



# GUADALCANAL PROVINCE

## Land Summit

28–29 March 2018

## URBAN LAND: HONIARA

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Honiara is the hub of rapid urbanization in Solomon Islands. The city is produced as an urban land space through a long historical process of alienation. This brief focuses on Honiara urban land. It will address a number of questions: (i) How was urban land (Honiara) alienated?; (ii) How was urban land (Honiara) acquired?; (iii) What is the total area of urban land?; and, (iv) What is the legal status of urban land in Honiara?

### ***How was urban land (Honiara) alienated?***

To understand how present day Honiara urban land was acquired by the state it is important to discuss how it was alienated. Alienation here refers to alienation of landowners from their land. Such alienation happened by way of sale then it was perpetuated through the decision of the Alexander and Philips Commission 1919-1924, which was binding on later court decisions.

The site of present day Honiara is a result of the alienation of generally three areas for plantation development. First, the core land area between Point Cruz to Tenaru, referred to as Kukum Plantation Estate. This area was sold for £60 of trade goods in 1886 by Uvothea, chief of Lunga, Allea, chief of Nanago, and Manungo, son of Allea. The purchasers of the core land were

traders: Garvin Kelly, John Williams, and Thomas Woodhouse.<sup>1</sup> The traders then sold the land in 1898 to Karl Oscar Svensen and his business partner, Alex J. Rabut (or Rabuth). The second alienation apart from Kukum was the area to the west, bordering on Point Cruz.<sup>2</sup> This area was referred to as 'Ta-utu' - Mamara Plantation Estate – comprised of two adjoining blocks. It was purchased in early 1900 by Svensen and his partners Alex Rabuth and Joe d'Oliverya. The third alienation was land east of Kukum known as Tenavatu Plantation Estate. William Dumphy, an employee of Svensen purchased this land around the same time as the 'Ta-utu' - Mamara estate transaction.

Svensen later sold Kukum and Tenavatu Estates (plantations) to Lever's Pacific Plantations Pty.<sup>3</sup> Most of these lands were held by Levers as Freehold (private ownership) while some were under Certificates of Occupation.<sup>4</sup> Svensen managed the The Ta-wtu' - Mamara Estate and became the major shareholder. He purchased in 1911 land on the western parcel of Mamara plantation (now White River area) from Voka and Tevu for £55 and land on the eastern Mamara plantation (now Rove area) from Nana for £30.<sup>5</sup> Svensen held the Mamara estate as freehold until his death in 1943, his children then sold parts of this plantation estate to R.C. Symes Plantation.



### ***How was urban land (Honiara) acquired?***

The acquisition of urban land can be categorised under four land transaction: (i) The Kukum Estate land transaction. UniLevers sold this land area (between the Matanikau and Burnscreek – now east Honiara) to the British colonial government for £2,174; (ii) The west bank of Mataniko transaction. This land area was from Mataniko to Rove – compulsorily acquired from landowners for approx. £4,000 around the same time as the Kukum Estate; (iii) The Ta-utu (Tautu) land transaction. This area was from Rove to the White – now part of west Honiara. The government acquired this land area from Mamara Plantation Ltd in 1948 for £302; (iv) National Park land transaction. This area – now back of east Honiara, was acquired by the government from landowners in 1954 with the intention of creating a National Park (i.e Queen Elizabeth National Park). The National Park idea failed and this area became subsumed as part of Honiara.<sup>6</sup>

These land transactions provided the impetus for transforming the alienated spaces into urban Honiara. Through surveying and land registration in the 1960s the state was vested with the registered perpetual estate title to urban land in Honiara. Over the years, landowners have contested the land dealings as unscrupulous. The existing Honiara city land boundary has also been a subject of concern and debate for decades due to unclear boundary descriptions and conflicting maps of the boundary areas. The Honiara city official land boundary, which extends to the sea area adjacent to Honiara, was legitimized through Plan No. 1981 Town Land (Honiara) Order 1973.<sup>7</sup>

### ***What is the total area of urban land?***

Honiara city is located on 22.73 square kilometers of government land. It spreads over 15 kilometers between White River and Burns Creek. It extends to the

foreshore (sea adjacent to Honiara) and inland approximately three kilometers. This urban land space is used predominantly for government and commercial offices, private homes, stores, hotels and small scale industry. It accommodates about 100,000 people with an average density of 2,953 people per square kilometer.<sup>8</sup>

The urban population of Honiara is estimated to reach 350,000 by 2050, which indicates the urban population could treble by 2050. With a rapid urban growth of 2.7 per annum due to rural-urban migration and natural population growth, the demand for urban land will increase. Currently, urban land supply is limited. As a result, customary landowners are under pressure to manage customary land. Such pressure is due to increase in informal settlements that encroach onto customary land outside the urban land boundary.

### ***What is the legal status of urban land in Honiara?***

Honiara urban space is established on alienated land. This is because this land was initially acquired by private persons (traders) then sold to Levers with state approval. Such land transaction was legitimized as freeholds, which meant a full private ownership. The state acquired these freeholds then converted them as registered perpetual estates with the titles held by the state. Generally, the state is the landlord of urban land in Honiara because it holds the perpetual estate title to most urban land.

### ***Questions to Consider:***

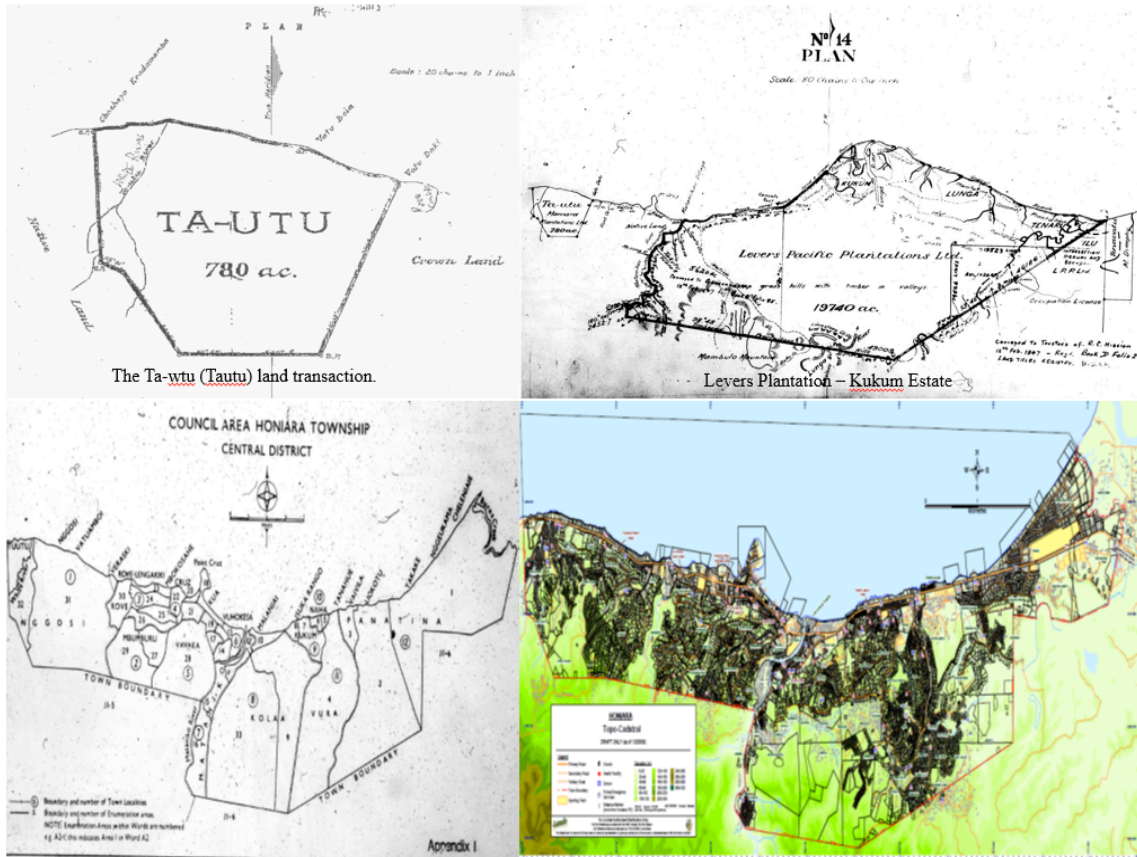
Rather than perceiving urban land in Honiara as a problem:

- How can Guadalcanal landowners capitalize on the benefit from the growth of urban Honiara;
- How can the issue of the Honiara town boundary be better addressed?



- What positive opportunities can be created to address the supply and demand of urban land?

## Maps of Honiara 1940s - 2018



- Copy of 1886 Land Deed enclosed in Pacific High Commission, Land Claims Register B, WPHC 18/1/1.
- Land immediately next west of Mataniko River was shown on Levers sketch map as native land.
- For documents and maps relating to Levers land on Guadalcanal and elsewhere in Solomon Islands see Levers documents in PMB 1121, ANU.
- Certificate of Occupation was issued by the State to Levers for land considered as empty or vacant.
- See Samasoni, T and Hula, J. (2012). Honiara City Council Constitutional Congress Team: 2012 Report on the Honiara-Guadalcanal Maritime and Land.
- Clive Moore in his upcoming new Book entitled *Honiara: The Village City* provides detailed discussion of these land acquisitions. For an outline of the amount of survey work required in and around Honiara, see Duties surveyor B.S.I.P., 1956, UASC, WPHC 16/11/165/3/7.
- Schedule 1, Honiara City Act 1999.
- See Keen, M., Barbara, J., Carpenter, J., Evans, D., and Foukona, J. (2017). Urbanisation in Honiara: Managing Change, Creating Opportunities. Canberra, ANU.