TOWN AS VILLAGE: URBANISATION, GOVERNANCE AND NEOTRADTIONALISM IN SĀMOA

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Abstract

At present Urban areas in Sāmoa are weakly defined and local government is based on a neo-traditional village governance model. Apia town has no municipal council so urban governance responsibilities lie with various agencies of the central government. No rates are paid and non-village urban residents have no say in the management and planning of the town. On the positive side Sāmoa has few informal settlements in the form of makeshift housing on land occupied under insecure tenure. On the negative side, urban and peri urban areas are inadequately served by the prevailing neo-traditional system of local government. It is increasingly evident that in many peri-urban areas there are large pockets of poverty and disadvantage which are not addressed by the current laissez faire attitude of the government of Sāmoa to urban governance. This rests on the untenable idea that traditional local government principles can be applied to urban or suburban and other peri-urban areas where there is either no traditional village, or where traditional villages are interspersed with privately owned land, shops and houses. We argue that the establishment of an Apia town council is long overdue.
Keywords: *Local government, poverty, neo-traditional, informal settlements*

Introduction

There have long been dire predictions about urbanisation trends in Pacific Island states (Jones 2012a; Connell 1984; Connell 2011; Asian Development Bank 2004 [a & b]; Asian Development Bank 2012a; Thomas and Keen 2017). For example, citing a 1996 United Nations Development Programme report, and its continuing relevance, Storey (2005: 1–2) points out that traditional forms of governance are unlikely to adequately respond to growing populations, increasing peri-urban squatter settlements; makeshift housing; greater poverty; mainly informal employment; deteriorating environmental conditions; unequal access to Infrastructure; and, increasing crime. He further cites a World Bank (2000: 15) commentary on the development threats of weak urban governance. In this paper we examine some of these predictions in relation to Sāmoa and critically examine the present policy of adapting a traditional village model to serve non-village settlements with associated institutional arrangements. We argue that this policy is likely to increase the pace of the negative trends identified above, especially poverty and crime. We will argue that there is an urgent need to overcome the complexities of defining the urban area and to establish a municipal government.

Contemporary trends of urbanisation in Sāmoa have positive and potentially negative aspects. On the positive side Sāmoa lacks informal settlements in the form of makeshift housing on land occupied under insecure tenure. Further, Sāmoa has no remote outer islands; its two main islands are connected by ferries and have sealed roads accessible to all villages, along with water supply, electricity and telecommunications. Population growth has slowed with declining fertility rates and emigration (although the population of north-west Upolu continues to grow, as will be further discussed). In these respects Sāmoa differs from most other Pacific Island states (Thomas and Keen 2017). On the negative side, urban and peri-urban areas Sāmoa are inadequately served by the prevailing neo-traditional system of local government resulting from a head-in-the-sand policy attitude to socioeconomic change and growing urbanisation. Sāmoa has no town council; urban and peri-urban residents pay no rates for road works, street lighting and rubbish collection. Services like these are provided by the central government through its various agencies to town and country alike (Jones 2002). Further, there are no programmes or services specifically directed to address problems of urban poverty and social disadvantage. So far there is limited quantitative evidence to focus remedial policies on the very visible poverty in some of the suburban areas around the town of Apia.

In Sāmoa, as elsewhere in the Pacific, defining the town or city boundaries can be problematic (Storey 2005: 3). Many scholars of urbanisation in Pacific Island countries (Storey 1998; Connell and Lea 2002; Bryant-Tokalau 1995; Jones 2012) have relied on United Nations published data sets to compose and analyse urban growth and urbanization in the region. But such data sets are incomplete, and open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation by non-specialists (Cohen 2004: 24). The UN must rely on official urban definitions and data released by the statistical agencies of member states, which differ widely by country. Definitions of the urban boundaries of Sāmoa's only town, Apia, vary according to whether the data comes from the Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, the Office of the Electoral Commission, or the Planning and Urban Management Agency. Over the inter censual periods 2001, 2006 and 2011 'urban' areas have been poorly defined. As an ADB study of urbanisation in the Pacific Island region (2012: 4) points out:

> Pacific urbanization has caused the term 'urban' to take on a number of meanings. In physical terms, Pacific urban areas vary greatly in population size and density, total geographic area, land-use patterns, quality and type of buildings, and their relationships to peri-urban areas.

'Peri-urban' is a term used to describe newly urbanized zones at the fringes of cities, especially in developing countries; where there are mixed areas under an urban influence but with a rural morphology (Ravetz, Fertner and Nielsen 2013: 16). For Sāmoa, the term 'peri-urban' refers to villages and settlement adjacent to but outside the designated 'Apia Urban Area', as well as parts of the densely populated North West Upolu region which, like Apia Township, is also characterized by a mixture of residential and commercial of freehold, church and customary land tenure.

According to the Census definition (SBS 2012: 54) the 'Apia Urban Area' comprises the electoral (*faipule*) districts of Vaimauga West (population of 24,105 in 2011; 22,264 in 2016) and Faleata East (population of 12,630, 2011; 13,190 in 2016). In 2015 two new parliamentary seats were created, defined not by locality but by property. The classification of "urban voter" is restricted to residents living within the boundaries of these electoral districts on privately-owned freehold land who may vote for two candidates who also belong to this property classification. Those who are living on government, church, or customary lands in these electoral districts vote for the candidates in these, or in other electorates where they are registered as voters.

From data in census reports, Sāmoa appears to have lower urban than national growth (Keen and Julien 2015) but this is misleading. The Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics (SBS) divides the population according to four main geographical regions: Apia Urban Area, North West Upolu, Rest of Upolu and Savaii (Figure 2). SBS 2012 data shows that the population growth has been mainly in North West Upolu, rather than in the Apia Urban Area where growth has declined since the previous census (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Population Distribution in Apia Urban Area AUA), North West Upolu (NWU), Rest of Upolu (ROU) and Savaii 2001–2016
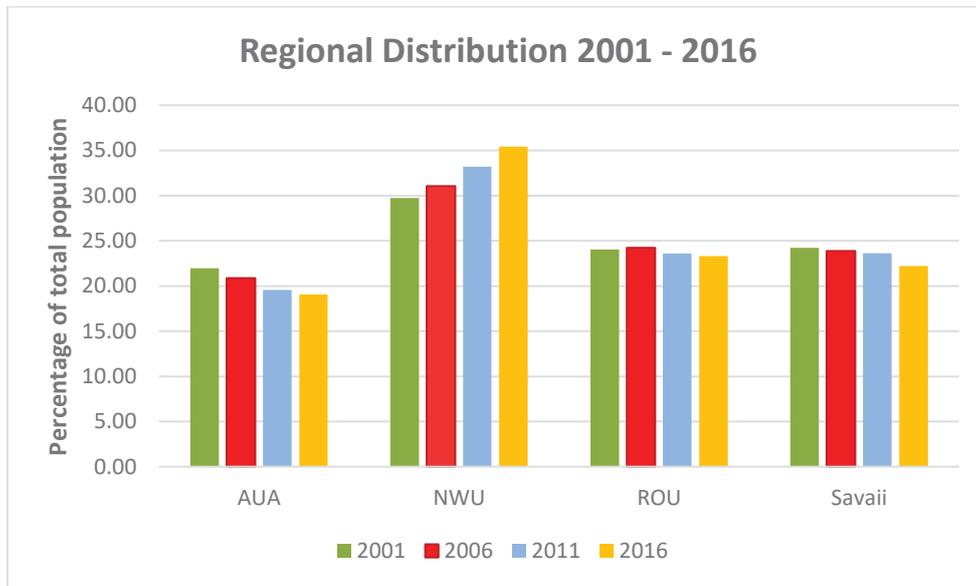
Source: Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics, 2012 & 2017

Figure 2: Map of the four population census regions Apia Urban Area AUA), North West Upolu (NWU), Rest of Upolu (ROU) and Savaii 2001–2011 and Urban Study Area.
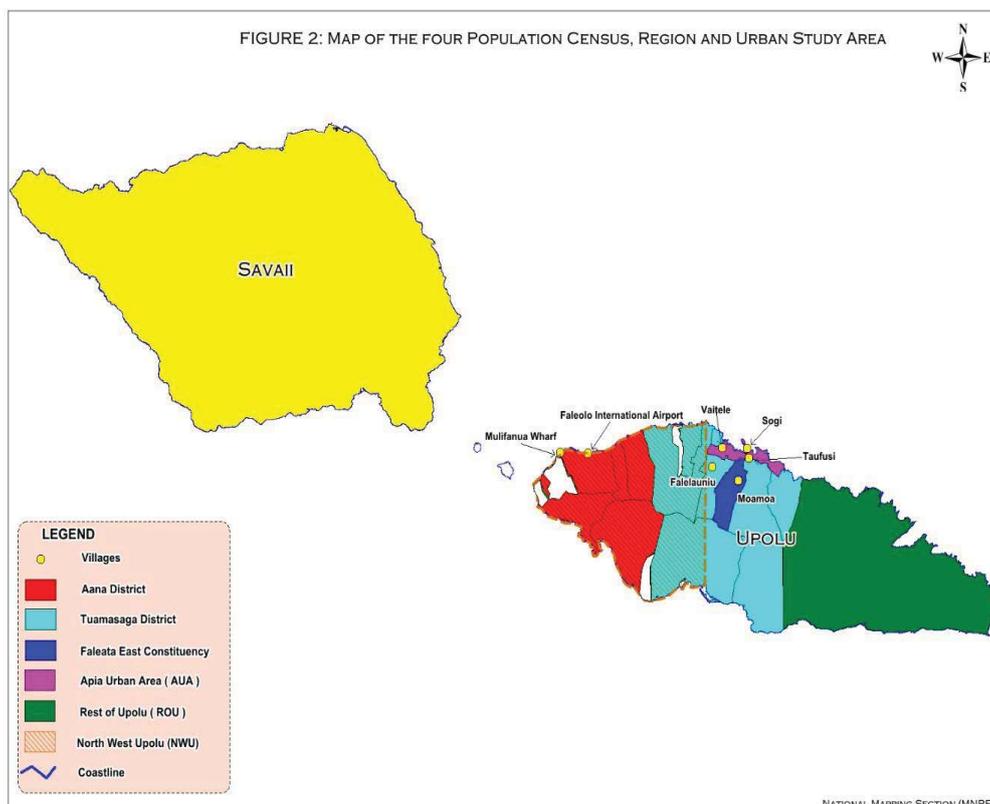
Source: Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment

The results of the 2016 census show an increase in the population of North West Upolu from 62,390 (2011) to 69,358 (Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics 2017: 14). This is a statistical artefact however. North West Upolu encompasses urbanised areas such as Vaitele. Part of Vaitele lies within the Faleata East constituency district, where about 50 percent of the land is owned under individual freehold tenure. Vaitele is a government-planned industrial/residential zone characterised by an 'agglomeration economy' as applied to urban planning theories elsewhere in the developed and developing world where development is driven by the advantages of agglomeration of established industries to smaller business and service providers. (Kaplan, Wheeler and Holloway 2009: 170) The Vaitele industrial zone represents the clustering of a diversity of economic activities and services drawn to several large industries in the area, as well as cheaper land and rents compared with the designated Apia Urban Area. It is not only Vaitele that is driving population growth in North West Upolu; the area also comprises 54 densely populated contiguous villages (SBS 2012: Table 93) interspersed with shops and other businesses. The busy road, now being upgraded, serves the airport at Faleolo and the inter-island ferry terminal at Mulifanua.

Apia Township

A factor in the decreasing population of the Apia Urban Area (Figure 1 and 2) has been the relocation of residents from leased government and Catholic Church lands at Sogi and Taufusi in recent years. These areas were once swamps; the land was reclaimed for housing by mainly low-income part-Sāmoan families in the 1940s–50s. They have now been sold or leased to private businesses. As residential areas like these have shrunk, the economic landscape of Apia is changing to pre-dominantly commercial and government premises. A profile of the main landward street from the Town Clock that marks the centre of Apia town on its seaward side shows that there is one residential property to every five businesses located along this major road (Tauaa 2016).

The town of Apia was originally a village (*nu'u*). A 'village' in the Sāmoan context is a territory encompassing a residential core and surrounding areas of farm and forest land, and in some villages the lagoon, governed by a council of the heads of land-owning families (in a manner which we describe further below). In the late 19th century, Apia became a foreign enclave that grew up around the harbour, surrounding Apia village which gave its name to the town. Until the 1960s the town was inhabited mainly by foreign residents serving the colonial administration and by the part-Sāmoan business community. As the town slowly grew it encompassed other villages, so that today the town is a patchwork of government, freehold, church-owned and customary land. In many Pacific Island towns and cities, acquisition of land for urban expansion is to some extent constrained because adjacent land is under customary tenure (ADB 2012: 4). This has not been a constraint in Sāmoa because Apia is surrounded by large pockets of land that were alienated from customary ownership in the 19th century (Meleisea 1986).

These lands were originally acquired from the customary owners during civil wars in the mid-19th century, mainly by German plantation companies and was, in 1921, transferred to New Zealand as reparation for the First World War, and became known as the New Zealand Reparation Estates. At independence in 1962 the land was given to the government of Sāmoa as the Western Sāmoa Trust Estates Corporation (WSTEC). In the 1990s, the extensive landholdings of WSTEC, mainly concentrated in the districts of Tuamasaga and A'ana, was divided between two statuary corporations: STEC, the Sāmoa Trust Estate Corporation (renamed when 'Western Sāmoa' was renamed 'Sāmoa') and the Sāmoan Land Corporation. This followed the financial collapse of former WSTEC when the government assuming responsibility for its multi-million SAT$ debt. Approximately 70 per cent of WSTEC land was transferred to the government under the legislative provisions of the Sāmoa Trust Estates Corporation Reconstruction Act 1990. STEC retained 650 acres at Faleolo (Upolu) along with other smaller holdings on Upolu, and 1,200 acres in Savaii (Schoeffel and Meleisea-Ainuu 2016; Meleisea 1986; Ward 2005; Davidson 1967).

Since the 1960s new urban settlements have been created by subdividing government land into quarter-acre residential sections and large section for business and industrial purposes. Thousands of Sāmoans have bought quarter acre (or larger) blocks of freehold land in urban and peri-urban subdivisions of formerly plantation land. The opportunity to buy land from the government has allowed further expansion of the town and surrounding areas, mainly without conflict over traditional land rights.

Informal settlements

Sāmoan people do not 'squat' on or occupy land on which they do not have some form of rights, although they may temporarily trespass on or illegally dump rubbish on unoccupied freehold or government land. A common manifestation of informal settlement arises from arrangements by Sāmoan owners of freehold land who live overseas, to allow relatives (who previously lived in villages) to occupy the land and house (if one has been built). In these cases rent is not charged but the occupants are expected to look after the property.

According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB 2012) informal settlements are a characteristic consequence of urbanization in Pacific Islands. Informal settlements as ADB defined them, are typically located in congested urban areas and characterized by make-shift dwellings with poor water and sanitation service and insecurity of tenure. They are seen as the consequences of rural-urban inequality in access to services and employment. In multi-cultural Pacific Island States, a characteristic of urbanization is the coming together of varied sociocultural island values, behaviour and attitudes that people take with them into the urban areas creating 'rural villages in the city' (ADB 2012: xiv). Discussion of urbanization in Pacific Island countries have mainly focused on the effects of deteriorating rural economic conditions, particularly in the larger countries of Melanesia, where population movements from outer islands or rural areas are generally motivated by a quest for paid work, and for the better education and health services that are thought to be available in towns. (ADB 2012: 3). These often have poor access to water and sanitation as well as insecure tenure and, as Jones and Lea explained:

> With the acceleration in rural–urban migration beginning in the 1960s, a new type of village has emerged and blossomed—the squatter settlement—which over time has become a nearly universal phenomenon in Pacific urban areas. … In extreme cases, Pacific squatter settlements have become the dominant component of the urban form (Jones and Lea 2007).

Sāmoa has no Informal or "squatter" settlements. There were once a handful of informal settlements dating back to the German colonial period 1900–1914 within the Apia township area. Those living at Sogi, mainly the part-Sāmoan descendants of Melanesia plantation workers have mostly been relocated to government land at peri-urban Falelauniu, although some still contest relocation. Each family was sold a quarter acre of government land at a subsidized price with connections to water and electricity put in by the Sāmoa Land Corporation. A similar relocation plan was implemented in 2011–2012 by the Catholic Church for the people who were leasing Church land at Saleufi and Taufusi. In this case, the families were first given the option of buying the land but because the families were mainly low income earners, and the price of land in this area of Apia in 2012 ranged between SAT$600,000 – $800,000 per quarter acre, they could not afford this choice. As an alternative, they were offered quarter acre blocks on Catholic church land at peri-urban Moamoa with SAT$30,000 to aid in their relocation, a more generous arrangement than that offered by the government to the residents at Sogi (Latai 2015: 54–71).

Custom and land

The reason why informal settlement in the sense of extra-legal occupation of private, customary or government land is very rare in Sāmoa, as we noted previously, because Sāmoa does not have remote rural areas or outer islands. Since the 1980s road networks connecting all villages to town on Upolu

have gradually been upgraded and all villages on Savaii are connected by roads to the ferry wharf. Thus rural to urban migration patterns differ from most Pacific Island countries. As a homogenous people and culture, every Sāmoan, whether in Sāmoa or outside Sāmoa, can claim ties to customary land by genealogical right. The Sāmoan kinship system is cognatic, meaning that membership of a clan or kindred ('*aiga*) can be traced through both parents and grandparents. Both the family and clan are known by the same term, '*aiga* which may mean 'family' in the sense of immediate relatives, people who live in the same house, or 'clan'—an extended family comprising many people living in different places. Membership is 'activated' by service and contributions to the family and its *matai* (titled head). For this reason participation in ceremonies (*fa'alavelave*) is very important to Sāmoans, because it affirms kinship ties and implied mutual duties and obligations between people who might only rarely see each other. A Sāmoan gains recognition of his or her rights of clan membership by attending and supporting (with cash or labour) events such as large collectively sponsored funeral ceremonies. This is one of the reasons why overseas Sāmoans send remittances to relatives in Sāmoa. The Sāmoan kinship system facilitates movements of people who want to live close to town. Customary land belongs, in theory, to clans, but in practice use rights belong to those family members living on the land, who have a kinship connection to the *matai* (chief) title associated with the land. A recognised clan member has the traditional right to occupy or use clan land, as long as permission to do so is granted by the *matai* (chief) who is acknowledged as the Sa'o (head of the clan) (Meleisea and Schoeffel 2015). This means, in practice, that if an individual wishes to live closer to town, they may activate clan connections to relatives living in urban or peri-urban village and seek permission to live on family land there. This may be a temporary arrangement, as is common with secondary school students whose parents want them to go to school in town, or a more permanent arrangement when an individual moves in with extended family relatives or builds a house on the customary land they occupy. The strength of family connections and mutual assistance is such that it is not unusual for people to move in with extended family living on freehold land, even though there is no customary right to do so. In these cases, rent is not charged but co-residents are expected to provide household labour and, if they have paid work, to contribute to household expenses including church donations and ceremonial gifts (*fa'alavelave*). The desirability of living near town is demonstrated by Tauaa's study of informal businesses in Apia (2016); more than half (70.2 percent) of the couples trading in town resided with the wife's family in urban and peri-urban villages, contrary to the culturally preferred and once culturally prescribed practice by which women move to live with the family of their husband. Accordingly, in theory, Sāmoan customs preclude landlessness. Those who do not live on customary land have rights to it as long as their membership of one or more extended families using customary land is acknowledged. According to Sāmoan beliefs, no Sāmoan person is without a '*fa'asinomaga*'—a place of 'belonging'. According to these beliefs, people may choose to move from rural localities to urbanising areas, but they are not, strictly speaking, landless.

Economic insecurity in peri-urban areas

In reality landlessness is becoming a possibility as Sāmoans relinquish customary ties and obligations and live independently. This can be a sign of affluence—Sāmoans who no longer have any economic need to maintain ties with their ancestral villages and '*aiga* and who prefer to avoid economic demands from the extended family; but it can also be related to poverty. Many of the households living on freehold land in the peri-urban Vaitele area are visibly poor, living in makeshift houses with insecure income from day labour. This may be because they lack the means to meet customary obligations beyond their immediate family. Because of the widespread belief among Sāmoans that everyone has land and a supportive family network, it is also common for Sāmoans to deny the existence of poverty. Statistically there is now a correspondence been poverty and large households. The Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics reported the national average household size at 7.3, but for poor, very low income households, the average household size was 9.8 (Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics 2012: 12). The largest average household size was found in rapidly urbanising Northwest Upolu (see Figure 1) with an average of 10.1 persons. This represents a change from a past in which a large household was

desirable and wealth-building in a subsistence economy in which food and highly valued ceremonial good were all produced by households. Studies of poverty in Pacific island countries refer to 'poverty of opportunity' rather than 'poverty of income' (Abbott and Pollard 2004; Abbott n.d; Morris 2011: 2). Poverty of opportunity embraces lack of education, health and economic assets that preclude people from full social participation in their societies. Abbott and Pollard defined poverty in the Pacific Islands as 'hardship' from the perspectives and experiences of those afflicted by it, seeing poverty as a state of being where meeting physical needs for housing, food and health care are inadequate due to limited income earning opportunities. It was significant that in Abbott and Pollard's Sāmoa study, hardship was often defined by respondents as lack of money to contribute to the church or to family or village ceremonies, indicating the importance of giving as a means of maintaining social status.

The generation growing up in households located on freehold land in urban or peri urban areas are at higher risk of poverty than those in villages with access to customary land. In urbanising North West Upolu 34 percent of households were recorded as having no access to agricultural land compared to 9.7 percent households in rural Upolu and Savaii (Sāmoa Bureau of Statistics 2017: 91). Households on small freehold blocks without cultivable land are more likely to depend on paid work or non-agricultural informal enterprises such as selling food or handicrafts than those living in villages (Tauaa 2016). Accordingly, they are more economically insecure than people living in villages where customary land ownership enables small scale food production for home consumption or informal markets. People living on freehold land may well have disconnected themselves from their families on customary land. If they are there due to family permission rather than by right of ownership, their tenure is insecure.

However, if an emerging 'landless' group in Apia is among those leasing land from the Church or looking after distant relatives' properties in Apia, as asserted by Thornton, Binns and Kerslake (2013) and Thornton (2017), there is so far little quantitative evidence of it. Their situation cannot be compared with those people elsewhere in the developing world who have been forced off their lands or who are being displaced due to civil wars in their countries. Those who have strained familial relationships with their kin or who, for whatever reason, have sought tenure on land belonging to churches, as referred to by Thornton, Binns and Kerslake (2013: 360) cannot be described as landless. According to Sāmoan customs there must always be a place of belonging for them. However, in reality familial individualism is becoming increasingly evident in villages, even those which are distant from the town, for example individual occupancy of customary land is evident where roadside household compounds in villages are fenced off in suburban style and gated against clan members who are not the close relatives of those living there. Tombs are used as signifiers of land ownership where parents or grandparents of the occupants are buried prominently in front of houses. Areas of agricultural land are fenced off, ostensibly for grazing cattle, even when no cattle are apparent (Meleisea and Schoeffel 2016: 2015). Furthermore, inheritance of houses built on customary land has become more contentious (Meleisea and Schoeffel 2015: 22). A house built of permanent materials (*fale pālagi*) can be a source of conflict between the descendants of the people who built it and their other relatives. Nevertheless, unless all of the land to which a family has customary rights is occupied, as appears to be the case of some villages in north-west Upolu, any Sāmoan who strategically maintain traditional relationships have rights to share the land appurtenant to the family *matai* title. What is beginning to modify the customary rights is the practice that has grown in recent decades to dividing these titles among many holders, when it is not clear which title holder is the *Sa'o* (holder of authority) in land matters. The contentiousness of traditional rights is evident in the back log and delays in proceedings filed at the Sāmoa Lands and Titles Court by heirs and descendants of titles and claimants of customary lands, against other heirs and descendants in relation to the bestowal of *matai* titles and the use of or access to land and possession of houses. Interestingly, a significant number of these petitions emanate from Sāmoans residing overseas for whom the belief that they have customary rights to re-activate land claims enabling them to return to Sāmoa is very important. As we noted previously, this may indeed be the primary motivation for sending remittances to their families in Sāmoa.

Customary land tenure may still be regarded as a social safety net, but it is often invoked as a barrier to economic progress (Murray and Overton 2011: 279) and with this in mind, recent legislation allows customary land to be leased for development purposes. About eighty per cent of total land in Sāmoa is under customary tenure, but although it is often said that large areas of this land is underutilised, this figure exaggerates the extent of customary land. It includes mountain slopes, steep gullies, lava fields and otherwise inaccessible or un-cultivable land. In contrast the 20 per cent of land in government, church or private hands includes nearly all the prime agricultural land and urban real estate of Sāmoa. A study of selected cocoa producing households living on customary land in 2016 (Schoeffel and Meleisea-Ainuu) found that most growers found it difficult to cultivate more than 2–5 acres due to a lack of family labour. Young men, who are expected to work on family plantations are increasingly unwilling to work without cash payment and will seek other means of earning cash as casual labour, and as fruit pickers in New Zealand under the seasonal worker schemes.

Local Government

Unlike most other Pacific island countries, no town council has been established in Sāmoa since the colonial municipal government that ended in 1889. The country is governed under two tiers of government, a central government comprising of elected parliament and public service, and village local government based on traditional structures and customary by-laws (Toleafoa 2006). The *Village Fono Act* 1990 (amended 2017), and the *Internal Affairs Act* 1995 are the two key pieces of legislation that address village government issues and guide the work of the Internal Affairs Division in coordinating central and local government relations. Sāmoa has 11 traditional districts (*Itumālo*) which date back at least to the 18th century and longer, according to Sāmoan traditions. There are now 19 recognised districts, 89 sub-districts, 26 urban local governments, and 286 rural (village) local governments (according to unpublished information provided by the Ministry of Women Community and Social Development (MWCSD). A recent study (Meleisea et. al. 2015: 20) distinguishes between local governments; 192 are traditional villages, 48 are sub-villages of traditional villages and 35 are non-traditional villages. Each of the traditional local governments operates their own system of local government, separate and independent from others, most drawing on unwritten customs and norms in their decision-making, although subject to the laws of Sāmoa. However, the 35 non-traditional settlement areas include suburbs and other settlements such as those of the major churches. They, like traditional villages and sub-villages, are governed under a model based on traditional norms, by council of *matai* and with elected village representative (*sui o le mālo*) and a women's committee representative (*sui tama'ita'i*) who liaises with the central government through the Governance Division of MWCSD.

The Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA) under the *Act* of 2004 (amended 2005) administers the urban area. The government treats new settlements on freehold land as though they were villages in terms of the provision of government services; even though they do not have traditional governance structures. Village government in both urban and rural areas is supported by the central government through the Internal Affairs division of the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD). Urban planning and governance is the responsibility of the Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA) which was set up in 2002 under the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment to develop the legislative and regulatory tools to administer the planning and urban management system. Improving urban infrastructure, services and the physical environment and increasing private sector participation are other responsibilities tagged to the section's work plan (Planning and Urban Management Agency 2013: 9). The roles, responsibilities and powers of the Agency are spelled out in the Planning and Urban Management Act 2004. The PUMA act provides an integrated planning system that can work with and assist village level governance through cooperation with the Governance Division of MWCSD to create support for and enhance urban and village governance (Sansom 2013: 67).

The problem of administering urban areas as though they were traditional villages is illustrated by the case of a pilot project that was set up in 2006 for residents of Vaitele, aiming to establish a no-traditional model of local government (Sansom 2013: 69). The outcome of the project highlights several factors critical to issues of urban governance and urbanization trends. First, the initiative was limited by the lack of cooperation between the key implementing agency—Planning and Urban Management Agency (PUMA) and the Ministry of Women, Community and Social Development (MWCSD). Second, Vaitele has both characteristic of a suburb and a village. Historically it was a village but it was overthrown in the late 19ᵗʰ century during a civil war and the land was sold to a German plantation company—land that later become WSTEC, then SLC property as described above. The families who trace their ancestry to the old Vaitele village wanted to re-establish Vaitele under the authority of its *matai*, with some land to be granted by SLC to establish a traditional centre (*malae*) and village *fono* (council) (Toleafoa 2006 cited in Sansom 2013: 70). This plan however did not sit well with most Vaitele residents; people who have moved there from many parts of Sāmoa, living on freehold land, who may be assumed to have adopted independent lifestyles with no desire to live under a neo-traditional authority. Another question was which *matai* would be recognised under a neo-traditional system of authority. Would it only be *matai* who traced their titles and ancestry to the original village of Vaitele, or would it include matai living in Vaitele who hold titles from other villages in Sāmoa?

Unfortunately, the traditional village government model is not conducive to modern urban local government. The so-called *fa'amatai* (government by *matai*) is custom and village based, as opposed to the principles of democracy enshrined in the Constitution of Sāmoa and in law (Toleafoa 2006). It is a 'system of chiefly authority based on the idea that title holders would represent the interests of the extended families who gave them their titles' (Meleisea 2000: 191). It evolved out of the blending of *'aiga* (families and clans) in a hierarchy of *matai* titles, each with an ascribed rank, where kinship relationships and social-political interactions are played out (Vaai 1999: 29; Toleafoa 2005; Le Tagaloa 1992: 117; Taua'a 2014: 60). In both pre-modern and contemporary Sāmoa villages, roles and status in village government are voiced on formal occasions in *fa'alupega* (honorific traditional salutations) which affirms the relative rank of each matai in the village and its council from the highest to the lowest (Davidson 1967: 17). It is in effect the 'who's who' of the village social-political hierarchy (*saofa'iga*). The *fa'alupega* is a condensed oral history of the village origin, kinship, ties to pagan gods, ancient warriors, and the natural environment, encompassing land, sky, ocean and spirit world, which evolved historically since ancient times to define rank, status, political decision-making and land rights. Extending this power and control outside the traditional village context is not compatible with individual property rights. Most traditional villages impose evening curfews, dress codes, and rules obliging people to attend church, which many people would consider incompatible because they live as individuals outside such systems of control.

Village councils are expected to maintain law and order, but do not provide any services, except in a few rural areas where village councils manage water supply. Public services are provided by central government agencies which license businesses, issue building permits (which are compulsory throughout Sāmoa), and enforce such environmental regulations that exist. State-owned enterprises provide water supply and electricity which are available to all rural and urban residents of Sāmoa, delivered on a 'user pays' system. Telecommunications are privately owned. There is no public transport; bus services are operated by private owners. Most schools are government operated, and government also partly funds and provides services to church and private schools. There are no tuition fees charged by government schools, but because most government schools are managed by village or district school committees (recruited from among the *matai* elected from the councils of villages served by the school) and they charge school registration fees. Health Services are provided by district health centres and two referral hospitals for modest fees. The police operate from district stations as well as from their town headquarters. However, because no rates are charged to urban residents; their roads (if they are government roads) are maintained, street lighting is provided and their rubbish is collected without charge.

Why Sāmoa needs a town council

The laissez faire attitude of the government of Sāmoa to urban governance has so far rested on the untenable idea that traditional local government principles can be applied to urban or peri-urban situations where there is either no traditional village, or where traditional villages are intertwined with privately owned land, shops and houses. Why does Sāmoa have no town council? There is no constitutional provision for one (Commonwealth Local Government Forum 2017) although we are told that the idea of establishing one has been proposed and rejected several times over the years. An anecdotal explanation is that the private sector and owners of private property in and around the town are opposed to the establishment of a town council, because they do not want to pay rates and enjoy the free services provided by the state. Another possibility is the government, led by a political party that has been in office for over 30 years (Ale 2019) prefers its present system of tight control over public policy and the bureaucracy through the processes of cabinet appointments of government executives. It may view the idea of establishing an elected city council as a potentially disruptive counterweight to its present ascendancy. The *Sāmoa National Urban Policy* of 2013 tiptoes around the issues of urban governance; it provides for strategic planning, establishment of urban governance principles, urban boundaries and associated legal parameters, a city development plan, spatial plan, plans for urban infrastructure and an urban services coordination plan (PUMA 2013: 22). But although it contains many idealistic statements about the expected benefits of its urban policy and strategy, it does not explain how cost-effective and participatory local government is to be established in the rapidly growing suburban and other peri-urban areas where around 40 percent of the population live in localities no longer subject to traditional Sāmoan norms.

As Jones (2002) point out for Sāmoa "*there is an increasing need for participation in the planning process*" however his discussion centres mainly on villages, with about 60 percent of the population, which have adequate, if not always effectively utilised, neo-traditional representative mechanisms. The Ministry of Women, Social and Community Development has a program aiming to improve rural planning processes, and to make them more participatory through District Development Committees aligned with the *Sāmoa Coastal Infrastructure Plan* and comprising elected representatives of the village councils and women's committees to assist empowerment of communities that will support provision of information and coordination of development initiatives for climate resilience, and for economic and social development, by other government and non-government agencies. A city council would allow non-village residents, representation.

The plan is also silent on how to address socio-economic problems of urbanization such as poverty and inequality highlighted in a number of reports (Storey 2005; Kidd 2012; Pacific Institute of Public Policy Paper 2011). The World Bank estimate shows Sāmoa has a high level of inequality, ranking 53 out of 158 countries with a Gini index of 42.00 (Index Mundi 2008). If a municipal council were empowered to charge rates on a scale relative to property values, it could provide the financial resources needed for investments to be made towards the alleviation of urban poverty by ensuring that all urban or non-village landowners, households and residents are registered. Other measures could include the enforcement of building regulations, regulations for adequate household water and sanitation (to be subsidised if necessary), establishment of by-laws and zoning, and provision of adequate schools and accessible opportunities for vocational training in non-village settlements. Measures could also include means to help households cooperate in maintaining the law and public order, through their elected councillors, community organisations and neighbourhood churches. Aside from rates there are other ways in which urban government could be financed, for example undeveloped and unmaintained land in urban areas could be taxed to allay the common risk and expensive consequences of trees being blown onto electricity wire and adjacent houses in cyclones.

Setting up a municipal council would require, at least in an establishment phase, considerable effort and financial outlay by government as well as the political will to resolve boundary issues. A decision would have to be made about which areas of Apia and surrounding suburbs would become wards, the residents of these localities would have to be surveyed for registration, an electoral system

would have to be designed, a system for numbered street addresses would have to be established, and a financial plan for rates payment would need to be worked out. As Shah describes (2006), there are many options for developing countries to consider in choosing an urban council model. Sāmoa needs to begin considering them. In the coming years the assignment of selected public service to a town council would not only provide for cost recovery it would also include ways to address urban poverty in the context we have described, but would give urban residents a voice in government that, with only two out of fifty parliamentary seats for urban voters, they lack at present.

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