


# Trading places: Inclusive cities and market vending in the Pacific Islands

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**Abstract:** *Rapid population growth in Pacific island cities far exceeds employment opportunities and is contributing to rising urban inequality and social exclusions. Livelihoods in the informal urban sector, such as market vending, provide much needed income, rural–urban connectivity and food security, but remain largely excluded from policy and planning frameworks. Spatial, economic and social exclusions limit vendors’ economic advancement, their influence over decision-making, and their access to basic services. Local communities close to informal markets fill some of the gaps left by the policy neglect, but investment and strategic management remains inadequate when vendors do not have secure market places and recognised rights to work. This article reports on a study of three informal markets in Honiara, Solomon Islands. These markets lack legal status but make significant contributions to urban development and economic opportunities. Drawing on surveys and focus groups with vendors and urban decision-makers we explore the impact of informal markets on urban economies, how social and institutional relationships hinder vendors’ economic advancement, and the opportunities to create more inclusive livelihoods that could contribute to equitable cities.*

**Keywords:** *informal, livelihoods, Pacific, SDG, Solomon Islands, sustainable, urban*

## Introduction

The current United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11) calls for equitable and inclusive urban development, a formidable challenge for most Pacific island cities where urban population growth continues to far outstrip formal employment opportunities. Rapid urbanisation is a significant driver of the rise in income disparities (PIFS, 2017: 7) with the urbanisation of poverty now increasing in the Pacific Islands (Asian Development Bank [ADB], 2012). Market vending can provide a lifeline, particularly for many women who are economically marginalised and struggle to secure wage labour (UN Women, 2009). Those selling on the streets are often part of what has been labelled the ‘informal economy’, defined legalistically as work places that are not regulated, taxed or legally sanctioned, or in developmental terms defined as activities marginal to modern capitalist development (Chen, 2012; Schindler, 2014).

Despite these narrow academic definitions, the informal sector continues to make a significant contribution to employment and growth in the Pacific Islands (ADB, 2014: 22).

Market places remain an integral part of urban environments and in practice their activities create connectivity between rural and urban systems, and bridge formal-informal divides. Market linkages between urban and rural areas can have a substantial and systemic poverty reducing effect when there is good access to infrastructure and services (Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) 2017: 14–20). Market vending, like many activities neatly classified as ‘informal’, are economic conduits between small-scale farming and small urban enterprises, commercial retailers and the tourism sector. While street vending may sit outside of legally prescribed activities, it is not a premeditated breaking of laws, but rather a survival strategy; an effort to recreate institutional arrangements in a way that facilitates greater opportunity, diversity and prosperity in the

city (Rubin, 2018). Roy (2005) has argued that urban informality, and activities such as market vending, are a mode of urbanisation that connects, not divides, different economies and spaces to one another. This bridging function is typical of hybrid institutions and can create a 'best fit' outcome for rapidly changing societies that aim to combine state, private sector, traditional and community structures of development (World Bank, 2011; Kent *et al.*, 2018). In this way, markets have the potential to be an important element of inclusive cities because of their contribution to economic and spatial connectivity and urban food security (Roever and Skinner, 2016). The current policy and institutional neglect and lack of understanding of community (informal) markets hinder progress on SDG 11 and the achievement of more inclusive cities.

At the 2015 Pacific Urban Forum, it was noted that: 'there should be increased acknowledgement of the influence and contribution of the informal sector to the national and urban economy' (UN Habitat and Commonwealth Local Government Association, Cities Alliance, 2015: 10). However, in places like Honiara, the capital of Solomon Islands, most urban food markets are illegal, lack basic services (such as sanitation and waste collection) and their contribution to the urban economy and communities is poorly understood. Over a decade ago, Goddard (2005) noted in his detailed study of Port Moresby (the capital of Papua New Guinea) that markets are part of the 'unseen city'. They are viewed as the antithesis of modernity and are places of illegality and crime. Even in Papua New Guinea (PNG) where there is now an *Informal Sector Development and Control Act* (2004) and a *National Policy for the Informal Economy 2011–2015*, the informal economy remains riddled with numerous impediments related to factors such as shortfalls in service, infrastructure and security provision (Kopel, 2017).

Many urban fresh-food markets in Pacific island cities lack secure land tenure and licences to operate despite their importance to urban livelihoods and food security (Pacific Community [SPC], 2011). This persistent policy exclusion leads to weak market management and low investment in market sites. Recently, there have been calls for studies and interventions that explicitly aim to better understand the structure and functions of market places, opportunities for

the economic advancement of vendors and ways in which vendor agency can be enhanced (Ryan *et al.*, 2018). Such studies can make an important contribution to the achievement of inclusive cities that address economic inclusion (opportunities for all to contribute to, and share, economic benefits), spatial inclusion (access to land and services) and social inclusion (opportunities for individuals and groups to take part in society and decision-making) (World Bank, 2015).

This article focuses on the under-researched informal (unplanned and unregulated) food markets of Honiara, Solomon Islands – one of the most rapidly urbanising cities of the Pacific Islands (SPC, 2016). In Honiara, the number of informal markets is steadily increasing to meet local employment and food demand. The objective of the study is to critically evaluate economic, spatial and social inclusion in relation to informal markets. In particular, we examine the contribution of these markets to urban livelihoods and economies; the ways in which vendors and their communities deal with limited access to marketing spaces and services; and the institutional reforms that could contribute to more control over decision-making in, and about, market spaces.

In the next section we provide context to the study through an overview of urban food markets and livelihoods in Pacific island countries. The third section describes the study site and methods. The fourth section examines market livelihoods – vendor earnings, gendered dimensions of vending and the supply chains that link urban markets to small-scale agriculture. We then explore how vendor livelihoods are affected by issues of access to land and services, and how social relations are being leveraged to fill service gaps. The fifth section draws on focus groups with vendors, and workshops with policy-makers and community leaders to examine how institutional arrangements could evolve to better include market vendors in decision-making processes and some of the challenges ahead. The final section summarises the key findings of our study and concludes the paper.

### **Urban food market: Livelihoods and social relations**

Between 40 and 84% of employment in the Pacific Islands occurs within the informal sector

(International Labour Organization [ILO], 2017: 4–5). Vendors sell produce at city markets to earn, or supplement, cash incomes for basic needs. They often rely on community-based social and economic arrangements to generate this income, and to ensure security within market spaces, especially given the limited reach of the state (Curry, 1999; Craig and Porter, 2017). Moore (2015) refers to this as Pacific hybrid spaces where pre-urban social networks and relationships survive and shape the contemporary city. Vendors leverage these relationships to access productive land, market spaces, basic services and even security. Activities within market spaces also expand social and economic networks by creating hubs that span community and ethnic groups, and traditional/kin divides (Rooney, 2015; Maggio, 2017).

Food markets generate thousands of jobs in Pacific cities, provide nearly all the fresh fruit, vegetables and fish for urban residents in Melanesian cities, and contribute to urban food security (Fresh Produce Development Agency [FPDA], 2009; Georgeou *et al.*, 2018a). In cities like Honiara, the lack of urban land and its rising value is leading to a decline in urban primary production. The 2009 census found that 50% of residents no longer grow their own food (Solomon Islands Government [SIG], 2013: 118) and many residents are turning to imported convenience foods, which is adversely affecting urban health and nutrition (SPC, 2011). Although fresh-food markets have the potential to create multiple benefits associated with livelihoods and health, Bourke (2005) has observed they are largely undervalued and overlooked by government and donors despite being one of PNG's (and the region's) success stories.

Informal markets not sanctioned by government often lack secure access to land, infrastructure and services such as water, sanitation and electricity, and thus are characterised by spatial and service exclusions. Expensive and infrequent transportation services create additional spatial exclusions for rural growers and vendors not close to urban markets. Keen *et al.* (2017: 112; 2018) have shown fish vendors who come from nearby locations surrounding Honiara can earn significant incomes for their rural communities, in excess of AUD 2 million per annum (Fig. 1). However, those provinces further away do not supply Honiara's markets because of factors related to costs, distance and inadequate cool storage facilities on transport vessels.

The production and movement of goods is not only affected by costs and services, it also relies on complex social relationships associated with social, kin and trade relations (Sharp, 2016). Social and customary arrangements often facilitate access to fishing grounds or agricultural land, transportation of goods, and finances for market retailing or business expansion. These diverse social and economic relationships underpin marketing activities, strengthen rural and urban economies, and contribute to economic inclusion and food security (James, 2002; Underhill-Sem *et al.*, 2014; Kopel *et al.*, 2017; Georgeou *et al.*, 2018b). Social networks also contribute to market security. Kopel *et al.* (2017) found in PNG that vendors, especially women, sell in areas where they feel safe and are close to residential locations. Feelings of safety are linked to community relations; positive gains can be achieved by incorporating community and local institutions into urban market management (Craig and Porter, 2017).

But social relations can also hinder economic advancement. Socially embedded exclusions such as gender-biased work opportunities create hurdles to achieving inclusive cities (Kawarazuka *et al.*, 2017). In the Pacific Islands, women have less access to wage earning opportunities than men – in Fiji and Solomon Islands women's share of wage employment in the non-agricultural sector can be as low as 33% (ADB, 2016: 13). Many women turn to the informal economy and market vending to support themselves and their dependents. Women currently comprise over 75% of all market vendors in the Pacific Islands (UN Women, 2017: 41). However, socially embedded and pervasive structures of inequality such as less access to productive land, financial services or basic social protections (Jolly *et al.*, 2015), severely limit women's economic advancement in market vending. This affects produce sold, land/resource access, personal security and mobility and financial service accessibility. Understanding how these social and economic dynamics affect informal markets in rapidly growing cities is a key to create inclusive cities.

### The study context and approach

Honiara is the capital of Solomon Islands, one of the poorest Pacific island states, ranking



**Figure 1.** Main sources of fish sales at Honiara Central Markets. Sources: Data provided by Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources, 2017; Keen *et al.* (2018). [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

156 of 188 in the 2015 United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Human Development Index. The country's primary city is rapidly growing as people seek jobs, better services and modern lifestyles, resulting in one of the highest rates of urbanisation in the Pacific Islands. Its small area of 23 km<sup>2</sup> cannot accommodate all; urban sprawl now extends into surrounding customary land in Guadalcanal province. The last 2009 census estimated urban growth at 4.4% per annum, which is about twice the national growth rate, but in selected settlements, such as the peri-urban areas to the east of the city, growth can be much higher, in some wards exceeding 12% per annum between 1999 and 2009 (SIG, 2013). It has long been recognised that the rapid growth of peri-urban areas, if not well managed, can lead to exclusive cities with risks of social discontent and conflict (Storey, 2003). By 2050, the Ministry of Housing, Lands and Survey predicts that Honiara's population could soar to 350 000 (Diisango, 2016) – that

is, more than three times the current population – and most of this growth will occur in peri-urban areas. Capacity to cope with such rapid urban growth is low. The country's institutional and governance arrangements, infrastructure and financial and human resources are overstretched (World Bank, 2017) and heavily reliant on aid and donor partnerships.

The development of Solomon Islands has been significantly affected by the ethnic conflict between 1998 and 2003 (referred to as 'the tensions'), low financial resources and a small population of about 651 700 (SPC, 2016) that is dispersed across six large islands and hundreds of smaller islands. The limited reach of the government and the high concentration of services in Honiara have led to a lack of connectivity between the capital of Honiara and the rural areas. There is a political bias against government investment in Honiara services and infrastructure because of the low political representation of urban dwellers and the

perception that there is already too much spent on urban areas (Barbara and Keen, 2017). Urban champions are slowly emerging across Melanesia but require more technical and financial support, as well as assistance to organise collectively and act (Mecartney and Connell, 2017). In the informal market spaces, there are few channels for the voices of vendors to be heard.

Wage-earning opportunities in Honiara are few. Most of the 100 000 residents (or more) of Greater Honiara (Keen *et al.*, 2017: 19) derive a living from the informal economy which has become 'critically important' to household income (UN Habitat, 2016). Urban markets are an important component of the urban economy with many vendors earning a higher income than casual or low paid wage employees (Union Aid Abroad, 2009). A UN Women study found that the gross value of market earnings in the Honiara Central Market (HCM) was equivalent to the basic wage of around 16 000 people – or 20% of the population of Honiara (UN Women, 2009: 8). The annual gross sales of HCM are valued between US\$10 and 16 million (AUD14–22.5 million) with women responsible for about 90% of this activity (IFC, 2010).

Currently, only two produce markets are legal in Honiara – HCM and Kukum market – the rest are tolerated but not legal, so they function in a continual state of operational uncertainty related to spatial and social exclusions. Informal market vendors are disadvantaged by little investment or support from government or donors despite the need for water and sanitation services, waste collection and better stalls. Of the two legal markets, the HCM is crowded, lacks adequate infrastructure and sanitation and secure spaces, raising the need for alternative market venues (Toito'ona, 2016; WRAM, 2016). The Kukum market is not functioning as a fresh produce market because of the dominance of betel nut sales and poor security on site. The government has neither the resources nor will to better manage the space.

There are also over a dozen smaller informal food markets dotted around the city, but there is little information about their economic value or the socio-economic arrangements that support their operations. Honiara City Council recognises the need to reform the outdated Honiara Market Ordinance (2009) and create more

inclusive policy frameworks that reach beyond the two legal markets, but it is yet to act. The persistent exclusion of informal market vendors from secure urban spaces, jobs and channels of influence has the potential to contribute to social unrest and instability. A recent United Nations survey on perceptions of peace in Solomon Islands found that Solomon Islanders ranked access to economic opportunities and employment as the most important factor affecting lasting peace and future development (UNDP, 2018a). The research reported in this article aims to investigate the contribution of informal markets to urban livelihoods and how vendors are affected by factors pertaining to economic, spatial and social inclusion.

### Methods

The data for this study were collected from November 2017 to April 2018 across three informal markets. The community markets surveyed included Fishing Village in the populous hub of Kukum ( $N = 122$ ), Henderson on the eastern border of the city ( $N = 29$ ), and White River on the western border of the city ( $N = 38$ ). All vendors in the markets were asked to participate, 93% agreed. In total 189 vendors were surveyed – 84% women. These three markets (see Fig. 2) are situated on the side of busy roads, and like other community markets, are 'informal', that is, they are unplanned, unregulated and lack basic services. They were selected for their recognised role in servicing the city. Government reports have acknowledged the need for a market to the east (e.g. Henderson area) and west (e.g. White River area) of the city and another central market (such as Fishing Village) (e.g. MLHS, 2015).

Our research occurred in three key phases. After developing and trialling the questionnaire, the first market-based phase of the research involved observations of the three markets spread over a three-week period and including morning and late afternoon visits. Notes were made of market layout, market vendors (numbers and characteristics), client numbers and available services. All vendors in each market were surveyed over one-week and on two different days in each market by local researchers trained in survey techniques. We surveyed on one day considered a 'busy' market day



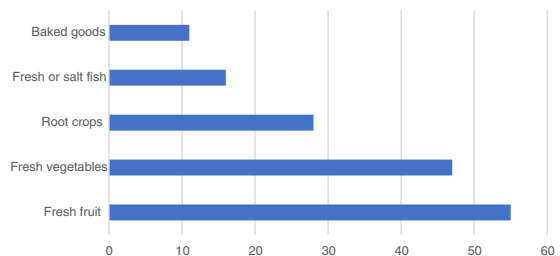
**Figure 2.** Location of market study sites. *Source:* Google maps, locations are approximate. [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

(Friday/Saturday or Sunday) and one considered ‘a normal’ market day (Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday) based on our observations and preliminary consultations. On the first day of surveying, every second vendor stall was approached giving us full coverage of all areas of the market. On the second day of surveying, the remaining vendors were surveyed. This approach ensured full coverage of the different areas of the market on each survey day and had the advantage of involving all vendors willing to participate; however, it did not capture market variations over seasons. The questionnaires collected data on: personal details, products sold (type, origin), estimated daily earnings, fees and services, and views on vending challenges and market management.

The second phase of the research involved market-based semi-structured focus group discussions with 15–20 vendors to present the findings and discuss their interpretation. In these discussions, we explored issues related to access to livelihoods, services and market-related decision-making. In the third phase of the research, we presented the findings from the first two phases to policy-makers, decision-makers and community leaders in two separate groups – one with the Honiara City Council senior officers and a second with a diverse group of decision-makers including government, donors, non-government organisations (NGOs), civil society and market leaders. This last phase investigated options for improving urban inclusion by enhancing market-based livelihoods, service access and vendor agency. The research benefited from the cooperation of

UN Women-Pacific and was funded by the Canada Fund for Local Initiatives.

We limited our survey to healthy, nutritious food vendors (see Fig. 3) and thus did not collect data on betel nut and alcohol sales, or on craft or construction goods. Most vendors in these informal markets were selling products which they or their household had grown (70%). Reselling activities were highly concentrated in the peri-urban White River market (42%) and Fishing Village (17%), with no resellers at the community-based Henderson market. We classified reselling as products not grown by the vendor or their family. A recent study of HCM found 18% of sellers were resellers (Georgeou *et al.*, 2018a), very similar to Fishing Village market. White River market resellers sourced much of their produce from HCM (24%) and the rest from other vendors (8%), or Chinese shops and fishers (5% each). The geographic origins of vendor products varied between markets. At Henderson market all products were locally produced and sold, but at



**Figure 3.** Products sold by percentage of vendors ( $N = 189$ ) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

White River and Fishing Village market about 44% of their produce came from areas beyond the Honiara city region, mostly from surrounding Guadalcanal province with less than 10% of produce from nearby islands (Malaita, Central and Western province). The age profile of these markets was skewed toward middle-aged sellers (Fig. 4). When we asked vendors about this age profile, we were told: 'This is the time when we [women] think seriously about the family needs' and when 'women experience demands concerning their children's needs and wants.' Additional issues relating to the age profile of the markets are discussed below.

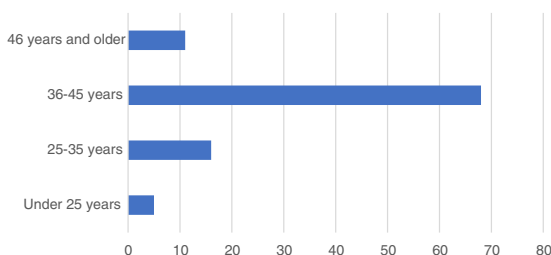
### Market livelihoods: Earnings, connectivity and services

The economic and livelihood benefits of community markets are significant. The three markets surveyed have an estimated combined gross sale value per annum of roughly AUD8 million based on the vendor estimates of daily earnings and the number of days they worked in a week. In relative terms, that is about 50% of the HCM gross annual sales, reported earlier in this article, being sold by a third of the vendors at these smaller informal markets. According to the vendors in our focus groups, products can be given a slightly higher price in these markets because of less competition than at HCM and the consumer convenience of purchasing goods closer to home. The markets provide the only source of household income for more than 80% of the vendors surveyed, reflecting the tight labour market and the limited work options. Incomes earned by vendors in informal markets can be significant. In the three market places studied, the median gross earnings of

vendors per day was AUD100 at Henderson (a small ward-based market) and AUD135 at Fishing Village and White River (larger city markets with regional supply chains). While daily earnings are good for most, the work is hard. The average time spent each day in the market is 11–12 hours with most working 5–6 days a week.

The median gross earnings figures, such as those provided above, mask the huge variations among vendors and income volatility over time. For example, at White River market, vendor gross earnings per day ranged from AUD 20 to AUD 350, and fluctuations between a good market day and the last market day when the vendor worked were as high as 45%. Those earning the highest amounts tended to be men selling high volumes of fish or mixed root/vegetable crops. Price volatility is related to supply and demand factors, seasonality and product quality. Brewer (2011) found fish prices in Honiara could vary by as much as 60% over a three-month period. He suggested that to reduce income volatility more needs to be known about value and supply chains that span rural–urban areas, such as the sustainability and resilience of source ecosystems, and these insights be reflected in policy. The lack of policy integration and its adverse effects is recognised by Lacey (2011) who argues that securing and enhancing livelihoods in the region needs to overcome the rural–urban policy divide by shifting our development 'gaze' to rural–urban systems and links, such as cross-sectoral and spatially dispersed supply chains.

Vendor productivity is also affected by vendors' capacity to access affordable transport. In our study, transport costs accounted for about 7–8% of earnings; bulky products (such as fish and some vegetable crops) requiring transport from surrounding islands cost up to 10% of gross income because of high fees for sea transport. The lack of affordable and suitable transport between Honiara and rural areas limits market supply chains. Most produce in these markets, over 90%, comes from surrounding Guadalcanal Province and Honiara. One of the earliest studies of Honiara's markets (Bathgate, 1978:23) observed that 80% of Honiara's produce came from villages located within 63 km of the centre of Honiara – the supply catchment, at least in these informal markets, has not



**Figure 4.** Age by percentage of vendors ( $N = 189$ ) [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

expanded much. Inadequate transport infrastructure and services create an added incentive to migrate to the city to improve economic prospects. This puts a further strain on urban services, land and governance. Even within the city, the lack of good transport is a deterrent for growing produce to sell, as one reseller in White River explained:

I use to garden; carry a heavy load down to the road and sometimes walk all the way to market. Now I do reselling; I don't earn as much but it's easier.

Market earnings of those surveyed were mostly spent on food, education, transport, housing and community welfare, creating positive economic multiplier effects in the local economy. Only about a third of vendors were committed to saving with lack of easy access to financial services an issue for some. Nearly all vendors in our focus groups claimed to have limited access to financial services. Most expressed feelings of exclusion from saving institutions because of onerous identification requirements, lack of familiarity with the operations of these institutions and the cost of getting to banking facilities. Currently, the preferred saving mode among vendors who were able to save was community-based savings groups that involve trusted community members and that are embedded in kin relations giving more flexibility in difficult times. While these decentralised forms of financial service provision meet a need, the lack of regulatory oversight can result in opportunistic individuals charging excessive interest rates and using social relations to bully for payments. Loan repayment arrangements imposed by unregulated micro-finance schemes operating in informal settlements can be crushing with interest rates on loans as high as 20% and payments required weekly (Keen *et al.*, 2017:85; also confirmed in our vendor discussions).

Our study found that financial exclusion is likely to be a major barrier to economic advancement with many unsure of how to save effectively or what services were available. Following focus group sessions and vendor engagement, we organised for all interested vendors to receive education about available financial services provided by key providers –

the Central Bank of Solomon Islands, Bank of the South Pacific and Solomon Islands National Provident Fund. For two out of three market locations, this was the first time that financial services and strategies were explained to the vendors, and assistance offered to open accounts. At the Henderson market, approximately two-thirds of all market vendors voluntarily attended the information session, suggesting high levels of unmet demand for financial education and services.

### **The challenge of increasing income and Agency for Market Vendors**

Most vendors in our discussion groups had not given much consideration to different business models operating in the market and the ability of some to yield higher returns when social networks were leveraged. The vendors with the highest sales pooled labour, for example in one case the produce of several growers was transported by a community member with a vehicle and sold by a senior and trusted female vendor for the group, thus leveraging kin and trade relations for economic advancement. Others coming longer distances particularly from island provinces, were more likely to pool produce and allow community representatives to transport and sell in bulk, resulting in higher returns on effort through collective action based on community relationships. However, with limited opportunities to learn from each other, and little training or external interventions to enhance their business skills, marketing efficiencies were rarely implemented for personal or group economic advancement.

In our market-based focus groups, everyone stated that it was the first time they had collectively discussed their vending activities and market operations. One woman remarked:

There's no organisation at the market; no group support. This is the first time we have come together. It's hard to gather with long working hours and lots of demands on our time.

None of the vendors had been involved in political engagements to influence policy or felt they would be able to access or influence policy-makers because they lacked high-level



political connections, resources and time. In Honiara, and many other Pacific cities, vendor associations are only formed in legally recognised markets to avoid political tensions with authorities. Even in these markets such as the HCM, the Honiara City Council expressed concerns during our consultations about NGOs setting up vendor organisations independent of council because this could undermine their authority.

Narratives around informal markets, including those of the Honiara City Council, often focus on the deficits of those conducting the informal or illegal activities, but not on social exclusions that limit vendor agency over their workplaces or decision-making affecting their livelihoods. These vendor deficits include low financial literacy, poor market hygiene and the illegal use of land with much less attention to governance failures of those currently holding power. As noted by Foukona and Allen (2017), the lack of political accountability allows 'elites' in Honiara to use legislative and policy ambiguity to protect elite interests, particularly where there may be a pecuniary or power interest, such as controlling access to urban land, restrictions on who can collect market fees and manage market spaces, and service exclusions. Stronger spatial, economic and social inclusion requires the marginalised to have channels of influence that reach and affect decision-makers, but these are currently lacking.

While actions to reduce urban exclusions often focus on access to productive capital like land and political agency (Mecartney and Connell, 2017), there is also a demographic dimension to urban exclusions that is evident in the markets we surveyed. Youth unemployment in Melanesian cities is high; in Solomon Islands it is probably over 35% and, for those who do get a job, turnover can be high and pay low (UNDP, 2018b). Youth working in the informal markets are disadvantaged, mainly because they tend to work in isolation from their social groups and wider networks. In our study, youth earned about 50% less than the median daily gross income of other older vendors – they sold less over fewer hours. Because so few youth are in the markets we surveyed, it is hard to analyse their situation or circumstances in any detail, but a few observations can be made.

Our key stakeholder and focus group discussions suggest the absence of youth in markets relates to socio-economic (mis)perceptions of markets, capacity gaps and cultural issues. Discussions with youth workers and market vendors found that most youth do not view markets as an attractive work option. There are likely two elements to this aversion, one relates to economic inclusion and the other to social inclusion. Consultations with young vendors, youth workers and vendors who are parents suggest there are few support mechanisms by which youth can access productive capital (land or finances) to engage in market vending. Those youths with an interest in vending lack the social networks to enter and operate in markets comfortably. For young women, there are added obstacles to vending such as exposure to sexual harassment and social expectations that tie them to the domestic sphere. If more unemployed youths are to earn income in the markets, much more work would be needed to create market spaces that are more inclusive, with youth vendors benefiting from supportive economic and social networks. Some programmes have tried to achieve this, but they have not been well integrated with existing marketing communities and have suffered from inadequate monitoring and evaluation measures to build economic and social inclusion over time (Evans, 2016). Nonetheless, these markets have demonstrated economic benefits for vendors, and well-structured programmes have the potential to enhance youth inclusion in market spaces.

### **Urban informality and the struggle for social and spatial inclusion**

The economic and social value of informal markets sits at odds with the lack of policy, planning and regulation they are afforded. Most remain unserved and rely on communities to provide access to water, sanitation and, in some cases, accommodation within villages in return for fees, or in-kind payments, with one vendor noting:

If we decided to make proper running water and toilet facilities we will have a problem

later, they [the government] will just take them out again because it's not our land.

The security in the informal markets is also reliant on community-based, social and kin relations. Vendors in our focus groups wanted the informal food markets to remain strongly embedded in the communities, and not run by governments:

Market-based groups can work together, build relationships socially and in all aspects of life. You can ask for help, tap in to opportunities and get help to succeed.

All wanted recognition of the legitimacy of their markets and livelihoods, possibly through community-based market licences with standards for service provision and fee schedules. It was felt that market licensing could remove uncertainty and attract investment for infrastructure, but still leave communities with power over market management.

In the third stage of our research we held two workshops with policy-makers and service providers to convey the research findings and explore the implications for policy and urban inclusion. There was not strong agreement about how to improve market management and services. Some high-level officials, particularly at the local government level, queried the contribution of informal vending to urban modernity, arguing that these vending activities represented underdevelopment and a governance failure. They were not inclined to allow vendors to influence land-use in the city as they questioned their rights to market outside of designated areas. The existence of informal markets was assessed as a failure of government to enforce existing plans and regulations, and control population growth. Their views have deep historical roots in neo-liberal development strategies that try to contain informality (mostly unsuccessfully) and generally fail to secure sustainable urban development (Connell, 2003).

Local government frustration with their failure to 'control' local markets is manifested in a desire by some to close informal markets. A view expressed in our local government focus group and exemplified in late 2018 when White River market was closed by authorities, only to resurface two weeks later. The persistence of

markets and the failure of current institutional arrangements to manage them, led some government participants in our policy discussions to consider ways in which responsibilities could be devolved, raising the possibility of ward-based markets which could be managed and serviced by communities, rather than the council. This arrangement would deal with governance and service shortfalls by shifting the burden under the guise of 'local resourcefulness' (Mayer, 2017). However, this approach risks perpetuating spatial exclusions where resources and finances for market development are withheld from communities, and markets remain excluded from higher level institutional arrangements and supportive policies. Some in the decision-maker focus group recognised that shifting responsibility for service and space provision fails to address issues of legitimacy and licensing within current planning frameworks, as well as service provision obligations – all key to securing future investment and vendors' agency. They recognised that markets needed to be nested in wider policy frameworks and services collaboratively provided, rather than leaving market communities to 'fend for themselves'.

The lack of clarity over the preferred policy direction for informal markets contributes to policy inertia, and a common view expressed at our workshop by market leaders and decision-makers that vendors working in informal markets are often 'stuck' between informal and formal systems with little capacity to organise, let alone influence, decisions about market place development. For example, while fees for roadside vending are charged by house owners at White River, this is technically illegal under current laws, and so any collective organisation across households by market leaders to formalise the system, provide services through pooled funds, and represent collective interests would risk market closure. In Fishing Village where market land is secured by the local cooperative and basic services are provided, plans to expand vending space and economic opportunities are hindered because the cooperative is not recognised as a business or NGO, meaning it cannot apply for loans, private investment, or donor assistance. Small policy reforms to secure greater rights and recognition for community market places and their vendors could make

significant differences to spatial investments, livelihoods and the capacity to represent collective interests.

### Conclusions: Markets and the inclusive city

Urbanisation can be a powerful driver of development, but it can also fuel inequalities and social divisions if little regard is given to issues associated to economic spatial and social inclusions in the city. This research has shown that informal markets can make a significant contribution to urban livelihoods yet they remain neglected by urban policy-makers and with few institutional supports. The persistent lack of legal recognition, secure market-place land tenure, and licences for community market operations mitigates against investment, development and expansion of economic benefits. Global research has found that legal reforms, such as enacting Vendors' Acts and reforms to market ordinances have the potential to expand productive activities, employment and government revenue in cities and overcome some of the exclusions urban poor experience when trying to access strategic urban spaces (Roever and Skinner, 2016).

Policy reform is necessary but unlikely to be sufficient to secure more inclusive cities. Support of collective organisation and political engagement need attention, as well as critical reflections on how the lack of government reach and will can be best addressed. Some consulted in our research saw benefits in stronger hybrid relationships, reflecting studies in other developing cities that have revealed gains when urban spaces and services are 'co-produced' through strengthened relationships between state agencies and groups of citizens (Mitlin, 2008; Joshi and Moore, 2004: 40). While these co-produced arrangements can help fill formal governance gaps, they are not without risks related to subtle power dynamics that affect benefit flows and thus these arrangements still require strong accountability measures and oversight.

Research such as that reported in this article demonstrate the value of vending to economic inclusion in cities but also reveals narrow conceptions of urban development and connectivity between rural and urban spaces. City decision-

makers and leaders still need to move beyond the formal–informal policy divides and narrow neo-classical ideas of development. Authorities would benefit from better recognition of the many ways in which food markets connect, not divide, economies and communities, and create expanded livelihood opportunities for the many excluded from formal employment. Street vending is a strategy used by the disadvantaged to make a living in the city; city managers can harness these activities through more transparent and permissive institutional arrangements to help overcome high unemployment and poverty, which have the potential to add to social tensions and conflict. More designated market areas, improved rural–urban connectivity, and better labour organisation could contribute to poverty reduction, but this requires the 'development gaze' to lift above the formal economy, and above spatial and sectoral divisions affecting policy development.

With mounting population and environmental pressures in Pacific cities, urban resilience relies on diverse and sustainable urban food supplies. Growers and vendors are in turn reliant on urban spaces and systems that are inclusive, provide opportunities for economic advancement and strengthen connectivity between rural and urban areas. While community-based initiatives and self-organisation can help meet the needs of urban vendors, policy makers are still failing to embed market management in city management, planning and service provision. Sustainable cities would benefit from re-imagining urban spaces to expand economic, spatial and social inclusions. More inclusive market policies and institutional arrangements can be part of a solution for uneven and inequitable urban and national development. Market and street vending is an essential component of inclusive and sustainable cities but remains largely outside of formal urban development frameworks and constrained by narrow visions of urban development and modernity.

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