

Displacing the displaced: Two-Mile Hill and Port Moresby's housing crisis

by Bradley Dare

18 April 2026



Drone footage after an eviction at Two-Mile Hill Rabiagini settlement

Photo Credit: Bradley Dare using imagery by Ovia Oa

The dust may now have settled at Two-Mile Hill, but twelve hundred former residents of Port Moresby's Rabiagini settlement remain homeless. They are the unfortunate victims of the latest of Papua New Guinea's state-sponsored eviction campaigns. Forced to move into other crowded settlements scheduled for future demolition, they embody Port Moresby's interlocking crises of housing insecurity, escalating violence and failing urban policy.

Urban squatter settlements are growing rapidly in the cities of Australia's Melanesian neighbours. Across [Noumea](#), [Suva](#), [Port Vila](#) and [Honiara](#), each is a testament to the region's accelerating rural-urban migration. The issue is most pronounced in PNG's capital Port Moresby — where [over 50%](#) of the city's population now reside informally and illegally in sprawling squatter settlements. These agglomerations emerged in response to ongoing housing shortages and [reconnect people](#) who felt separated from friends and family when they reside in culturally unfamiliar Western-style suburbs. Communities recreated village structures on unoccupied stretches of state-owned land, wiring up their own (usually illicit) power connections and tapping into the city's water. They were first called "self-help" settlements: as settlers had no choice but to help themselves establish basic services.

Now, settlements are a defining feature of Port Moresby. They are equally the primary target of National Capital District (NCD) Governor Powes Parkop's [urban policy](#). Political elites, the Royal PNG Constabulary and many others have [long blamed settlements](#) for Port Moresby's manifold urban problems — from the [deteriorating city water supply](#) to [carjacking](#). Traditional media and increasingly pervasive social media amplify this narrative. Settlements are often stereotyped as hotbeds of criminality and settlers, by association, as hordes of unwelcome criminals.



Anti-settler rhetoric in newspaper headlines from the PNG Post-Courier, PNG’s leading daily newspaper (Curated by author).

This rhetoric exacerbates existing settler marginalisation. While trustworthy quantitative data is scarce in PNG, qualitative markers strongly suggest Port Moresby residents face record unemployment. When a **supermarket opened recently at 8-Mile**, a large settlement in the city’s north, and advertised entry-level positions, owners were met by a queue of 3,000 hopefuls — many waiting more than 12 hours in the sun and without food, for the possibility of an interview.

Without income, settlers cannot secure loans necessary to access formal housing. They remain trapped in the settlements under the ever-present threat of violent eviction. Despite this insecurity, many settlements have grown into communities of thousands. **My previous research** combining satellite imagery analysis with ground-level interviews suggests 8-Mile, a settlement covering 250 hectares, houses around 25,000 people, many of whom have lived there for decades. Their houses are far from shanties, built not just to last but for **children to inherit**.

However, children growing up in a settlement cannot legally inherit this land. Instead, they will inherit housing insecurity. The informal (and often traditional) network of leases governing settlement housing are **not accepted by PNG’s legal system**. Despite **official acknowledgement** that customary land leasing is widely understood and accepted, the NCD recognises only those physically possessing land titles, which grow **increasingly valuable**. Land titles in a fast-growing city are sensible **capital investments for corporations** — particularly so when **security is provided by the state**. This dynamic has generated, and continues to generate, **sporadic violent confrontations** between settlers and officials executing evictions.

Typically, settlers receive **30 days' notice** before police, private security and bulldozers arrive to burn and level the settlements. This may be ordered pre-emptively by the NCD or at the behest of a land-title holder. **This is what occurred** in January and February 2026 at Two-Mile Hill (Rabiagini) and likely caused the contemporaneous **attacks on police**. Geospatial analysis of open-source aerial imagery and drone footage shows at least 150 dwellings over 8.8 hectares were destroyed in the Two-Mile Hill settlement. Those wishing to stay but having lost their homes have no recourse but to rebuild their lives in other settlements. Otherwise, they must uproot to villages far from the capital where government services may be limited or non-existent and opportunities for paid employment scarce.



Drone footage imagery georeferenced and overlaid onto a satellite map, highlighting demolished dwellings (Bradley Dare using imagery by Ovia Oa).

Few choose to leave. Data from a recent study of 8-Mile demonstrated that mass evictions around a settlement increase housing density within its boundaries. Settlers do not move out of Port Moresby when evicted. They move further in.

As more settlements are slated for future demolition, the number of people displaced by evictions is likely to increase, causing the issue not only to persist, but worsen. Continuing to violently evict settled internal migrants without planning for their future residential or economic integration furthers the marginalisation of an already-marginalised group, inviting instability and further violence into PNG's

capital.

To avoid this future, NCD urban planners — and urban planners watching from across Melanesia — must engage with their settlers before eviction. Rural-urban migration cannot easily be halted nor reversed, and therefore a dialogue must be opened that acknowledges settler rights to secure housing and employment opportunities, whether in formal or informal economies (such as gardening). Steps have already been taken in this direction, **such as Governor Parkop's calls for settlement upgrades**, but these statements mean little while settlements such as Two-Mile Hill continue to face demolition without sufficient planning for the future welfare or security of their displaced residents.

Author/s:

Bradley Dare

Bradley Dare is a researcher specialising in Melanesia. He is currently based in Australia.

Link:

<https://devpolicy.org/displacing-the-displaced-two-mile-hill-and-port-moresbys-housing-crisis-20260418/>