

# **Squatters, Vulnerability and Adaptability of Urban Poor in a Small Island Developing State: The Context of Fiji Islands**

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## **Abstract**

*Poverty and vulnerability are closely intertwined. The poor are more vulnerable socially, economically and environmentally. Vulnerability is location and context –specific and the degree of vulnerability varies widely between countries, cities, localities within cities and between communities/ households. The vulnerability of poor can be understood through a vulnerability- adaptability framework and by analysing the dialectic relationships between the ‘external’/ structural and ‘internal’ or adaptability/ coping dimensions of vulnerability. A livelihood and asset-vulnerability approach explains access to assets helps the poor reducing their vulnerabilities. The adaptability capacity of poor households to cope with vulnerability is limited because of fewer assets available to them. The more assets they control, less vulnerable they are. The ‘social capital’ plays crucial role in reducing vulnerability of poor. Poverty-vulnerability relationships are critical in structurally constrained, poorly resourced and environmentally vulnerable small Island Developing State such as Fiji Islands. Urban squatters, the symptom of poverty, located mainly on environmentally hazardous sites are the most vulnerable population groups in these countries. They are vulnerable to global as well as local environmental changes and to the socio-economic burdens.*

*The paper exemplifies a vulnerable migrant population group such as squatters in an island’s urban setting. It brings out the inter-linkages between poverty and vulnerability and their spatial manifestations in squatter settlements in a small island developing Island City such as Suva, Fiji Islands. It also identifies factors contributing to their vulnerabilities and explores various adaptation/coping strategies by the poor in minimising vulnerability.*

Key Words: Adaptability, informal sector, livelihoods, social capital, squatter, urban poor, vulnerability

## **Introduction**

Poverty and vulnerability are closely intertwined. The poor are more vulnerable socially, economically and environmentally. Vulnerability is location and context –specific and the degree of vulnerability varies widely between countries, cities, localities within cities and between communities/ households. Vulnerability changes over time and space. Vulnerability stems from location and social disadvantage (lack of power), often manifested as income poverty (Cutter, 1996). With rapid process of urbanization, the low income squatter settlements or ‘shanty towns’ are on the rise in urban areas. As Walter (1989) says, ‘...up to half of the populations of the largest cities of the developing world are in unplanned and often illegal squatter colonies’. Many poor urban dwellers live on the worst quality land on the edges of ravines, on flood-prone embankments, on slopes liable to mudslide or collapse, in densely packed areas where fire easily start, on roundabouts at busy intersections (Sanderson, 2000: 94). This reflects the vulnerable spatialities to natural hazards and often disastrous consequences for the poor.

The Small Island Developing States (SIDS) are the most vulnerable nations. The vulnerability of SIDS is due to interplay of factors such as remoteness, geographical dispersion, smallness, small domestic market and distance from the world markets, limited land and other environmental resources, lack of diversification and proneness to natural disasters. Of the most vulnerable 25 countries, 24 are small states and 17 are small islands (UNESCAP, 2000b). On the one hand, the

poor in the small island states are environmentally burdened under the global environmental changes and the consequent occurrence of natural hazards such as cyclones, floods, heat/cold waves, storms and lightening. On the other, they are vulnerable to wide ranging local (urban) environmental burdens such as unhealthy environmental living sites, poor housing and overcrowding and cramped conditions, indoor air pollution from cooking and heating; epidemic diseases and health hazards and poor drainage resulting in frequent water logging and flooding, collapsing of building, road accidents, fire, and the socio-economic deprivations. Vulnerability of poor in the small island states can be broadly categorized as: natural/inherent/intrinsic and acquired/ extrinsic vulnerability. While the former type is due to intrinsic factors being islands at macro scale, the latter is primarily due to the socio-economic and demographic characteristics, the structures (i.e. institutions, organizations) and processes (i.e. policies and legislations) that control poor's access to income and resources at micro level.

The basic questions arise: who are the vulnerable groups in urban areas in island setting? Why certain groups are more vulnerable than others? What are the contributing factors for their vulnerabilities? What coping strategies the urban poor adapt? What are the barriers to access to resources for the urban poor in meeting their basic needs and securing livelihoods?

The paper exemplifies a vulnerable migrant population group such as squatters in an island's urban setting. It brings out the inter-linkages between poverty and vulnerability and their spatial manifestations in squatter settlements in a small island developing Island City such as Suva, Fiji Islands. It also identifies factors contributing to their vulnerabilities and explores various adaptation/coping strategies by the poor in minimising vulnerability.

### **Poverty, Vulnerability and Adaptability: Conceptual Framework**

Although poverty and vulnerability are often used synonymously, the two are however, different. All poor are vulnerable but not all vulnerable people are poor. Vulnerability is more complex than poverty and also dynamic concept in the sense that 'people move in and out of poverty' (Lipton and Maxwell, 1992 cited in Moser, 1996: 23). Vulnerability simply refers to the tendency of being damaged or potential for loss. It may be defined as 'the characteristics of persons or groups in terms of their capacity to anticipate, cope with, resist, and recover from the impacts of environmental change' (Vagel 1998, cited in Kasperson, 2001: 2).

The Livelihood Approach that puts people at the centre stage of development is a unifying approach in explaining vulnerability. A Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) was developed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID, 1999) which provided a framework for livelihoods of the poor. The Household Livelihood Security (HLS) approach developed by CARE (cited in Sanderson, 2000: 98), provides a tool for urban households' living and explains the role that assets play in strengthening poor households and thus reducing their vulnerabilities. The Household Livelihood Security is described as "...sustainable and adequate access to income and other resources to meet basic needs and to build up assets to withstand shocks and stresses" (ibid). According to the livelihood approach various capital assets: social, human, financial and physical / productive assets act as important strategy through which the poor cope with their vulnerabilities. The poor are powerless socially, economically and politically. The lack of power reduces access to resources and in turn narrows the range of options available in times of stress and thus makes them more vulnerable. The livelihood approaches aim at building strengths of the poor to withstand risks. It stresses upon factors that have poverty reducing potentials derived from social network, access to physical resources, and ability to influence institutions and so on (ibid).

The asset-vulnerability framework (Moser, 1998) explains that access to resources / assets helps the poor cope with their vulnerabilities. Assets thus act as ‘buffer against vulnerability’ (Moser, 1996:1). ‘The more assets people have, the less vulnerable they are, and the greater the erosion of their assets, the greater their insecurity’ (ibid: 24). Assets are broadly of two types: tangible assets such as labour, human capital and physical/ productive assets and intangible assets such as household relations and social capital and social cohesion. The ‘social capital’ refers to the social networks, social ties and relationships which people develop basing on mutual trust. The ‘human capital’ refers to the skills, knowledge and education, health status and labour. Similarly, the physical/ productive assets include e.g. land, housing, and transport (Moser, 1998:4). The urban poor largely draw upon the capital assets to make their livelihoods. The capital assets thus provide the poor social security and play an important role in strengthening the households. The adaptability capacity of poor households to cope with vulnerability is limited especially in the island countries because of fewer assets available to them.

The vulnerability of poor can also be understood by analysing the dialectic relationships between a double structure of vulnerability: an ‘external’/ structural side and ‘internal’ or adaptability/ coping dimensions of vulnerability (Bohle, 2001: 4). A complex interaction exists between the exogenous (external threat/ event) and the internal capacity of a community or household to withstand or respond to the event (Kasperson, 2001:2).

Vulnerability and adaptability are closely linked. Adaptability reduces vulnerability. Adaptive capacity include both the ability to cope or react in the short term to adverse effects, as well as adjust in the longer term to environmental changes (Schjolden, 2003:12). Vulnerability determines adaptability and the vice versa. An analysis of vulnerability also involves identification of concepts of ‘risk’, ‘threat’ and ‘resilience’. Risk is closely tied to vulnerability. According to Kasperson (2001:2), communities or households that are most vulnerable may also be those most at risk. As he says, they may be facing the same risk but not equally vulnerable. Risks are measures of threat. The term ‘resilience’ is opposite to vulnerability and it refers to the ability in resisting, adapting or recovering from the negative effects of a changing environment. The means of resistance are the assets that household can mobilize in the face of hardship (Moser, 1996:24). The more capital assets the poor posses, greater is their capacities to sustain and resist vulnerabilities/ threat. Vulnerability thus can be viewed ‘along a continuum from resistance and resilience to susceptibility (Kasperson, 2001:2).

### **The Context of Fiji**

Poverty-vulnerability relationships are critical in structurally constrained, poorly resource-endowed and environmentally more vulnerable small Island Developing State such as Fiji Islands. Urban squatters, the symptoms of poverty and located mainly on hazardous sites are the most vulnerable population group in these countries. They are vulnerable to global as well as local environmental changes and to the socio-economic burdens.

### **Growth of Squatters**

With increasing urbanisation, there has been a dramatic growth of low-income squatter population in Fiji. In Fiji the level of urbanisation has increased from 35 per cent in 1970 to 53 per cent in 2005 and it is expected to reach 69 per cent by 2030 (United Nations, 2004). A Report released by the formerly Ministry of Local Government, Housing, Squatter Settlement and Environment revealed that squatter population in Fiji has increased significantly (Lingam, 2005). According to the Report, there are 182 squatter settlements around the country with a total of 13,725 squatter families and a total population of 82, 350. Of the total squatter

population in the country, over 60% live in Suva- Nausori corridor. On an average, over 450 people per squatter settlement live in Fiji and in some squatter settlements such as Jittu Estate in Suva City for example, the density of population exceeds 6,000 persons (Mohanty, 2006). The major contributing factors for the growth of squatters in urban areas in Fiji are rural-urban migration, poverty and unemployment, breakdown of family relationships/disputes, land insecurities, job losses, shortage of affordable houses and high house rent in urban areas.

### Methodology

A survey was conducted by the author in squatter settlements in Suva City in 2003. The samples were drawn randomly from the squatter areas in the City and altogether 290 squatter households were covered in the survey. The study covered 7 squatter areas in the City covering a population of over 1,500 in 137 Fijian, 147 Indo-Fijian and 6 other ethnic group households in the City (Table 1).

**Table 1 . Summary of Squatter Households Survey in Suva City**

Item	Fijian	Indo-Fijian	Others (+)	Total
No. of households	137	147	6	290
Population	824	678	31	1, 533
Household size	5. 9	4. 6	5.1	5. 3

Source: Household Survey by the Author, 2003.

(+) Includes European, Chinese and Pacific Islanders.

### Findings:

#### Dimension of Poverty

According to the formerly Ministry of Local Government Report (2005), 50-60% of squatters in Fiji was very poor and lives below the poverty line. The survey revealed that more than one third of squatter dwellers in Suva lived on per capita income less than F \$2 per day and about 11 % lived on per capita income of F\$1 a day (Table 2). Their average weekly income was F\$ 98.40 (Mohanty, 2006). The poor living in the squatter settlements have extremely limited resources and choices for their sustenance and they are more vulnerable. Many of them are asset less and live in absolute poverty.

#### Patterns of Concentration of Poor in Squatters in Suva City

The concentration of poor and their degrees of vulnerability are location –specific and vary from one settlement to another within city. The proportions of poverty-stricken population were high in Hawell roads (46%), Flagstaff (44%), Wailea (41%) and Veidogo (36%) (Table 2).

**Table 2. Proportions of population in selected Squatter Settlements in Suva City living on Daily per Capita Income of Less than F\$ 2.**

Ethnic Group	Jittu Estate	Wailea	Nanuku	Veidogo /Veria Road	Hawell Road	Raiwaqa Flats	Flag staff	Total
Fijian	32. 0	44. 8	63. 2	31. 9	44. 3	24. 2	43. 8	37. 7
Indo-Fijian	33.1	39.7	22. 8	10. 6	47. 2	23. 0	-	31. 0
Total	34.7	41.4	29. 4	35.7	45. 5	21. 8	43. 8	33. 9

Source: Household Survey, 2003.

According to the survey, a large proportion of squatter households (40%) in Suva City live in absolute poverty and without asset of any kind (Mohanty, 2006). This varies among the ethnic groups and across the settlements. About 47% of Fijian and 35% of Indo-Fijian squatter households in the City were asset less. The proportions of such households were as high as 70%, 69% and 59% in Veidogo, Hawell road and Nanuku Vatu respectively (Table 3).

**Table 3. Proportions of Households without any Asset in Selected Squatter Settlements in Suva City by Ethnic Group**

Ethnic Group	Jittu Estate	Wailea	Nanuku	Veidogo	Hawell Road	Raiwaqa Flats	Flag-staff	Total
Fijian	29.0	21.0	86.0	80.6	90.0	25.0	42.9	47.4
Indo-Fijian	16.7	23.1	53.8	46.7	53.3	-	-	34.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>22.0</b>	<b>21.9</b>	<b>58.7</b>	<b>69.6</b>	<b>69.2</b>	<b>19.2</b>	<b>42.9</b>	<b>40.3</b>

Source: Household Survey, 2003

### Vulnerable migrant Groups

Squatter dwellers are the most vulnerable migrant group. In recent times, the agriculturally displaced people due to non-renewal of leases of their farm lands have migrated towards urban areas in search of their livelihoods and alternative options and thus contributed much to the growth of squatters. The Asian Development Report (2003) shows that highest squatter growth occurred in the sugar belt of western and the northern divisions and mostly the Indo-Fijians. This suggests that most of the displaced Indian farmers due to expiry of land leases landed up in these squatter areas. It is expected that about 3,500 farming families with a total population of at least 18,000 will be displaced and would seek resettlement in next few years (Lingam, 2005: 4).

### Origin of Migrants in Squatters of Suva City

A bulk of migrant population in Suva squatter settlements originated from the Central region (59%) followed by Western (15%), Eastern (11%) and Northern (8%) regions (Table 4). Migrants from Central region are mainly from Rewa, Naitasiri and Tailevu province. The other provinces from where migrants come to Suva squatters are Ba, Lau, Lomaiviti and Macuata. Migrants from other urban areas to Suva city came mainly from Ba, Labasa, Nausori, Navua, Tavua and Nadi (Mohanty, 2003).

**Table 4. Origin of Migrants in Squatters in Suva City by Region and Ethnicity**

Source Region	Fijian (%) N=137	Indo-Fijian (%) N=147	Total (%) N=290*
Western	8.8	20.3	14.5
Central	61.4	59.9	59.3
Northern	3.6	11.6	7.6
Eastern	20.4	2.1	10.7
Unknown	5.8	6.1	5.9

Source: Household Survey, 2003.

\* includes six households of other ethnic groups.

### Reasons for Migration to Squatter Settlements in Suva

The reasons from migrating to squatter areas in Suva city as responded by the households are: better job opportunities (31%), owning a piece of land/house (20%), high house rent elsewhere (12%), family disputes (11%), easy access to children education (8%), locational benefits (6%) and due to expiring land leases (2%) (Table 5).

**Table 5. Reasons for Migration to Squatter in Suva City by Major Ethnic Group**

Reason	Fijian (%) N=137	Indo-Fijian (%) N=147	Total (%) N=290
Owning land/house	15.3	24.5	20.3
Land insecurity	4.4	2.7	3.4
Job opportunities	32.1	29.3	30.7
Children education	10.9	4.8	7.6
Family disputes	10.9	12.2	11.4
High rent	15.3	8.2	12.1
Land lease expiry	-	4.8	2.4
Locational benefits	4.4	6.8	5.5
Others*	2.2	0.7	1.4
Not stated	4.4	6.1	5.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: Household Survey by the Author, 2003.

\* includes natural hazards such as cyclones and environmental causes in rural areas

## Vulnerabilities of Urban Poor in Suva City

### a. Environmental vulnerability

Due to shortage of land, high land values and land tenure problems, the poor live in unproductive, low value/ waste land that are unsuitable for commercial development. These are commonly hazard-prone and unhealthy areas environmentally. A majority of squatter households in Suva live on marginal lands and hazardous sites such as mangroves and flood prone areas along the coasts (e.g. Veria road); unstable hillsides (e.g. Flagstaff) and highlands; riverbanks, land slide areas; and waste dump sites. They are vulnerable to frequent tidal waves, coastal flooding, cyclones and landslides. The steep hill sides are subject to erosion and landslides and the low lying, marshy lands are very often subject to flooding.

**Table 6. Household Responses towards Pressing Problems in Squatter Settlements in Suva City**

Problem	Fijian (%) N= 137	Indo-Fijian (%) N= 147	Total (%) N= 290
Threat to Eviction	10. 2	12. 2	12. 8
Financial	27. 0	36. 1	35. 5
Crimes	19. 7	51. 7	36. 7
Neighbour-hood dispute	35. 8	32. 0	33. 8
Unemployment	7. 3	7. 5	7. 6
Flooding/ Water logging	31. 4	34. 7	32. 8
No problem	13. 9	18. 5	16. 2

Source: Household Survey by the Author, 2003.

### Flooding and Water logging:

About one-third of the squatter households in Suva said, flooding/ water logging as a major problem (Table 6). It is acute problem in three areas in Suva City namely, Wailea, Veidogo/ Veria road and Nanuku Vatu (Table 7). The squatter residents of Veidogo/ Veria road living on the mangroves along the coastline were worse affected by the problem of sea waves and consequent problem of flooding. Due to flooding, many of them had also planned to migrate to other areas within the city.

**Table 7. Household Responses towards Flooding/ Water logging as an Environmental Threat in Squatter Areas in Suva City**

Ethnic Group	Jittu Estate	Wailea	Nanuku	Veidogo/ Veria	Hawell Road	Raiwaqa flats	Flagstaff	Total
Fijian	-	66.7	57.1	71.0	10.0	-	-	31.4
Indo-Fijian	-	74.4	41.0	40.0	-	-	-	34.7
Total	-	71.9	43.5	60.9	3.8	-	-	32.8

Source: Household Survey by the Author, 2003.

Apart from the environment hazards such as poor quality housing and inadequate water supplies, sanitation and solid waste disposal, a common environment threat in squatter areas is fire. These environment hazards have serious impact upon the poor's human capital, health and well-being (Hardoy et al, 1990). Due to lack of awareness and negligence, household fire is a common environmental risk in the overcrowded urban squatter settlements. The use of toxic and hazardous chemicals in the households such as acids, bleach, fly and insect sprays, paints, and petrochemicals, and pesticides is very common and their improper handling and unsafe disposal increase greatly the proneness to household accidents and health hazards. Many household chemicals are fire hazardous and increase the risk of fire. Most of the squatter areas lack the basic urban amenities and infrastructures such as water supply, sewerage, proper drainage, solid waste disposal provisions, electricity and road connectivity. The lack of proper road and inaccessibility make the settlements more vulnerable as in the event of fire or other emergencies, neither fire engines nor ambulances can reach these settlements.

#### **b. Health vulnerability**

Inadequate water, poor sanitation and improper personal hygiene, contamination of food, indoor air pollution in poor households make the dwellers more vulnerable to health hazards. The incidences of waste, contaminated food, water-borne and respiratory infectious diseases among the urban poor households remain high. Some of these diseases include: dengue fever, diarrhoea, dysentery, filariasis, infective jaundice, influenza, leptospirosis, malaria, pneumonia, scabies, trachoma, tuberculosis and typhoid. The Survey found that about 13% squatter households were affected by influenza, 14% had skin related diseases, 5% diarrhoea and 5% diabetes and 28% other types of diseases including high blood pressure and heart related; asthma and other illness (Mohanty, 2003). The poor households also lack adequate provision for storage of food to protect against spoilage and contamination. About 57 % of squatter households in Suva did not have a refrigerator to preserve food (Mohanty, 2003). The consumption of contaminated food is very likely to occur in such households and increase their vulnerabilities to health risks.

Poor housing with inadequate lighting and ventilation in the squatters also exacerbate health risks. The houses are overcrowded mostly with one-room or two room provisions. More than 95% squatter households in Suva City live in tin and corrugated iron built houses (Mohanty, 2003). These houses are unprotective from heat and cold, very often heated up due to persistent dry and sunny weather conditions in the city, and adversely affect the health of the poor.

The squatter households are also affected by indoor air pollution primarily due to inefficient energy use for cooking and heating in overcrowded and cramped living conditions. About 93 % of dwellers in Suva used kerosene stove and 36% used firewood as the chief source of energy for cooking and heating (Mohanty, 2005). The smoke emitting from these inefficient energy sources and its inhalation make the poor more vulnerable to respiratory illness especially tuberculosis. Women and children are the most vulnerable groups to indoor air pollution and to health risks in the squatters.

### **c. Socio-economic vulnerability**

The rising costs in urban environment affect the poor the most. The urban poor may be vulnerable to 'social fragmentation' and community and inter-household mechanisms of trust and collaboration are weakened by greater social and economic heterogeneity in urban environment (Moser, 1998:4). Social exclusion of poor from housing and economic opportunities make them more vulnerable. Increasing levels of crime and violence associated with growing unemployment, social and economic situations affect the poor as well. About 37% and 34% squatter households responded that they are affected by crime in the vicinity and neighborhood disputes respectively (Table 4). Most of the squatter settlements in Suva are not connected to articulated water supply and sewerage systems and do not receive garbage collection service (World Bank, 1995: 13).

Besides, the squatter dwellers in Suva City undertake home-based informal economic activities such as carpentry, bakery, hair dressing, binding and printing, tailoring, mechanical works and the like and often subjected to many occupational health hazards and physical disabilities. Working in informal activities in poor conditions and in the absence of occupational and health safety measures increase the vulnerabilities of poor to ill health and diseases.

### **d. Vulnerability to Eviction**

The low- income groups who have no access to tenured land and affordable housing of their own, 'squat' on vacant land, mostly on the public land. Eviction is one of the instruments used by the governments in dealing with squatter problems. The vulnerability to eviction depends mainly upon the factors such as distance from the city core, the age and size of informal settlement, land values and land market pressure and the demand for land for urban development. About 13% squatter households in Suva City responded that government eviction is a pressing problem (Table 4). Currently, more than 3,300 squatter families are vulnerable to eviction threat in Suva in areas such as Jittu Estate, Veidogo and Nanuku and Muslim League Estate (Lingam, 2005). This means, more than 20,000 people need to be rehabilitated in the short span. Choices before the poor households are however, very limited. There have been strong resistances from the squatters to move elsewhere from their present residences.

### **Adaptability and Coping Strategies**

Various coping strategies are adapted by the poor to overcome vulnerabilities. As Kasperson (2001:2) says, the vulnerable people 'choose a wide variety of options to increase their adaptability and to minimize their risk in times of stress and shock'. The ability to reduce vulnerability depends not only on assets but also on the capacity to manage them and transform them into income, food or basic necessities (Moser, 1998: 5). The coping strategy mechanisms by the poor are found in earlier literatures as cited by Moser (1998) in 'culture of poverty (Lewis, 1961), 'myth of marginality' (Perlman, 1976), 'networks and marginalization'(Lonitz,1977).



### **Informal sector employment**

Labour is the most important asset of the poor. An analysis of employment status of household heads in the squatter in Suva reveals that about 48% were casual labourers, 25% salary earners, 16% self-employed and 3% unemployed (Mohanty, 2006). Another 3% households were social welfare assistance holders / pensioners.

A vast majority of poor get absorbed in the urban informal sector. The sector provides employment, helps the poor to make a living and builds up capital assets and thus helps alleviating poverty. It allows the poor in a diverse way to earn a living and acquire assets/resources. According to a study, there were substantial changes in the net income and value of assets of the urban informal sector participant households in Fiji after the informal sector activities were undertaken and the growths were 59% and 159% respectively (Reddy, Naidu and Mohanty, 2003: 141).

The growth of activities of informal sector is directly linked to the growth of urban squatters. According to the Survey, high proportions (37%) of squatter dwellers were engaged in informal sector activities. Wide variations existed between the Indo-Fijian and Fijian households. About 28% indigenous Fijian and 43% Indo-Fijian squatter households were in informal sector activities. Some of the informal activities in which Suva squatter dwellers are engaged in include: small carpentry, hair dressing, tailoring, baby sitting, boat building, selling of goods (including grog, cloth, food, BBQ, fish, dalo, kite, fruit, crab, coconut, peanut), vegetable vending and many work as house girls, hawkers, mechanics, electrician, fishermen and plumbers (Mohanty, 2006).

### **Social capital**

With limited financial, physical and human capital assets, the 'social capital' such as social networks/ ties, and community/household relationships play crucial role in reducing vulnerability of poor. It helps the poor to draw resources and make their living. In Suva squatter settlements are marked by extended family structures especially, among the Fijian households. The Survey found about more than one-fourth of households in Suva squatters had extended family structures and higher proportions (33%) of extended family structures existed in Fijian households than Indo-Fijians (20%) (Mohanty, 2003). There is increasing reliance on the extended family support networks by these households. They rely on mutual help and support. Social networking helps greatly the urban poor households in Fiji to cope with their poverty conditions. As Walsh (1998: 3) writes, 'fourteen percent of households report significant contributions from relatives in Fiji and abroad'. Many of them also live by arranging a system of borrowing of amounts from their relatives and friends. Household and community relations thus act as 'safety nets' and as 'shock absorbers' and help reducing the vulnerability of poor.

### **Income- raising and consumption modifying strategies**

The urban poor adopt various 'income- raising' and 'consumption modifying' strategies to adapt to the changing circumstances. The poor adopt 'income raising' as a coping strategy to adapt to high cost living in urban environment. According to Survey although a bulk of squatter households (55%) had single livelihood earner and about 39% of households had two or more bread earners (Mohanty, 2006). The informal sector participants in urban Fiji involve family labour including women and children and they work on an average six days a week and about 10 hours a day (Reddy, Naidu and Mohanty, 2003: 139). The 'consumption modifying' strategies are also adapted by the poor in the event of declining income such as 'cutting total spending, changing dietary habits, and cutting back on purchase of nonessential goods' (Moser, 1998: 6). Apart from reduction in expenditure, the poor develop strategies around assets that generate non-

monetary resources (Moser, 1996:29). As Moser says, the 'poor mobilize and transform their assets both by intensifying existing strategies and developing new ones'.

### **Measures Undertaken:**

The government of Fiji has been adopting both short term and long term measures in alleviating poverty and also resolving the squatter problems. The short term measures for the squatter problems include strategies to discourage further growth of squatters. The measures such as regular policing, issuance of notices to new squatters and disallowing essential services such as water, electricity to new squatters are undertaken. The long term measures include more land acquisition and development for squatter areas, strategies to reduce rural-urban migration through regional development and reducing disparities between the rural and urban areas.

### **Conclusion**

There is a greater need for integration of vulnerability reduction strategies in urban development policies and programmes and urban planning. There is also a need to promote choices, opportunities and diversities for the poor to make a living and reduce vulnerability. Livelihood approach is seen as an effective poverty alleviation and vulnerability minimisation strategy. This approach need to focus more in understanding the dynamics of urban poverty and vulnerability of poor in urban areas. Programmes which focus on income-generation and building assets of the poor households that can help the poor less vulnerable to environmental changes and build resilience to external shocks should be undertaken.

Poverty is the root cause of squatting therefore effective programmes towards alleviation of poverty are highly called for. A coordinated approach and collaboration between government, development agencies, city councils and NGOs and civil society, and private sectors is required for minimising the problems of squatters. Informal sector plays an important role in urban poverty alleviation through employment and income generation. Promotion of informal activities has been seen as strategies in poverty alleviation. There is a need to promote the growth of urban informal sector. The productivity of informal sector in Fiji can be stimulated through non-formal education, skills development and entrepreneurial training programmes and creation of a supportive environment.

An integrated planning and developmental policies /strategies and action programmes towards poverty alleviation, provision of low-cost and affordable housing for the poor and disadvantaged groups, and above all a sustained economic growth and human development are the prerequisites for addressing the squatter question and reducing poverty-vulnerability syndrome on a sustained basis.

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