



THE NATIONAL
RESEARCH INSTITUTE
PAPUA NEW GUINEA

SPOTLIGHT

INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS THE EMERGENCE OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN URBAN AREAS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Logea Nao
Lindsay P Kutan

www.pngnri.org
Volume 15, Issue 8

Key Points

- The rapid growth of informal settlements in urban areas of Papua New Guinea (PNG) threatens orderly development of towns and cities.
- In Port Moresby, informal settlements have rapidly expanded on both State and customary land.
- Recent government initiatives to address the rise of informal settlements have included evictions and the settlement to suburb upgrade program.
- In the absence of effective customary land administration, settlement to suburb upgrade on customary land may not work.
- To address informal settlements, those to be relocated should be done on State land only; settlements to be upgraded should be done with care to discourage emergence of new ones; affordable housing should be provided; and, enforcement of regulations should be strengthened.

inquire
inform
influence

July 2022



INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS THE EMERGENCE OF INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN URBAN AREAS OF PAPUA NEW GUINEA

By Logea Nao and Lindsay P Kutan
Introduction

The rapid increase of informal settlements poses a threat to proper and orderly urban development in Papua New Guinea (PNG). It largely reflects the lack of policy directions on addressing issues regarding inadequate supply of titled and serviced land, shortage of affordable housing, and high purchase and rental prices in relation to the mismatch between the demand and supply of housing in the formal market. Alternatively, urban residents have resorted to residing in informal settlements with sub-standard living conditions and lack of basic services.

The recent forceful eviction of settlers of informal settlements, particularly in Port Moresby, raises the questions, “what preventive measures could have been undertaken to avoid such exercises?” or “what happens to the displaced settlers after eviction?” The implications on proper and orderly urban developments, as well as the rights and welfare of PNG citizens has emerged consequently from the eviction processes. Furthermore, should the evictions continue, it may promote an environment of insecurity and uncertainty that undermines the basic human need for a decent and quality life.

This paper makes reference to the [eviction exercise at Garden Hills in Port Moresby in December 2021](#). Particularly, highlighting the policy implications drawn from the [response of customary landowners resenting the notion of the government to resettle the displaced settlers on customary land](#). It emphasises on the weak or lack of enforcement of policy framework that encourages preventive measures rather than resorting to evictions. Furthermore, it highlights the policy directions concerning upgrading informal settlements rather than the resettlement initiatives as the means of formally engaging the residents of settlements.

Current situation of settlements in Port Moresby

Informal settlements in Port Moresby have rapidly expanded on both State and customary land. For instance, the National Capital District Commission Urban Development Plan Review (NCDUDP) in 2020 noted that the growth of houses in settlements has overwhelmingly surpassed the rate of growth in the formal suburbs. According to NCDUDP (2020), in the last decade, over 23,000 new buildings have been established in settlements as compared to 6,500

buildings in formal residential areas. Furthermore, it has also been noted that 50 percent of the inhabitants of Port Moresby reside in settlements.

Types of settlements

According to the NCDUDP (2020), settlements within the urban areas of Port Moresby are defined into two categories: planned settlements and squatter (informal) settlements. The latter entails unauthorised settlements, largely on State land, and residents do not have land titles and areas lack basic infrastructure including water, electricity, sewerage, and garbage collection. A UN-Habitat Report (2010) highlights that in 2008, there were 79 informal settlements in Port Moresby. The NCDUDP (2020) indicates that this number is likely to have increased as more people have moved into the city. On the other hand, the planned settlements include the formal settlements that were regarded as part of self-help housing settlements for urban areas in the 1970s. These include upgrade programs involving subdivisions, granting of individual titles and provision of basic services to recognised settlements. Over the years, planned settlements which include Morata in Port Moresby Northwest and Horse Camp in Port Moresby South have deteriorated into settlement conditions due to lack of funding and mismanagement of the programs.

Recent Government initiatives to address growing informal settlements

In recent times, there have been several government initiatives to address the growth of informal settlements in Port Moresby. These initiatives have included the following:

- Evictions – There have been various evictions of informal settlements in Port Moresby. Rooney (2021) highlighted that from 2012 to 2021, there were 62 stories of evictions that took place and 36 cases of threats of evictions and court cases between settlers and parties seeking the evictions.
- One-month ultimatum issued by Department of Lands and Physical Planning (DLPP) – In February 2020, squatter settlers on State land throughout the country, including Port Moresby, were [issued with an ultimatum by DLPP to pull down their homes and to vacate their premises](#). The ultimatum was in the form of public notices in the two daily newspapers.

- Settlement to suburb upgrade program – The upgrade program is a collaborative effort by National Capital District Commission (NCDC), DLPP and National Housing Corporation (NHC) to upgrade some informal settlements to formal suburbs by introducing trunk infrastructure such as mains for piped-borne potable water, sewerage, electricity and good road networks (Ezebilo and Savadogo, 2021).

Concerns that should be addressed

The National Government should consider focusing on and promoting preventive measures to avoid forceful evictions of informal settlement dwellers. It has the potential of avoiding resettlement of settlers as well as unlawful invasion and occupation of land now and in the future. Some of the ongoing concerns that need to be addressed are as follows:

- **Weak enforcement of laws, regulations and policies**

It is not enough for laws, regulations and policies governing orderly development to be passed and introduced, effective enforcement of the laws, regulations and policies is just as critical. In Port Moresby, the enforcement of laws, regulations and policies on orderly development of land continues to be a struggle. This is evidenced by the large number of informal settlements on State land in Port Moresby. There are often no clear responses by authorities to questions such as who is responsible to ensure that State land is not being illegally occupied. If responsible authorities had been undertaking effective enforcement, the unlawful occupation of State land over the years at Garden Hills and the recent eviction from the same land could have been potentially avoided.

- **Acquisition of customary land for relocation of informal settlements**

At the 2019 National Land Summit (NLS19), the government was very clear that it has no intention or desire to take land away from landowners and that customary land ownership will remain under the control of customary landowners (Niugini Land and Properties, 2019). Resettling squatters on customary land, as in the case of [settlers evicted from Garden Hills being resettled at Farea, Manuti, Buswara and Dogura](#), is not within the spirit of customary land reforms which is for ownership to be retained by traditional landowners.

- **Housing affordability problem**

Customary landowners should be encouraged to register their customary land and release it for

development through a lease-based system. This will involve incorporating their land group and registering customary land. The lease can then be issued to individuals for private housing, or to entities for large-scale housing such as housing schemes. This is to ensure that landowners bequeath ownership to the next generation and generations thereafter of landowners, but that potential leaseholders interests/ rights are also protected.

Potential policy intervention initiatives to address informal settlements

- **Settlement upgrade**

The NCDUDP (2020) promotes upgrading of existing informal settlements into suburbs. Ezebilo and Savadogo (2021) contributed to the debate around making the upgrade program successful and sustainable by making an assessment of the socio-economic characteristics of residents and seeking the opinion of community leaders and other residents on the program and how it should be implemented. It should be noted that plans to allocate land titles to settlement families remain contentious as some observers in Port Moresby city call for equal access to land titles for all city dwellers and not preferential treatment of settlement dwellers under the upgrade program.

- **Relocate squatters on existing State land**

A key question that needs to be asked and answered by the authorities is whether resettling people is in the best interest of the general public. Observations suggest that customary land that is acquired for resettlement is often done through compulsory acquisition. Compulsory acquisition by definition, in Section 12 of Land Act 1996, is intended for public purposes such as roads, schools and health facilities. It remains to be clarified that settlements qualify as a public purpose. However, given that informal settlement dwellers also have a right to a decent living, any plans for relocation of existing informal settlements in the future should be implemented on State land only.

- **Provide affordable housing**

Affordable housing for different segments of society and different income levels should be provided and facilitated by the government. The government should play a facilitatory role in the housing sector, especially in the provision of trunk infrastructure services as well as improve systems and processes such as quick turnaround for contract enforcement

at the appropriate government agencies. The private sector should be allowed to build houses. However, the government should also be encouraged to provide social housing for low-income households through public-private partnership.

- **Strengthen enforcement of regulations**

Physical planning and building board regulations should be strengthened such that once new informal settlements appear, both on State land and customary land, enforcement officers should be able to issue stop-work notices and eviction notices (where applicable). This also requires public awareness on the importance of neighbourhood watch and citizen support to report any impromptu erection of buildings on State and customary land.

- **Discourage new settlements**

Current initiatives on settlements, such as NCDC's settlement to suburb upgrade program, should be geared towards ensuring that no new settlements emerge as a result of the upgrade program. The settlement to suburb upgrade program has the potential to encourage the emergence of new informal settlements, if care is not taken to monitor the implementation and effectiveness of the program. At the moment, there is no guarantee that current initiatives to address settlements will stop new settlements from emerging.

Conclusion

Evictions of informal settlements can be avoided in the future if preventive measures are applied or proactive initiatives are introduced. Also, resettlement on customary land should not be encouraged because the government made a commitment not to take land away from customary landowners by acquiring land. Landowners should be encouraged to register their land and to release their land for development through leases for housing. To prevent evictions, resettlement and unlawful occupation of land in Port Moresby in the future relocations should be done only on State land, provided that it is in the best interest of the general public; affordable housing should be provided for different segments of society

and different income levels; strengthen enforcement of regulations; and discourage new settlements from emerging.

References

- Ezebilo, E. E. and Savadogo, P. (2021). *Strategy to improve living conditions in informal settlements in Papua New Guinea: Evidence from Port Moresby*. (PNG NRI Discussion Paper 188). Port Moresby: Papua New Guinea National Research Institute.
- NCDC. (2020). *National Capital District Urban Development Plan Review 2020 - Port Moresby Towards 2030: One City, One People, One Future*. Port Moresby: National Capital District Commission (NCDC).
- Niugini Land and Properties. (2019). National Land Summit consolidated report on the stakeholder and regional workshops. Port Moresby: PNG.
- Rooney, M. N. (2021). *Settlement evictions in Port Moresby between 2012 and 2021*. Devpolicy Blog. <https://devpolicy.org/settlement-evictions-in-port-moresby-between-2012-and-2021-20211125/>. (Accessed on 15 March 2021).
- UN-Habitat. (2010). Papua New Guinea: Port Moresby Urban Profile. Nairobi: UN-Habitat.

About the Author

Ms Logea Nao is a Research Fellow with the Sustainable Land Development Research Program at the PNG National Research Institute. She holds a Masters and Graduate Diploma in International and Development Economics from the Australian National University. Her research interests include economic development, land economics and policy, housing economics and policy.

Dr Lindsay P Kutan is a Senior Research Fellow and Program Leader of the Sustainable Land Development Research Program. He received his Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Economics and Management from the University of New South Wales. He has keen research interests in land development, housing and urban town planning.