top priority. A National Policy on Climate Change and Disaster-Induced Displacement was launched in September 2018 to provide a roadmap for mitigating challenges resulting from climate change to protect the displaced people by developing strategy for long-term recovery and identifying development needs of communities. Vanuatu National Disasters Management Office’s (NDMO), a department under the Ministry of Climate Change and Adaptation responsible for coordinating responses to disasters, has been actively engaged in disseminating education and raising awareness on climate change and disaster preparedness to community level through development of Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees. To expand the operation of NDMO at the provincial level and strengthen relationships with the communities directly, the Provincial Disaster Offices was officially opened in 2018. In addition, the Department of Environmental Protection & Conservation was established to ensure that Vanuatu’s national protected area targets and priorities are met through a coordinated and inclusive manner with available and accurate information that can be efficiently shared across stakeholders for policy formulation.

PILLAR 3: Urban Economy

The high cost structure in Vanuatu puts especially the poor and informal settlements in a difficult position to meet their basic needs for housing, food and clothing. Due to insufficient jobs in the country, a seasonal work programme is being put in place for providing employment to young people in Australia and New Zealand. In accordance with the COVID-19 economic response plans, the central government has initiated issuing stimulus packages to help small to medium enterprises and small locally owned businesses recover from the loss incurred by the pandemic. The engagement of women in small business through roadside markets and selling handicrafts has also been expanding. Moreover, in order to encourage innovative entrepreneurship for locals, the government has provisions for providing subsidies in agriculture and fisheries sectors.

PILLAR 4: Urban Governance

In April 2021, a new dedicated Department of Urban Affairs and Planning (DUAP) under the Ministry of Internal Affairs was launched to ensure sustainable urban development in Vanuatu. DUAP is responsible to deliver a range of basic urban services and play a key role in urban planning to advance urbanisation in a socially and economically optimal manner. Some legislations including Physical Planning Act and Foreshore Development Act are undergoing review. It is the first time the Physical Planning Act, enacted by Parliament in 1986 and enforced in 1987, is being reviewed. The purpose is to improve on facilitating control of land use within a designated physical planning area. Furthermore, as a part of capacity building, elected councilors from Port Vila and Luganville have received Local Elected Leadership training. The National Urban Policy is also reportedly in the development phase.

Priority urban development issues and needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)

1. Enhancing climate and disaster resilience will be important as the urban regions of Vanuatu continue to develop and recover from the economic impacts of COVID-19. Financial support, training and economic diversification within the international tourism industry is needed to reduce the impact of future shocks.

2. Support the newly launched Department of Urban Affairs to implement change in urban areas with a particular focus on slum upgrading, housing availability, and local economic development.
IV. Policy Priorities and Next Steps Towards Implementation of the PNUA

A number of key urban development challenges and priority areas arose out of the Virtual Pacific Urban Forum Event, country interview process and regional literature review. These topics will form the basis of a longer-term work plan for implementation by the PP-NUA in collaboration with Pacific Island Countries and regional development partners. Key policy priorities are identified along the four working pillars of the Pacific New Urban Agenda as detailed below:

Priority urban development issues that needs to be addressed (post-COVID-19)

PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation

- **Prioritise Informal Settlements and Affordable Housing**
  Growing demand for affordable housing was reported as a key challenge for most Pacific countries. Progress is being made through development of new housing stocks, provision of loans and financial support, and through settlement upgrading programs for existing informal settlements. More action is needed to build on this momentum and ensure these gains are felt across the region to provide longer-term solutions to housing availability and overcrowding. Informal settlements should be prioritised with greater community engagement, data collection and mapping to best inform policy-making. Investment in urban basic services including clean improved water supply and sanitation services is also key to promote public health and human rights.

- **Provide COVID-19 Support, Training and Vaccine Distribution**
  National and local government support and training are needed to mitigate the public health risk and economic impacts of COVID-19. In particular, provision of basic water and sanitation services, preventative public health measures, quarantine processes, and investment in public health preparedness and vaccines are priorities. Accessible education, awareness raising and financial support, particularly for vulnerable groups, are needed to protect communities at this time.

- **Promote Gender Equality**
  Gender equality and gender-based violence remain key development challenges for the Pacific. Although progress is ongoing in several countries through local community empowerment projects and formation of national task forces, these approaches need to be replicated across the wider Pacific region. The economic and entrepreneurial potential of women can help support wider COVID-19 recovery and urban socioeconomic development.
PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation

- **Invest in Climate Adaptation and Resilience**
  In densely populated cities, investment in resilient infrastructure, services and community disaster risk reduction is needed at all scales to ensure effective adaptation. While some countries have begun development of climate-related resettlement policies, expansion of this migration planning and local engagement with at-risk communities is needed.

- **Incorporate environmental considerations in COVID-19 recovery**
  All countries face significant socioeconomic and environmental challenges in their COVID-19 recovery. The incorporation of environmental considerations, such as resilient infrastructure development projects and urban climate adaptation programmes and retrofitting can create jobs while supporting a green economic recovery. Few countries include direct or indirect environmental considerations in their current COVID-19 national plans, therefore opportunities must be taken when possible to redirect investment towards environmentally friendly initiatives.

- **Connectivity, Electrification and Closing the Digital Divide**
  The access and application of new technologies varies greatly across the Pacific. Continued progress and investment in connectivity and electrification infrastructure for households are needed to promote urban development and digital readiness.

- **Plan for Urban Waste Management**
  Waste management and environmental pollution are emerging issues for the Pacific cities. With limited existing recycling infrastructure and per capita waste generation expected to increase, investments in urban waste systems should be a priority. Development of city formal-informal sector partnerships can provide cost-effective ways to expand collection services.

PILLAR 3: Urban Economy

- **Support Small Medium Enterprises and Innovation**
  Creating robust and adaptive urban economies is vital for sustained urban socioeconomic development. National and city governments can develop policies that target small and medium enterprises and support entrepreneurship. The uptake of innovative technology transfers and prioritising access to education and training, can help create economic opportunity in urban communities.

- **Ensure COVID-19 Economic Support and Tourism Sector Retraining**
  The impact of COVID-19 on international tourism and remittances is expected to continue for several years. Cities will need to promote self-sufficient economic activities and workforce diversification, particularly for those citizens dependent on the tourism sector, to mitigate these impacts. Most national governments have provided direct support for struggling businesses and communities but a longer-term policy plan is also needed to ensure this remains financially sustainable.
PILLAR 4: Urban Governance

- **Greater Data Collection and Centralization**
  Accurate and up-to-date urban development data is essential for developing effective policies. The lack of a centralized urban database and regular data collection plans in most Pacific countries remains a key barrier for understanding urban development progress and challenges. Investment in secure data architecture and training for local government should be a priority. Data collection is also a key part of national and local voluntary review processes (VLRs) which support accounting of sustainable development goal progress.

- **Develop National Urban Policies, Housing Policy and Building Codes**
  Significant progress has been made in recent years towards development of national urban policies, action plans, housing policy and building codes. This is important to ensure strategic investments and longer-term sustainable urban development. Countries that still have significant policy gaps in their respective urban and construction sectors should prioritise development.

- **Support Cross-Ministry and Cross-Sector Collaboration**
  The Pacific New Urban Agenda can only be achieved through effective engagement and coordination of all relevant stakeholders. Developing institutional relationships and cross-ministry capacity through working groups and other mechanisms is necessary to support policy implementation. Similarly infrastructure projects and other initiatives require collaboration with the private sector and local communities. Public-private partnerships present one way to accelerate investment in urban development issues.

- **Develop Digital Land Registration Systems**
  The development and digitization of land registry systems presents a new way to mitigate land disputes and ensure clear allocation of responsibilities and ownership. Countries should continue their rollout of these technologies and ensure proper engagement of local communities, particularly vulnerable groups, to foster a common understanding of land conditions.

- **Enhance Local Governance Capacity**
  Building the capacity of national and local governments is necessary for successful implementation of the Pacific New Urban Agenda. Sustainable urban development requires multidisciplinary understanding and expertise to ensure the best results. Training opportunities and international initiatives, as well as knowledge sharing, will be key for governments to leverage the wealth of case studies and innovations across the Pacific. The Pacific Urban Forum and Pacific Partnership for the New Urban Agenda provide institutional foundations for knowledge sharing at a regional level.
Annex A. Interview Summaries

Polynesia Subregion:

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<td>Samoa</td>
<td>• Samoan leaders are the national government’s first point of contact for implementing local development projects.</td>
<td>• Green Climate Fund Programme supported climate retrofitting for families residing within water catchment areas in Apia. Focus on development of embankment and bridges reinforcement and drainage system upgrades to prevent flood risk.</td>
<td>• Developed an international seasonal work programme to send young people to New Zealand and Australia for employment and training.</td>
<td>• District Development Plans (DDPs) produced to localise development activities and tailor budgets to individual community needs - developed by local community leaders with support from Samoa Gov and development partners (UN and DFAT).</td>
<td>• Zero COVID-19 cases to date, borders remain closed and social preventative measures are implemented.</td>
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<td>• Active programme of anti-violence - especially for gender-based domestic violence which increased since the onset of the pandemic.</td>
<td>• Community Integrated Management (CIM) Plans led by the Ministry of Environment have been developed for Samoa’s regions to support local climate mitigation infrastructure programmes (e.g. sea walls, forest and mangroves conservation).</td>
<td>• Active engagement and promotion of women in business with ngo groups - targeting roadside and night markets selling handcrafted goods.</td>
<td>• Faced challenges with establishing a centralised national data bureau that aimed to store key statistics across ministries and inform development decisions.</td>
<td>• Food and hygiene packages received from UNICEF, UNDP, DFAT and others.</td>
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<td>• National beautification programmes underway to improve public urban areas and villages - grants and prizes for winning entries.</td>
<td>• Samoa has developed a strong network of village representatives/community leaders who are the national government’s first point of contact for implementing local development projects.</td>
<td>• Central government stimulus packages to support SMEs and local businesses during COVID-19.</td>
<td>• Pandemic economic response plan - grants for new businesses and start-ups and capacity building and training for businesses. e.g. supporting development of a local “Cook Safe App” for contact tracing.</td>
<td>• Mass unemployment faced by workers in the tourism sector - in response special occupational training is being offered by the Pacific Technical College to support the unemployed and help protect SMEs.</td>
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<td>Cook Islands</td>
<td>• Short-lived migration of populations to outer islands at the onset of the pandemic - many have since returned to Rarotonga.</td>
<td>• Diverting national capital to infrastructure investment (e.g. bridges maintenance and flood defences) to create job opportunities, especially for those who worked in the tourism industry.</td>
<td>• Pandemic demands have accelerated the rate of the fibre optics construction programme between Rarotonga and Polynesia - with faster broadband speed anticipated.</td>
<td>• In progress: data updates for national population, land use and community mapping surveys.</td>
<td>• Women’s committees and village reps acting as stewards for village COVID-19 mitigation support working alongside healthcare workers.</td>
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<td>• Migration challenge - contraction in the younger and economically productive cohorts of the population, as many immigrate to New Zealand and Australia for employment and benefit from visa exemptions.</td>
<td>• Disaster risk management policies implemented to guide climate adaptation and disaster preparedness.</td>
<td>• Pandemic economic response plan - grants for new businesses and start-ups and capacity building and training for businesses. e.g. supporting development of a local “Cook Safe App” for contact tracing.</td>
<td>• Efforts underway to re-establish the Local Government Association - 2020 Islands governance elections were disrupted by the pandemic.</td>
<td>• Border will reopen for a travel bubble with New Zealand as vaccination rolls out - international flights to increase.</td>
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<td>• Increase in crime rates since onset of COVID-19 due to unemployment.</td>
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<td>• Subsidies (e.g. for energy, tariff relief and loan interests) provided by the national government.</td>
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  • Additional half acres on all islands for Agriculture development and leased by the government.  
  • National Strategy for Healthy Local Food Supply.  
  • Application and management of ESIAs on development projects in the country.  
  • Ensured usable land remediation after completion of the Tuvalu Borrow-Pits project.  
  • Building of harbour facilities in the outer islands to ensure reliable services.  
  • Tuvalu Priority Infrastructure Investment Plan 2020-2025.  
  • Outsourcing of some government services to the private sector.  
  • Provision of loans to local farmers with low interest rates.  
  • Formulation of the National Climate Mobility Advisory Committee.  
  • Formation of the National Infrastructure Steering Committee – advises Tuvalu Cabinet on major infrastructure projects.  
  • Border closures.  
  • Health service capacity impacted.  
  • Sea and air transport and import/exports disrupted.  
  • Talaaliki Plan (COVID-19 Alert & Response Plan).  
  • COVID-19 Task Force – Chaired by the Hon Prime Minister. |
| Kiribati | • Participatory Slum Upgrading Program in progress, housing and infrastructure upgrades in South Tarawa.  
  • Social benefits and support funds for the unemployed between 18-59, elderslies and those with disabilities.  
  • Approved Kiribati National Waste Management & Resource Recovery Strategy - 4-year waste management roadmap with support from MFAT and JICA.  
  • Kiribati Joint Implementation Plan for Climate Resilience - e.g. establishment of disaster risk management committees in the 3 urban councils, and distribution of water tanks and solar panels to all private households in Tarawa.  
  • Road rehabilitation in South Tarawa to improve connectivity to other parts of Kiribati.  
  • Urban Task Force Committee established to accelerate and manage urban development.  
  • Development of strategic commercial areas to boost local economy in Betio - in line with Ministry of Lands zoning objectives.  
  • Public-Private Partnerships - employment and business loans to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship and strengthen informal businesses (local economic development training by UN Women).  
  • Kiribati National Urban Policy - guiding document for the national gov - 7 thematic areas (urban economy, social, urban housing, urban environment and infrastructure etc.)  
  • Enforcement of policies has proven the most challenging aspect for Kiribati’s urban governance.  
  • Border remains closed until further notice - affecting international trade and imports.  
  • Taskforce established to roll out Kiribati’s National COVID-19 preparedness and response plan - e.g. setting up quarantine centres, social distancing and awareness activities. |
### Marshall Islands

|---------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Marshall Islands | Marshall Island Development Bank continues to provide three housing support options, including a self-build rural housing programme with USDA which targets low-income and very-low-income citizens. Planning to continue expansion of services to 5 more atolls. Housing support for over 20+ years.  
- Lots of marshallse, especially young and educated, are migrating internationally.  
- Continued trend of rural to urban migration. | Green climate fund for adaptation, infrastructure and climate resilient buildings. Also runs training for women and youth groups on climate adaptation and DRR including large multi stakeholder workshops that bring communities together from more remote islands and atolls.  
- Ongoing environmental cleanup programme with NGO and women’s groups in Majuro.  
- Ongoing work by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Commerce to protect, preserve and restrict use of cultural fishing sites. To be introduced in 18-19 local government districts from when parliament reconvenes in August 2021.  
- Sea level rise remains a high priority for Marshall Islands and promoted at international fora (COP). Ongoing training and planning for the relocation of communities from at-risk atolls. | Land status - Land owned by local people, families and clans. Businesses don’t own land except under lease issued by the Historic Preservation Office and Office of Environment.  
- CLGF project - Training for local governments to support Local Economic Development with a focus on sustainable natural resource use, knowledge sharing and training of local mayors through the Marshall Island Mayors Association (MIMA).  
- New ‘Digital RMI’ project funded by the World Bank and implemented by the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Transport and Comms, and the National Telecomms Authority. The National Telecomms Authority is the only communications service provider at present. | No national urban development policy but recently published the national building code for urban developers. Developed by the Ministry of Works Infrastructure and Utilities over 2 years, currently distributed for review and aiming for cabinet approval and implementation by the end of 2021.  
- Data collection by different organisations is decentralised and non-standardised. Potential to support a data centralisation project in the RMI 2022 work plan. | Emergency declaration from the president and closed borders.  
- Low cases so lots of preparation by hospitals and urban health infrastructure.  
- No international tourism so government assistance for affected tourism local companies and workers.  
- No major changes to city budgeting.  
- Receiving strong assistance from donors including US Gov (CDC), World Bank, ADB, Japan, New Zealand - funding for hospitals. Strengthening water and sanitation access is a priority.  
- The National Disaster Committee, in partnership with the local College of the Marshall Island, has built a 2-story isolation unit for repatriating citizens. Also good relationships with a nearby US military atoll helps to provide additional quarantine overflow capacity if needed. |
### Federated States of Micronesia

**PILLAR 1: Social Equity and Urbanisation**
- Development programs being implemented to integrate disadvantaged communities into mainstream economic activities (e.g. coconut processing plant in Chuuk).
- Progressive expansion of services from urban areas to rural and outer island settlements.
- Establishment of social protection community-based grants for covid awareness programs.

**PILLAR 2: Environment, Resilience and Urbanisation**
- First ‘State of the Environment Report’ launched in 2018 which includes a road map for improving the urban environment.
- Ongoing implementation of FSM Infrastructure Development Plan, 2016-2025.
- State-level action plans in place since 2017 for disaster risk management and climate change.
- New project launched to develop FSM Building Code which seeks to ensure high standards of resilience in the built environment.

**PILLAR 3: Urban Economy**
- Funding mobilized from the World Bank to improve the primary road network and strengthen urban-rural economic linkages.
- Projects to expand renewable energy capacity, digital connectivity and water and waste water services in progress.
- Loan program established to support women-headed business ventures.
- Social programs ongoing to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the unemployed and most vulnerable households.
- Tax Reform commission established to expand the revenue base for social and economic programs.

**PILLAR 4: Urban Governance**
- Ongoing reforms and institutional development of utility companies.
- Town Councils and Municipalities engaged in the administration of economic and social protection programmes.
- Stakeholder participatory approaches being implemented to improve the governance of new infrastructure projects.
- Town Councils and Municipalities engaged in the administration of economic and social protection programmes.

**COVID-19 IMPACTS AND RESPONSES**
- Significant reductions in economic activity, government revenues, household income and employment.
- Slow down in development project implementation.
- Higher costs of imported commodities.
- Implementation of economic stimulus and social protection programs.
- Establishment of a tourism sector mitigation fund.
## Micronesia Subregion:

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<td>Fiji</td>
<td>• Informal Settlement Upgrade Programme.</td>
<td>• Fiji Resilient Informal Settlements (FRIS): (1) Vulnerability and Risk Assessments at community, municipal and national level. (2) Coordination, knowledge management and data collection/mapping of informal settlements.</td>
<td>• Cross-government engagement on economic policy with key stakeholders including the Min of Lands, Min of Eco, Rural &amp; Maritime Dev, Solicitor General.</td>
<td>• Review of National Housing Policy – which will include a provision on informal settlement upgrading.</td>
<td>• Borders remain closed.</td>
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<td>• Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP), Phase III in progress – Lami Informal Settlement Analysis and Strategy.</td>
<td>• Participatory Slum Upgrading Programme (PSUP), Phase III in progress – Lami Informal Settlement Analysis and Strategy, aims for replication in other municipalities in Fiji.</td>
<td>• Land status review of state and native land. Land leases are facilitated by the Ministry of Lands for State Land and Itaukei Affairs for native land.</td>
<td>• Development Lease – upgrade of informal settlements resulting in access to basic utilities and issuance of 99-year lease titles to occupying residents.</td>
<td>• Preventative measures implemented for businesses and remote working.</td>
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<td>• First Home Initiative Programme.</td>
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<td>• In progress of capturing data for informal settlements.</td>
<td>• In progress of capturing data for informal settlements.</td>
<td>• Reactivation of Veilomani Food Bank initiative and distribution of face masks in informal settlements.</td>
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<td>• Rural Housing Assistance Program.</td>
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<td>• Diversion of Civil Servants to National COVID-19 response operation in conducting awareness, screening, facilitating isolation and quarantines.</td>
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<td>• Social Housing Assistance Policy (Subsidies).</td>
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<td>• Development of Socio-Economic Impact Assessment of COVID-19 on urban systems in Fiji, with particular focus on informal settlements.</td>
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<td>• Debt Relief Programme.</td>
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<td>• Tourism is heavily impacted as it is one of Fiji’s major sources of revenue.</td>
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<td><strong>Fiji’s updated NDC (Dec 2020) includes two critical provisions: (i) multi-hazard risk assessments and “planning and development of climate-resilient human settlements” and (ii) strengthened housing stock and “climate resilient upgrading of informal settlements”</strong>*.</td>
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<td>Papua New Guinea</td>
<td>• Gender-Based Violence Parliamentary Committee</td>
<td>• Aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030.</td>
<td>• Creation of special economic zones aiming to attract foreign investments.</td>
<td>• National Housing Policy 2021-2031 being drafted.</td>
<td>• National Pandemic Act 2020 and establishment of national and provincial control centres to address COVID-19 institutional challenges.</td>
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<td>• Duran Farm Housing project to develop 2,500 allotments to address housing shortage in Port Moresby.</td>
<td>• PNG Electrification Programme aiming to connect 70% of houses by 2030.</td>
<td>• Launched National Digitization Transformation Policy to improve access to communication and technology.</td>
<td>• Decentralization reform to empower provincial governments. Three City Authorities have been established since 2019 to support local delivery of municipal services.</td>
<td>• Revitalized provincial radio stations to achieve the PNG COVID-19 Communications Strategy</td>
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<td>• National Housing Corporation progress on fraudulent sales of assets and working to restore rightful land titles.</td>
<td>• Merged Edu Ranu and Water PNG services to improve WASH provision.</td>
<td>• Digitization of land titles and formation of an online land management and payment system.</td>
<td>• District Facility Audits in 2019 to monitor the effectiveness of administrative reform and operational efficiency.</td>
<td>• Provincial hospital program to upgrade health facilities.</td>
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<td>• Introduced and funded a new Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)</td>
<td>• 'Connect PNG Program' investing in road, air, and maritime infrastructure. Includes 100 roads to be linked in all regions and a trans-islands highway.</td>
<td>• Crakdown on illegal unreported and unregulated fishing with increased surveillance.</td>
<td>• Civil identity registration is ongoing, processing over 2.12 million.</td>
<td>• Major economic impact - 35% of households reported job losses; 75% of MSMEs severely impacted by lockdown; travel and tourism sectors lost 97% of income.</td>
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<td>• UNICEF programme to register all children under five under civil identity registry.</td>
<td>• New monitoring and surveillance system for illegal logging exports and ban all log exports by 2025.</td>
<td>• Aim to have 500,000 SMEs in the country by 2029.</td>
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<td>Solomon Islands</td>
<td>• National Housing Policy development for drafting September 2021.</td>
<td>• Climate Resilience Honiara Project is entering the implementation stage but still needs to receive funding to begin.</td>
<td>• Ongoing review of land rents and drafted Honiara land valuation roll.</td>
<td>• National Urban Policy draft endorsed by cabinet and represents priority shift towards climate change management and resettlement.</td>
<td>• Budget redirection towards border security (with PNG) and health funding.</td>
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<td>• 3 Major housing projects are ongoing. Mamara Pilot Housing project started, aiming for 1000 affordable houses in west Honiara to be purchased by the government. MLHS housing project targeted for ministry staff in early surveying. Pacific Games housing complexes funded by China Aid.</td>
<td>• Covers community, ward and acit-level climate interventions.</td>
<td>• Review of Lata/Tulagi local planning schemes.</td>
<td>• Reclassification of peri-urban areas with Aerial data collection (LiDAR).</td>
<td>• Relocation of people out of the city coincided with TC Harold, and then a fast return to Honiara.</td>
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<td>• Land registration is ongoing and requires accelerated implementation for 2021 title allocations.</td>
<td>• UN-Women conducting a gender forum to support action on climate change and disaster risk reduction.</td>
<td>• Drafted Constitution of Solomon Islands Planners Association.</td>
<td>• Ward boundary review started but progress was delayed.</td>
<td>• Ongoing economic impact on markets for food, arts and crafts, and tourism related industries have been raised by communities during engagement.</td>
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<td>• Public service rental scheme under review.</td>
<td>• Climate change resettlement policy aims to be presented to Cabinet by the end of the year. Pilot sites in islands - Walande, Aruligo, Titiana, Nukuaisi.</td>
<td>• Review of Honiara Local Planning Scheme with ADB GIS support.</td>
<td>• UNDP-funded land recording to establish walking boundaries for &gt;200 tribal groups.</td>
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<td>• Ongoing review of land rents and drafted Honiara land valuation roll.</td>
<td>• Kukum Highway Upgrading (airport and terminal) due to start this year and complete by 2023.</td>
<td>• Greater Honiara Urban Development plan to be resubmitted to the Prime Ministers Office.</td>
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<td>• Review of Lata/Tulagi local planning schemes.</td>
<td>• West Honiara Highway upgrade scoping completed.</td>
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<td>Vanuatu</td>
<td>• Participatory Slum Upgrading Program Profiling completed for National, Port Vila, Lugarville and Lenakel.</td>
<td>• Displacement policy launched in September 2018, to fulfill the Vanuatu Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction Policy to ensure protection for displaced people while addressing the long-term recovery and development needs of communities.</td>
<td>• Seasonal work programme to send young people to Australia and New Zealand for employment</td>
<td>• New dedicated Department of Urban Affairs and planning recently launched - mandated to deliver a range of basic urban services</td>
<td>• NDMO takes lead on overall coordination of COVID-19 operation with the Health Cluster leads the medical aspects of the operation</td>
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<td>• The National Housing Corporation (NHC) is a statutory with the mandate to execute government policy on housing</td>
<td>• Vanuatu National Disasters Management Office’s (NDMO) education and awareness programs to develop climate change and disaster preparedness at the community level continued with the formation of Community Disaster and Climate Change Committees.</td>
<td>• Pandemic economic response plans - central government issuing stimulus packages to help SMEs and small locally owned businesses</td>
<td>• Legislative review and amendment of Municipalities, Physical Planning Act, Foreshore Development Act and development of National Urban Policies</td>
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<td>• The Building Act is officially gazetted by the State Law Office to ensure proper quality of the construction of buildings.</td>
<td>• Provincial Disaster Offices officially opened in 2018, furthering the ability of NDMO to operate at the provincial level and strengthening relationships with the communities we serve directly.</td>
<td>• Women engagement in small business through roadside markets and selling handicrafts</td>
<td>• Elected councilors from Port Vila and Lugnacille received Local Elected Leadership training.</td>
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<td>• UNELCO is a private enterprise that transports and supplies electricity and water in Port Vila and partly Lenakel, while VUI (private enterprise) supplies electricity in Lugarville, while PWD is responsible for supply of water.</td>
<td>• Department of Environmental Protection &amp; Conservation established to ensure that Vanuatu’s national protected area targets and priorities are met through a coordinated and inclusive manner with support from available and accurate information that can be efficiently shared across stakeholders for policy formulation.</td>
<td>• Public-Private partnerships (government subsidies - 70/30, 60/40) in the agriculture and fisheries sectors to encourage innovative entrepreneurship for locals wanting to start a small business.</td>
<td>• New gazetted bylaws for Port Vila Provincial Government</td>
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<td>• Legislative review and amendment of Municipalities, Physical Planning Act, Foreshore Development Act and development of National Urban Policies</td>
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<td>• To date, there is no confirmed case of COVID-19 in Vanuatu</td>
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<td>• Tourism sector remains severely affected.</td>
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