PRIF Community of Practice

Livable Pacific Cities and Towns

Urbanization strategies for resilience, sustainability and inclusion

This project is funded by the European Union

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WHAT DOES THE REPORT ADDRESS AND WHY DO IT?

THE CHALLENGE

The Pacific Island Countries are **urbanizing rapidly with uncontrolled growth**.

At the same time, **climate and disaster risk will grow substantially**, threatening people, infrastructure and economic activity.

Despite their role in the economy, Pacific cities and towns have **yet to fully realize the economic and social benefits** of urbanization.

The report provides evidence and practical recommendations to help PICs manage urban growth while reducing climate and disaster risks.

Report Objectives

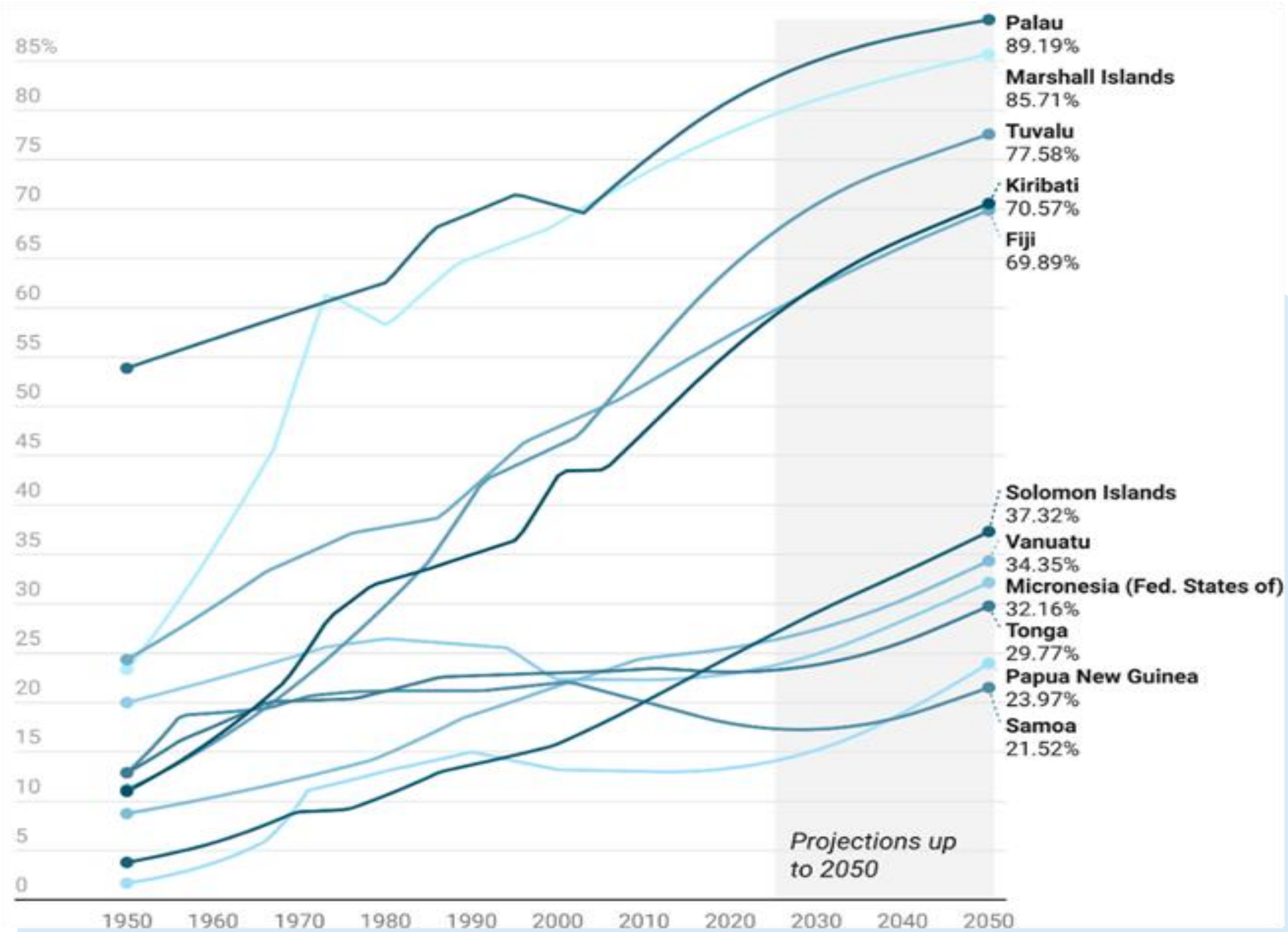
- Diagnose urbanization patterns and growth trajectories across the Pacific*
- Quantify exposure of natural and climate-related hazards to urban populations and infrastructure
- Identify systemic gaps in urban planning, infrastructure and governance
- Provide policy directions and investment priorities for resilient, inclusive, and liveable urban areas

* The report covers 11 Pacific countries that are clients of the World Bank: Federated States of Micronesia, Fiji, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Kiribati, Tuvalu, Vanuatu

URBANIZATION IS A RELATIVELY RECENT BUT ACCELERATING TREND IN THE PACIFIC

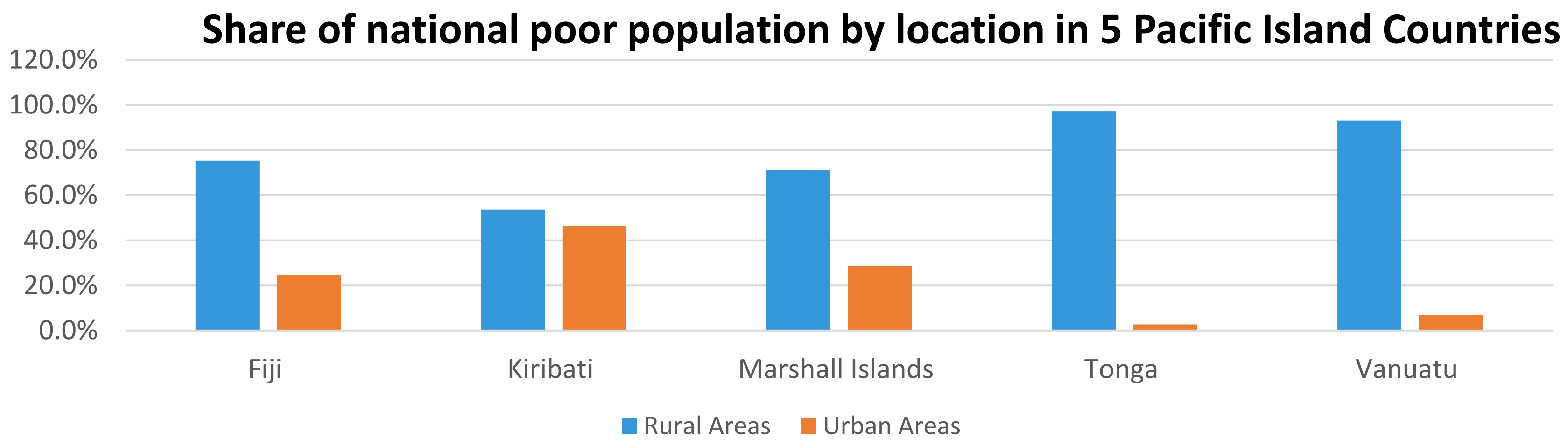
- In the last 3 decades, the urban population has **grown by 175%** from 600k to 1m people.
- Pacific populations are expected to **double between 2010 and 2050**.
- Nearly **one in every two people** living in the PICs by 2050 will be living in an urban area.

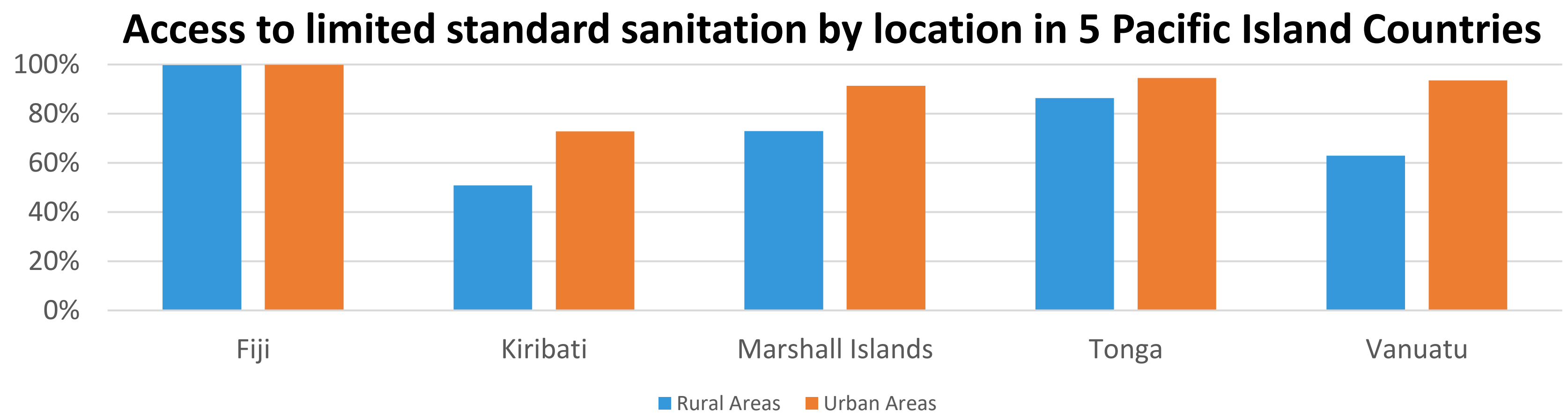
Source: United Nations, World Urbanization Prospects (2018). Graphic by Yann Kerblat.



ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES IN URBAN AREAS DRIVE INTERNAL MIGRATION FROM RURAL AREAS AND OUTER ISLANDS

- Urban areas offer **employment and livelihoods opportunities** (“push” and “pull”)
- **Living standards are higher** in urban areas, with generally **less poverty** and **better basic services**
- Family ties, marriages, disputes and other **contributing factors**
- Key migration drivers expected to persist, highlighting the **economic potential of Pacific cities and towns**

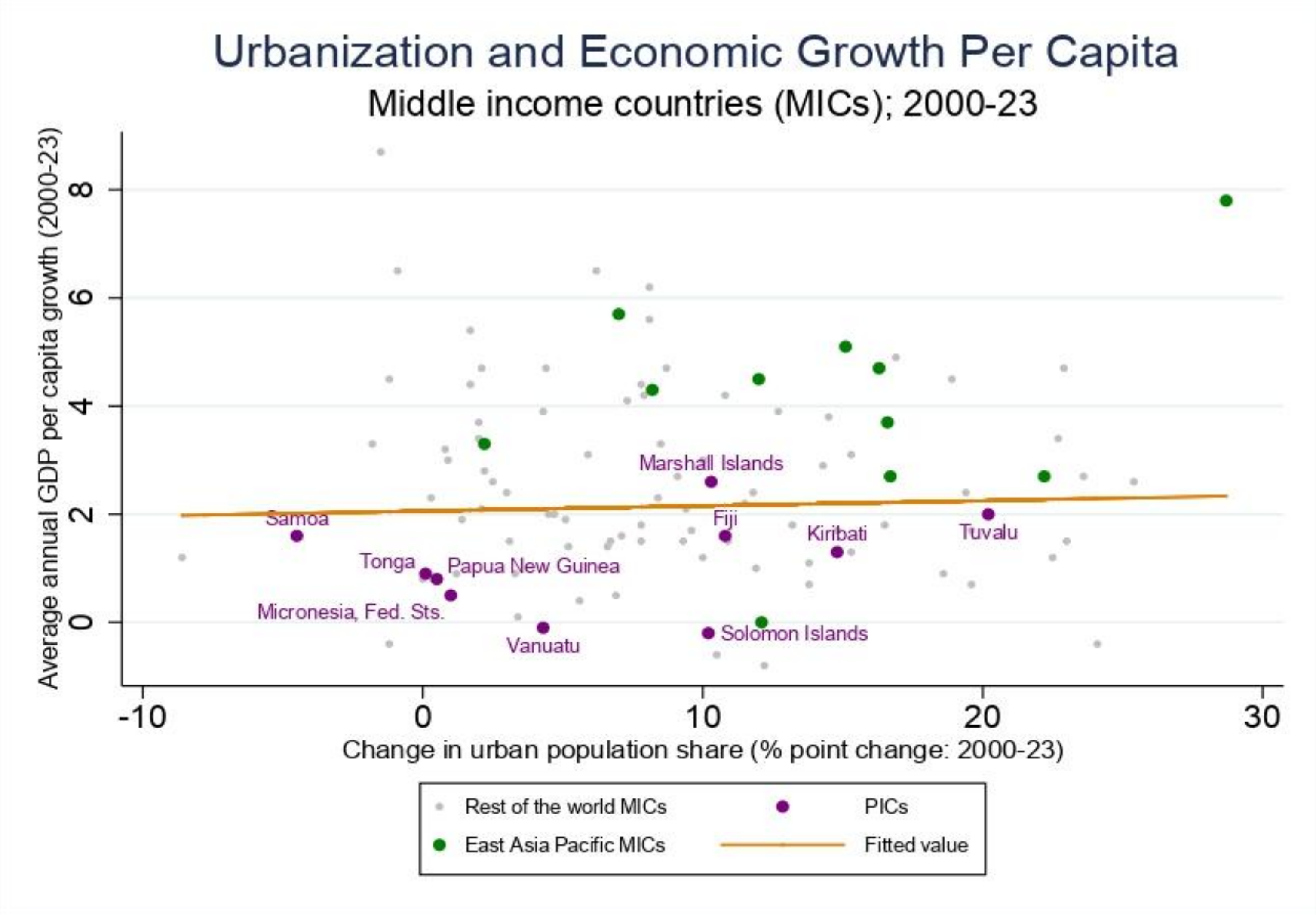




Source: World Bank staff analysis

COSTS OF URBANIZATION ARE SWAMPING THE BENEFITS, CONSTRAINING ECONOMIC GROWTH & JOB CREATION

- **Urban growth rates have outpaced** rural and outer island population growth over the past 30 years.
- But the Pacific has **not received boosts to economic growth and jobs** typically expected from urbanization.
- GDP per capita in PICs has grown at a **slower annualized pace**.



Sources: World Bank Development Indicators; World Bank staff estimates

PACIFIC CITIES AND TOWNS HAVE GREAT POTENTIAL FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES …

Urbanization **can drive economic development** by creating jobs, diversifying local economies, and raising incomes.

Suva (Fiji) and Honiara (Solomon Islands) have invested in healthcare and educational facilities, **creating additional jobs in these sectors**.

Climate hazards and disasters can disrupt economic growth and livelihoods. Cities need stronger **urban management, resilient infrastructure, and disaster preparedness**.

The **Government of RMI is updating its planning and zoning legislation**, investing in coastal protection and resilient public spaces in Majuro, and enhancing community-based preparedness in urban areas.

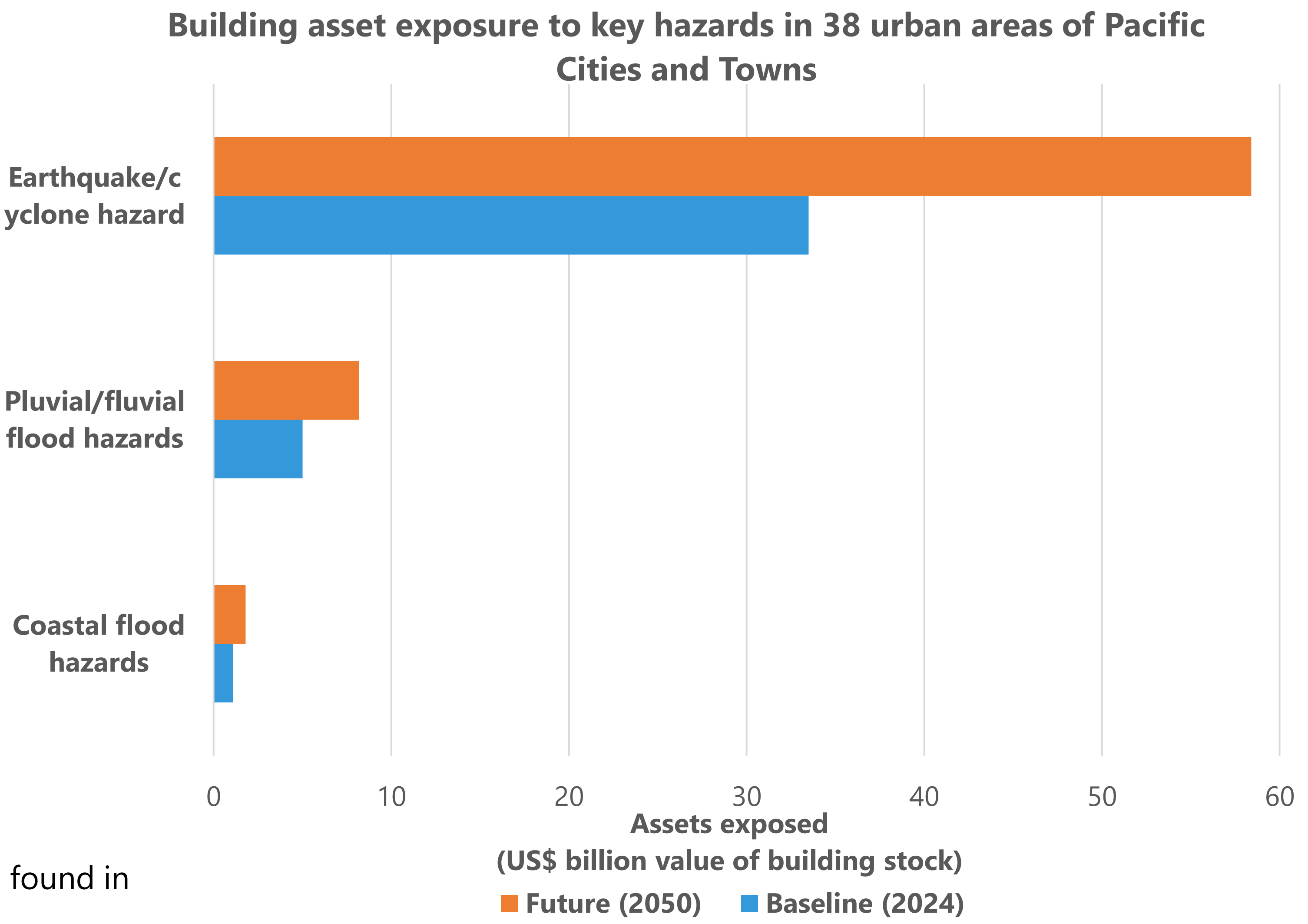
Urban development should **align with future economic drivers**, such as tourism, digital services, industry, and transport hubs.

The **Government of Samoa is investing in the secondary city of Salelologa,** following a multi-hazard risk assessment, to inform urban planning, tourism development, and government digitization objectives.

... BUT NEED TO ADDRESS THE IMPACTS OF GROWING CLIMATE AND DISASTER RISKS IN PARALLEL

People exposed to **earthquake and cyclone hazards will more than double**, rising from 1.0 million to 2.4 million by 2050.
Exposure to **pluvial and fluvial flooding is projected to increase by 126%**, while coastal flooding exposure is expected to rise by 95% compared to 2024.*

US$58.4 billion building assets exposed to **earthquake and cyclone hazards** by 2050, a 74% increase from US$33.5 billion in 2024.
Building asset exposure to **coastal flooding** is projected to **grow by 60%, and by 63% for fluvial/pluvial flooding** by 2050.*



*These data refer to 38 selected PIC urban and peri-urban areas. More details about this analysis can be found in the **Spotlight: Mapping Risk, Building Resilience**

UNCERTAINTIES CREATED BY CLIMATE CHANGE WILL REQUIRE URBAN ANALYTICS TO INFORM COMPLEX DECISION-MAKING

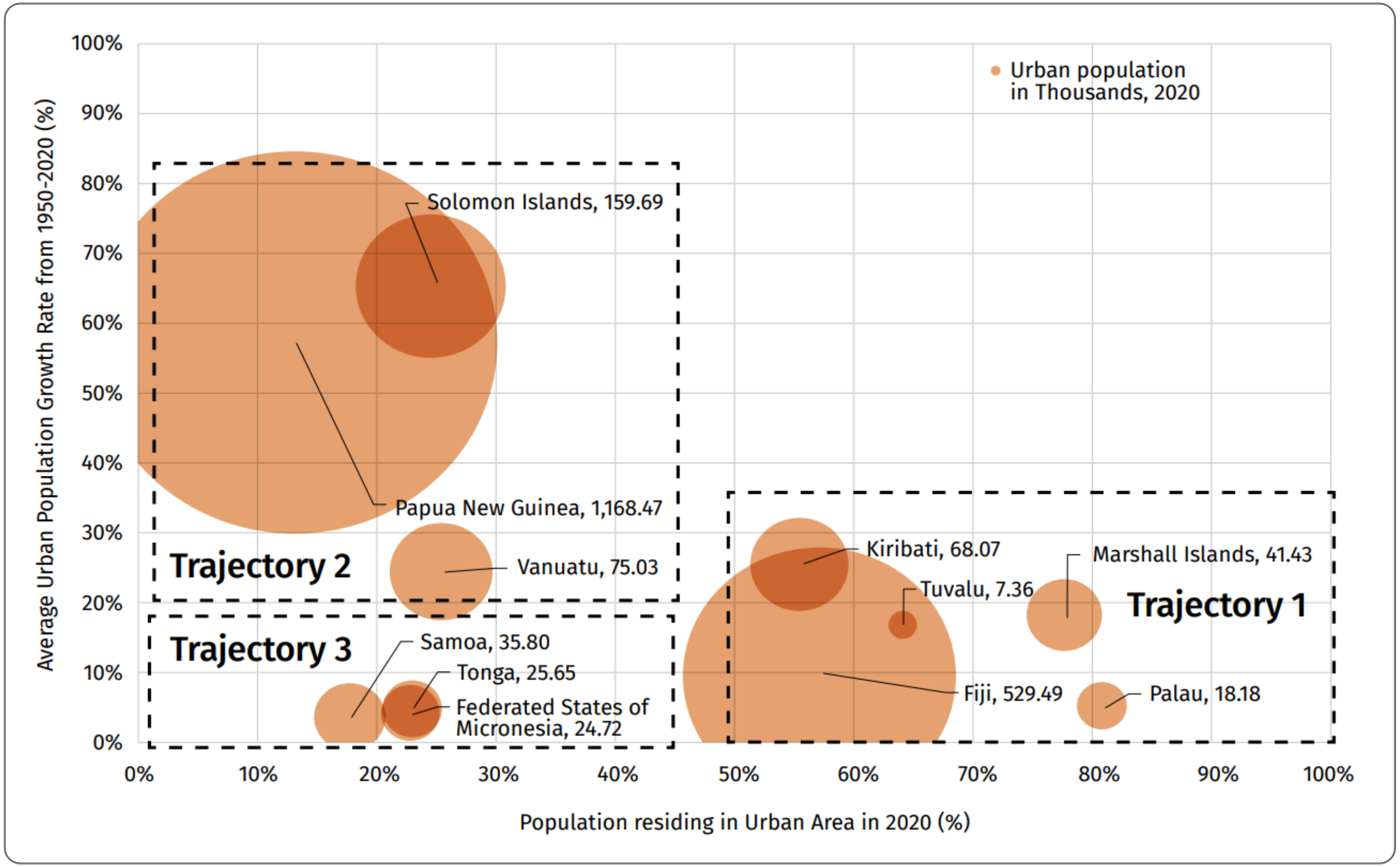
Climate projections for the Pacific region show increasing air and sea temperatures, more variable rainfall and storm activity, and rising sea levels. These changes will heighten the risk of natural hazards.

Given the concentration of people and assets in urban areas, the impacts of natural and climate-related hazards on cities and towns will also increase unless governments take action.

With limited financial resources to address all hazards simultaneously, the prioritization of urban centers and hazards is needed along with complementary investment.

Exposure and vulnerability analysis can help with prioritization, and development projects and infrastructure investments should address multi-hazard risk assessments and urban design analysis.

COUNTRY-SPECIFC URBAN GROWTH TRAJECTORIES WILL HAVE TO SHAPE PLANNING, POLICY AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES



Trajectory 1
Highly urbanized
Examples: Fiji, Kiribati, RMI, Palau, Tuvalu
Trajectory 2
Predominantly rural PICs with rapidly growing urban areas
Examples: Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu
Trajectory 3
Predominantly rural PICs with peri-urban growth
Examples: FSM, Samoa, Tonga

Urbanization vs urban growth rate and population (thousands), 2020. *Source: UN World Urbanization Prospects Data.*

DIFFERENT SPATIAL DEVELOPMENT PATTERNS TARGETED CITY-SPECIFIC REFORMS AND INVESTMENTS

Type 1 Linear development

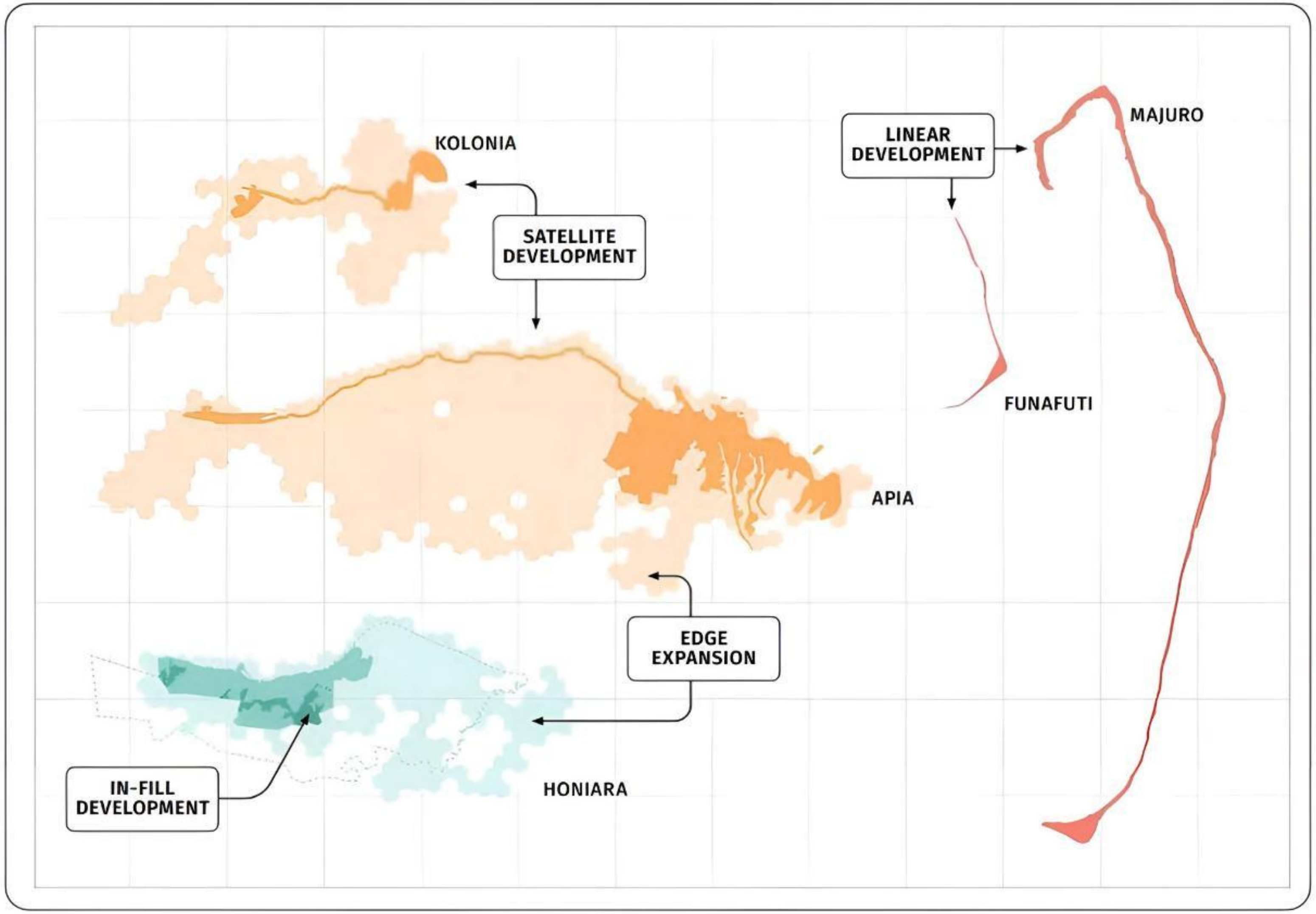
Concentration of urban growth and development along a linear, elongated corridor.

Type 2 Multi-nodal development

Multiple centers or 'nodes' rather than a single Central Business District.

Type 3 Urban sprawl

Expansion of low-density residential and commercial areas into surrounding rural areas, which may have little to no development control.



Graphic by ONE Architecture

THE REPORT RECOMMENDS 4 BUILDING BLOCKS TO PROMOTE RESILIENT URBANIZATION AND ADDRESS GROWING URBAN RISK

1. STRENGTHEN RISK-INFORMED URBAN MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

INSTITUTIONALIZE RISK-INFORMED URBAN PLANNING

- Integrate **multi-hazard risk assessments** into urban and spatial planning.
- Establish specialized **urban management institutions**.
- Promote **multi-stakeholder coordination** across land administration, urban planning and disaster risk management.

STRENGTHEN POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

- Develop or update **national urban policies** that align with risk profiles and promote resilient urban growth areas.
- Adopt **risk-sensitive land use regulations** to shift development away from high-risk areas.

ENABLE RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND FINANCING

- Establish **master plans** that prioritize multifunctional and nature-based solutions.
- Explore innovative subnational **financing mechanisms**, e.g., tiered development fees and earmarked levies.
- Strengthen **land administration systems** to support urban upgrading and revenue generation.

VANUATU AFFORDABLE AND RESILIENT SETTLEMENTS PROJECT

Aims to improve access to and the resilience of infrastructure and services in selected new and existing settlements.

- **Risk-informed planning:** embeds disaster and climate risk into urban growth by developing affordable settlements in low-hazard land and updating land subdivision regulations.
- **Evidence-based, participatory management:** strengthens urban management through community-led planning, tenure regularization, and risk-informed settlement upgrading.
- **Scalable resilient model:** demonstrates a replicable model for resilient urban expansion that can inform future planning and policy reforms in Vanuatu and other Pacific cities.

2. INVEST IN RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND HOUSING

STRENGTHEN EVIDENCE-BASED PLANNING

- Conduct **regular and comprehensive assessments to identify vulnerabilities** and guide proactive investment and maintenance.
- Explore the **viability of traditional architecture and building techniques** for modern applications.

DEMONSTRATE RESILIENCE THROUGH INFRASTRUCTURE

- Invest in **exemplary public facilities**, e.g., schools, health centers and government buildings that showcase climate-resilient design and multifunctionality.
- Ensure facilities serve everyday needs and are **adaptable for emergency situations**.

MOBILIZE CAPACITY AND FINANCING FOR RESILIENT GROWTH

- **Partner with private sector** to build awareness and capacity in resilient design and construction.
- Access global and regional **climate and disaster funds**.
- Strengthen national systems to support **effective delivery of sustainable infrastructure and housing programs**.

PACIFIC RESILIENCE PROGRAM - SAMOA

The Pacific Resilience Program in Samoa had a key component on resilient infrastructure, in addition to support early warnings and preparedness.

- **Resilient public infrastructure:** the reconstruction of Vaigaga Primary School helped it meet current disaster and climate resilience standards, directly addressing recommendations to strengthen the resilience, safety and functionality of urban infrastructure.

- **Improved building standards and asset resilience:** the project supported risk assessments and compliance with strengthened building codes, demonstrating how resilient infrastructure investments can be systematically scaled in urban areas.

3. ENHANCE CITY PREPAREDNESS FOR SHOCKS

STRENGTHEN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND GOVERNANCE

- **Integrate** urban planning, early warning systems, and planning for emergency services.
- Ensure **governance structures** across urban boundaries support coordinated disaster risk management.

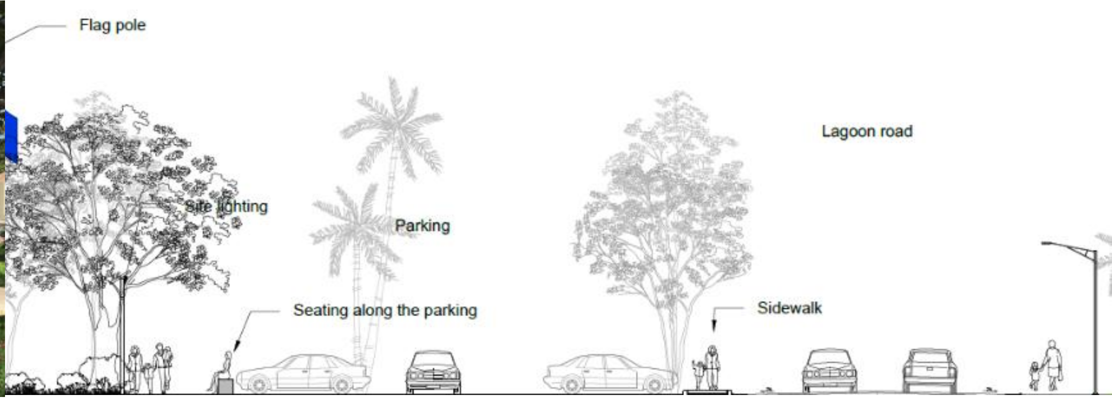
BUILD LOCAL CAPACITY FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE

- Empower cities and towns to respond swiftly by developing **interconnected routes and shelters**.
- Implement **public awareness programs** for residents and tourists.
- Train **urban emergency responders** continuously.

INVEST IN RESILIENT AND HEALTHY URBAN INFRASTRUCTURE

- Ensure durability and functionality of **critical facilities** during and after disasters.
- Promote **environmentally sustainable public spaces** that support urban health, active living, clean water and sanitation, and reduce risks from vector- borne diseases.

REPUBLIC OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS URBAN RESILIENCE PROJECT



- **Strengthening preparedness systems:** planned additional support will strengthen early warning dissemination to support faster, better-coordinated emergency response in urban areas.

- **Improving operational readiness:** subnational emergency management facilities, alongside emergency equipment and sirens, directly addresses gaps in urban emergency coordination and response capacity.

- **Building local preparedness and response capacity:** scales up community-based preparedness, including atoll-level disaster management plans, training, drills, and awareness programs, aligning with emphasis on preparedness *before* shocks occur.

4. PRIORITIZE SOCIAL INCLUSION AND COMMUNITIES

EMPOWER COMMUNITY-LED URBAN RESILIENCE

- Invest in **multi-sectoral, pro-poor initiatives** that reflect cultural and community contexts.
- Use **inclusive and participatory approaches** to risk assessment, planning, and service delivery to address the needs of vulnerable populations.

INSTITUTIONALIZE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

- Reform urban planning, disaster risk management and land policies to **mandate diverse community representation**.
- Collaborate with residents and utility providers to **overcome barriers to equitable service delivery** in informal settlements

EXPAND ADAPTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION AND LOCAL CAPACITY

- Develop city-specific **shock-responsive social protection**.
- Support informal safety nets and economic inclusion through **income-generating opportunities** in resilient infrastructure maintenance.
- Prioritize **meaningful consultation** on customary land rights and recognition.

COMMUNITY ACCESS AND URBAN SERVICES ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

Demonstrates how **localized, inclusive, and participatory approaches** can deliver connective, climate-resilient infrastructure and basic services to disadvantaged settlements while also providing **access to economic opportunities** for vulnerable urban populations (unemployed women, youth, and persons with disabilities).

Lesson learned: using community contracting for small-scale urban infrastructure strengthens local ownership and leads to more sustainable maintenance and longer-term employment outcomes.

DIAGNOSTIC METHODOLOGY FRAMEWORK

- Diagnostic tools present a critical opportunity to better understand the impacts of disasters and climate change, **and inform urban development planning that considers risk**.
- The Spotlight Report **Tides of Change: Urban Resilience Across Pacific Landscapes**, presents **3 different assessment tools**.

	Rapid City Scan (RCS)	Critical Hazard Assessment	Detailed Multi-Hazard Assessment (MHRA)
	High-level geospatial screening using global datasets. Identifies priority areas for further assessment.	**Rapid diagnostics using secondary data. It provides timely insights in data-constrained environments.**	**Comprehensive modeling of hazards, exposure, and vulnerability. It supports long-term planning and investment prioritization.**
Data requirements	Low	Moderate	High
Indicative cost	US$5,000-10,000	US$20,000-50,000	US$75,000-500,000
Time requirements	2-3 weeks	2-3 months	6 months+
Recommended use	Initial screening and dialogue	Rapid prioritization	Strategic planning and investment prioritization

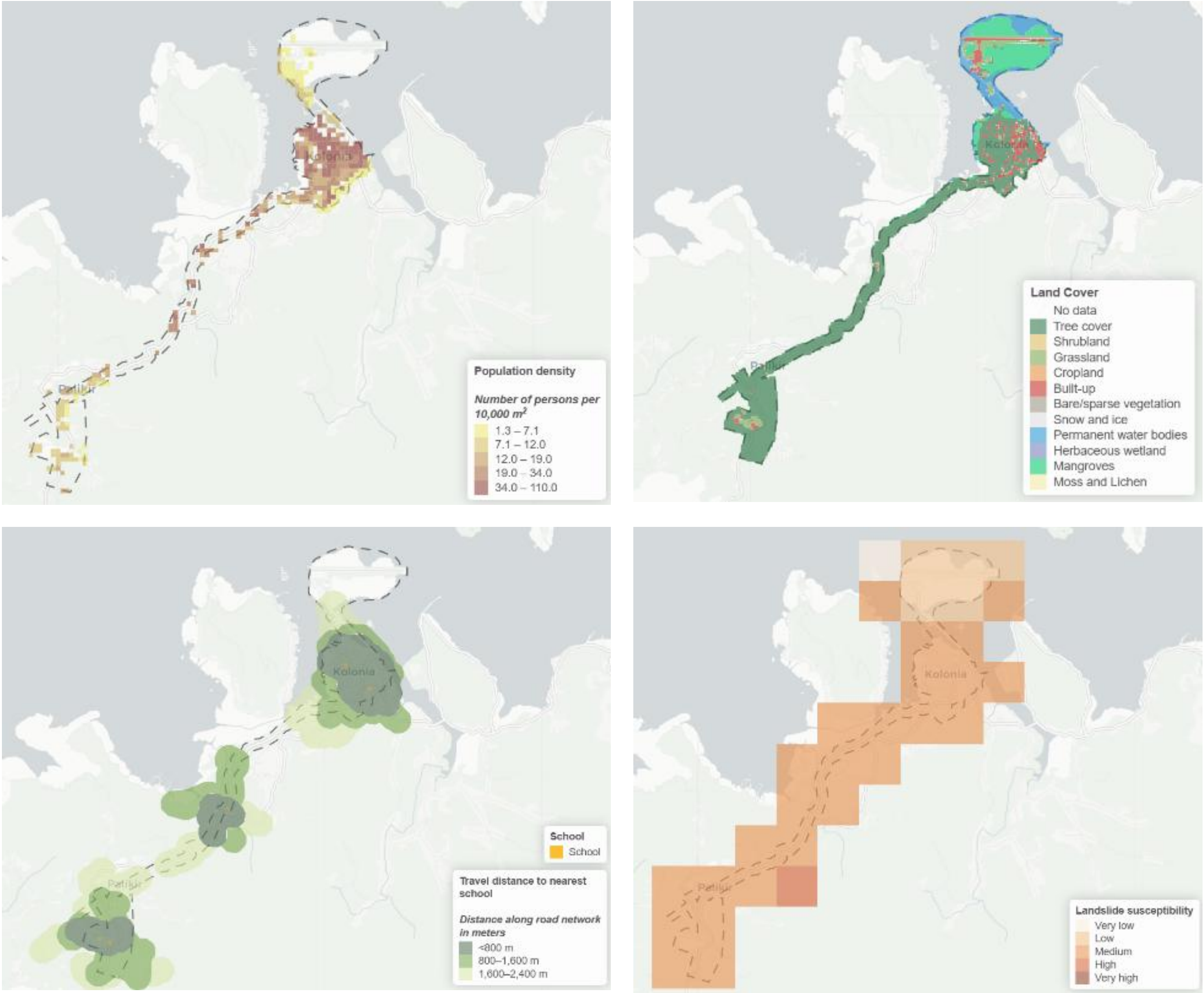
RAPID CITY SCAN (RCS)

RCS are high-level geospatial screening using global datasets, identifying priority areas for further assessment.

Example application:
Kolonia, Federated States of Micronesia (FSM)

Context:
- Secondary urban center on Pohnpei Island
- Administrative and service hub for FSM in Pohnpei Island
- Highly exposed public buildings and critical infrastructure to coastal flooding and sea level rise

Investment implications:
- Prioritize coastal road protection
- Improve drainage infrastructure
- Guide relocation or elevation of critical facilities



Source: Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR)

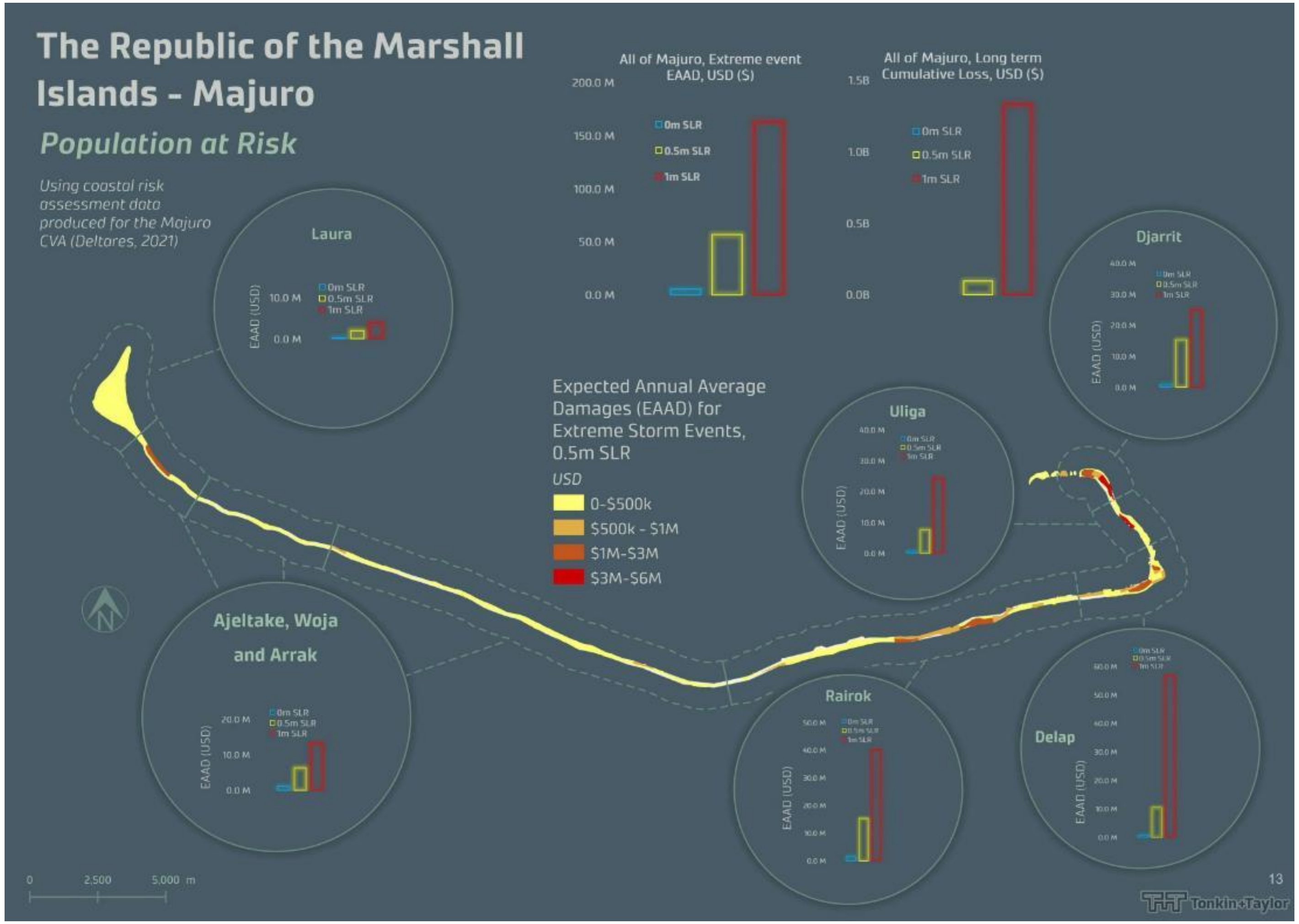
CRITICAL HAZARD ASSESSMENT (CHA)

CHAs are rapid diagnostics using secondary data, providing timely insights in data-constrained environments.

Example application:
Majuro, Republic of the Marshall Islands

Context:
- Highly urbanized atoll city (linear development)
- Limited elevation and severe land constraints
- High vulnerability to flooding and sea level rise

Investment implications:
- Upgrade coastal defenses in Delap–Uliga–Djarrit
- Improve drainage systems
- Strengthen building code enforcement
- Support land raising strategies



Source: Tonkin & Taylor

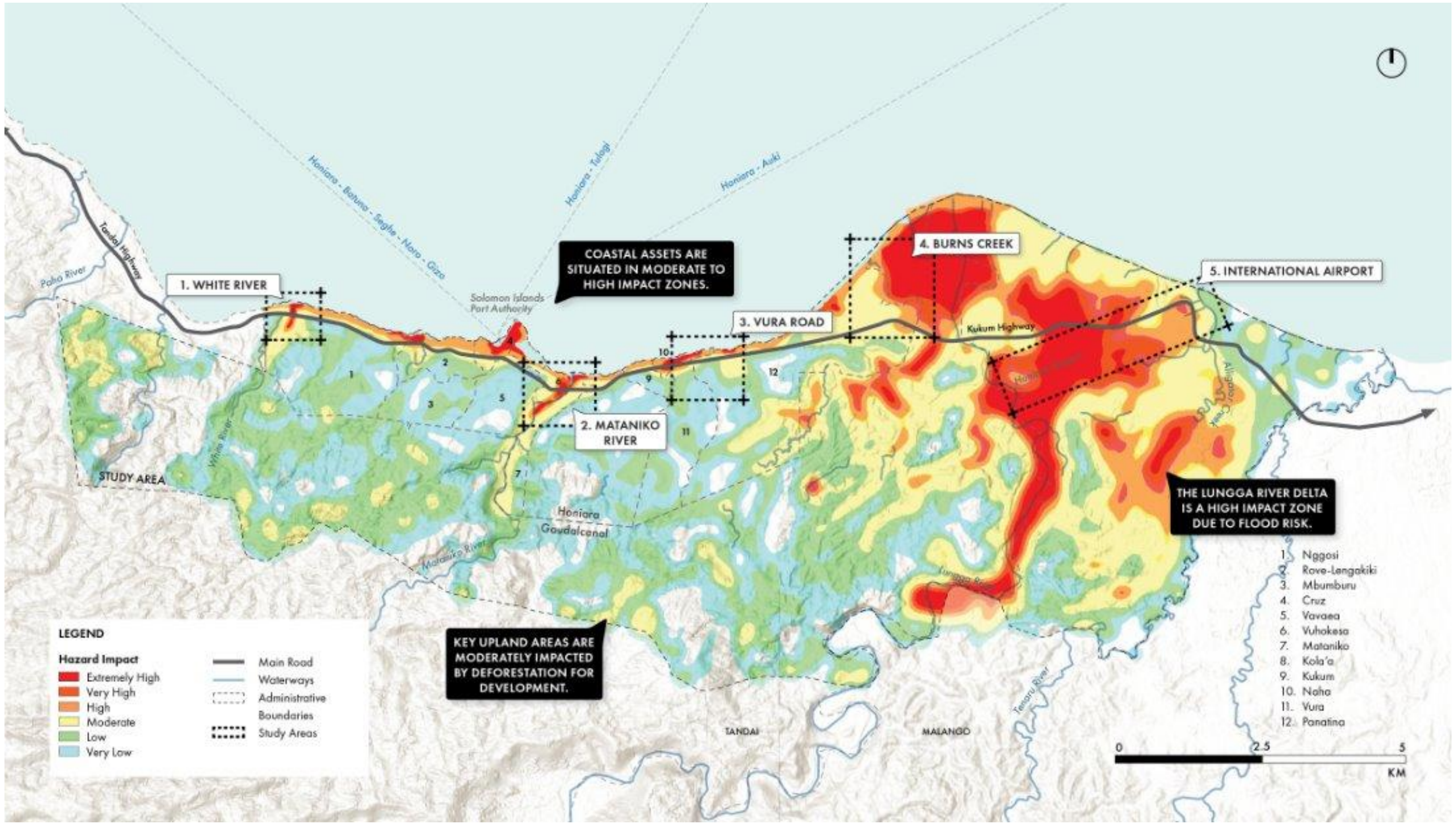
MULTI-HAZARD RISK ASSESSMENT (MHRA)

MHRAs are comprehensive modelling of hazards, exposure, and vulnerability; supporting long-term planning and investment prioritization.

Example application:
Honiara, Solomon Islands

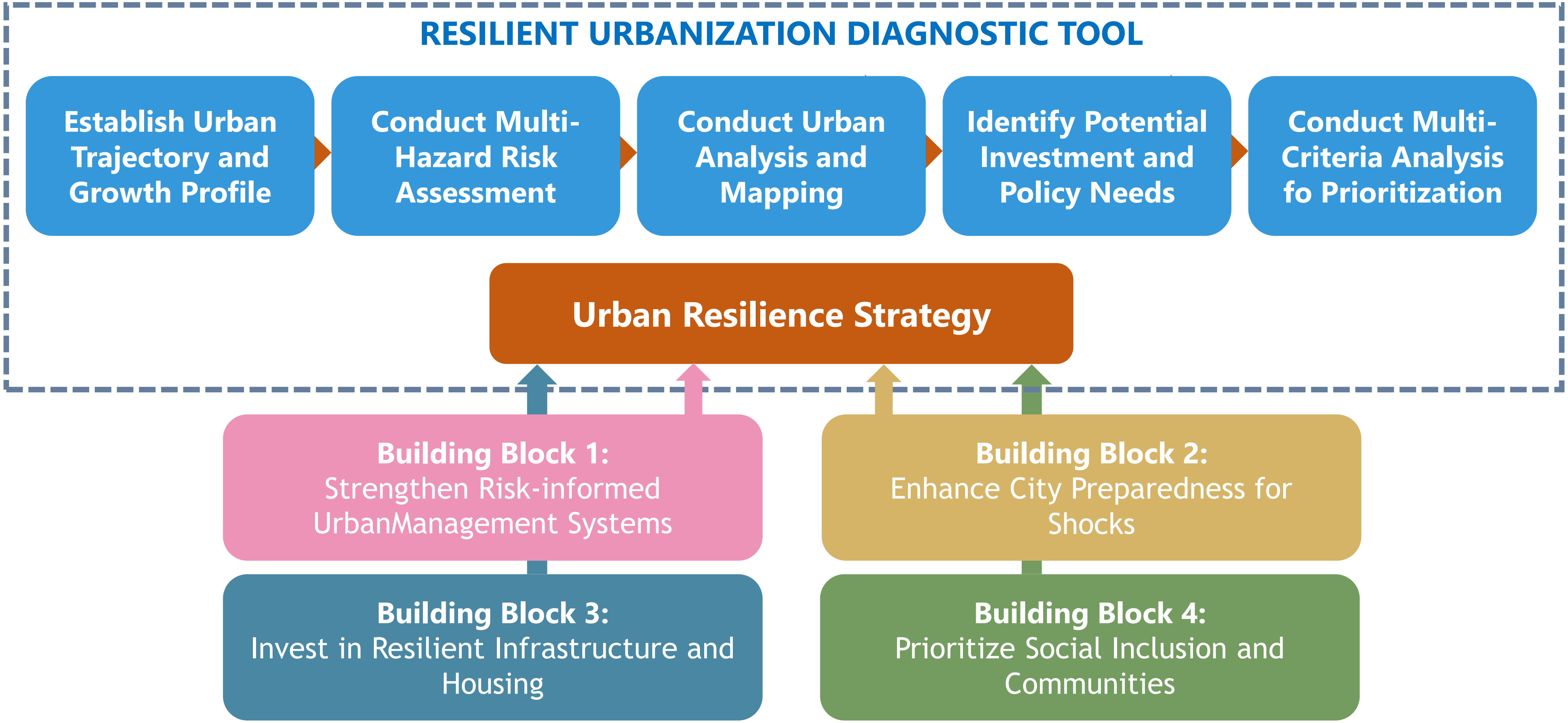
Context:
- Rapid population growth
- Urban sprawl along coastal and riverine corridors
- Informal settlements in highly exposed areas.

Investment implications:
- Updated land-use planning
- Strengthened land administration
- Drainage & flood mitigation upgrades
- Early warning system strengthening



Source: ONE Architecture

A PATHWAY TO DEVELOP URBAN RESILIENCE STRATEGIES FOR THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES



THREE KEY TAKEAWAY MESSAGES OF THE REPORT

Urbanization in the Pacific is accelerating– but so is risk. By 2050, the number of people exposed to **earthquake and cyclone hazards could more than double from 1.0 million to 2.4 million**, while exposed building assets could reach **US$58.4 billion – more than 4.5x the combined 2025 GDP**.

Cities already drive Pacific economies but their full potential remains largely untapped. Urban areas generate **50–70% of GDP**, but many cities have yet to capture the full economic benefits of urbanization due to **inadequate investment and policy frameworks** for resilient urbanization.

Pacific countries can turn risk into opportunity through the four building blocks. The choice is not between growth or resilience – well-planned, inclusive and risk-informed cities are essential to achieving both. Diagnostic tools can help identify specific actions.

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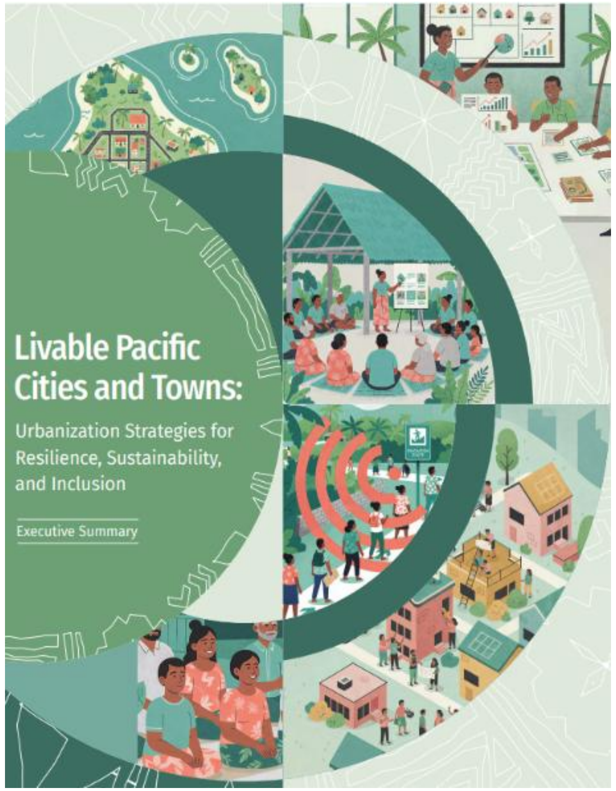

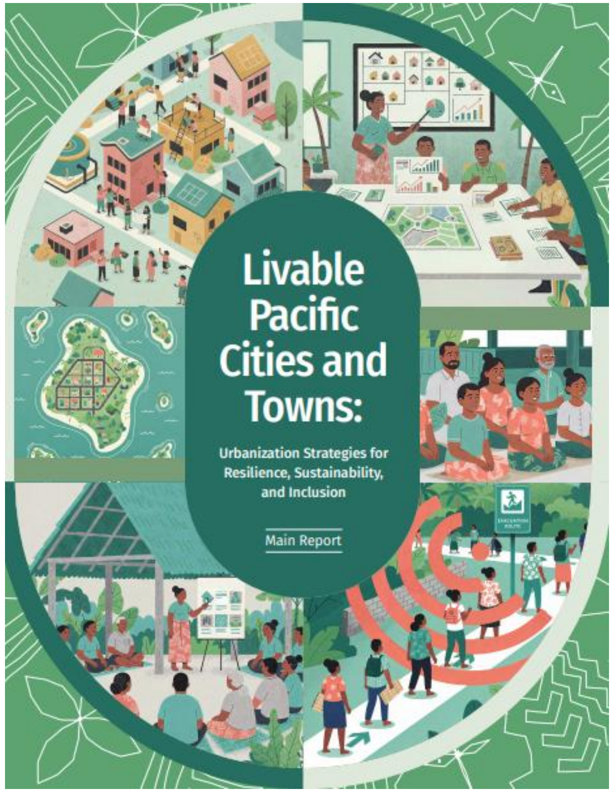

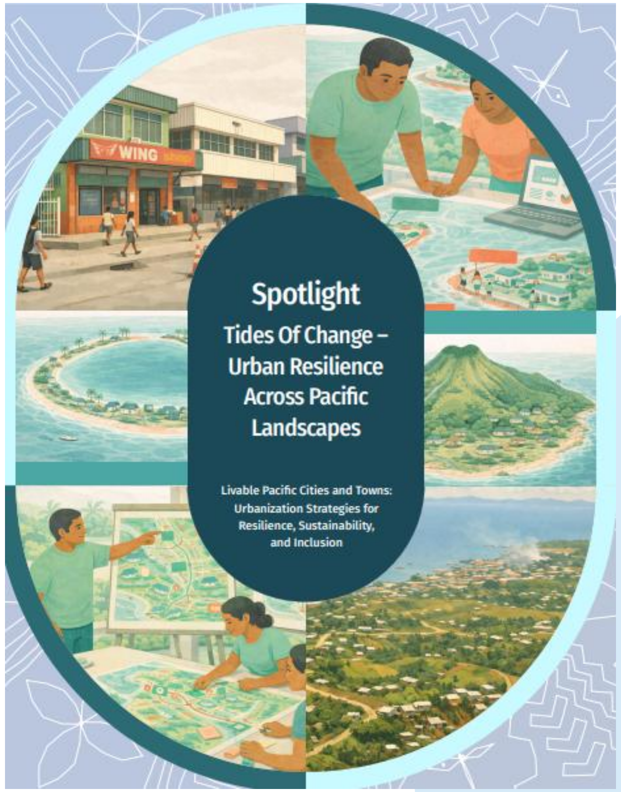

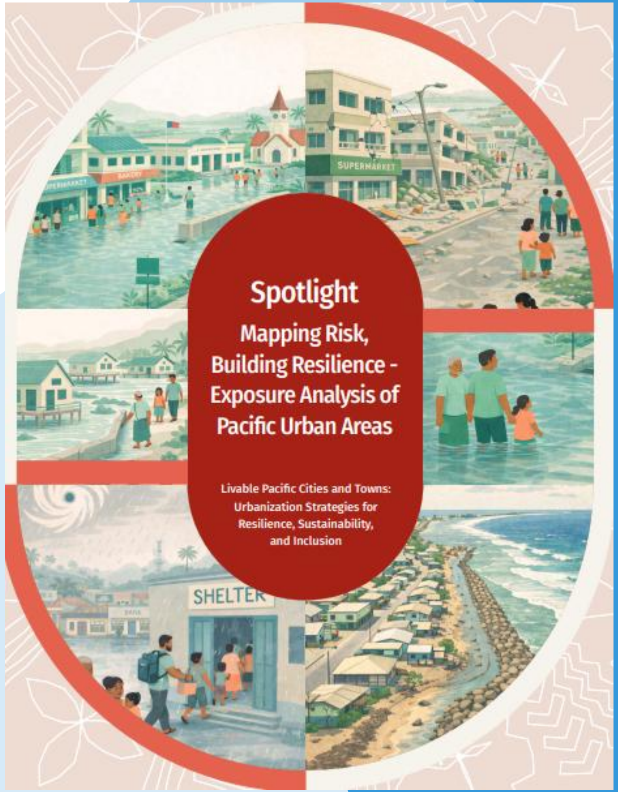

Jian Vun: jvun@worldbank.org; Jessica Schmidt: jschmidt@worldbank.org