

Chapter 2

Issues and Opportunities

Urbanization has increased the diversification and competitiveness of economies in the region, and it can continue to improve living standards. But this potential is being jeopardized by a lack of vision of the kind of economic, social, and physical environment desired by town dwellers in the Pacific, an absence of appropriate policies, and poor urban management and service delivery. Dealing with the worsening problems caused by urbanization and realizing its potential to increase living standards calls for a policy and institutional response that goes beyond resettlement schemes of uncertain viability. Indeed, in light of the importance of the urban economy and the proportion of the population that lives in urban areas, the time has come for urban management strategies to feature in national economic and social development strategies and for accountabilities to be defined.

The problems are structural. The task is strategic. The way ahead lies in reshaping the debate on urbanization with a view to building a broad-based vision of how to achieve a more equitable distribution of opportunities while safeguarding the fragile environment. Shaping this vision will require a consensus throughout Pacific island societies on policies and practical measures that draw on and enhance urban-rural linkages and harness the potential of towns to absorb population growth more productively.

Adaptability has long been a strength of Pacific people. It lies largely within the power of these societies, acting alone and through regional cooperation, to harness and enhance the positive impact of urbanization and the contribution it can make to improving the competitiveness of Pacific island economies and the quality of life for these societies.

A. Improving Urban Governance and Management

The search for national identities in the postcolonial era and the preoccupation with macroeconomic development has relegated planning and management of the growing new towns to secondary importance in most Pacific countries, despite the considerable impact wrought by the pace of their growth. Negative perceptions of urbanization by many political leaders, policy caution, weak institutional memory, the slow pace of administration, and a lack of public sector innovation further inhibit urban management in the Pacific.

There is a crucial role for local governments in the Pacific in planning and coordination. But these efforts invariably suffer from inadequate financial and technical resources to cover day-to-day operational and maintenance costs, much less discharge the extensive range of functions assigned to them.

Strengthening Local Governments

There appears to be little support in the region for strengthening local governments. In most Pacific countries, therefore, planning and managing services for urban areas is effectively a national government function. At the national level, responsibility is usually divided among many government departments and utilities, with little coordination. In South Tarawa, Kiribati, for example, urban services are handled by the Ministry of Home Affairs and Rural Development, the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, the Public Works Department, the Kiribati Housing Corporation, the Public Utilities Board, the Ministry of Health and Family Planning, and the Ministry of Environment and Social Welfare Development.

In Port Vila, the municipality and at least five national and provincial ministries and departments have responsibilities for land use planning and development control. Despite the large number of agencies involved, Vanuatu could claim only two qualified land use planners in 1999, one of whom was laid off as part of the government's comprehensive reform program.

In Fiji, responsibility for Suva is shared by a number of local governments, including those of Suva, Nausori, and Lami, while the expanding peri-urban areas are under the jurisdiction of rural local authorities administered by the Ministry of Health. The range of agencies involved in the town of Suva alone includes the City Council, the Department of Town and Country Planning of the Ministry of Housing, Urban Development and Environment, local planning boards, the Native Lands Trust Board, the National Housing Authority, and individual landowners. Metro Suva (the Lami-Suva-Nausori corridor) and the Nadi-Lautoka corridor are each forming metropolitan areas, but there is no regional planning to guide or control urban growth beyond municipal administrative boundaries—or even any reliable information on its pace or direction. Nor is there provision for any sort of metropolitan management.

The current institutional structure in most of the region is characterized by central government planning and control that does not involve local authorities in a coordinated manner; a lack of communication among municipal governments, rural local authorities, and urban villages in the same metropolitan area; a tax burden to support urban development that falls unevenly on beneficiaries in the urban region; and a lack of capacity to address the needs of the population, which vary greatly across jurisdictions.

Increasing the Efficiency of Urban Management

Until recently, there has been little, if any, recognition of the need to reduce the number (and costs) of the many national, provincial, local, and quasi-governmental agencies charged with urban management functions—each with its own agenda and few, if any, with adequate

funds or managerial and technical expertise. Establishing a coordinating locus for managing these towns, creating a more inclusive process representing a broad base of stakeholders, and rationalizing the institutional framework for planning and delivering urban services is vital to halting the declining productivity and deteriorating quality of life in Pacific towns.

As the Pacific countries become more closely linked to the global economy, pressure for efficient urban management will increase. Governments need to view urbanization as a crucial part of national development policy, and they need to adopt measures that will enable towns to continue to grow in an orderly way.

Improving the Responsiveness of Government to Local Needs

Several obstacles stand in the way of good governance in the region. National governments—and to a large extent lower levels of government—tend to be organized along Western institutional models, which are poorly integrated with traditional structures and processes. Decisions are generally made by formal government bodies, based on top-down planning and budgeting, and do not often make sense in terms of traditional views of how decisions should be made, nor do they accurately reflect local level priorities for development. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that regulations that conflict with customary practices and traditional lifestyles—such as those relating to land use—are often ignored.

Improvement of governance in the urban environment should be based on one key assumption: to the extent possible, higher-level institutions should embody the basic norms and values of the people they are intended to serve rather than imposing on them a new set of norms and values. In addition, the decision-making process should be more responsive to shared norms of how decisions should be reached. This implies a shift in the role of technicians and other experts away from actually making decisions and devising plans to advising representatives of the people on how most

effectively to meet the needs expressed by communities and the local level.

Inclusion of representatives chosen by community institutions in higher-level bodies would encourage the extension of traditional methods of building consensus across and among different communities and groups, including women and urban youth as well as marginalized groups such as the landless poor, who have not utilized such methods before. It would also increase the sense of ownership among participants and strengthen the willingness by the members of the group to take the necessary steps to implement a decision.

The lines of communication between local and higher levels need to be improved. There should be a well-defined point of entry for those at the local level who wish to communicate their needs and priorities to higher levels. Improving communication between levels of government would greatly improve the ability of local communities to make their needs known to higher-level officials and to have those needs reflected accurately in planning and budgeting. It would also provide communities with a source of accurate and clear information. As traditional community-based institutions become more inclusive, they should be formally recognized as the representative institutions of people at the community level. At the same time, these bodies should be empowered to determine who will represent them at higher institutional levels, where decisions are made that affect development, service delivery, and other public activities at the local level.

Pacific countries are fortunate in that they have retained much of the vitality of traditional social and cultural organization at the local community or neighborhood level, whether this be in the form of the Samoan *aigas* and village *fonos*; or the *utus*, *kaingas*, and *maneabas* of the I-Kiribati. Within these groups, the processes by which authority is expressed and decisions made are well defined and understood. Although the specifics vary a great deal across cultures, most Pacific societies are characterized by a strong emphasis on group decision-making. Most decisions are arrived at through a process that

allows all those eligible to participate in the discussion before a course of action is chosen.

The challenge in urban areas is to find a means to include all affected residents, including those from different clans and ethnic groups, in the decision-making process. Explicit attention needs to be paid to the needs and priorities of these otherwise marginal stakeholders or they will act as disintegrative social forces in the urban environment. This is a daunting task, but it is not beyond the capacity of Pacific societies. The tradition of negotiation and consensus building is strong and in most cases sufficiently flexible to incorporate “outsiders” into at least some kinds of group activities.

The likelihood of success in this process would be improved by clearly articulating the incentives for greater inclusion. Greater inclusion would give the group access to additional human and other resources at the local level and expand support from the community for local level demands. It would also strengthen the legitimacy of the traditional structures and decision-making processes—such as the Matai in Samoa or the Unimane in Kiribati—as the “voice” of the community beyond the restricted group it used to represent.

B. Moving Toward Community-Based Planning

In most Pacific countries urban planning is effectively a national government function, divided among many government departments. There are very few urban managers and virtually no capacity to enforce compliance with building codes or other regulations, much less to formulate integrated physical, economic, and environmental plans to guide urban development at the national or local government level. The most significant manifestations of the failure to execute demand-based integrated planning is the inadequate provision of water supplies, solid waste and sewage disposal, and housing that characterizes many of the high-density urban areas in the Pacific.

Appropriate land use planning is central to effective environmental management. But

institutional arrangements for land use planning are weak, and the options for effective intervention to solve environmental problems associated with land use are limited. Inadequate zoning laws and un-enforced building codes foster substandard housing, overcrowding, and poor sanitary conditions.

Throughout the Pacific, information gaps are a major stumbling block to the adoption of effective planning of any kind. Many of the data required to prepare urban plans are not available, and research on the degree of deprivation or how families and firms cope with deficiencies in urban services has not been performed. In the absence of any overall-planning framework, development controls are generally applied in an *ad hoc*, inconsistent and (sometimes) corrupt manner. Moreover, formal planning is still regarded in many Pacific countries as an imposition from the colonial past and is resisted where it threatens to impinge on the rights of traditional landowners.

Planning legislation is either outdated or nonexistent in most Pacific countries, and few towns have an approved land use plan. Despite—or perhaps because of—this deficiency, an effective approach to planning was made in Ebeye, in the Marshall Islands, one of the most densely populated towns in the Pacific, in 1989. The major landowners gave the Kwajalein Development Authority (KADA) a leasehold interest over more than 75 percent of the island. This enabled KADA to develop plans to establish commercial zones, expand recreational facilities, and build the island's first high school.

Similar reforms have proven more difficult in the capital, Majuro, where major landowners are represented in the country's political leadership. The establishment of a municipal government in Majuro has not led to effective land use planning. Zoning laws proposed in 1991 were defeated during public hearings. No other local governments have attempted to draft such laws, although national legislation assigns them responsibility to do so.

Ironically, Kiribati, one of the more traditional Pacific countries, has made most progress toward developing an appropriate municipal framework for coordinated urban planning (box 8). Integration with the Kiribati Environmental Information Management System (KEIMS) being developed within the Ministry of Environment and Social Development would increase the critical mass of its application and potentially widen the client user base. It would, thereby, increase the commitment to sustain the initiative since both have adopted the same proprietary GIS software (MapInfo) and there is a logical synergy of benefit between Land and Environmental management.

Improving Land Use

More than 80 percent of land in the Pacific region is under some form of indigenous control, with strict kinship rights affecting its development (table 1). In urban areas, this ranges from about 40 percent in Kiribati to nearly 100 percent in the Marshall Islands.

Customary land ownership and kinship traditions of sharing resources have protected communities against poverty by ensuring that all family and clan members have access to land. Customary traditions allocate land rights according to status in society, roles, age, and gender. These rights are under constant renegotiation to reflect the changing needs and interests of individuals and groups. However, this has also complicated the provision of even basic services and limiting economic progress and growth of income opportunities in towns. In many Pacific countries land remains in unproductive or under-productive use. Easing the constraints on land use and availability would significantly increase the productive potential of Pacific towns.

Modern economies rely on legal systems that recognize individual rights, gender equality, and individual ownership of property. Not surprisingly, land held under customary tenure is not normally accepted as collateral for loan finance by formal sector financial institutions.

Box 8. Urban Management and Planning for South Tarawa

The Urban Management Plan for South Tarawa (UMPST) prepared by the Land Management Department (LMD) of the Ministry of Home Affairs and Rural Development clearly defined the context and rationale for urban management, the main issues and objectives for managing the urban environment. With the benefit of considerable community consultation, the plan provides an indicative planning strategy and direction, together with a proposed planning framework address key issues to guide future urban development and urbanisation in the short to medium-term. Significantly, the plan identified - “the lack of co-ordination, commitment and an absence of a single integrated policy framework, which cuts across all sectors of South Tarawa” - as the primary obstacle to effective urban management.

Building on this experience the Government initiated, with ADB support, work on an Integrated Urban Plan and Program for the whole of South Tarawa (TIPPS). This TIPPS was intended to provide a development “vision” for the whole of South Tarawa and a broad strategic structure plan that could, amongst other things, identify existing and potential land to accommodate future population growth in an orderly and planned fashion as well as infrastructure plans and programs together with a detailed physical planning and financing framework for infrastructure development and an economic appraisal of water and sewage improvements.

Whilst it fails to tackle the intractable ‘land supply’ issue and related cultural modalities for implementation, TIPPS’ recommendations include a number of innovative approaches, such as: a Government land purchase strategy with valuation advice; voluntary property trusts; and Comprehensive Urban Development Zones.

The computerised GIS land use database system being developed by LMD is being used to help resolve actual ownership disputes and to illustrate the importance of related land-use considerations. The system offers great potential as a contribution to more effective land management. However, its success will depend on political commitment and resources for continued development and operation of the system as well as the extent to which other government agencies tap into this valuable information resource.

Lack of security of tenure and the practice of renegotiating lease terms *ex post* are frequently cited by foreign investors as major constraints to investment, especially large-scale long-term investment.

Table 1. Land Ownership in Selected Pacific Countries

	Customary Land (%)	Government Land (%)	Freehold Land (%)
Fiji	83	9	8
Vanuatu	98	2	
Solomon Islands	97	3	
Federated States of Micronesia		60	40
Kiribati	40	60	
Marshall Islands	100		
Tonga		100	

Land leasing by the government or the private sector occurs in most Pacific urban centers in one form or another. Use of customary land remains problematic, however, even for essential public facilities such as water supply and waste disposal, since customary landowners usually oppose regulations that might restrict their rights. Landowners in South Tarawa, for example, succeeded in pressuring the

government to return land that had been set aside for urban water supply reserves. Lack of basic land ownership information showing location and boundaries does not exist in most Pacific countries, increasing the number of disputes over land ownership.

Governments are rightly keen to protect cultural traditions. But intervention in the land market need not challenge customary values placed on land. The issue is not one of changing the traditional land tenure system *per se* but of unlocking land tied up in unproductive uses or held speculatively.

For example, many of the custom owners in Port Vila, some of whom own land individually, would like to register their land holdings and use them to secure financing for subdivision and land development for residential purposes. However, formalizing custom land holdings (involving certification of ownership by traditional authorities, surveying, registration and issuance of a lease) is time-consuming and costly – possibly amounting to VT 700,000 to 1 million for a block of about 6-7 hectares. Few

custom owners have such resources readily available.

Devising means to facilitate the registration of custom land should be a high priority for the Government of Vanuatu. One possible solution that has been under consideration is the setting up of a revolving fund, possibly managed by the SHEFA Provincial Council, which would provide loans to custom land owners to finance the costs of surveying, registration and titling of their land. Financing should be short term, say 2 - 3 years, and at market interest rates.

Forging a broad-based consensus that action is necessary to avert further deterioration in living standards holds the key to gradual progress in this area. The problem should be brought into the public domain and openly discussed among key stakeholders, including landowners and other affected parties, with a view to agreeing on practical measures to promote the efficient use of land while protecting natural resources for the wider public good.

Important trends are becoming discernable in a number of countries. Individualism and egalitarianism are replacing close kinship structures, with their emphasis on reciprocity, inherited social status, and rank. Concepts of property and ownership are shifting from a group to an individual orientation, and emigration and wage employment have disrupted ritual obligations and communal activities.

For example, in Samoa, village practices appear to have been diverging from “proper custom” for some time. There is a growing expectation that children will be able to inherit family house and land rights directly, without having to override claims by other branches of the wider descent groups of the village. (There is still no move toward freeholding of customary land, however.) In Fiji, the importance of the *Mataqali* as a land-owning unit reduced, as access to land has become more individualized. In many parts of the country, individual households intend becoming the owners and users of tracts of land, parts of which they are unwilling to lease or lend.

To facilitate improved land management, there is merit in intensifying networking and the pooling of knowledge within the region, discussing examples of good practice and experience in addressing this problem, and collaborating in pilot approaches in keeping with the established traditions and needs of individual Pacific countries.

C. Addressing Environmental Issues

Environmental management issues in Pacific urban centers require urgent attention. These issues have become particularly important in recent years because of the rapid increases in urban population pressures, often on small and low land masses; the vulnerability of urban areas to sea level rise; the economic and cultural dependence on the natural environment; the prevalence of natural disasters and the vulnerability of freshwater lenses on atolls to environmental; and climate change impacts (box 9)

Most countries in the Pacific have prepared National Environmental Management Strategies (NEMS) and some, such as Fiji, are particularly active in promoting recycling, awareness campaigns (including in schools), conservation of water resources, and the like. Fiji has also involved industries, such as Exxon, which sponsors and promotes environmental clean-up programs, and the tourism industry that has a growing eco-tourism subsector and uses ecological features in some resorts.

However, many NEMS do not deal extensively with “brown” issues of urban wastes. Recognition is not yet widespread that environmental management of urban areas—particularly integrated planning and management of land resources, including inland and coastal areas—is a prerequisite for successful long-term economic development.

Implementation and enforcement of environmental regulations governing inappropriate land use are weak in many countries, particularly in towns. For example, programs of the Environmental Protection Authority of the Republic of the Marshall

Box 9. Protecting the Watershed in Apia, Western Samoa

The problems in Apia are typical of those faced by other Pacific towns (Figure 2.7). The watershed is suffering from erosion, sedimentation, and contaminated drinking water due to land conversion, livestock grazing, and uncontrolled waste disposal. The Vaiusu Bay and its foreshore suffer from high concentrations of bacteria, nitrogen and solid wastes, shellfish contamination, and reduced fishery productivity caused by industrial pollution, destruction of the mangrove habitat, urban runoff, and wastes from the old disposal site. Low-lying areas of the city are affected by vector-borne diseases and unsanitary conditions caused by flooding and sedimentation. The Vaisigano River Watershed Management Project, supported by the United Nations Development Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization, is a good example of a low-cost program that is working to protect critical areas, rehabilitate eroded lands, provide proper drainage, introduce agroforestry and conservation practices, and educate the public.

Islands include public education and monitoring of public water quality and supplies, pesticides, solid and hazardous waste management, toilet facility regulation, village environmental health, sewage disposal inspection, and dredging. Regulations governing these areas have been approved and are being implemented in dredging, solid waste, toilets and sewage, and pesticide use. Water quality regulations have also been approved. The Ministry of Health, Family Planning and Social Welfare has been given responsibility for advising on and coordinating all these environmental issues. However, enforcement of protective measures will continue to be limited until political support and institutional responsibilities in this area are clarified.

Moreover, coordination is often weak. In Kiribati, the Management Plan for Tarawa Lagoon was being prepared at the same time as the Urban Management Plan for South Tarawa. Both were preceded by the National Environmental Management Strategy, but there was no integration or cross-referencing of research, findings, recommendations, or conclusions, even though the government has

monitored the status of the marine resources in Tarawa Lagoon since the late 1970s.

Lack of legislation also hurts efforts to protect the environment. Kiribati has no legislation dealing effectively with the collection and disposal of waste of any kind, let alone toxic or non-biodegradable waste or for dealing with pollution of the sea or lagoon from land-based sources.

D. Improving Disaster Management

The number of natural disasters world wide increased fivefold during the 1990s, and damage increased by a factor of 9. About half the economic impact of these disasters was borne by developing countries—a massive burden relative to their GDP. Much of this burden is borne by the poor, especially in developing countries.

Pacific countries are exposed to the full range of natural hazards, including tropical cyclones, floods, landslides, extended droughts, volcanic eruptions, and earthquakes (table 2). Accelerated changes in demographic and economic trends, climate change, and sea level rise are all increasing the vulnerability of the growing population concentrations in towns, virtually all of which are located on coasts. Lower-income communities—which gravitate to marginal lands, such as foreshore mangroves, floodplains, and stream banks—are particularly vulnerable to flooding, cyclones, and storm surges.

Many Pacific countries have experienced and will continue to experience increased vulnerability to natural hazards as a result of high population growth rates, over-development, increased exploitation of biological and physical coastal resources, mangrove clearance, sand and aggregate extraction (figure 7), overexploitation of fisheries, and poor waste management. These changes may compromise the protective capacity of reefs, leading to a reduction in sediment availability (Gillie 1997a, b; Mimura and Peliskoti 1997; Nunn and Mimura 1997).

Table 2. Vulnerability to Natural Disasters

	<i>Cyclone</i>	<i>Coastal Flooding</i>	<i>River Flooding</i>	<i>Drought</i>	<i>Earthquake</i>	<i>Landslides</i>	<i>Tsunami</i>	<i>Volcano</i>
Fiji	High	High	High	Medium	Medium	High	High	
Vanuatu	High	High	High	Low	High	High	High	
Solomon Islands	High	High	High	Low	High	High	High	High
Federated States of Micronesia	Medium	High	Low	High	Low	Low	High	High
Kiribati	Low	High		High	Low	Low	High	
Marshall Islands	Medium	High		High	Low	Low	High	
Palau	Medium	Medium		Medium	Low	Low	Medium	
Tonga	High	High	Medium	High	High	Low	High	High

Source: SPREP (1994)

Potential impacts include accelerated coastal erosion, inundation, and flooding, which will put further pressure on infrastructure. These impacts are expected to be exacerbated by climate change, sea level rise, and changes in storm frequency and intensity (see Volume IV). As population growth continues to increase pressure on natural resources and the environment, risks to public infrastructure and facilities and the large and growing proportion of economic activity in coastal towns increase.

Disaster management needs to go beyond minimising loss of life. Physical losses—including losses due to business interruption that are often comparable to those resulting from direct physical damage—can impose enormous burdens on the population. Secondary loss from damage to communication and power infrastructure can be particularly significant in counties such as Vanuatu, Fiji, and Samoa, where major tourism assets are located in or near urban areas and tourism revenues are significant.

Efforts in Kiribati

The recently updated Kiribati Disaster Management Plan (Kiribati National Disaster Management Office 1998) is already comprehensive in its coverage, addressing mitigation, public awareness, and training as well as relief, rehabilitation, and international assistance. A National Disaster Management Council—made up of secretary-level representatives of 10 sector ministries and chaired by the Secretary for the Ministry of Home Affairs and Rural Development—is responsible for overall disaster management on a

Figure 7. Sand Mining at Shoreline



continuous basis. A Mitigation and Prevention Committee has been assigned the role of preparing policies for disaster mitigation, including training, education, and awareness programs at all levels of government and the community.

The plan covers a range of issues and provides a reasonable statutory platform from which to launch positive change. Although the urban agenda appears to have been largely overlooked in the plan, current work to develop a geographic land and property information system, mapping and survey registration system together with the creation of an environmental resource database could provide the spatial information on which to base hazard and vulnerability assessments.

Efforts in Vanuatu

Vanuatu has taken an active approach to disaster management, establishing a permanent National Disaster Operations Center in Vila. Its plan, originally drafted in 1985, was reviewed to incorporate the lessons learned during the 1991/92 cyclone season, observations by the National Disaster Executive Committee, and recommendations of the Barr Report (AIDAB 1989). The plan now covers preparedness measures, national disaster response, and post-disaster review, as well as stages of implementation and a warning and alert system.

The plan does not include any disaster mitigation measures, and little attention has been focused on integrating vulnerability aspects into a comprehensive preventative strategy or integrating disaster management into national development strategies. The need for attention to hazard mitigation has been recognized, however. With assistance from the South Pacific Disaster Reduction Program, the National Disaster Management Office of Vanuatu is formulating a Comprehensive Disaster Management Program that will guide all future disaster management activities, including hazard and vulnerability assessment to facilitate the identification of mitigation activities.

One omission common to the plans for both Vanuatu and Kiribati is the lack of explicit reference to the roles and responsibilities of local governments. The broad list of functions that may be conferred on local councils presents a *prima facie* case for them to play at least an important interface role between the government and the community and for them to be represented in bodies responsible to formulating and overseeing prevention and mitigation measures.

E. The Costs of Doing Nothing

The absence of appropriate policies, plans, strategies, and effective institutional arrangements to guide urbanization will not only close off the opportunities to harness the dynamic potential of the towns for economic

growth, but will have an increasingly negative impact on the existing productive capacity of the urban economy. It will also reduce the quality of life in the region's rapidly growing towns.

Further pressure will be placed on the already stretched infrastructure services and the institutions charged to deliver them. Unemployment will likely increase. Environmental conditions and pollution, which reduce the carrying capacity of the limited natural resource base, will worsen, and serious outbreaks of epidemic illnesses may become more frequent. These public health risks are unlikely to be confined to low-income populations in informal and squatter settlements, since these communities provide much of the service sector workforce in higher-income households, in commerce and industry, and in hotels, restaurants, and other facilities associated with tourism. All of these effects will constrain economic growth, deter investment, and increase urban unemployment and underemployment.

Already the pace of urban growth has challenged the ability of customary traditions to protect people from poverty, and a growing permanent urban underclass is emerging in towns and cities in the region. Not surprisingly, further deterioration in urban conditions will be felt most directly by the poor, who represent a large and growing proportion of the population. The increasing hopelessness among these very youthful urban populations is almost certain to lead to increased levels of crime and urban violence.

A "no action" scenario is thus likely to lead to an increasing gulf between the "haves" and the "have-nots" in terms of access to land, shelter, basic services, and quality of life. Lack of action threatens to reverse recent progress in improving the coverage, quality, and reliability of urban utility infrastructure and services, as responsible agencies become increasingly dependent on government subsidies and external assistance.

This scenario is not inevitable. Action now by political and community leaders and other key stakeholders could set in place the building blocks that would reduce these risks. The

region's long tradition of family and kinship could be harnessed through an urban dialogue beginning in local neighborhoods and culminating in an urban "summit" in each country intended to create a shared vision and consensus on strategies, roles, and responsibilities to mobilize the benefits of urbanization and to achieve a more equitable distribution of opportunities for all while

safeguarding the fragile environment. Achieving this consensus requires a more inclusive constituency of stakeholders in the decision-making process, including policymakers, public sector institutions, customary landowners, and ordinary urban residents. The well-established cultural traditions of communal decision-making make doing so a realistic proposition.