

Community Water and Sanitation in the Pacific: Fostering Sustainable WASH Marketplaces

Fiji update: July 2015

This research project works in partnership with impoverished informal communities and local enabling actors (from government, utilities and community service organisations (CSOs)) in Fiji, Vanuatu, Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea. We are using a process known as participatory action research, where the communities and enabling actors are co-researchers alongside our team, and we move towards actions based on the knowledge that we have co-generated in the early phases of the research. The research activities investigate water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) exchanges, which are the processes by which people go about fulfilling their WASH needs by interacting with one another and the enabling actors. We investigate the access communities have to WASH products and services, how communities use these WASH products and services, and how such access and use can impact on individual and community well-being. We aim to understand and help to foster the conditions under which sustained, self-determined WASH exchange systems can operate among Pacific island communities.

Our role in this project is mainly to facilitate action planning and bring communities and enabling actors together, particularly where existing government and CSO programs may be of interest to community participants. As well as empowering communities to improve their WASH situation, we will gain insight that can be applied to policy and practice in Melanesia more widely.

In Fiji we are working with communities at Wailea and Muanivatu. Both of these settlements are tidally inundated on a daily basis.

Project phases

Phase 1 (November 2013): Investigate the community WASH and well-being situations and exchange systems.

Phase 2 (August 2014): Investigate the WASH situation and exchange systems within individual households in target communities; meet with enabling actors to understand the country context.

Phase 3 (February 2015): Work with communities towards identifying WASH aspirations and developing action plans; bring communities and enabling actors together to share the knowledge they have generated thus far in the project, including community-facilitated tours of their settlements; assist in the planning of joint WASH actions.

Phase 4 (February 2015 onwards): Communities and enabling actors take WASH action and begin fostering different types of WASH exchange.

Wailea Community

Following Phase 3 in February 2015, Wailea formed a WASH Sub-Committee which sits below their community-wide Watch Council.

The community are particularly interested in improving the sanitation situation in the settlement. They have discussed several sanitation technologies with the wider community, and many households are interested in compost toilets. There is significant concern around the affordability of compost systems, but the WASH Sub-Committee have decided that the first step is to determine whether the technology is suitable in Wailea, and what types of operation and maintenance such a system would entail. They are preparing a proposal to build a pilot system using locally available materials. If the pilot is considered a success, the WASH Sub-Committee will then investigate how best to approach funding, and whether there could be opportunities for developing an enterprise around building and maintaining these toilets.

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Muanivatu Community

Following Phase 3 in February, Muanivatu formed a WASH Sub-Committee which sits below their community-wide Development Committee.

A major concern for the Muanivatu community is the lack of connection to the water mains for those residing in the southern part of the settlement. With assistance from one of the enabling actors, the WASH Sub-Committee prepared a letter to Water Authority of Fiji requesting that a second main connection be installed in the community. Water Authority of Fiji have recently inspected the site and the WASH Sub-Committee are waiting on confirmation as to whether the installation of another connection will go ahead.

Enabling actor engagement

We have engaged with staff from Department of Environment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Climate Change Division, Department of Water and Sewerage, Ministry of Health, Ministry of Local Government, Urban Development, Housing and Environment, Ministry of Agriculture's Division of Land and Water Resources Management, National Disaster Management Office, Suva City Council, University of the South Pacific (PaCE –SD and IAS), UN-Habitat, UNICEF, People's Community Network (PCN), Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Water Authority of Fiji, Housing Assistance Relief Trust, Rotary Pacific Water, and Live & Learn Environmental Education.

During Phase 3 of this project, many of these enabling actors came together and decided to start the Fijian WASH Forum, where they act as advisors

to informal settlements interesting in improving their WASH situation. Currently representatives from both Wailea and Muanivatu WASH Sub-Committees are engaged with the Forum and attend its bi-monthly meetings.

Since February, both WASH Sub-Committees have approached PCN and received assistance in the form of equipment to perform regular clean-ups of their drains. The communities have noticed that this cleaning has reduced the incidence of flooding, even during high tide. The WASH Sub-Committees have also sought advice from Suva City Council regarding rubbish collection and the procedures for reporting illegal dumping in their communities.

Both WASH Sub-Committees have requested training on management skills, which will likely be carried out in the coming months by enabling actors involved in this project.

Project outputs

In the coming months we will share various project outputs, including policy briefs, a WaSH marketing manual, peer-reviewed journal articles and various reports.

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