Decentralisation and rural water service delivery in Solomon Islands

Final Report – December 2024

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Abbreviations

ADB:	Asian Development Bank
CE:	Community Engagement
CWM:	Community Water Management
CWM+:	Community Water Management plus
EHD:	Environmental Health Division
EU:	European Union
ICT:	Information and Communication Technology
IEDCRP:	Integrated Economic Development and Community Resilience Project
MEL:	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MHMS:	Ministry of Health and Medical Services
MPGIS:	Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening
NDS:	National Development Strategy
NGOs:	Non-government organisations
NIWCC:	National Water Coordination Committee
PACWAM+:	Pacific Community Water Management Plus
PCDF:	Provincial Capacity Development Fund
PEHD:	Provincial Environmental Health Division
PGSP:	Provincial Governance Strengthening Program
PIC:	Pacific Island Countries
PKLE:	Pacific Knowledge and Exchange
RCDF:	Rural Constituency Development Fund
RDP:	Rural Development Programme
RIS:	RWASH Information System
RWOC:	Rural WASH Oversight Committee
RWASH:	Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (Unit)
RWASH Policy:	Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Policy
RWASH Plan:	RWASH Strategic Plan
RWSS:	Rural Water Supply and Sanitation
SBD:	Solomon Islands Dollars
SDA:	Service Delivery Approach
SDP:	Service Delivery Partner
SIG:	Solomon Islands Government
SINU:	Solomon Islands National University
RAMSI:	The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands
UNICEF:	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID:	United States Agency for International Development
WASH:	Water supply, Sanitation and Hygiene
WATSAN Plan:	National Water and Sanitation Implementation Plan
WATSAN Policy:	National Water Resources and Sanitation Policy
WC:	Water Committee
WDCs:	Ward Development Committees
WDCSO:	Ward Development Committee Support Officer
WHO:	World Health Organisation
WSG:	WASH Stakeholder Group

Executive Summary

This report examines the strengths, challenges and opportunities associated with rural water service delivery in Solomon Islands, with a specific focus on decentralisation.

Globally, there has been a slow but steady shift away from the Community Water Management (CWM) model towards various alternative models – sometimes referred to as "Community Water Management plus" (CWM+) (e.g., Baumann, 2006; Hutchings et al., 2015) – marked by increasing decentralisation, professionalisation, and a diversification in service delivery models, including various forms of private sector involvement (see Lockwood and Smits, 2011). However, there is little to no information about what this might look like in the Pacific Islands region. This research explores these wider global shifts and debates in the rural water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) space in the context of Solomon Islands.

Due to demographic, geographic, environmental and socio-economic particulars unique to the Pacific Island countries (PICs), the professionalisation of rural water service delivery at scale is unlikely in the near term, meaning that the CWM model will remain the dominant water service delivery approach (SDA) for the foreseeable future. However, as Hutchings et al., (2017), among others argue, the balance of responsibility must eventually shift away from the expectation that rural communities can independently be successful "public service managers" (Hutchings et al., 2017). Communities need some kind of support.

While some PICs, such as Vanuatu, have adopted elements of CWM+ (by outsourcing training and planning, and strengthening community-level legal powers), there remains a widespread absence of systematic post-construction follow-up monitoring and support across the region. Lessons from Africa, Asia and Latin America demonstrate the value of institutionalised post-construction support and operationalising diverse SDAs (e.g., government, private sector, civil society organisations). However, the unique character of the region questions the direct transferability of lessons from elsewhere to the Pacific Islands region.

Solomon Islands is one of the most underserved nations globally in terms of access to clean drinking water and basic sanitation, with only 59.41% of its rural population accessing basic drinking water in 2022—a significant decline from 76.47% in 2000 (WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2022). Limited water services and poor water quality, sanitation and hygiene practices, contribute to some of the highest rates of stunting and wasting in children under 5 in the region (33%) (WHO, 2024). Over half of all water infrastructure projects are believed to less than half their designed lifespan. Challenging logistics and environmental conditions, combined with limited state presence in rural areas, underscores the challenges of providing equitable and sustainable water services in the small island developing state context.

As in many PICs, decentralisation is positioned as a critical strategy for improving water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) outcomes in rural Solomon Islands, as per government Policy and Strategic Plans. Historically, decentralisation has long been a feature of the nation's governance structure, dating back to legislative efforts in the 1960s. However, the abolition of area councils in the late 1990s left a vacuum in local governance, leading to weakened accountability and declining service delivery (e.g., Allen et al., 2013; 47, 72; Cox and Morrison, 2004:8). Recent initiatives, including the establishment of Ward Development Committees (WDCs), represent a renewed effort to empower local governance and promote participatory planning.

This research employed a mixed-methods approach, including literature reviews, stakeholder interviews, and participatory workshops, with interviews conducted across national, provincial, and village levels. Adapting and extending on the various extant WASH "building blocks" frameworks (e.g., Huston and Moriarty, 2018) and other key relevant literature (Lockwood and Smits, 2011; World Bank, 2017), this study identified six critical "elements" or "building blocks" deemed critical to progressing decentralisation in the rural water sector in the PIC context:

- Policies, legal and regulatory frameworks
- Budgeting, finance, and resources
- Information and knowledge sharing
- Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)
- Harmonisation and coordination
- Human resources and capacity development.

These elements were examined within the broader context of the enabling environment (including the political economy) for sustainable rural water service delivery in Solomon Islands (we did not explore sanitation). A total of 40 indicators were ultimately identified, with each element containing between 5 - 9 indicators. Each indicator was assigned a rating based on the evidence at hand (qualitative data and grey literature). Whilst a subjective process, applying a quantitative rating was deemed productive for identifying strengths, weaknesses, priority areas, and providing a benchmark for longitudinal purposes.

Decentralisation is in its early stages in Solomon Islands and faces significant challenges. A significant structural reform, decentralisation is a long-term process that requires substantial resources, capacity development and support; this is especially the case in complex, low resource contexts such as Solomon Islands. Based on the analyses in this report, Solomon Islands corresponds to a mix of "partial" and "inadequately resourced" examples of decentralisation in the context of rural water services. Overall, the current state of decentralisation in the rural water sector in Solomon Islands was rated as "very weak" (mean 1.6 across 38 rated indicators), with five "very weak" elements and one "weak" element (policy, legal and regulatory frameworks).

The **policy, legal and regulatory landscape** governing WASH in rural Solomon Islands is inherently complex. While national policies, such as the RWASH *Strategic Plan*, outline comprehensive targets and strategies, their practical implementation remains inconsistent. Some misalignments between national and provincial levels (e.g., financial calendar) further complicates efforts to achieve long-term goals. Provincial governments often lack the financial and human resources to translate strategic plans into actionable outcomes. Although mechanisms for the legal recognition of community-based management entities are in place, their implementation remains inconsistent (e.g., water committee by-laws not enforced by the state when requested). Stronger enforcement and broader social awareness of provincial ordinances and community bylaws are needed.

Budgeting, finance and (material) resources are a critical area of concern. Development partner funding constitutes the bulk of WASH expenditure in Solomon Islands. Inefficient financial disbursement processes, coupled with deficient budget allocations for both hardware and software components of service delivery, impede rural water service delivery progress. The absence of lifecycle costing and low levels of community-level cost-recovery mechanisms for water system maintenance (e.g., water fees, regular fundraising) exacerbates system failures. Resource constraints hinder community training and post-construction support, which is under resourced and not receiving the attention required for sustaining rural water service delivery, e.g., according to the RWASH Information System, 79 of 135 completed projects (59%) had not received community engagement training.

Information and knowledge sharing is essential to advancing decentralisation and improving rural water service delivery outcomes. Effective data management—from collection through to dissemination—is necessary for informed decision-making and adaptive management. However, the fragmented and inconsistent sharing of information among stakeholders remains a significant barrier. The RIS provides a platform for data storage but suffers from gaps and limited utilisation at provincial levels. Coordination among government agencies, non-government organisations (NGOs), and community actors is weak, with no unified process for reporting or accessing the RIS. It was suggested by some respondents that these challenges are compounded by socio-cultural attitudes towards data collection and information sharing. Limited digital infrastructure in rural areas, and limited government allowances for purchasing mobile data credit, hinders information collection, storage and access. Addressing these issues requires financial investment and the establishment of streamlined mechanisms for data integration and sharing and fostering a culture of transparency and collaboration across the sector.

Research findings underscore the importance of **monitoring, evaluation and learning** (MEL) systems for tracking progress and informing adaptive management. Currently, monitoring efforts are predominantly compliance-focused, lacking the depth needed for evaluating long-term service sustainability (especially "software"). Implementing MEL is substantively hampered by resource and capacity constraints at the Rural Water and Sanitation and Hygiene Unit (RWASH). Strengthening MEL frameworks and integrating them with information-sharing platforms is required to enhance accountability and promote evidence-based decision-making. The use of information and communication technology (such as mobile phones or tablets) for data collection and monitoring progress towards WASH targets – which has been discussed and partially attempted – could be productive but not without substantial systems strengthening first.

Harmonisation and coordination among stakeholders remain a significant challenge. The fragmented nature of data collection and dissemination limits the effectiveness of WASH initiatives. Key sector bodies such as the Rural WASH Oversight Committee (RWOC) and WASH Stakeholder Group (WSG) are largely inactive and not fit-for-purpose, leaving the sector

struggling to achieve effective multi-actor and multi-level coordination. Strengthening sector cooperation through re-invigorating the RWOC and WSG – and/or establishing new oversight mechanisms – is critical. Coordination between national and provincial levels is hampered by poor communication, reporting gaps, resource constraints and over-stretched Provincial Environmental Health Division (PEHD) staff. The establishment of WDCs enhances subnational coordination, but it is too early to assess their impact.

Human resources and capacity development are central to successful decentralisation. At both provincial and community levels, there is a marked shortage of skilled personnel and essential resources. The recent appointment of Ward Development Committee Support Officers (WDCSO) is designed to enhance the performance and accountability of WDCs by supporting community profiling, infrastructure planning and implementation, and monitoring and reporting. Water committees (WCs) often lack training, with RWASH's ability to conduct training limited by resource and capacity constraints, as well as logistical challenges. Building the capacity of communities and WCs and better integrating them into formal governance structures is crucial for ensuring the sustainability of rural water systems. The establishment of a WASH focal point at the ward level, and/or the training of WDCSOs in water management "backstopping", has been recommended as a possible way forward.

Despite the myriad challenges faced by Solomon Islands, developments such as the Provincial Capacity Development Fund and the recent introduction of WDCs signal positive steps that should advance decentralisation. These initiatives aim to bridge the gap between national and local governance, fostering community involvement and accountability. The success of such efforts will depend on the continued commitment to building and supporting the enabling environment, addressing financial and capacity constraints, and enhancing policy coherence. WASH should be included in these reforms; WDCs and WDCSOs should not focus on "projects" alone but rather the wellbeing and development of communities. Thus far, WASH has not been part of these conversations. This is a missed opportunity. Additionally, substantial and more strategic resource allocation (human and financial) is required for improved rural water services – without it, rural WASH service levels will continue to go backwards. It cannot be overemphasised that greater and more strategic resource allocation (human and financial) is required to improve both decentralisation and rural WASH outcomes.

This report aims to assist development partners, stakeholders, and Solomon Islands Government (SIG) in prioritising resources and actions to enhance rural water service delivery and decentralisation efforts, ultimately improving WASH outcomes and strengthening the resilience and well-being of rural communities.

Introduction

Pacific Island countries (PICs) face significant challenges in providing access to improved drinking water and sanitation services. Only half of the population uses basic drinking water sources, and just one-third have basic sanitation, placing these nations among the lowest globally in terms of access (United Nations, 2021). With limited government and private sector water services in rural areas, community-based water management (CWM) has become the dominant model for rural water service delivery, as reflected in numerous government policies.

The CWM model is entirely dependent on **water committees** (WCs) – a group of 'volunteers' who are tasked with managing and operating a water system (ideally) after some training. However, evidence from PICs and elsewhere demonstrates that **most WCs are struggling to function sustainably and effectively** (e.g., Bond et al., 2015; Clark et al., 2014; Hutchings et al., 2015; Love et al., 2020, 2021; Whittington et al., 2009; World Bank, 2017).

Poor CWM leads to poor water supply, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) outcomes, such as inadequate accessibility, quality, and reliability of water and compromised hygiene practices. In Solomon Islands …

> **Access to basic drinking water has gone backwards in Solomon Islands over the last 20 years – 76.47% in 2000 to 59.41% in 2022 (WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2022)**

Since the beginning of the 2000s, there has been a growing emphasis on the need for post-construction support and the rise of what has been called "community water management plus" (CWM+) approaches (e.g., Baumann, 2006; Hutchings et al., 2015, 2017). This has resulted in the emergence of alternative models marked by increasing **decentralisation,** professionalisation, and a diversification in service delivery models, including various forms of private sector involvement. There is a global shift towards a **service delivery approach** (SDA) to rural water supply, which means considering the entire life-cycle cost of water service delivery, incorporating both the hardware (engineering or construction elements) and software (management) components necessary for sustainable water services (Lockwood and Smits, 2011: 19-20, *et passim*; Moriarty et al., 2013; World Bank, 2017).

This shift in tackling rural water services also entails a greater appreciation for the enabling environment and its political economy, at all levels (international, national and subnational), and a nuanced appreciation for the role of local (non-state) institutions (Whaley and Cleaver 2017).

Decentralisation

Decentralisation can be defined as "the transfer of authority to plan, make decisions or manage public functions from the national level to any organisation or agency at the sub-national level" (Mills et al., 1990: 89). In international development, decentralisation harks back to the post - World War II reconstruction-era, where empowering local governments was a means to rebuild war-torn nations. It was refigured in the 1980s under the International Monetary Fund and World Bank as part of structural adjustment policies aimed to reduce central government expenditure and improve public sector efficiency and, since the 1990s, has been seen as a means to enhance local governance and service delivery (Awortwi, 2011; Bergh, 2004; Conyers, 2007; World Bank, 1999; Smoke 2003). Decentralisation is also an unmistakable feature of the water sector worldwide – considered a "critical building block" and a precursor to, or component of, the professionalisation of rural water service delivery (Lockwood and Smits, 2011; World Bank, 2017).

There remains debate amongst scholars and policy makers about the net development benefits that have derived from decentralisation in low- and middle-income countries (see esp. Faguet and Pöschl, 2015). Many **development partners** working in the Pacific, including the Australian government, have not paid adequate attention to decentralisation. A 2014 evaluation of Australian aid found that it had only "variable success" in sustaining service delivery outcomes in decentralised contexts, and that subnational capacities and context were not appropriately taken into consideration in development policy, strategy, sectoral design and evaluation (ODE, 2014). A key recommendation was:

> **Aid is more likely to achieve sustainable improvements in services delivery if it works to improve *service delivery systems* rather than directly support the delivery of health, education, infrastructure or other services (ODE, 2015: 4)**

Decentralisation and service delivery

Service delivery refers to the mechanisms, processes, and activities involved in providing services (such as healthcare, education, water and sanitation etc.) to individuals, communities, or businesses. Key questions for service delivery include: What authority is held at the subnational level to make decisions about service delivery? Where does responsibility for planning, providing, and delivering services and monitoring lie? (ODE, 2014: 92).

There are both **supply** and **demand** aspects of service delivery (Figure 1).

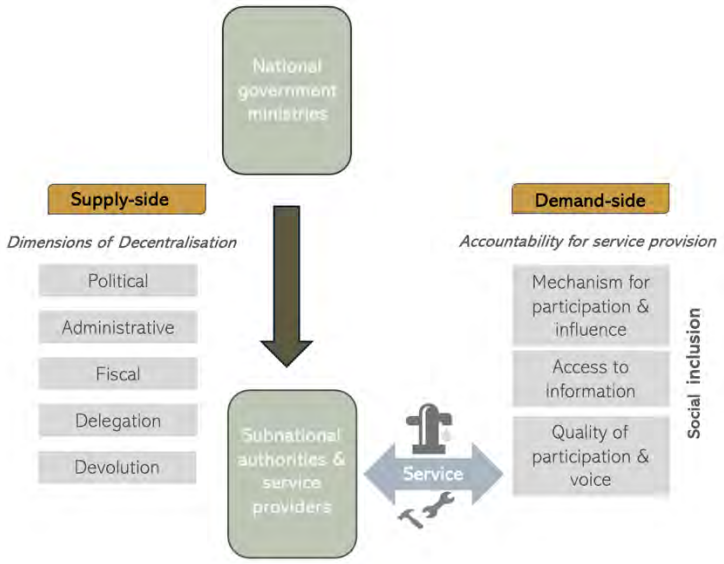


Figure 1: Service delivery and decentralisation[1]

The **supply side** focuses on the entities responsible for delivering the services and their capacity to provide quality services. It includes regulation and policies, resources, providers, and distribution and accessibility.

There are four main **dimensions** or types of decentralisation.

> Dimensions of Decentralisation
>
> **Political**: The voice of citizens is integrated into policy decisions at a subnational level and civil society can hold the associated authorities and officials accountable
>
> **Administrative**: Redistributing authority and responsibility for providing public services from the central or national level of government to a subnational and/or local level
>
> **Fiscal**: The decentralisation of government expenditure and revenue-raising authority to subnational government structures in line with their allocated functional responsibilities
>
> **Market or divestment**: The transfer of functions to the private sector or NGOs.

Analysts often speak of three **modes** of decentralisation – deconcentration, delegation and devolution. In practice these modes co-exist, with political drivers and logistical realities rendering these categories less clear. This is especially evident in countries with low resources and capacity (ODE, 2014: 91-2) such as Solomon Islands.

Modes of Decentralisation

Deconcentration: The weakest form of decentralisation, transferring administrative responsibilities to lower levels of central government (generally the first step in decentralisation)

Deconcentration entails the mere relocation of execution to the local level with decision-making power remaining at the centre

Delegation: Transfers managerial responsibility to semi-autonomous organisations, not wholly controlled by the central government but accountable to it

A more extensive form of decentralisation

Devolution: Transfers governance powers and responsibilities to subnational levels outside direct central government control, typically involving elected local governments

Devolution is the most far-reaching form of decentralisation and involves the transfer of governance powers and responsibilities to subnational levels that are largely outside the direct control of the central government, often through some electoral process which makes local governments directly accountable to local people.

The **demand side** of service delivery refers to the role and influence of users, customers, or beneficiaries in shaping the delivery of services. It emphasises the perspectives, preferences, and needs of individuals and communities who consume public or private services (such as healthcare, education, water etc.). Social inclusion is vital here - ensuring that all groups (women, men, children, and people with disabilities) can participate in decision making, hold providers accountable, and access services equitably.

Citizen demands for effective governance represent an important facet to effective service delivery in decentralised contexts. Their role is critical to support accountability for the quantity and quality of services and who gains access to those services (ODE, 2014). Three areas are of critical importance:

Accountability for service provision

Mechanisms for participation and influence: The structures and processes that ensure active participation of citizens in influencing the operations of government (elections and other means to participate in policy, planning, budgeting, and social auditing)

Access to information: Degree to which governments, especially at the subnational level, ensure accountability and transparency and the availability of information to citizens (e.g., public access to budgets and acquittals, user-friendly access to policy and processes, commitments and standards of service delivery)

Quality of participation and voice: Citizens' ability to engage in participation mechanisms, use information, and voice their opinions to influence government and services (ODE, 2014: 93).

Rural water service delivery and decentralisation

The transfer of authority from central to local governments has significant implications for how water services are delivered in rural contexts. There are a range of decentralisation scenarios evidenced around the world. Decentralisation unfolds over an extended period, requiring many years, even decades. Evidence demonstrates that effective decentralisation requires meaningfully empowering lower levels of government, endowing them with not only service mandates but the resources, capacities, and decision-making autonomy required to meet those mandates. Without adequate resourcing and long-term commitment, service delivery falters and WASH situations can deteriorate.[2]

In their study of rural water service delivery in 13 countries, Lockwood and Smits (2011) identify four main decentralisation experiences associated with rural water service delivery:

Rural Water Service Delivery and Decentralisation

Phased Decentralisation: Initial deconcentration to the provincial level, followed by further decentralisation (e.g., Benin, Mozambique)

Partial Decentralisation: Varying degrees and dimensions of decentralisation applied in parallel (e.g., Ghana, India, USA, Ethiopia)

Inadequately Resourced Decentralisation: Implemented rapidly, often only on paper, without sufficient support or decentralisation of key capacities to local authorities (e.g., Burkina Faso)

Wholesale Planned Decentralisation: Well-planned and fully implemented (e.g., Colombia, South Africa, Uganda) (Lockwood & Smits, 2011: 65-8).

The low population densities, geographical dispersal and isolation of many rural communities in PICs – among other factors unique to small island developing states – complicates the neat transferability of lessons learned from elsewhere to the PIC context.[3] This is perhaps most evident in regard to the professionalisation of rural water service delivery through market divestment or other means: **most PICs remain reliant on the community-based water management model** and a full SDA to rural water supply is yet to be fully embraced (due to resource constraints and other factors).

Nevertheless, decentralisation trends have been intensifying in Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji, with each country enacting policy changes over the last decade or so that transfer greater responsibility to subnational actors to support (in varying ways and levels) rural water service delivery.

Context

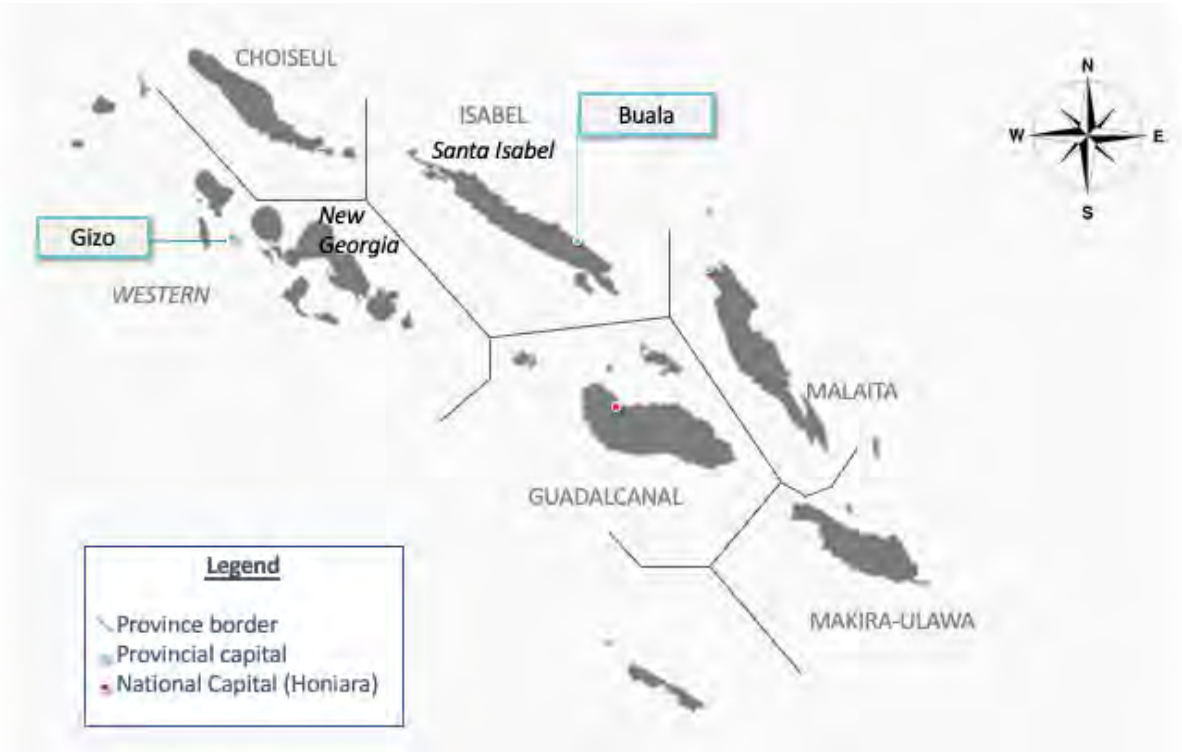


Figure 2: Map of Solomon Islands (source: Google maps and authors)

Solomon Islands

Solomon Islands is an archipelago in the southwest Pacific comprising six major islands and over 900 smaller islands, spread across 1.34 million km² of ocean—46 times the country's land area of 29,900 km². The estimated population is around 734,887 (SINSO, n.d.).

Like its near neighbours' Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, Solomon Islands is marked by significant socio-cultural diversity, with over 80 languages and dialects and varying community governance structures influenced by a mix of quasi-traditional authority and church influence (Allen et al., 2013). The economy relies heavily on logging, with extraction rates exceeding sustainable yield (Global Witness, 2018). Resource rents have amplified disputes over land/sea tenure and chiefly title, destabilising local-level cooperation and governance systems (Hviding 2015; World Bank, 2017).

In most rural areas of Solomon Islands, the state's presence is minimal, reflected in the poor status of basic infrastructure such as schools, hospitals/health clinics, roads, and wharves. Water systems have high failure rates and short lifespans, with Solomon Islands having one of the lowest levels of access to clean drinking water in the world (Anthonj et al., 2020).

Due to the geographical isolation of many villages and the government's limited resources, a fee-for-service or centralised maintenance model is impractical. This has resulted in a focus on one-off infrastructure projects with little regard for ongoing service needs.

Over 50% of water supply infrastructure projects last less than half their 20-year design lifespan, with the percentage of functioning water supply systems in 2014 standing at 35-40% (MHMS, 2014: 4, 13; MHMS, 2013: 7)

This high failure rate has been attributed to:

- Government and other implementing agencies lacking the resources to maintain systems
- Communities lacking the awareness that they are responsible for minor maintenance
- Adequate and appropriate training is not provided to communities (MHMS, 2014: 4).

Decentralisation in Solomon Islands

Political and Administrative Decentralisation

Decentralisation has long been a feature of Solomon Islands discourse and politics, even before Independence in 1978. In 1962, a Legislative Council was appointed, followed by a White Paper titled "The Respective Functions of Local Councils and Central Government" (B.S.I.P., 1962). This led to the 1963 Local Government Act, which established councils through elections. Below these councils were "area committees," formed on a village or ethnic basis, composed of local leaders and chiefs who followed customary decision-making processes. These area committees were intended to link local council activities with grassroots opinion. Over the next decade (1963-73), the councils achieved some success, including the construction of 75 clinics and 34 schools (Premdas, 1982:243). However, despite legislative changes and further decentralisation efforts in the 1970s, the area committees ultimately failed to maintain effective connections between local councils and villages (Premdas, 1982:245-7).

In the early 1980s the national government established "area councils" under the Provincial Government Act 1981. Area councils could pass local bylaws and employed village health workers and area constables who lived in local communities. For a range of reasons – including financial constraints, inefficiencies, weak capacity, accountability issues and centralisation trends – Area councils were suspended in 1996/7 with the passing of the *Provincial Government Act 1997*, which remains the key legislation governing the nine provincial governments to this day. Numerous analysts have argued that there has been a governance and service delivery vacuum ever since the abolishment of the Area Councils (e.g., Allen et al., 2013; 47, 72; Cox and Morrison, 2004: 8; Phillips, 2017; Suluia, 2012).

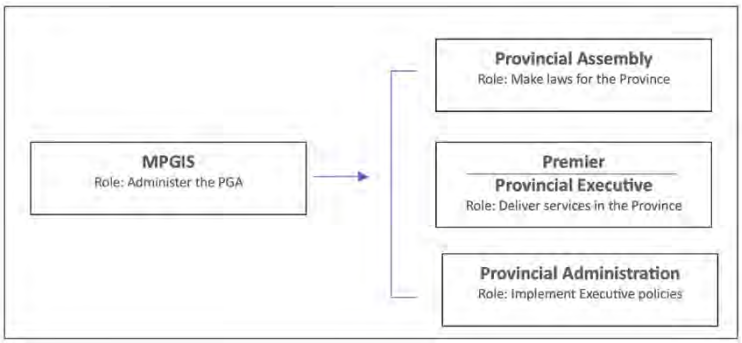
An ex-Area Council administration officer noted:

> *When the councils were phased out, we really saw a gap […] government assets were neglected […] water systems broke down, no one seemed to care. Today, people do not have a sense of ownership of public assets. However, when area councils existed, the community had a sense of ownership (WP-WPG-M)*

The situation worsened in the 2000s when provincial sub-stations closed due to financial cuts and the effects of the Tension (1998-2003). The Regional Assistance Mission to Solomon Islands (RAMSI) intervention brought stability, reinforcing centralisation, particularly in fiscal matters, (Phillips, 2017:35).

Provincial governments (PGs) are, in law, made up of two and, in practice, three, parts. The legal parts are the Provincial Assembly and Provincial Executive, led by the Premier. The third part – although not specifically referenced in the PGA – is the Provincial Administration (Figure 2).

Figure 3: Provincial government structure (Phillips, 2017: 23)



The provincial administration has been described as a "fractured mix" of direct employees and seconded officers from line ministries, resulting in silos, ineffective management delegation from central ministries to the provinces, and fragmented administrative operations (Phillips, 2017:28). The resultant patchwork of responsibilities and resource allocations makes accountability for service delivery difficult to achieve.

The Ministry of Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening plays an important role in subnational affairs, holding the provincial system together through its administration of the *Provincial Government Act 1997*.

In 2008, the **Provincial Government Strengthening Program** (PGSP) was launched as an ambitious effort to improve provincial governance and rural service delivery. The program aimed to enhance provincial public expenditure, financial management, budgeting, leadership training, and deliver small infrastructure and technical assistance to provinces. It also focused on strengthening central ministries, particularly Provincial Government and Institutional Strengthening, and Finance and Treasury, to better support and supervise provincial governments (SIG, 2008; World Bank, 2022:13).

Planned as a 15-year initiative, the PGSP was divided into three five-year phases. By the end of the third phase (2019-2024), provinces were expected to be fully exercising their legislative powers, providing basic services, managing their natural resources, and promoting local economic development through multi-level governance (SIG, 2008:9).

Things have not progressed as far as hoped, but there has been some improvement, especially in terms of Provincial

Governments public financial management capacity (World Bank, 2022:15-16). Hence, in 2022, the World Bank approved USD$24 million over 5-years to the Provincial Capacity Development Fund (PCDF) as part of its Integrated Economic Development and Community Resilience Project (IEDCRP).

A core aim of the IEDCRP was to support the establishment of 173 **Ward Development Committees** (WDCs) across all nine provinces to "ensure that the Planning Processes, Social Accountability and Climate Change Adaptation and Risk Resilience and Disaster Management are institutionalized and mainstreamed" (SIG, 2023a). More recently, Ward Development Committee Support Officers (WDCSOs) have been employed (SIG, 2024).

Ward Development Committees

WDCs mark the most substantive change in governance in Solomon Islands in close to three decades, signalling a substantive shift towards greater decentralisation and holding the promise of correcting the socio-political and developmental vacuum that has existed at the rural level since the abolition of Area Councils.

WDCs are designed to facilitate participatory planning that supports equitable community development and play a key role in supporting the provision of basic infrastructure and services to communities (MPGIS, 2020:17-18). There is further donor momentum in this space, with the European External Action Service funding an aligned project – the Solomon Islands Provincial Governance and Service Delivery Project – which is also designed to strengthen provincial governance and local service delivery (EEAS, 2022).[4]

Water service access, delivery, and enabling environment

Water access situation

According to the World Health Organisation (WHO)/United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (2021) Joint Monitoring Programme report, the Pacific region faces significant challenges in achieving Sustainable Development Goal 6 for access to clean drinking water and safe sanitation, making it one of the furthest behind globally. Solomon Islands sits within the lowest 20 countries globally for rural access to basic drinking water (59.41%) (WHO/UNICEF JMP, 2022).

WASH coverage varies considerably across the country, with some provinces enjoying better access to basic water services than others. Our key case-studies for decentralisation focused on two provinces - Western and Isabel. According to Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (Unit) (RWASH) data, Isabel has better coverage than Western, with 76% of households in Isabel accessing basic water services compared to 50% in Western. The large size of the Western Province (7,509 km^2) combined with the many islands relative to Isabel (4,136 km^2, one major and just a few smaller islands), makes implementation especially challenging (Figure 4).

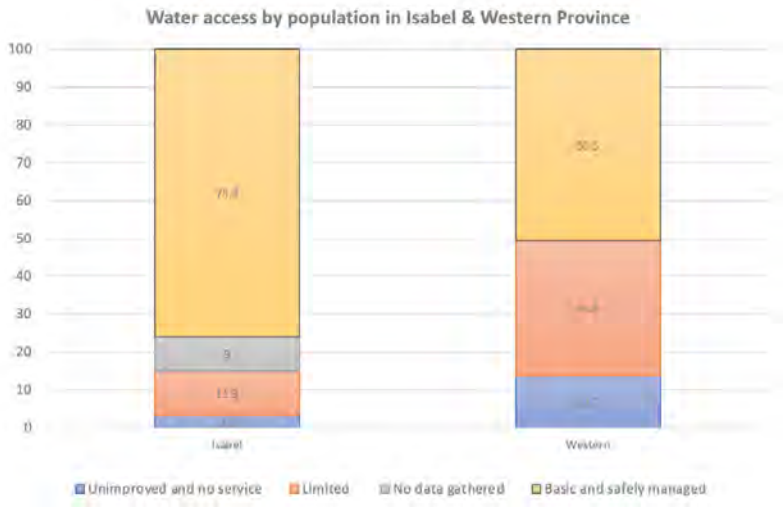


Figure 4: Solomon Islands-service level – Western & Isabel (RWASH, 2021a)

Rural water service delivery

Water system implementation in Solomon Islands is undertaken by a range of actors:

RWASH/Environmental Health Division (EHD): Construction of water systems and pre- and post-training – funded from 2014-2020 primarily by European Union Development Funds. Some funding has also come to RWASH from the Provincial Government Strengthening Program/Provincial Capacity Development Fund (PGSP/PCDF).

Rural Development Programme (RDP): Led by the Solomon Islands Government (SIG) with support from the World Bank, European Union (EU), the International Fund for Agriculture Development, and the Australian Government [operated from 2007 – 2020].[5]

Non-Government Organisations (NGOs): Numerous NGOs undertake water supply projects (e.g. World Vision, Plan International, Save the Children).

Members of Parliament: Members of Parliament, through the **SIG's Rural Constituency Development Fund (RCDF)** system support some infrastructure implementation (e.g. rainwater harvesting systems).

Private Sector Contractors: There are some private sector actors involved in implementation (e.g., Rukamauri Plumbing Ltd). Logging companies sometimes rehabilitate water systems and/or assist other implementors.

Community-based Organisations: There are Community-based Organisations that have built their own water systems.

Other: Some churches have undertaken water infrastructure implementation. The United Nations intergovernmental body the International Organisation for Migration have recently undertaken water system implementation in Isabel Province.

According to the **2021 RWASH Information System (RIS**), between 2015-2020 the Rural Development Programme funded a total of 187 projects: 156 community water systems, 11 schools, and 20 health care facilities. EHD/RWASH implemented 107 projects: 88 community, 15 school and 4 health care facilities. The PGSP/PCDF supported 59 projects: 17 community, 26 schools and 16 health care facilities (RIS, 2021).

The Western Provincial Environmental Health Division (PEHD/RWASH) database records a total of 127 completed water supply system installations over a fourteen-year period (Figure 5).

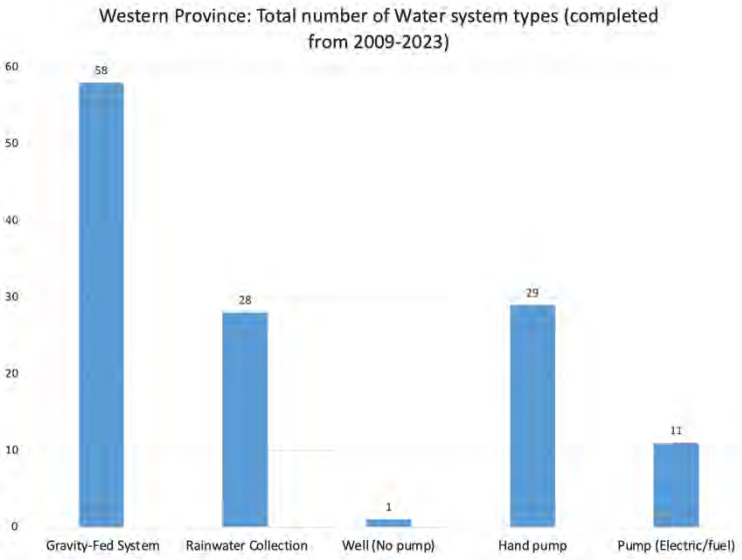


Figure 5: Western Province - total # of WS implemented (completed) (source: PEHD Western, 2023)

Enabling Environment

The **enabling environment** can be defined as the set of interrelated sector functions that impact the capacity of governments and public and private partners to engage in WASH service delivery functions (e.g., UNICEF, 2016: 3). In terms of formal governance, the rural WASH sector is the responsibility of the **Rural WASH Program**, situated within the **EHD**, which sits at the national level of the **Ministry of Health and Medical Services (MHMS).** Its primary task is to protect and promote a healthy environment to sustain "resilient and healthy communities".

The division is structured into four units: **Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene** (RWASH), Food Safety Unit, Health Quarantine Unit, and the Environmental Health and Occupational Health Management Unit. EHD plays a cross-cutting role in achieving other health outcomes and objectives as stipulated in the *National Health Strategic Plan*.

The **Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification** is responsible for the overall management and regulation of **water resources**, while the MHMS, through the **EHD**, RWASH unit and Rural WASH Program, are responsible for the provision of **safe water supply** and monitoring sanitation conditions for the rural population. **RWASH** coordinates the sector and regulates infrastructure, technical design, construction standards, and community development training.

At the **provincial level**, the EHD and RWASH structure is the same across all provinces except in the Western province (due to demographic and other factors).

Following the replacement of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RWSS) with RWASH in 2014, the ***RWASH Strategic Plan*** (2015-20) and ***National Rural WASH Policy*** were launched. Supported by multi-year funding security, the Plan and Policy were ambitious. A key aim was to **devolve greater responsibility for health programming, including EHD/RWASH, to the provincial level** and RWASH was to **steadily move away from implementation towards a regulatory and monitoring** role as more "service delivery partners" – private sector and non-government organisations (NGOs) – took over implementation (MHMS, 2015, 2017).

The recent socio-political maelstrom surrounding the delays and inactivity associated with the major donor-funded establishment of the Kongulai Water Treatment Plant – intended to provide 15 million litres of safe drinking water to Honiara – provides insights into the challenging **political economy of development** extant in Solomon Islands (see Piringi et al., 2024).

Where is RWASH currently at?

RWASH is currently struggling. The recent cessation of EU funding, combined with the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing challenges with payments and human resource gaps (e.g., vacant positions) has led to departmental under-performance and over-stretched staff at both national and subnational levels.

Since 2020, RWASH has worked on only 39 projects. In 2024, RWASH constructed no water systems (workshop, Dec. 24). According to a senior RWASH manager this lack of progress is "appalling":

> *You don't do 39 projects for 3 years; it cannot be real. Something is wrong somewhere … (HN-RWASH-M1).*

Several respondents highlighted that, in their view, what was needed was a restructure of EHD/RWASH that would establish RWASH as a division of its own, so it has greater autonomy, agency and financial control.

Decentralisation remains an ongoing key objective for RWASH, with the latest (draft) *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2021-25) – currently under review – recommending more concretely actioning and resourcing the decentralisation strategy outlined in the first *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2015-20) (MHMS, 2015) and *National Rural WASH Policy* (MHMS, 2014), which promoted the steady devolution of planning and management of RWASH to the provinces and "service delivery partners" (MHMS, 2021).

However, as stated by numerous respondents and evidenced by this research …

When it comes to decentralisation and rural water service delivery in Solomon Islands rhetoric has not been matched by deeds and plans have not materialised into practice

What comes next for RWASH remains an open question. Development partner support is desperately required. However, Official Development Assistance for WASH globally is at its lowest level since the Sustainable Development Goals began – since 2018, global Official Development Assistance to water supply and sanitation has declined by 28% and, if trends continue, could be over US$2 billion per year lower in real terms in 2023 than at its 2018 peak (Oza and Goff, 2023).

Nevertheless, the wider rural development sector is receiving some valuable support. The IEDCRP provides for the appointment of Provincial Program Coordinators, a National Engineer, WDCSOs, goods and technical assistance (e.g., drafting and design technicians) and incremental operating costs to support the coordination, planning and implementation of investments in infrastructure and improved participatory planning (SIG, 2023b:10-11).

To what degree this might support improved water service delivery is impossible to know at this juncture, but it reflects findings **that improving service delivery systems – rather than supporting service delivery alone – is essential.**

Combined with the PCDF funding and associated accountability measures, these initiatives are strengthening the **supply side of service delivery**, providing greater parity between supply and demand. However, as identified in this research, much more needs to be done to create greater demand for improved water (and sanitation) and ultimately improve rural WASH outcomes for Solomon Islanders.

Research Design & Methodology

This report summarises the results of formative research conducted in Solomon Islands across 2023 and early 2024.

Data was collected across three levels – village, provincial and national:

I. **Village**
   - WC members (WC chairman and members)
   - Community leaders/members
   - Ward Development Committee members

II. **Provincial**
   - Environmental Health Division/RWASH officers
   - Provincial Government representatives

III. **National**
   - MHMS/RWASH/EHD
   - MPGIS

Data collection

Data collection involved a desktop review, key informant interviews, and two workshops. A desktop review commenced in January 2023 with interview data collected at the subnational level (Western and Isabel provinces) in June and July 2023. National-level interviews were conducted in January 2024, following analysis of the subnational level data and the first workshop – a **Pacific Knowledge and Learning Exchange** (PKLE) held in Suva, Fiji, November 2023, attended by academics and water sector professionals from Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji (see Appendix -Table 4).

Additional grey literature was sourced during field visits and through subsequent correspondence.

A **stakeholder validation workshop** – kindly supported by UNICEF – was conducted in early December 2024. This provided an opportunity to gather further data, validate findings, fill gaps, and elicit some recommendations.

Ethics approval was granted by Griffith University (GU Ref No: 2023/161) and the Solomon Islands Health Research and Ethics Review Board, MHMS, on 31 May 2023 (HRE013/23). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants before interviews commenced.

A total of 17 interviews were undertaken with 15 individuals: Western Province (9 interviews with 7 individuals, two of whom were interviewed twice), Isabel Province (n=5) and national level, Honiara (n=3) (see Annex 1-3 for respondent details). Interviews were conducted in Solomon Islands Pidgin, recorded (with consent), transcribed and translated into English. Interview data was coded using NVivo® (see Jackson and Bazeley, 2019; Saldaña 2013). Two cycles of coding were applied: i) a broad-brush coding based on emergent themes and (some) predetermined descriptive codes; and ii) a further round of coding following the PKLE workshop.

Through free listing and then recourse to the broad "building blocks" categories and definitions, participants at the PKLE workshop identified what they considered to be the key **elements of effective decentralisation** for rural water service delivery. This became the framework for our analysis of decentralisation in Solomon Islands, Fiji and Vanuatu.

Framework: Elements of effective decentralisation for rural water service delivery

An effective enabling environment is critical to furthering rural water service delivery and enhancing WASH outcomes. There are a growing number of guidance documents on what the required "building blocks" of an effective WASH sector are. These include UNICEF's (2016) *Strengthening the Enabling Environment for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene* (which builds on the five Sanitation and Water for All sector strengthening building blocks), and the IRC International Water and Sanitation Centre's *Understanding the WASH system and its building blocks* (Huston and Moriarty, 2018). In specific rural water service delivery terms, Lockwood and Smits (2011) *Supporting Rural Water Supply: Moving Towards a Service Delivery Approach* (based on the results of the Sustainable Services at Scale (Triple-S) research program) and the World Bank's (2017) *Sustainability Assessment of Rural Water Service Delivery Models,* also identify "building blocks" deemed essential to improving rural water service delivery.

Combined with the participatory data analyses and verification processes undertaken during the Pacific Knowledge and Learning Exchange event, we co-identified six key "elements" or "building blocks" deemed critical to progressing decentralisation in the rural water sector in the PICs context:

- Policies, legal and regulatory frameworks
- Budgeting, finance, and (material) resources
- Information and knowledge sharing
- Monitoring, evaluation, and learning
- Harmonisation and coordination
- Human resources and capacity development.

Framework Indicators

Numerous indicators are applied to each of the six key elements. These were developed through reference to the afore mentioned "building blocks" literature and the first cycle coding of primary qualitative data. A total of 40 indicators were ultimately identified, with each element containing 5 - 9 indicators. More indicators could, and ideally should, be added to this list that reflect the unique and complex character of delivering rural water services in the Pacific Islands context.

Following analyses of the data, and validated at the stakeholder workshop, each indicator was assigned a rating using a Likert five-point scale, with 1 equating to "very weak" and 5 "strong".

- Very weak
- Weak
- Moderate
- Moderately Strong
- Strong

Whilst ultimately a subjective approach, the ratings are based on a detailed analysis of the data (qualitative and desktop). Applying a quantitative rating can be productive for numerous reasons, from easily identifying strengths and weaknesses, providing a means for comparative (cross-country) analysis to identify regional challenges and strengths, and as a benchmark for longitudinal purposes and tracking change over time.

We considered applying the traffic light scoring system – green, amber, red – used, for example, by World Bank (2017), but ultimately choose to use a Likert five-point scale as it provided a more **granular assessment**.

The numerical value given the ratings were aggregated for each element, then divided by the number of indicators, resulting in an overall score for each element. Thirty-eight of the 40 indicators were rated; two (sound legal and institutional frameworks for financial transactions; service delivery partners adequately trained) were not assessed and are excluded from the means. In 2026 the ratings were harmonised across the three country studies, and this edition reports the harmonised values (see the Version note before the References).

The elements are high-level and neither exhaustive nor exclusive; rather, they are inter-related and overlap (to varying degrees), e.g., "information and knowledge sharing" is critical to "harmonisation and coordination" and "monitoring and evaluation"; "human resources and capacity development" and "budget, finance and (material) resources" are critical to everything. This reflects the complex, cross-sectoral character of WASH.

Elements and indicators of effective decentralisation for rural water service delivery

Policies, legal & regulatory framework

- Single, overarching national plan and subnational plans (overarching and sectorial) that support WASH and decentralisation.
- WASH policy plans and targets- *Put into practice.*
- Role definitions for all involved national ministries & departments support decentralisation goals.
- Mechanisms for consumer feedback and complaints.
- Traditional and community leaders represented and engaged in the planning process.
- Local and intermediate institutional levels (sub-national, e.g., provincial and community levels) can and do adapt and apply local bylaws or ordinances.
- *WCs and their bylaws are legally recognised and supported by the State.*
- Internal control mechanisms (e.g., policy reviews and audits).
- Design standards and types are appropriate, effective, adequately resourced and implemented.
- Staff are aware of policies, plans regulations etc.,

Budgeting, finance & resources

- Budget & funding for rural water service delivery is adequate and disaggregated between hardware and software.
- Funding is dispersed effectively and devolved to Provincial levels. (*Effective national - Provincial financial disbursement and payment processes; Provincial - community financial support systems; Review/audit process).*
- Adequate financial information. *Budget and expenditure are publicly available. Financial flows are known and predictable. Financial needs for sector operations are known; Amount of funding available is known.)*
- Sound legal and institutional frameworks in place for financial transactions. (e.g., acquittal procedures).
- Financing institutions in place support decentralisation.
- Staff have access to necessary equipment and resources to undertake their duties. (*e.g., computers, vehicles, fuel. Access to materials/parts.)*
- Community contributions (in-kind and/or monetary) are clear, understood and systematically applied.

Human resources & Capacity development

- Adequate staff to meet policy & planning objectives (and all positions filled).
- Government-led sector capacity development.(*capacity needs assessment).*
- Staff have access to professional development training opportunities.
- Service delivery partners are adequately trained (in line with national policy and strategies).
- Structured follow-up (or backstopping) to support community water-mangers following handover.
- Non-government implementation partners provide or fund community training (in line with government standards).
- Community capacity development. (*iterative, scaffolded learning (e.g., backstopping).*
- Contextually appropriate & effective training manuals & pedagogy.*e.g., vernacular language, visual aids (slides/flipcharts, videos)* .

Information & knowledge sharing

- Clear national coordination process/mechanism for information sharing.
- National WASH database exists, is accessible, up-to-date, and utilised by multiple actors across the sector.
- Information reporting process/mechanisms exist that are clear, practical, and utilised.
- Asset management procedures are undertaken.
- Data transparency and public access to information.

Harmonisation & coordination

- Evidence of all sectors contributing to a single national plan.
- Policy and strategy alignment and harmonisation to support decentralisation goals.
- Harmonisation and coordination strategies and policy are practiced by all actors working in the sector (e.g. SDPs).
- Financial alignment and harmonisation (to support decentralisation goals).
- WASH information is collected and stored in a central depository that is accessible and used by WASH sector actors.
- Regular stakeholder meetings, operational taskforce/working group, sector specific MOUs.

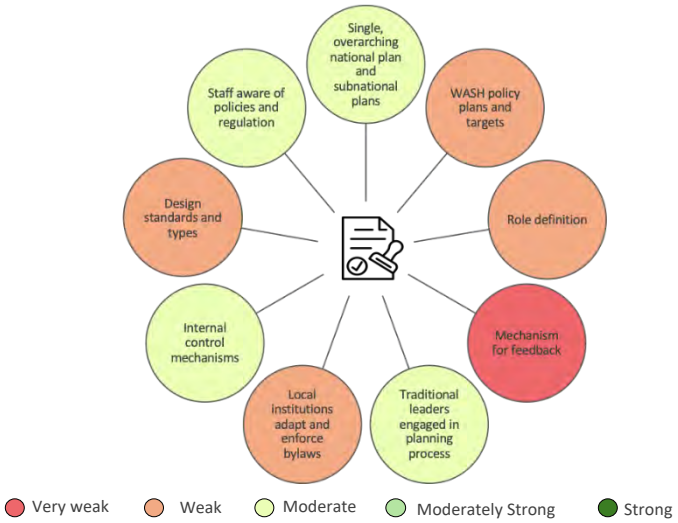
Monitoring, evaluation & learning

- Monitoring & evaluation of water service delivery and management is undertaken.
- WASH reports and sector reviews (*National & sub-national).*
- Appropriate indicators exist to monitor and report on service delivery sustainability and effectiveness.(*Software and hardware).*
- Monitoring at the community level *(Software and hardware).*
- Follow-up support and monitoring (post construction).

Figure 6 : Elements of effective decentralisation for rural water service delivery

Policies, Legal and Regulatory Frameworks

A critical element for effective WASH decentralisation is ensuring that the appropriate policy, legal, and regulatory architecture is in place; without a 'proper' suite of national and subnational (provincial and community level) policies and plans, decentralisation falters and stalls.



Overarching national plan and subnational planning supports rural WASH and decentralisation

There is a single, overarching national plan and subnational plans, **with mixed degrees of support for advancing WASH and decentralisation.**

The *National Development Strategy* (2016-2035) (NDS) sets Medium Term Strategies that guide policies and priorities, which are translated into actionable programmes through 5-year *Medium Term Development Plans* and 4-year *Medium Term Budget Frameworks*.[6] Water and sanitation services come under NDS target objective 2 (alleviating poverty) and aims to ensure 60% access to safe drinking water by 2035.

At the **subnational level,** Provincial governments develop *Strategic Plans*, 3 year rolling *Development Plans*, and annual work plans. Problematically, **the financial years for the national and provincial governments differ** – the national government's financial year aligns with the calendar year, running from 1 January to 31 December, whilst provincial governments operate on a financial year that ends on 31 March each year.[7] This discrepancy reportedly complicates budget coordination and financial procurement and reporting, resulting in delays in service delivery and hindering the progress of joint initiatives (WP-EHD-F1, WP-EHD-M2; workshop, Dec. 24).

Additionally, motions of no confidence frequently plague provincial governments, impacting the long-term achievement of policy ambitions (Phillips, 2017:26). In addition to supporting and strengthening provincial governments, the MPGIS key objectives include promoting effective decentralisation, capacity-building for provincial administrations, and fostering collaboration between national and provincial governments. However, **aligning national objectives with provincial plans is challenging**. An MPGIS respondent stated that:

> *"In terms of challenges, from my perspective, policy commitment is a concern. The provincial government operates at a different level from the national government (HN-MPGIS-F4)*

The commencement of a "participatory planning approach" through the WDCs and the recent appointment of WDCSOs reflects the government's commitment to decentralisation.

In 2014, the first national rural WASH framework was developed and the National *Rural WASH Policy* developed (MHMS, 2014). The Policy estimated the failure rate of water systems as over 50% and underscored a lack of national implementation capacity.

In March 2015, the government released its 5-year *RWASH Plan* (2015-2020) (MHMS, 2015). Two years later, the long-stalled *National Water Resources and Sanitation Policy* (*WATSAN Policy*) (MMERE, 2017a) and the *National Water and Sanitation Implementation Plan* (2017-2033) (*WATSAN Plan*) (MMERE, 2017b) were formally endorsed by the government. A *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2021-25) (MHMS, 2021) was developed in 2021, but has not yet been endorsed by the government.

The *WATSAN Policy* and WATSAN *Plan* is envisioned as the umbrella policy for the sector, providing a framework for "the supply of safe, adequate and financially, technically and environmentally sustainable water supply and sanitation services to rural and urban communities" (MMERE, 2017a: 2)

Rural water service delivery is encompassed in Objective 5.4 of the Policy: "Water supply systems in non-urban, rural areas planned, owned and operated by local

communities". Intriguingly, the *RWASH Policy* and *Plan* is not listed in the otherwise comprehensive table of "Policies, legislation, plans, reports and analyses…" said to be underpinning the *WATSAN Policy* (MMERE, 2017a: 18).[8]

WASH planning is largely under-represented in subnational planning, with only a few provinces having their own provincial WASH plans (below).

WASH policy, plans, and targets – put into practice

There is a suite of water resource and WASH policy, plans and targets, with some evidence of policy misalignment and ample evidence a "policy-practice gap". Key policies and plans of note are:

- *Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Policy (2014)*
- *Rural Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Plan (2015 -2020)*
- *WASH Marketing Plan (2018)*
- *RWASH Engineering Standards (various)*
- *National Water Resources and Sanitation Policy [WATSAN Policy]*
- *National Water and Sanitation Implementation Plan [WATSAN Plan] (2017-2033).*

In 2014, the first national rural WASH framework was developed and the National *Rural WASH Policy* developed (MHMS, 2014). The Policy estimated the failure rate of water systems as over 50% and underscored a lack of national implementation capacity.

In March 2015, the government released its 5-year *RWASH Plan* (2015-2020) (MHMS, 2015). Two years later, the long-stalled *WATSAN Policy* (MMERE, 2017a) and the *WATSAN Plan* (MMERE, 2017b) were formally endorsed by the government. A *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2021-25) (MHMS, 2021) was developed in 2021, but has not yet been endorsed by the government.

The *WATSAN Policy* and *WATSAN Plan* was/is envisioned as the umbrella policy for the sector. It touches on rural water service delivery. Objective 5.4 is: "Water supply systems in non-urban, rural areas planned, owned and operated by local communities". However, there is a decided lack of reference to WASH in both the *WATSAN Policy* and *WATSAN Plan*. Intriguingly, the *RWASH Policy* and *Plan* is not listed in the otherwise comprehensive table of "Policies, legislation, plans, reports and analyses…" said to be underpinning the *WATSAN Policy* (MMERE, 2017a: 18).[9]

The *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2021-25) sets comprehensive targets and strategies but has not gained formal government endorsement. Both the Policy and previous and recent *Strategic Plan* emphasises **decentralisation,** advocating a shift away from government delivery to delivery through service delivery partners (SDP) and devolving further responsibility to provincial EHD/RWASH and (MHMS, 2014:16; MHMS, 2015: §2.13).

However, there is a substantive **implementation deficit** in relation to this objective of the *RWASH Policy*. Reflecting on the Policy in terms of decentralisation, a senior RWASH manager stated:

> *"The Policy is still transitioning between one set of rules or ways of doing things to new ways. It's in the transition period and a little tricky […] I'd like to see the program's policy go with the pace of change in Solomon Islands […]. We are like a child that must go through the stages of life in the process of growing […]. We need contributions from partners and lots of different people and it needs a structure; there is a long way to go (HN-RWASH-M1)*

The respondent here is arguably pointing towards what could be called a kind of "**policy inflation**" **where the goals set are unrealistically high and designed to align with international standards or donor expectations but not considering the local context** (e.g., resources and capacity). As highlighted by numerous participants, for example, service delivery partners are simply not present in every province (workshop, Dec. 24).

Provincial level

The effectiveness of WASH planning and implementation varies across provinces. Some, like Western and Central Provinces, have taken proactive steps and developed their own *RWASH Plan*, indicating progress towards coordinated, province-led efforts. **However, a disconnect between national and provincial levels complicates the execution of these plans.** Provincial governance often faces challenges from fragmented planning, limited oversight, different financial calendars (above) and political dynamics that hinder long-term WASH development.

> *"We aim to decentralise services from the ministry; the funds go to the provincial level, and they are responsible for coordinating the funds and services to the community. However, sometimes, even though they are aware of the requirements, there are instances where they do not comply with the process. There is a gap there (HN-MPGIS-F4).*

Role definitions for all involved ministries and departments – progressing decentralisation

The cross-cutting nature of WASH requires the involvement of multiple ministries and departments at national and subnational levels. The MHMS Role Delineation Policy aims to decentralise health services, shifting responsibility from national to provincial levels. This policy seeks to move away from 'silo' management towards a more integrated approach, involving Provincial Health Program Managers and Directors. There is **no mention of EHD or RWASH anywhere in the Delineation Policy**, highlighting the need for more comprehensive inclusion.

An independent assessment of the Solomon Islands Health Sector Support Program undertaken in 2018-2019 gave the implementation of the MHMS Role Delineation Policy a performance score of 80%, and MHMS Executive and Corporate Services Restructure a score of 63% (SIRF, 2019:6-7).

Mechanisms for consumer feedback and complaints

The WASH sector in Solomon Islands lacks dedicated mechanisms for capturing consumer feedback and complaints. At the Provincial and community level, the current approach is reactive, with WCs and EHD/RWASH engaging with issues only when complaints arise.

Traditional and community leaders represented

Giving the weak presence of the state in rural contexts, the role of 'traditional' and other community-level leaders in WASH policy and planning is doubly important. The *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2015-20) advocates for a "national effort" that includes churches, civil society, the media, and private business to build WASH capacity and accelerate implementation across the country; but until the recent advent of the WDCs the **involvement of chiefs, church representatives and other community leaders (such as women and youth leaders) in policy and planning development was largely non-existent.**

The **PGSP Policy Blueprint** mandates that one church representative and traditional village head must be members of the **WDC**, and there must be two women (MPGIS, 2020: §11.1.3, p. 15). Moreover, one nominated representative of a church committee is mandated to be a member of the Provincial Planning and Development Committee (MPGIS, 2020: §16.1.9, p. 21).

Regardless, the active engagement of customary leaders and faith-based groups in WASH specifically remains underutilised.

WDCS can assist with enhancing the involvement of customary leaders and faith-based groups in community-level WASH planning, policy and activities

Local and intermediate institutions adapt and apply local bylaws and ordinances

Community-based management entities must be legally recognised to be effective (e.g., Lockwood and Smits 2011). The Solomon Islands **does not have a relevant Act that regulates community level bylaws, nor does it have a formal register of WCs**. However, there is an avenue to enact Provincial WASH related Ordinances.

For example, the Western Province has a Rural Water Supplies Ordinance 1995, which includes a list of responsibilities for water committee (maintenance and minor repairs), roles for the government [RWSS at the time] (major repairs), and provisions for fines (e.g., illegal connections, damage to system etc.).

In 2019, a decision was made to review and update the Western Province Ordinance (including the fine amounts), but this has not yet occurred (WP-RWASH-M1).

Community engagement training manuals also address water rules and bylaws, underscoring that the provincial government is tasked with enforcement through these ordinances.

However, **practical application is hindered by resource constraints and limited local capacity.** Recent visits to some communities in Western Province demonstrated that enforcement has been non-existence or, at best, limited.

Internal control mechanisms (e.g., policy reviews and audits)

Policy reviews and audits are crucial for keeping WASH policies effective and aligned with organisational goals. Policy reviews evaluate the content and relevance of a policy. Policy audits seek to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of policies.

While regular reviews of the *RWASH Policy* and *Plan* occur, they are not undertaken every 5-years. There is limited evidence of systematic audits in the WASH sector.

Internal control mechanisms, including policy audits, need improvement

Design standards: appropriateness, effectiveness, and implementation

The *RWASH Design and Construction Standards*[10] provide guidelines for inclusive WASH infrastructure, including accessibility for people with disabilities. However, gaps exist; there are no designs for wheelchair-accessible standpipes (WP-EHD-WP-F1, M2). It was noted that data is collected on vulnerable individuals before construction, but this information is not translated into accessible WASH infrastructure at implementation. Additionally, there remains limited means for monitoring and supporting safe water delivery in rural contexts, with no encompassing reduction methodology:

Although the Standards mandate the incorporation of climate variability and adaptation options into all WASH designs, they are not linked to a comprehensive template for an overarching risk assessment and reduction methodology, such as water safety planning

In sum, while the *Standards* align with actions aimed at enhancing water security, they fall short of addressing water safety and accessibility in a strategic, implementable, and inclusive manner.

Staff awareness of policies, plans, and regulations

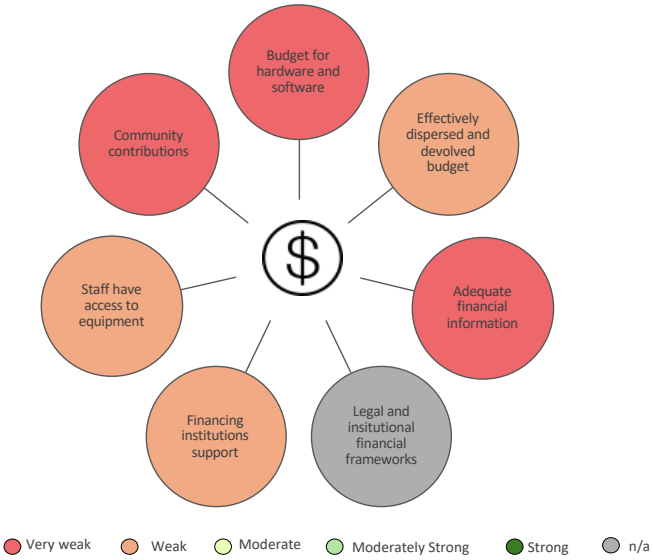
Awareness of WASH policies and plans varied: national-level staff were generally more informed about the *RWASH Strategic Plan* and decentralisation aspirations than their provincial counterparts. This echoes earlier findings by WaterAid (2016), which found that the SDAs outlined in the *RWASH Policy* were generally not understood.

This gap highlights the need for comprehensive training and socialisation of policies to align all stakeholders with strategic goals. Regular training and communication would enhance staff capacity and improve the effectiveness of WASH initiatives. Summary Policy and WASH-related information could easily be incorporated into staff induction process.

Budgeting, Finance, and Resources

Adequate budgeting, finance, and material resources (e.g., access to transport, materials, and human resources) are essential components to furthering decentralisation within the rural water services sector. In the IRC's nine 'WASH building blocks", finance deals with everything from the "cost of service delivery, the sources of funding, the roles of different actors in providing finance, effective mechanisms for long-term financial procurement and channels for getting money to where it is needed" (Huston and Moriarty, 2018:21).

This element is strongly linked with human resources and capacity development.



Other key funding sources have come from the Rural Development Programme [World Bank], RCDF, Provincial Government Strengthening Program / Provincial Capacity Development Fund (PGSP/PCDF), and a host of NGOs.

Other key development partner support for the sector comes from UNICEF, USAID, and New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

In 2016, funding sources for rural WASH in Solomon Islands reportedly totalled around SBD$30M (WaterAid, 2016). According to a recent UNICEF (2023) study of WASH financing, budget allocation for WASH in Solomon Islands has decreased since 2015 (Figure 8), falling to one of the lowest per capita WASH expenditures in the Pacific (an average annual allocation of USD$1.30 per capita, 2016–2020) (UNICEF, 2023:21).[11 12]

Budget and funding for rural water service delivery

Adequate Funding

Effective decentralisation requires strong financial planning and long-term budget certainty. In Solomon Islands, the SIG provides a recurrent budget of Solomon Island dollars (SBD) 900,000 annually, primarily for fuel and meetings and "then it's all gone" (HN-RWASH-F3).

The bulk of WASH expenditure for Solomon Islands comes from development partners. Since 2014, the primary funding for the sector has come from EU budgetary support to MHMS of around SBD$18 million (M) a year, with disbursements through fixed and variable tranches, with conditions that must be met by not only by the MHMS but also the government (e.g., strengthening public finance management) (WaterAid, 2016:29). This support was supplemented by funds from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of around SBD$5M a year (primarily for sanitation projects) (e.g., MHMS, 2016a; Rodgers, 2019:14).

Solomon Islands – budget estimates

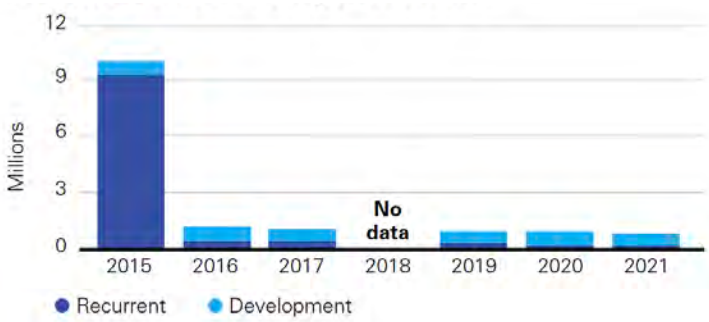


Figure 7: Solomon Islands Budgeted WASH expenditure (source: UNICEF, 2023:19)

The *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2020-25) anticipates future funding from the People's Republic of China, potentially providing SBD90M per year for five years, with SBD22.5M annually allocated to rural WASH. As of writing, this has not yet materialised. Funding uncertainties are complicating financial planning and the ability of RWASH to undertake its work.

There is currently no certainty of funding for RWASH beyond the recurrent budget support

Budget Disaggregation

Best practice includes not only funding certainty but also lifecycle costing for service delivery, as well as disaggregating budgets between hardware and software components (e.g., community training and monitoring).

Currently, there is **no budget disaggregation between hardware and software**. Many countries now allocate a portion of their budgets to software to enhance system longevity and WASH coverage and is considered best practice.[13]

A senior RWASH manager mentioned that there are plans to disaggregate budgets in the future, allocating 70% to hardware (materials, transport) and 30% to software (pre- and post-construction training, M&E) (HN-RWASH-M1).

Budget disaggregation would better address both the infrastructure and capacity needs required for sustainable water service delivery

There is no national or provincial budget for **World Water Day** or **World Toilet Day** activities – this is a significant gap given that creating demand is as important as focusing on supply.

Funding management and effective disbursement to Provincial levels

Since 2008/9, provinces have received funds from three main sources: Fixed Service Grants (FSG), PCDF, and Own Source Revenue (OSR). The Ministry of Finance and Treasury distributes these funds quarterly, contingent on satisfactory account submissions.

Ineffective Financial Distribution Process

The process of dispersing funds to provincial EHD/RWASH is **slow, complex and challenging**. Previously, RWSS had a dedicated project account code which allowed for speedier and more efficient operations (HN-RWASH-F3). Since transitioning to RWASH, funds are now under the MHMS account code, which contributes delays.

In all provinces except Western, the centrally dispersed funds go directly into the bank account of the provincial hospital. Sometimes these funds are diverted for a time, or there are delays in accessing it, which in turn causes interrupts implementation (HN-RWASH-F1).

These challenges are evident in the recurrent underspends across the whole-of-government. Between 2015-2020, the rate of spending against budget allocation in RWASH ranged from 15% in 2015 to 51% in 2020, and this was attributed to slow financial approval procedures (MHMS, 2021:7, 11). **Others have suggested that funds earmarked for WASH are sometimes redirected to other departments** (workshop, Dec. 24). The latest publicly available budgetary data (2021) elucidates that there was an underspend of recurrent budget expenditure of SBD276.4M (9.2%) across most ministries, as well as Donor Budget Support (SBD246.4 M, 36%) (SIG, 2022).

Slow and ineffective disbursement processes impinge on WASH program implementation and limit the ability to meet rural water targets

Provincial - WDC Development Support

Provinces have long allocated funds for ward-level development but lacked criteria or records of how funds were used. PCDF allocations increased from SBD10.8M in 2010 to SBD40M in 2020, but **most of these projects were identified without community input.** WDCs were introduced to create a more participatory and accountable mechanism for national and provincial governments to support rural development. Projects over SBD100,000 are managed through the PCDF, whilst smaller projects are handled by WDCs. This is designed to promote community involvement and ensure alignment with local needs.

Most community-level development now relies on grants from WDCs. A stipulated 15% of provincial recurrent revenue (e.g., business licences) is allocated to WDCs, though not all provinces fully comply. Funds follow the provincial financial year (April to March), and any project funding shortfalls means waiting for the next year (WP-WDC-F). Funds are classified as assistance for materials, with the community covering the rest of the project costs. However, ensuring community assistance is reportedly a challenge with expectations of payment (e.g., IS-WDC-F1, IS-WDC-F2).

> *“Sometimes the community do not work together or there is no support from the community in terms of water supply. People expect to get paid before they do work in the community […] sometimes the WDC must pay people to do the projects in the community… (IS-WDC-F1).*

Slow and convoluted disbursement processes also impact WDC projects, with several respondents citing projects that had stalled due to delays in accessing funds (e.g., WP-WDC-F).

Lastly, there are reports of some politicking and (occasional) issues with the miss-management of WDC funds, but monitoring is generally capturing such issues (HN-MPGIS-F4). This will also improve with the roll-out of the new WDCSOs.

Despite challenges, WDCs generally offer a more participatory, accountable, and structured mechanism for financial devolution through provincial governments to rural communities

Review / Audit Processes

SIG and ministries follow financial oversight and auditing regimes to access development partner funds.

The exact number, timing and quality of internal audits for RWASH could not be ascertained.

At the subnational level, the World Bank – through the PGSP and PCDF – have supported financial management reform and capacity strengthening. All provinces are now producing their Financial Statements using International *Public Sector Accounting Standards*, with some provinces (Isabel, Central, Choiseul and Western) earning qualified and unqualified audit reports (World Bank, 2022: 15).[14]

Adequate financial information

There is limited publicly available financial information on WASH sector financial matters. The *Public Financial Management Act 2013* requires a final Budget Outcome report within four months post-financial year; however, the most recent report is from 2021. At both national and provincial levels, recurrent estimates typically reference MHMS without specific mention of RWASH or EHD**. There has been no Public Expenditure Review (PER) of the WASH sector in Solomon Islands.**

There has been no feasibility study on financing mechanisms (e.g., taxes, tariffs, transfers) for rural water service delivery. The latest RIS database provides a good geographic overview of project distribution but lacks complementary fiscal evaluation.

Sound legal and institutional frameworks for financial transactions

The status and applicability of legal and institutional frameworks for financial transactions could not be determined, but there are acquittal and procurement policies and processes in place.[15]

Financing institutions support decentralisation

Visibility into how government recurrent budgets, supplementary budgets, and development partners ultimately support decentralisation in the rural water space was limited. However, it appears that the bulk of development partner support has hitherto been distributed via central financial disbursement processes.

Staff and Community Water Managers' access to equipment and resources

Staff Equipment

The RWASH asset register for the Western Province reveals a need for repairs, upgrades, and replacement of key equipment, including workshop tools (welding machine, pipe burner, cutter, dice, water generator), and office assets and transport (outboard motor engines and vessels), and office assets. Staff must often rely on using their own telephone and credit to contact rural communities. Adding applications to work on computers (e.g., zoom) requires formal support from superiors, which can be a slow and cumbersome process.

Procurement

Effective supply chain management requires standardisation (to reduce market fragmentation) and accessible and economically viable spare parts (Lockwood and Smits, 2011:127; Harvey and Reed, 2004). Supply chains for handpumps – which RWASH are installing – are notoriously fraught with problems (Oyo, 2006). Challenges with procurement in Solomon Islands include material shortages, inaccurate orders, delays, expensive transportation costs, and funds leakage.

At the workshop in December, an ex-senior RWSS staff member recalled that from 1995-2005 RWSS undertook **direct procurement from overseas**, rather than from local suppliers, which reportedly resulted in substantive savings (material for 3 systems is equivalent to the materials for 1 system procured locally) (workshop, Dec. 24). A suggested solution to deal with transportation and slow

procurement issues was to have a sub-depot warehouse in larger provinces (WP-EHD-M1, M2).

At the community-level there are also challenges, with tools and spare parts frequently going "missing". In some communities, the WC keep their tools and spare parts in the church rather than with the WC ("safer place") (WP-EHD-F1). Accessing spare parts for many WCs can be challenging – the private sector pool in rural areas is small. The Ward level provides an opportunity to potentially redress some of these challenges, with a suggestion that a hardware focused distribution point could be established at the ward or clustered ward level (Wickham et al., 2023).

Community contributions

Sustained financing is crucial for the functionality and longevity of rural water supply systems.[16] While the RWASH budget covers capital and operational costs, **it does not extend to community-level operation and maintenance.**

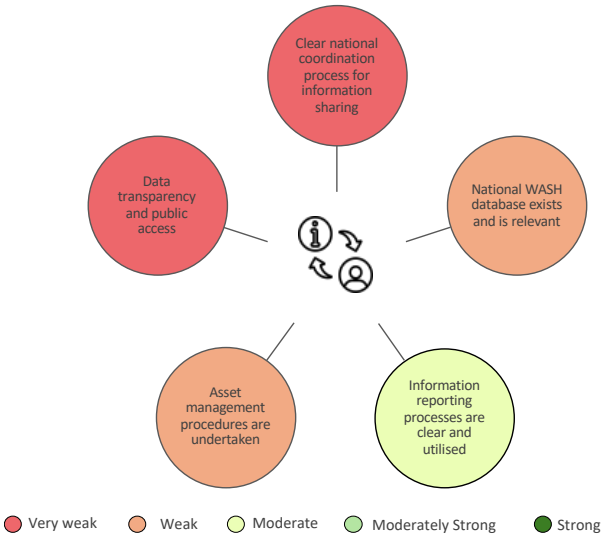
The governments community-based water management model requires ongoing community contributions (in-kind and/or monetary) for the model to work. The RWASH Policy and Community Engagement (CE) guidance/training materials – including the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) signed between communities and RWASH[17] – notes **the requirement for water fees or regular fundraising to maintain the water system.** However, this has not translated into practice, with most communities failing to provide regular monetary inputs to support parts replacements or subsidise labour.

> **The notion that it is community's responsibility to maintain water systems is not socially embedded. For financial self-help to become a norm, improved training, public engagement campaigns and structured follow-up are required**

It was suggested that calling community contributions a "maintenance fee" rather than a "water fee" might find more traction (workshop, Dec. 24)

Information and Knowledge Sharing

Information and knowledge sharing is a critical element for advancing the rural WASH decentralisation agenda. Without robust data management practices, from collection through to storage, access and dissemination, decentralisation policies, plans and practices cannot progress. A culture of learning and adaptive management is required and this hinges on good information and knowledge sharing. This element is closely linked to both the "harmonisation and coordination" and "monitoring, evaluation and learning" elements.



The cross-sectoral nature of WASH complicates information collection and coordination. In Solomon Islands the information and communication technology (ICT) environment is constrained by limited data services. Most Provincial Governments have limited access to SIG-Connect networks, and at the rural community level connectivity can be patchy and limited to basic cellular services (World Bank, 2022:32).

Lack of national coordination for WASH data

Currently, there are no effective national processes for coordinating information gathering, storage, and dissemination across rural WASH-related agencies and actors in the sector. WaterAid (2016) recommended integrating the RIS with the *District Health Information System* within MHMS, supported by the ICT Support Unit. It also suggested that WASH data responsibilities should remain with relevant agencies, such as MHMS for Community WASH and Health Care Facilities, and Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development for School WASH. **This recommendation has not been implemented.**

Information and knowledge sharing is delimited by the fact that a single RWASH M&E officer manages five databases: Community Water Supply, Health Care Facilities, Project Database, Community-Led Total Sanitation, and School WASH (HR-EHD-F3).

NGOs do not have easy and timely access to the RIS. A PEHD officer stated that they collected School WASH data when working with NGOs (e.g., Save the Children) and submit it to the RIS (HN-EHD-F3), but information **sharing across WASH actors in the sector is not systematic.**

A respondent stated:

> *"The sharing of information among other WASH implementers has been limited; they have not provided detailed insights into their activities. It is essential for us to ensure that their actions align with the RWASH policy, but unfortunately, they are not sharing relevant information with us (HN-EHD-F3).*

Information and knowledge sharing is not a challenge for RWASH alone – many government departments struggle with data management and sharing (e.g., HN-MPGIS-F4). One respondent felt the challenge of information sharing was amplified in Solomon Islands due to cultural factors:

> *"I see this as a significant gap. I believe it all comes down to our attitude towards how we collect, keep, and share information […]. Perhaps it is our attitude; we seem reluctant to share information. In white culture, information is shared when asked for, but within our culture, there's often a reluctance to share findings and information (HN-MPGIS-F3).*

National RWASH Information System (RIS)

The RIS is the centre-plank of rural WASH information storage and management system. First outlined in the *RWASH Policy* (MHMS, 2014) and *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2015-20), the RIS includes WASH coverage, community management, construction and design, project

identification, program management, and logistics and procurement.

The 2018 copy of the RIS (RIS, 2018) includes projects going back to 2009, whilst the more recent database (RIS, 2021) includes mainly projects from 2015 to 2020. Neither is considered comprehensive and there are significant information gaps and evidence of incorrect data entry (e.g. wrong Global Positioning System – GPS locations). However, it has been used for forward planning (e.g., Western Province WASH Plan, 2020-22) to identify and select the location of projects.

There is both human and resource capacity gaps in the current collection, curation, and management of information management systems, with insufficient access both within and outside government circles

Information reporting process/mechanisms

The reporting processes/mechanisms for collecting and sharing data are not clearly delineated across the multiple actors involved in the sector (cf. harmonisation and coordination element).

As noted above, the RIS suffers from inaccuracies and gaps. For example, RCDF allocations for water supplies are approximately SBD200,000 annually, but are under-represented in the RIS.[18]

There is an expectation that WASH data be collected, entered, and shared, **but no clear guidance or compliance procedures to ensure that this happens in a systematic way**. PEHD/RWASH staff feel like they are already stretched to capacity, which is acknowledged by national RWASH staff ("they are busy juggling two roles [EHD and RWASH]") (HN-RWASH-F3).

A national RWASH officer noted that "today, information can be sent anywhere from all the mobile gadgets" (HN-RWASH-M1). However, although a smartphone or tablet application for provincial staff to upload data is under development it is not yet operational and may not be available in the short term due to budget constraints. Note the new WDCSOs are using tablets for community profiling and monitoring.

Such technology can support improved information collection and reporting through increased efficiency, faster information flows, and enhanced community participation. However, it also comes with significant challenges, such as infrastructure limitations, digital literacy gaps, and the costs associated with implementation and maintenance (e.g., Ball et al., 2013; Dickson & Bostoen, 2013; Kotzé & Coetzee 2019).

The *Western Province WASH Plan* (2020-22) includes data gleaned from the *District Health Information System*, which records disease occurrence monthly, and incorporated diarrhoea heat maps to help assist with water project site selection prioritisation (Western Province RWASH, 2019: 11). Not all health facilities provided data, but some productive data sharing/access is occurring.

Asset management

Effective asset management, including asset registers and reporting procedures, is crucial for accountability, planning, capacity development, and resource allocation. RWASH/EHD reviewed asset registers in 2022, but only three of 24 divisions submitted complete registers in 2018, indicating a need for improved asset management practices (SIRF, 2019:6).

Western Province had an up-to-date asset register.

Data transparency and public access to information

There is some public access to rural WASH information through the RWASH website, which includes provincial summaries of the baseline survey data, the community engagement guidelines, and other information.

However, as a national RWASH officer noted:

> *We have a website intended for disseminating information, making it accessible to everyone. However, we have not been active in updating it (HN-RWASH-F3).*

RWASH lacks a social media presence[19]

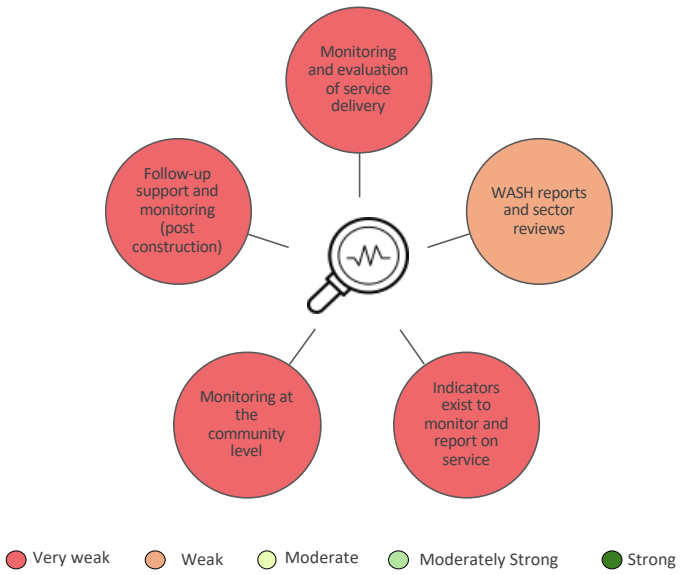
Asked how PEHD/RWASH share information with communities, a respondent noted

> *One of the strongest networks is the church. They can share information through announcements, using the church notice board and any communication can be reached by the whole community […] I know they are very effective (IS-EHD-F).*

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

WASH improvement and effective rural water sector management requires ongoing learning and adaptation – this is doubly so when undergoing decentralisation – and is impossible without good data. However, monitoring in the sector is about much more than simply reporting on a set of indicators and is not the same as project-based monitoring and evaluation; there must be a systematic way of collecting and analysing data and using it to inform action and decision making at multiple levels (national, provincial and community) (see Huston and Moriarty, 2018:23).

This element is closely linked to both the "information and knowledge sharing" and "harmonisation and coordination" elements and includes the all-important CWM+ "follow-up / backstopping" component, deemed a critical transitionary step towards a service delivery approach in the rural PIC context (see Love et al., 2021; Souter et al., 2021, 2022)



Monitoring and evaluation are undertaken

Monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) require substantial fiscal and human resources and contextually informed indicators. Despite recommendations for RWASH to adopt a full life-cycle SDA and incorporate MEL into its recurrent budget, this has not been implemented**. Currently, MEL focuses mainly on compliance.**

The *RWASH Policy and Strategic Plans* (2015-20 and 2012-2025) and the *Western Province WASH Plan* (2020-2022) all stress the importance of MEL for tracking sector progress and strategic planning. However, **RWASH faces significant financial and staffing constraints, which hinders monitoring effectiveness.**

Compliance only M&E practices impede insightful learning

RWASH has one national monitoring and evaluation (M&E) officer for monitoring water system construction and training, and they are also responsible for looking after the RIS and four other databases. A senior RWASH manager noted:

> *M&E is very important because our reporting, like any other organisation, depends on M&E. Unfortunately, M&E itself has been overlooked at RWASH for a long time (HN-RWASH-M1).*

In terms of monitoring community water infrastructure projects, the process involves filling out a "Community project verification form" and submitting two photos. The questions focus on infrastructure, e.g., "verification to check if the system complies with the standards" (HN-RWASH-F1). Following the handover of a system to a community, the RWASH M&E officer is primarily tasked with verification duties—auditing procurement and ensuring compliance with technical designs and constraints" (WP-EHD-M1). Last year, the national RWASH M&E officer visited 68 communities in five provinces (HN-RWASH-F2).

A senior RWASH official stated that if RWASH became a division of its own "We would have a voice and budget" and then could "allocate more resources to M&E" (HN-RWASH-M1)

At the provincial level, some monitoring of service delivery sustainability and effectiveness was being undertaken, but it was nascent and ad hoc. **PEHD/RWASH generally do not do any post construction monitoring** (e.g., WP-EHD-F).

Non-PEHD Provincial government staff reported that they undertook "some monitoring", but it was focused on needs assessments rather than service delivery sustainability and effectiveness (e.g., IS-WDC-F1). A Provincial planning officer stated that the only M&E she is aware of was after project implementation:

> *As long as the project is completed, that's it. But it's after that I am concerned about. What happens after? That's why I said there needs to be an evaluation to know why people don't care for their water supply and then we must always have to build new ones (IS-PGP-F).*

It was confirmed that there is no mechanism for systematically tracking if policies or strategies are being implemented and adhered to, specifically in relation to SDPs and NGOs and their reported lack of adherence to policy proscriptions, such as sharing data. It was astutely noted that "if we don't monitor the policy, asking other WASH partners to comply with it is going to be a challenge" (HN-RWASH-F2).

The World Banks' IEDCRP has a monitoring and evaluation component to measure progress and impact through reference to a Results Framework (World Bank, 2022: 31).[20]

WASH reports and sector reviews:

MEL are crucial for managing the WASH sector, aligning with regulation and accountability by providing relevant data to assess policy and service delivery (Lockwood and Smits, 2011:99-100). In Solomon Islands, key WASH policies and plans stress the need for regular reports and reviews, including WASH situation reports and sector reviews.

WASH situation reports

The most significant recent reports are the *RWASH Baseline Survey* (2015) and a *WASH in Health Facilities Census*. These reports, along with ongoing census data, are used for monitoring WASH progress.

The *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2015-20) outlines five M&E components: WASH coverage, community management, construction and design, project identification and management, and logistics and procurement. It specifies that detailed community-level WASH data will be collected before implementing new water supplies (MHMS, 2015). Additionally, the *RWASH Plan* states that:

> *Further detailed information about the WASH situation in each community will be collected by the National Rural WASH program or its contracted partners [SDPs]. In this way, a complete picture of all rural communities will be built up over six to ten years (MHMS, 2015:11).*

A core objective of the WATSAN Policy (MMERE, 2017a) is that a national monitoring and reporting program be established (objective 1.5, p. 30). **This has not occurred and neither the NIWCC nor NWSRC are currently active.**

Sector reviews

There have been several formal sector reviews, including:

- Review of RWASH policies and community training manuals (2014)
- Review of the *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2015-20), funded by the EU, which led to revised SIG-approved targets (2018)
- An undated audit of RWASH Projects (2015-17) and a sector performance review (2021)
- WaterAid (2016) *WASH Sector Analysis*
- WASH sector governance capacity assessment (Oliver & Souter, 2019)
- *WASH Sector Enabling Environment Review* supported by UNICEF and UNDP in April 2024 (UNICEF/UNDP, 2024).

Appropriate indicators for monitoring and reporting

Effective monitoring and reporting require suitable indicators to assess service delivery and sustainability. The Rural WASH Program is tasked with incorporating WASH indicators into national censuses and health surveys for accurate coverage information (MHMS, 2015). The *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2015-20) defined key performance indicators for tracking progress, but these indicators are **overly coarse and insufficient for tracking service delivery sustainability and effectiveness**.

The output indicator of "No. of WASH committees formed and functioning effectively" is too diffuse and not a useful indicator for the associated outcome indicator. There are no proxy indicators for tracking water committee activities e.g., number of meetings in a year, fundraising events/water fee, rule recall/bylaws enforced, membership numbers (and gender). These could be collected iteratively through follow-up 'backstopping' visits or via telephone.

An RWASH officer stated that they "sit down with the water committee" and ask questions about tools, leaks, fundraising etc. (HN-RWASH- F1). However, these management-related questions are not included in the verification form they fill out, nor is the data recorded (or entered anywhere) in a systematic way that can be tracked over time. The form also has some printing errors and needs adjusting.[21]

The *WASH Stakeholders Group* (WSG), led by MHMS and coordinated by RWASH, has the mandate for assessing progress against key indicators, whilst the national RWASH Programme is meant to define the standards against which to monitor progress and ensure that the RIS database "is regularly updated and includes information on community management capacity and water system functionality, as well as WASH coverage". However, currently – and for some time – the WSG has not functioned (cf. harmonisation and co-ordination element).

Census data is disaggregated by disability, and PEHD staff reported that they collect data on people with a disability in communities' pre-intervention (however, as noted above under "standards", in practice this data does not result in material changes in design and construction).

Community-level monitoring - infrastructure and management

Community-level monitoring of water systems and management actions is almost non-existent among water managers and implementers (e.g., EHD/RWASH, NGOs). Although policies, plans, and community engagement (CE) guides stress the need for regular monitoring by WCs, this rarely happens. Numerous respondents noted the lack of systematic monitoring by WCs (e.g., IS-WDC-F1).

A senior PEHD/RWASH officer mentioned that while "awareness" is promoted through remedial training, it is not structured or used for MEL.

Each WDC has a project officer responsible for monitoring projects, and their relationship with RWASH – at least in some locales – has strengthened over time:

> *We have a project officer. He does [monitoring] and usually travels with the RWASH officers to communities. At the beginning, we did not understand WDC functions, so we did not have a good and close partnership with RWASH. So, for water projects, we did the assessments and the tasks instead of RWASH. As times went on, we realised the importance of collaborating with RWASH. At present, we have a good partnership and have worked closely together (IS-WDC-F1).*

Follow-up monitoring and support for water committees:

With over 50% of water systems in Solomon Islands experiencing breakdowns, some kind of follow-up support after construction (or "backstopping") to community water managers is required. Previous research demonstrated that the main support needed was more focused on motivation and management (software) rather than technical aspects (hardware). This includes motivating WCs, reminding them of their roles, and encouraging them to fundraise or apply a water fee for water system sustainability (Love et al., 2021). In this sense, **follow-up monitoring can be support.**

In the absence of a strong private sector presence, the most viable option for short-to-medium term support is for existing water service providers (PEHD/RWASH) to offer such assistance. NGOs may also provide help where they have an active provincial presence. **WDCs and WDCSOs could also play a more constructive role in monitoring and support.** Such backstopping would combine monitoring with mentoring and capacity strengthening.

The only monitoring that PEHD/RWASH currently do what was referred to as "reactive follow-up":

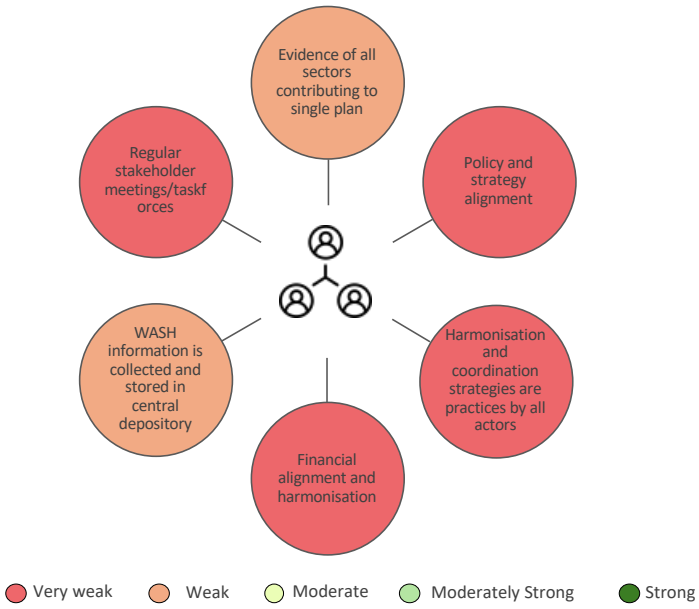
> *Only when communities have a complaint and want to raise concerns, they would call us, or we would call. We call it reactive follow-up. Most of the communities in the Western Province use that kind of method. When they need anything or have any concerns, they would call to seek advice (WP-EHD-M2).*

The necessity for some kind of follow-up/monitoring after system handover was widely acknowledged, largely unprompted, by many respondents:

> *… some villages in the past, they had water systems but now they don't work - what went wrong, what happened? Is it the water source or did they spoil it? We need to investigate and understand how people think nowadays and how they think about these things (IS-PGP-F).*
>
> *… there is no follow-up support to help the community manage and sustain their water system for that [20yr] life span. I know that monitoring and follow-up is the ingredient we've been missing. If we incorporate that, it will boost the management capacity of the communities and the RWASH Policy and Plan becomes more achievable (WP-EHD-F1).*
>
> *A way forward after completion is to track what happens to the water supply that was built 5 to 6 years ago -they need to go back and revisit communities (IS-PGP-F).*
>
> *… this is one of the important areas we should add to the exiting RWASH activities because monitoring is very important to help community sustain their water system (WP-EHD-M2).*

Harmonisation and Coordination

Effective water service decentralisation requires strong coordination mechanisms and structures. To achieve multi actor and multi-level coordination requires good policy and clearly defined roles, relationships, and responsibilities, supported by good communication and coordination platforms (hence, is closely linked to "information and knowledge sharing"). Coordination can be assisted through working groups, technical meetings and joint sector review processes that increase interaction amongst stakeholders and ensure that sector actors understand their roles and are working together effectively (Huston and Moriarty, 2018:19). This element also includes donor alignment and harmonisation (see OECD, 2006).



Evidence of sector contributions to a national plan

Planning for rural WASH primarily occurs at the national level, with limited input from provincial EHD staff. The WaterAid (2016) report highlighted a lack of effective provincial-level engagement, and this situation that persists.

Analysis reveals limited coordinated planning among actors – NGOs and private sector SDPs – involved in rural water service delivery. Although there have been discussions about different organisations specialising in certain provinces to enhance efficiency, this has (largely) not occurred and structured sector coordination remains absent.

The 2015 RWASH baseline survey appears to have galvanised some partnerships and coordination between disparate organisations across the sector, but this has not been sustained

The *RWASH Policy* and *Strategic Plan* both aim to integrate all sector stakeholders towards common goals. However, current implementation shows limited engagement across all levels, leading to ineffective policy execution and a fragmented approach. The lack of mechanisms for continuous, inclusive participation from all sub-sectors contributes to isolated efforts rather than a unified strategy.

Policy and strategy alignment and harmonisation

The *RWASH Plan(s)* and *Policy* aim to enhance cooperation among stakeholders by promoting alignment in technical design, hygiene promotion, and gender equity. They align with broader national strategies, such as the *National Development Strategy* and various *National Health Strategic Plans*. Two of the six core RWASH policy aims and objectives focus on cooperation and sector alignment (MHMS, 2014:6).[22]

However, has noted throughout this report, decentralisation has not been effectively implemented and is not reflected in provincial Annual Operation Plans and budgets. This **implementation deficit** is most evident in the focus on SDPs who are earmarked to increasingly undertake implementation whilst EHD/RWASH transition from construction to regulating and monitoring the sector (e.g., MHMS, 2015:9).

The latest draft *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2021-25) highlights overlapping responsibilities among ministries, duplicated policies, and weak sector leadership as key issues (MHMS, 2021:9). This misalignment impedes sector harmonisation and the achievement of strategic goals.

Effective policy and strategy alignment requires harmonising the objectives and operations of different stakeholders through clear communication, mutual understanding, and consistent policy application. While the strategic plans stress technical coherence and regulatory compliance, practical implementation remains inconsistent.

Harmonisation and coordination strategies and policy(s) are practiced

National - PEHD

Interviews with PEHD staff demonstrated that coordination between the provinces and national line Ministries is weak. One provincial-level respondent stated that the "connection between the sectorial ministries at the national level and the provincial level really needs to be strengthened", further noting that "sometimes things happen at the national level, but the province will not be aware of it […] the provincial level is strong but from the Ministry of Health to the province, it is weak" (IS-PGP-F).

A **national-level** RWASH respondent also highlighted that poor reporting and communication practices impacts national-provincial coordination:

> *"We need to strengthen the communication aspect. Reporting is one of their (PEHD] failings. We don't receive reports from them, so we don't know what they are doing. Sometimes we receive reports, sometimes we don't, and we must ask. They focus more on the hardware part and tend to forget the software part … (HN-RWASH-F3).*

The challenge at the provincial level is, in part, due to resource constraints and PEHD staff being over-stretched (see human resources and capacity development).

The advent of WDCs appears to be improving subnational coordination (IS-WDC-F2; IS-WDC-M).

Service delivery partners (SDPs) / non-government organisations (NGOs)

Coordination and communication gaps between SDPs – primarily NGOs – and EHD/RWASH remains a significant issue, despite the Policy and Plans. This was highlighted by WaterAid (2016) nearly a decade ago and has not improved.

National RWASH staff acknowledge the importance of partnering with NGOs – it is the only way the country could ever achieve national WASH coverage targets. However, respondents stressed that the relationship between RWASH and NGOs needs improvement, with many NGOs deemed to be operating "independently", leading to duplication of effort and missed opportunities for synergy (e.g., HN-RWASH-F1). One respondent, stressing the need for improved NGO/RWASH coordination, stated:

> *"It says in the Policy that every NGO working on WASH programs must consult with RWASH and observe the Policy, but that doesn't always occur. We fail to monitor it, so communication regarding WASH is not effective. I don't know why we do not enforce that [laughs]. It's just that we don't enforce the Policy […]. We need to address the gaps so that although we have different implementers, everyone conforms to the same requirements and standards (HN-RWASH-F2).*

The same respondent further stated: "One of the things is that most NGOs engage us towards the end of their projects" but they need to engage with RWASH "in the beginning" (HN-RWASH-F2).

An RWASH staff member from Western Province suggested that coordination between the government and NGOs **deteriorated after the 2006 tsunami when lots of NGOs arrived to implement post-disaster projects** (WP-EHD-M2). It was suggested that NGOs typically do not consult or leave their plans with PEHD/RWASH, and often neglect to provide pre- and post-construction training:

> *"Since working in Gizo, I have never received such things [e.g., plans]. All I know is that ADRA built this system, World Vision built that system, but for any consultations between the NGOs and RWASH office - there has been none […]. A drawback is that after the projects are implemented, they leave and do not come back to carry out M&E. [Moreover], they don't do handover [pre- and post-construction training]. Any NGOs that implemented WASH projects must come under the government. That is why we set up the database … (WP-EHD-M2).*

Enforcing the existing Policy guidelines for NGOs working in rural WASH is a critical first step. Ensuring that NGOs deliver (or support RWASH) government accredited WASH training, conduct at least some post implementation M&E, register all their programs in the RIS, and foster regular communication with government agencies are essential further step towards revitalising sector harmonisation and supporting national WASH objectives.

NGOs play a critical role in extending WASH services, especially in remote and underserved areas. However, the lack of a coordinated framework for their involvement, and lack of enforcement of current Policy, results in fragmented efforts and inefficiencies

Financial alignment and harmonisation

A comprehensive forensic analysis of the sector's financial alignment and harmonisation was not possible. However, it is evident that there have been considerable improvements to financial management systems at the provincial level (see World Bank, 2022: 14). [23] Nevertheless, as noted above, the lack of a RWASH departmental account and poor disbursement process impinges on provincial EHD/RWASH performance.

More targeted funding is needed from development partners and government that advance and support financial devolution and planning to the provincial level.

WASH information accessibility

Up-to-date and comprehensive data is vital for effective coordination and harmonisation, as elucidated in key Policies and Plans (e.g., MHMS, 2015:22).[24]

As identified in the "information and knowledge sharing" element, this remains a work in progress and is not yet being actively accessed by all key stakeholders, including NGOs active in the sector and, at least in Western and Isabel, by key PEHD/RWASH staff.

Centralised data repositories are fundamental for effective WASH management: they enable stakeholders to access critical information, which supports informed decision-making and efficient resource allocation

Current limitations in WASH information access **hinder these processes**, underscoring the need for improved data management systems that support greater transparency and collaboration across the sector.

Pond-well, Lambulambu, Vella Levella

Regular stakeholder meetings, taskforce/working groups

Various committees and groups are, or have been in the past, tasked with overseeing WASH sector coordination, including: the *National Intersectoral Water Coordination Committee* (NIWCC); the *WASH Stakeholder Group* (WSG); and the *Rural WASH Oversight Committee* (RWOC). However, these groups are inactive – the WSG has been dormant since an expatriate left and the RWOC has not meet since 2019 (when the active EU engagement ceased) (HN-RWASH-F2). The NIWCC has been non-existent for nearly a decade.

A *Sanitation Working Group* has been relatively active over the last few years (primarily through the energy and encouragement from key CSOs, including UNICEF and Solomon Island National University).

Inactive oversight committees and non-functional stakeholder groups limit sector coordination.

The Western province have an *RWASH Advisory Board* that meets quarterly.

The (draft) *RWASH Strategic Plan* (2021-25) proposes reforms to strengthen these groups, but practical implementation is pending. Regular stakeholder meetings, taskforces, and working groups are essential for ensuring continuous coordination and addressing emerging issues. Strengthening these groups and ensuring their active participation is vital for achieving effective sector coordination.

The involvement of numerous staff from **Solomon Islands National University** (SINU) in the *Sanitation Working Group*, and in WASH research more widely over the last 7-years, **is a positive development**. As neutral players with research and M&E capacity, SINU could and should be leveraged, encouraged and supported by government and development partners alike. From a political economy perspective, **SINU may be able to support sector dialogue and harmonisation in a way that other agencies cannot.**

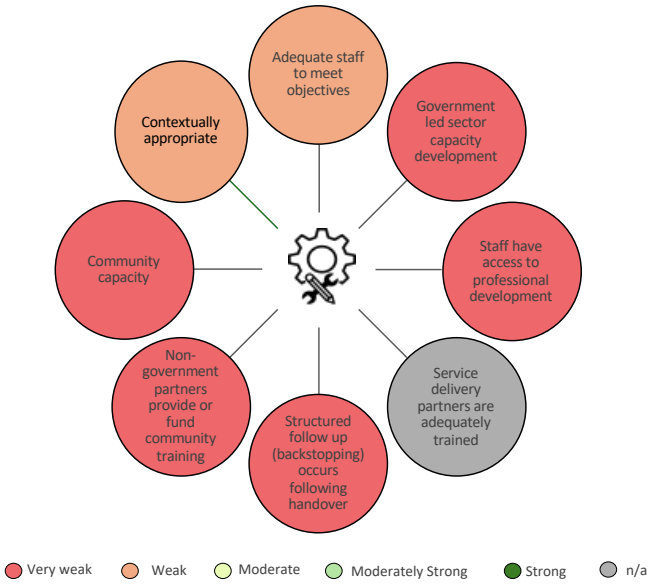
Active stakeholder engagement through regular meetings and working groups creates a collaborative environment where issues can be promptly addressed, and best practices shared. The current inactivity of key coordination bodies undermines these efforts.

A **national WASH Summit or Forum** could assist in reactivating the sector and galvanising some of the WASH sector activities currently underway (e.g., the Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project).[25]

Human Resources and Capacity Development

A critical component of the enabling environment to support effective decentralisation is ensuring that there is adequate human and institutional capacity and competency. Public and private institutions at all levels must have the capacity to carry out their roles and responsibilities. As captured by Lockwood and Smits (2011), many local governments require capacity support as they decentralise; without it, decentralisation efforts tend to stall and falter. Institutions need both sufficient material and human resources to efficiently decentralise (see budgeting, finance, and resources for material resources).

This element also includes capacity development at the community-level – ensuring that water committee training (and/or other sector specific training) is contextually appropriate, undertaken as stipulated in national strategic plans/policy, and effective.



Adequate staffing numbers

Staffing is a major challenge within the WASH sector in Solomon Islands – as reiterated by numerous respondents – and deemed a key barrier to furthering decentralisation and water service delivery outcomes.

At the national level, there are 30 RWASH personnel: 11 "office bearers" and the remainder "in the warehouse, dealing with materials and construction work" (HN-RWASH-F2). **This is a huge decrease relative to the past (when RWASH was RWSS) and there were reportedly more than double the number of field technicians than there are today** (workshop, Dec. 24). Maintaining sufficient staffing at subnational levels is a challenge. For example, while Western, Malaita, and Guadalcanal are each meant to have their own engineers, most RWASH engineers are currently stationed at the national level.

A senior RWASH manager explained:

> *We had to centralise them to make it easier to send them out. The idea is to have one in each province, but we can't afford it (HN-EHD-M).*

EHD/RWASH Western has had three vacant positions for over three years. There remains a recruitment freeze on filling staff vacancies and creating new positions.

Staffing shortages severely affect the sector's ability to implement and sustain water service projects.

The impact of understaffing affects all areas of RWASH, but was especially salient with regard to MEL and information and knowledge sharing:

> *The challenge we face is having only one [M&E] officer for nine provinces. Unfortunately, the budget is insufficient to employ provincial monitoring officers. We rely on provincial RWASH officers to collect information for us, but this is not always reliable […]. Monitoring and evaluation are crucial for building the RWASH database. However, with only one officer, it becomes challenging to input information, find, and collect data (HN-RWASH-F1).*

Government-led sector capacity development plan

There is – to the best of our knowledge – **no WASH specific sector capacity development plan,** nor has there been a targeted **sector training needs assessment** at the national or subnational levels for rural water service delivery (or sanitation).

The *National Health Strategic Plan* (2011-15) included a needs assessment for executives and mid-level managers

to support decentralisation, but it primarily focused on health workers and administrators, excluding EHD/ RWASH staff.

Subsequent plans mentioned workforce development but fail to set specific objectives for capacity development. International agencies like WHO, UNICEF, and the ADB offer sector-relevant capacity programs but often neglect targeted human resource strengthening for government staff. For instance, the ADB's *Capacity Development for Sustainable Rivers Management Program* focuses on policy frameworks but does not address the specific resource and capacity needs of RWASH or Water Resource Management Division personnel tasked with implementing policy.

Staff have access to professional development opportunities

EHD/RWASH staff have had some professional development opportunities. For example, the MHMS supported two staff from Western PEHD to undertake an online Environmental Health bachelor course through Fiji National University. However, they completed only five units before the Ministry stopped funding the course (15 units left to complete) (WP-EHD-M2).[26]

Technical field officers and supervisors have generally undergone some vocational training. Nevertheless, senior field staff said more training was needed, especially on dam construction, rainwater harvesting, and disability-inclusive tap stands (WP-EHD-M1).

A national RWASH staff member underscored the significant capacity gap regarding monitoring and evaluation, noting that there had been no training opportunities to date:

> *"It is a kind of new concept. We have just taken on board, and so far, we have not done any training on monitoring […]. I see that we need training in this area (HN-RWASH-F1).*

The *RWASH Strategic Plan* notes that training and capacity development has, historically, focused on construction skills with **limited attention given to management and higher-level leadership.** Moreover, the focus has been on formal training with little consideration for other capacity development approaches, such as coaching and mentoring (MHMS, 2021:10).

There has been numerous Technical Advisors in the past (especially at the national level and in larger provinces such as Malaita and Western), but there has been none for some time. Regardless, without monitoring, the long-term effectiveness of Technical Advisors. As in terms of **capacity transfer and development of EHD/RWASH staff** remains an open question.

Service delivery partners are adequately trained

The anticipated shift of construction and implementation responsibilities going to SDPs, primarily NGOs, has not fully materialised. Many SDPs continue to build water systems, but there was not enough data to ascertain if they are adequately trained. From what can ascertain**, NGOs have not been trained to deliver the pre- and post-construction or remedial training.**

The World Bank (2017), among others, highlight that effective decentralisation and improved service delivery ultimately depends on **proper training and capacity building for SDPs**; the private sector remains underdeveloped in Solomon Islands due to the small and nascent status of indigenous enterprises and relatively strong status of the NGO sector.

NGOs/SDPs provide or fund mandated community training

Non-government implementation partners, such as NGOs, play a crucial role in providing or funding community training. However, in terms of water supply implementation, there were numerous examples proffered of NGOs constructing water systems but not providing the government-recommended pre- and post-construction (or remedial) training or, alternatively, providing the funds for RWASH to conduct the training (e.g., IS-EHD-F; HN-RWASH-F2).

It was stressed that when there is "good communication" RWASH can sometimes find the funds to conduct community training (e.g., Japanese Grassroots). It was further noted that sometimes NGOS invite the government (e.g., RWASH) to participate in their programs, but they do not respond (workshop, Dec. 24).

In the School WASH domain – at least in the case of the Western province – there seems to be a closer relationship between some NGOS (such as Save the Children) and PEHD/RWASH, with staff travelling with the NGO and co-delivering training activities with the NGOs support (WP-EHD-F).

Community capacity development

To address poor operation and maintenance practices, in 2019 the RWASH Program introduced *Community Engagement Guidelines* (CE Guidelines), which detail the processes to engage and prepare recipient communities for their WASH scheme (RWASH, 2019a, 2019b). The CE process includes training in plumbing skills (Caretaker Training) to ensure basic maintenance activities, such as repairing small leaks and taps, replacing washes etc., can be undertaken by the water committee / community.

However, an analysis of the RIS database shows that RWASH struggle to conduct the number of CE training required, with 79 of a total 135 completed projects not yet receiving any CE training (Figure 9).

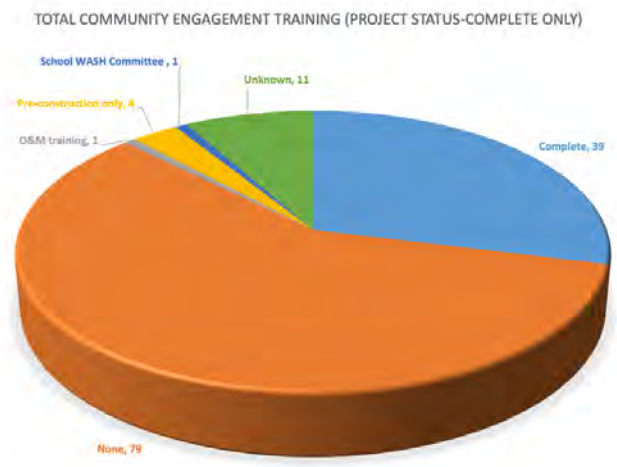


Figure 8: Total CE training (completed water systems), 2009-2023 (RIS, 2023)

Despite the introduction of the CE training, most WCs remain reactive rather than proactive, typically failing to fulfil their responsibilities (see Love et al., 2020, 2021a, 2021b).

Structured follow-up (or 'Backstopping')

The EHD/RWASH community engagement training package is a positive step and, when done well, has impact. However, the lack of proactive maintenance regimes, plethora of inactive WCs, the absence of water fees/fundraising, and lack of enforcement of bylaws etc., all suggest training alone is not enough.

The high rate of water system failure is not just the "fault" of WCs: evidence from around the world demonstrates that WCs everywhere require some kind of ongoing support (Lockwood and Smits, 2011; World Bank, 2017). Not surprisingly, **one-off intensive training is not enough to ensure water system sustainability for the 20-year lifespan of systems.**

Given the dynamic nature of WC membership, the challenges associated with members remaining active and diligently raising and managing funds, and the fact the full-scale professionalisation of service delivery remains out of reach for some time, **communities need some kind-of external monitoring and support to keep them motivated and animated.** "Backstopping" or follow-up support to WCs and communities is a logical, feasible and constructive step towards furthering decentralisation and professionalisation aspirations.

The necessity for follow-up was widely recognised by respondents. In example:

> *"Training on water management should be an ongoing program (IS-WDC-F1).*

> *"We only do project [compliance] monitoring. It should be recurring, like after six months, so that it triggers the community to continue looking after their system […] I think if we monitor them on a continuous basis, people will fulfil their responsibility (HN-RWASH-F1).*

As elucidated in the last quote and in the MEL element (above), **monitoring is support:** it can be combined with structured capacity strengthening, filling two gaps at once. Such support can an entail both virtual (phone) and on-site visits.

Structured monitoring and follow-up 'backstopping' is essential for community water managers following system handover.

Contextually appropriate and effective community training

There are three sets of main community engaging training conducted by EHD/RWASH: Pre- and Post-construction and, for communities who have had neither, Remedial training:

TRAINING	DAYS	SESSIONS
Pre-construction	2	11
Post construction	2	18
Remedial	2	22

The CE training focus solely on gravity-fed systems – **a short-coming given RWASH also construct hand-pump and rainwater harvesting systems**. The training manuals were recently revised to better foreground women and people with a disability. The trainings are each 2-days, but sometimes they are shortened and/or sessions contracted or skipped (e.g., WP-EHD-F1). Contextual particulars require EHD staff to adapt to the vagaries of weather, transport issues, and the rhythm and preferences of communities (e.g., deaths. marriages). Moreover, training is sometimes inconsistent, with system handover and post-construction training undertaken before construction is complete (WP-RWASH-M2). Due to resource constraints, training is sometimes not done for many years (see Figure 9).

Training delivery is primarily a 'lecture' format with limited participation. There are very few visual aids, and the pedagogy used is primarily the instructional/educational model of social change: **there are no social marketing-informed approaches used (e.g., emotional drivers to motivate action)**. The training guides are also in English, but delivery is in Pidgin.[27] The pedagogy is not necessarily well suited to the socio-cultural and historical realities of the Pacific islands, where oral rather than written communication dominates. As one respondent stated:

> *"Most times we verbally talk, but if we use visual materials, it will help those who are illiterate to grasp the message. Sometimes, we think everyone understands what we say, but it is not the case (HN-RWASH-F2).*

Effective community engagement training employs dynamic and contextually appropriate pedagogies. This includes using visual aids, narrative learning, structured participation, and other strategies that create engaging learning environments (e.g., videos).

Narratives and storytelling are powerful tools for conveying information: Social marketing often employs storytelling techniques to create relatable scenarios, making educational content more memorable and impactful

The use of videos has proven to have good message penetration and can show, rather than tell people, what good community water management looks like, leveraging strength-based emotional drivers such as self-reliance and pride. After using videos in four follow-up visits to communities in Western Province, an EHD/RWASH officer said:

> *"Video is one of the tools that is very useful. People understand and remember the messages much better, and in that sense, it gives them a clearer mind to take the right actions […]. That movie we showed them was very inspiring. When they saw how other people struggle in other countries it brings emotions. Likewise, with this one capturing the stories in Malaita and Isabel, they learned from it and said we should do more to keep our water good (WP-EHD-F1).*

It is noteworthy that the World Bank's IEDCRP includes support for the development of a training strategy, curriculum and learning materials and resources for subnational capacity strengthening, including the delivery of training the trainers, adopting a cascade approach to train PG officials and staff, Project Officers, and WDCs (World Bank, 2022: 59). The appointment of WDCSOs is a constructive step forward (SIG, 2023b:10), but it is too early to assess their impact.

Incorporating some water management content in the training for WDCs and WDCSOs would be a cost-effective way to, among other things, socialise water fees/fundraising as essential to system sustainability and maintenance. All the WDC representatives interviewed believed that including WASH related information in WDC training would be beneficial.

John Sele & Merilyn Vana – EHD/RWASH – Baini, North New Georgia

DISCUSSION

There remains debate about the net benefits that have derived from decentralisation in developing country contexts (Faguet and Pöschl, 2015). What is clear is that decentralisation unfolds over an extended period, taking years or even decades. Effective decentralisation necessitates not only empowering but also resourcing lower levels of government. There are a range of rural water service delivery decentralisation scenarios evidenced around the world. Based on the analyses in this report, Solomon Islands currently corresponds with Lockwood and Smits (2011) "partial" and "inadequately resourced" decentralisation categories.

The national RWASH policy emphasises community ownership, aiming to make communities "fully responsible" for operation and maintenance through cost-sharing, with specific guidelines ensuring gender and disability inclusion (RWASH, 2019b:11). However, evidence suggests that the sustainability of systems remains an ongoing challenge and social inclusion in water management a work in progress. While systems are designed for a 20-year life span (by which time the population has generally outgrown the supply), more than half of all systems have broken down due to a lack of maintenance, intentional damage and/or "illegal" and poorly executed extensions.

There was a sense from some respondents, and backed-up by the wider data, that the *Rural WASH Policy* and *Strategic Plans* are perhaps too ambitious – an example of policy inflation – leading to what one respondent referred to as "**over-promising and under-delivering**" (HN-RWASH-M1).

SOPAC highlighted decades ago that in the Pacific Islands the significance of legislation and policy is often over-stated, as government administrations are relatively weak and under resourced and internal communications and access difficult (Carpenter & Jones, 2004: 15).

The draft *RWASH Policy* and *Strategic Plan* was under-review at the time of conducting this research, and a review of the WATSAN Policy and Plan has recently commenced. Any new Plan and Policies must be more realistic/contextually situated, supported by targeted funds, capacity strengthening and human resources, and ongoing MEL. Given the decentralisation aspirations evident in past policies and plans, water matters should arguably be more integrated into the evolving subnational arrangements in place (WDCs, WDCSOs).

The **elements** and **sub-indicators** used in this analysis are reflective of the Pacific Islands context (at least the three countries where the PaCWaM+ research was undertaken). Especially in Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, due to demography, geography and socio-economic factors, the professionalisation of rural water service delivery at scale is unlikely in the near term – the CWM model will remain the dominant water SDA for some time. Thus, the selection of sub-indicators, and the data used to rate them, have remained largely focused on the CWM approach. It is hoped that this selection of indicators can help better identify and asses what the most appropriate and feasible "plus" (CWM+) factors look like in the context of Solomon Islands.

In this closing section of the report, we summarise the key findings from each element. In terms of rating, **the highest 'scored' element was "policy, legal and regulatory framework**" (2.3, still "weak"), whilst the lowest was "monitoring, evaluation and learning" (1.2, "very weak"), followed by "human resources and capacity development" and "harmonisation and coordination" (both 1.3, "very weak"). Overall, Solomon Islands had one "weak" and five "very weak" elements (mean 1.6).

It's important to recognise that just because an element or sub-indicator was rated as weak does not mean that there has been no improvement over time: enhanced accountability, the establishment of community engagement activities/training resources, (some) monitoring protocols, the introduction of more participatory-led development processes (through the establishment of WDCs and WDCSOs), and the self-driven EHD follow-up initiatives evident in Western Province (and inserted into annual work plans), are all positive developments. WDCs, in particular, offer a means to bridge the decades old void between communities and government which is, in good part, responsible for the service gaps evident at the rural level.

The point of quantifying an indicator is so that it can be measured, tracked, and compared over time. This can assist with identifying priorities and adjusting resource allocations. **It is hoped that this evidenced-based report is used by development partners, stakeholders, and the government to better prioritise resources and actions to improve rural water service delivery going forward.** Given the deteriorating rural WASH situation in Solomon Islands, the stakes could not be higher.

Summary Findings: Policies, Legal, and Regulatory Frameworks

Effective rural water service decentralisation hinges on robust policies and legal frameworks at both national and subnational levels. Although this element received the highest score among the six elements (2.3), it is still "weak" with significant gaps between policy and practice demanding reform and adaptation.

The rural water policy landscape in Solomon Islands is inherently complex, with multiple strategies and numerous draft policies and plans in existence. While the *National Rural WASH Policy* and *RWASH Strategic Plan*(s) emphasise sustainability, persistent challenges in service delivery remain. National strategies like the NDS provide a framework for action, but discrepancies between NDS goals and RWASH targets, particularly in policy coordination and coherence, reflect alignment issues. The exact relationship between the *WATSAN Policy* and *Plan* and *RWASH Policy* and *Plan* is unclear.

At the subnational level, provincial governance is hindered by staffing shortages, political dynamics, and financial disbursement issues, which affect policy implementation and long-term planning at the rural level. Enforcement of provincial ordinances and community bylaws is very weak. Provincial WASH plans, like those in the Western Province, signal a positive trend towards more province-led WASH planning. However, national policy formulation has typically lacked sufficient provincial and community-level consultation, policy awareness is low (esp. at subnational levels) and the role and responsibilities given provincial and community-level actors is not adequately resourced.

Internal controls, including policy reviews and audits, require improvement.

The role delineation policy supports decentralisation in health services, yet implementation lacks clarity, particularly regarding EHD/RWASH.

There are no mechanisms for consumer feedback and complaints.

Involving traditional and community leaders is vital for successful CWM in the Pacific Islands. In the absence of a strong state presence, informal networks such as faith-based organisations can provide a complementary (and low-cost) means to reach communities, households and individuals. WDCs help foster more inclusive engagement: the mandated inclusion of church representatives, traditional leaders, and women in WDCs signifies a move towards more representative decision-making. The advent of WDCSOs offers an opportunity to strengthen policy awareness around CWM, as well as potentially provide essential follow-up / backstopping opportunities.

Design standards, although comprehensive, require updates to address accessibility issues for persons living with disabilities. Handpump designs need to be formalised and printed.

The absence of a risk reduction methodology – such as water safety planning – is a substantive gap that requires redress.

- Complex regulatory landscape and overambitious policies impact effective WASH decentralisation
- Participatory planning through WDCs shows promise but faces challenges in achieving long-term goals
- Provincial WASH plans signal positive trends but need updating
- Legal recognition mechanisms for community-based entities require review, enhanced enforcement and socialisation
- Internal control mechanisms, including policy audits (not just reviews), require improvement for effective policy impact
- Design standards need updating for inclusivity (e.g. PWD)
- There is no comprehensive template for an overarching risk assessment and reduction methodology, such as water safety planning
- Staff awareness varies, suggesting the need for consistent understanding and implementation.

Summary Findings: Budgeting, Finance, and Resources

A strong financial foundation is integral to the successful decentralisation of rural water service delivery. Challenges in securing long-term and adequate financial support, overall coarse budgeting (e.g., a lack of financial disaggregation between hardware and software) and the inefficient dispersal of funds all impede progress in realising decentralisation goals and scaling-up rural water service delivery. Budgeting, finance, and material resources were rated as "very weak" (1.5).

Key challenges include securing long-term financial support, a lack of detailed budgeting (which fails to separate hardware from software costs), and inefficient fund disbursement hindering decentralisation efforts. Effective decentralisation relies on ensuring some financial autonomy and devolution at subnational levels. Presently, current financial planning, forecasting, and fund sourcing are not fit-for-purpose, limiting a comprehensive understanding of project costs, particularly concerning infrastructure and community mobilisation Capacity constraints contribute to limited fiscal devolution.

Reliance on recurrent budget and development support is insufficient to meet the objectives of the *RWASH Policy* and Plan(s). Aligning national goals with available resources is challenging, compounded by slow fund disbursement from national to subnational levels. There is a need to better align national goals with available resources.

Recurrent underspends signal systemic challenges: between 2015-2020 the rate of spending against budget allocation in RWASH was extremely low, ranging from 15% in 2015 to 51% in 2020. This demands a re-evaluation of current of financial disbursement processes. The absence of a separate project code (since the transition from RWSS to RWASH) adds a further layer of complexity that appears to dramatically hinder RWASH activities.

The cessation of EU funding in 2021 has negatively impacted staffing, monitoring, and capacity development. The prospective shift towards funding from the People's Republic of China **introduces an element of uncertainty**, lacking a guaranteed commitment to sustained support beyond recurrent budget and project-driven assistance (especially if dispersed primarily through RCDF as rumoured).

Limited financial information at both national and provincial levels hampers effective planning, exacerbated by the lack of a sectoral Public Expenditure Review. Procurement processes are plagued by bottlenecks and inaccuracies, delaying water system implementation and contributing to recurrent underspends. Direct procurement – as occurred in the past – was suggested as cost-saving measure that would improve implementation progress.

The absence of recovery costs for operation and maintenance highlights the need for updated capacity development approaches and the application of a lifecycle approach to service delivery. There is a widespread lack of **water fee/fundraising** by communities to support system maintenance. Addressing financial and budgetary challenges, enhancing community financial involvement, and streamlining procurement are all crucial to transitioning to a more sustainable, CWM+ approach.

- Details regarding WASH financial needs and flows are not widely available
- Inadequate financial devolution and budget disaggregation hinder effective decentralisation
- The cessation of EU funding and reliance on national allocations has introduced funding uncertainties
- Chaotic financial disbursement processes impact water system implementation and monitoring
- WDCs play a constructive role, but challenges with "ownership" and community-generated financial contributions persist, affecting water system sustainability
- Limited financial information and slow procurement processes contribute to recurrent underspends
- There is an acute absence of community financial support for water system operation and maintenance
- Addressing supply chain challenges is imperative for efficient project execution and spending.

Summary Findings: Information and Knowledge Sharing

Currently, there are no effective national coordination processes or mechanisms for information gathering, storage and sharing across the multiple actors/agencies working in the rural WASH sector in Solomon Islands. Information and knowledge sharing is currently rated as "very weak" (1.8).

The Rural WASH Information System (RIS), intended to support forward planning and sector coordination, is not being adequately accessed, resourced, or managed. There are numerous inaccuracies and gaps in the system, with data from subsector actors (e.g., NGOs) as well as water-related RCDF initiatives, not comprehensively included.

The latest RIS (2023) has a good geographic overview of project distribution but no complementary fiscal evaluation of funds allocation. Moreover, it is not freely accessible, and obtaining information outside government circles is challenging (compounded by a lack of effective sector oversight). Few provincial staff use the RIS, and information sharing between EHD/RWASH and SDPs, including NGOs, is problematic.

Human resource and capacity gaps exacerbate challenges in information gathering and sharing – a single national-level staff member manages the RIS along with four other databases as well as monitoring and evaluation activities across all nine provinces. While the Policy and numerous national-level EHD/RWASH respondents express an expectation for efficient data collection and sharing, subnational levels lack clear guidance and compliance procedures. Over-stretched PEHD staff struggle with data collection and record-keeping due to high workloads and a weak institutional culture of record keeping.

Reporting templates and mechanisms need revision: the main data collected is compliance or "verification" focused, with no room in current reporting templates (or guidance) for recording software matters (e.g., water committee membership, gender, bylaws, water fees, meeting and maintenance activities, etc.). Over-stretched provincial staff combined with the absence of a culture of record-keeping, impede information collection and management.

Mobile phones or tablets could improve information sharing, and there is reportedly an app in development that provincial staff could use to upload data; however, resources and capacity constraints would remain a challenge.

Public access to rural WASH information is limited, with the RWASH website providing some access; however, it is outdated and RWASH currently lack the resources for updating and maintain the site.

Asset management, through registers, is critical for accountability and resource allocation, but only some provinces have an up-to-date asset register.

Improving information reporting, revising reporting mechanisms, enhancing asset management, and increasing public access to WASH information are essential for the sector's effective functioning in Solomon Islands.

- There is substantial material and human resource capacity gaps impacting the collection, curation, management and sharing of information
- There is a lack of clarity and enforcement in delineating reporting responsibilities amongst the various actors involved in the sector
- Access to the RIS is limited, with many NGO WASH programs – as well as RCDF water-related initiatives – not listed in the database
- Gaps in the RIS highlight deficiencies in data collection and management
- Resource and capacity constraints hinder the use of novel technology for data sharing
- The RWASH website is not up-to-date and there is a total absence of a social media presence, limiting public accessibility to important information and the opportunity to promote demand
- There is imperfect access to the RIS within government circles.

Summary Findings: Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL)

The significance of MEL in fostering continual learning and adaptation, especially in the context of decentralisation, cannot be overstated. Key WASH sector Policies and Plans all mention the need for monitoring and evaluation, but this is not translated into practice. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) was the weakest of all the elements in Solomon Islands (1.2).

Current monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) processes are very weak: they are mainly focused on compliance and verification, rely on overly coarse indicators, and the data is primarily collected at only one point in time. A more systematic and ongoing approach to collecting and analysing data is required for enhanced decision-making.

As with many other elements, resource and capacity constraints hinder the RWASH program's ability to collect and analyse data. The absence of a well-functioning *WASH Stakeholders Group* and other oversight bodies (e.g., RWOC, NIWCC) exacerbate these challenges, creating a void in effective supervision and coordination of data. This limits learning.

Post-construction monitoring, crucial for sustaining water infrastructure, is largely absent. While the *Western Province WASH Plan* acknowledges the importance of MEL, provincial-level implementation is sporadic, focusing more on needs assessments than service delivery outcomes and effectiveness.

External policy and sector reviews occur but are not unifying and pushing the sector towards progressing Policy and Plans, underscoring broader structural challenges. The quality of policy reviews could not be ascertained. **There has been no Joint Sector Review.**

Given the lack of progress towards decentralisation as outlined in various Policy and Plans, and the view of some senior RWASH staff that the *RWASH Policy* and *Strategic Plan(s)* have been overly ambitious – not in line with local social, political and economic contexts ("over-promising and under-delivering"). **A more realistic and locally grounded *Strategic Plan* is called for.**

Appropriate indicators for monitoring and reporting rural water service delivery performance, especially longitudinal data that incorporates both **hardware** and **software** considerations, are absent. Current indicators lack the granularity required to track system sustainability. The focus on compliance-related indicators neglects essential factors critical to the CWM model, such as monitoring water committee membership, water fees/fundraising activities, WC meeting frequency, bylaw/Provincial ordinance status and enforcement, and maintenance activities.

The necessity for some kind of post-construction follow-up/backstopping for WCs – "monitoring as support" –was called for by many respondents. This echoes research findings from Solomon Islands and elsewhere.

Addressing MEL challenges requires a paradigm shift towards a more systematic, learning-oriented approach, supported by adequate resource allocation – both financial and human. Going forward, **any revitalised or new sector oversight body must develop more nuanced and instructive indicators** that include a post-construction monitoring regime.

Reviews and audits must become more intrinsic to the sector's adaptive processes, monitoring alignment / miss-alignment with government Policy and Plans, as well as with adapting to changing needs and circumstances.

Enhancing the MEL component of rural water service delivery is integral to the success of improving rural water service delivery. Without improved MEL, past mistakes are likely to be repeated.

- Limited fiscal and human resources hinder comprehensive sector monitoring and learning
- Provincial-level monitoring, evaluation and learning are absent or limited
- Compliance-focused monitoring and evaluation prevail, impeding insightful learning
- There is a lack of policy audits and process monitoring mechanisms to effectively track policies and plans
- Current indicators lack granularity - the focus is on hardware and compliance, neglecting post-construction management (software) which is required for system sustainability
- Greater sector oversight – at national and subnational levels – is essential for MEL enhancement to further water service delivery and improve WASH outcomes.

Summary Findings: Harmonisation and Coordination

Effective rural water service delivery in Solomon Islands will only be realised with stronger sector harmonisation and coordination. This was rated the third weakest element – "very weak" (1.3).

The effectiveness of sector coordination hinges on well-defined policies, roles, and relationships, and clear communication platforms. Policy and strategy alignment appear strong on paper, with the *Rural WASH Policy* and *Strategic Plan(s)* supporting wider national strategies. However, the **emphasis on decentralisation has not materialised in practice**, as evident in Annual Operation Plans (AOP) and budgets.

Subnational actors' contributions to national WASH plans and policies have been weak. Planning largely occurs at the national level with minimal input from PEHD staff. There is a *Provincial WASH Committee* in some provinces (e.g., Western), which should provide opportunities for constructive coordination. The advent of WDCs has the potential to enhance subnational coordination, but their role in WASH is currently limited to managing small grants (e.g. rainwater harvesting).

The 2015 RWASH baseline survey briefly boosted partnerships and coordination, but this momentum has not been sustained.

Bodies responsible for overseeing the sector, such as the *RWOC* and *WSG*, are inactivate, leaving the sector struggling to achieve effective multi-actor and multi-level coordination. **Strengthening and revitalising the RWOC and WSG – or establishing new bodies – is crucial.**

The *RWASH Strategic Plan* and *Policy* envisions **RWASH moving to a regulatory role with SDPs handling implementation. This has not been realised**: SDPs are not active in every province, and coordination between SDPs and EHD/RWASH is weak at both national and subnational levels.

While donor alignment exists, weak communication and data sharing between NGOs and EHD/RWASH limits mutual accountability and results management.

Coordination between national and provincial levels suffers from poor communication, reporting gaps, and resource constraints. However, modern (and cheap) ICT enablers such as Zoom are not being leveraged by the department. More regular communication (online meetings with both national and other PEHD staff) can enhance information and knowledge sharing and promote coordination.

Financial alignment challenges impede the devolution of financial and planning mechanisms to the provincial level, delimiting decentralisation progress.

In short, gaps in communication, resource constraints, weak sector coordination and insufficient alignment between plans and practices are all significantly impeding rural water service delivery in Solomon Islands.

- Limited evidence of subnational actors contributing to national WASH plans
- Decentralisation policy and strategy alignment on paper, but this is not reflected in practice
- Some provinces have a *Provincial WASH Committee* (e.g., Western) – this enhances sector coordination
- Weak coordination between national and subnational levels is compounded by poor communication, reporting gaps and resource and capacity constraints
- Financial alignment challenges hinder coordination and devolution to the provincial level
- Lack of access to an up-to-date and systematic WASH information database impedes comprehensive coordination
- Inactive oversight committees and non-functional stakeholder groups delimit effective sector coordination.

Recommendations

Summary Findings: Human Resources and Capacity Development

Successful decentralisation is contingent upon robust human resources and capacity development. In Solomon Islands, human resources and capacity development was rated the second weakest of all the elements (1.3), after MEL.

The rural WASH sector faces severe staffing challenges, including a shortage of engineers and high staff turnover, exasperated by short-term contracts and low pay. Vacant positions persist in several provinces. The impact of understaffing stretches to other elements, such as MEL and information and knowledge sharing. A current recruitment freeze amplifies these challenges.

There is no targeted capacity development plan or needs assessment, focused on rural WASH, at either national or provincial levels. While the *National Health Strategic Plan* includes capacity development to support decentralisation, it primarily focuses on health department staff, neglecting EHD and RWASH personnel.

Donor support towards capacity development, while present, tends to focus on specific areas, leaving broader capacity needs unmet (especially for government personnel).

While some support for staff training exists, they are too few and not effectively targeted. The discontinuation of funding for an online Environmental Health bachelor course exemplifies this issue. Training has historically emphasised construction skills, lacking opportunities in the areas of management and higher-level leadership skills. Structured mentoring and other "on-the-job" training are largely absent.

NGOs involved in water system construction frequently overlook pre- and post-construction training for communities, although early engagement with RWASH has led to better outcomes in some cases.

The development of RWASH's standardised community engagement training is a positive step, but issues persist with resource and capacity constraints hindering systematic, timely, and high-quality training.

If SDPs are to undertake increased training of WCS – as aspired in the *RWASH Policy* and *Plan(s)* – some kind of formal training of trainer's process is required. To facilitate the handover of the RWASH training responsibilities to SDPs will require a nationally endorsed certification process to ensure quality control and provide a mechanism for revision and adaptation into the future.

The absence of formal policies and funding for follow-up / backstopping support for WCs contributes to the short lifespan of water systems. Western PEHD shows positive shifts here, with four community follow-up visits a year npw inserted into annual workplans (from 2023-).

Undertaking effective capacity development activities at the rural level in Solomon Islands is challenged by logistical difficulties (travelling to remote, scattered villages, often by boat) and by variable literacy levels. The unstandardised status of Solomon Islands Pidgin arguably further complicates matters. The current community engagement training process, whilst constructive and welcome, requires monitoring and review. There is an underemphasise on community roles and responsibility, especially cost-recovery and financial management. Effective service delivery requires demand as well as supply mechanisms - demand needs to be actively fostered through marketing campaigns, not just educational approaches to behaviour change.

- Significant staffing challenges hinder the progress of both decentralisation and rural water delivery
- There is no sector-specific capacity development plan at national and provincial levels
- Challenges persist in providing professional development training for staff
- NGOs sometimes neglect to conduct pre- and post-construction training following water system construction
- There is no formal mechanisms for verifying SDPs to undertake RWASH training
- Formal policies and financial support for follow-up training/backstopping with communities are needed but lacking (although Western province EHD have commenced some structured follow-up)
- Community training effectiveness is hindered by various factors (logistics, narrow educational modality).

representatives from EHD/RWASH, Ministry of Mines, Energy and Rural Electrification, MPGIS, Solomon Islands Water Authority, and civil society organisations.

The recommendations are far from comprehensive and focus mainly on those points that attracted the most attention and consensus. Many more suggestive findings are found throughout this report.

Policy and legislative actions

- SIG promptly debate and pass the (draft) *Water Resources Bill*
- Greater consultation / input from provincial and community levels in Policy and Plan formulation and reviews
- Policies and Plan's require better socialised
- Each province (that has not already done so) should establish its own Provincial WASH Committee
- Improve the legal clarity and enforcement mechanisms for WCs (e.g. bylaw recognition and application)
- With MPGIS, explore how WDCs and (especially) WDCSOs might be able to offer ongoing and monitoring support for EHD/RWASH, including providing some tailored backstopping support to WCs
- Any future Policy and Plan reviews/audits to incorporate professionalisation and broader CWM+ approaches
- Move towards adopting a contextually appropriate risk-based methodology (water safety planning) to ensure progress in accessing safe and secure drinking water
- Undertake a Joint Sector Review to improve accountability and WASH sector governance.

Budget, finance and (material) resource issue

- RWASH requires its own budget project code to improve financial management efficiencies and accountability
- Key software-related activities (e.g., capacity development & MEL) require their own budget lines and should be set as proportion of the annual budget
- SIG and development partners coordinate and provide stop-gap support to RWASH so at least some water system implementation and training continues
- Development partners to increase support to subnational levels, focusing not only on service delivery but also systems strengthening.

Information and knowledge sharing and sector coordination

- Clarify data collection and reporting processes for all sector actors, both government and non-government
- Improve access to the RIS
- Review and update current monitoring indicators to include more of a focus on software considerations (e.g., WC membership, meeting frequency, maintenance regime, cost-recovery mechanisms, bylaws etc.)
- Revitalise extant, or establish new, sector oversight bodies
- Development partners to consider funding a permanent WASH sector coordination position
- Conduct a national WASH Forum – supported by strong provincial participation and a high-level ministerial meeting – to animate sector revitalisation and reform.

Human resources and capacity strengthening

- Conduct a capacity development and needs assessment of the rural WASH sector
- Improve training opportunities for national (and especially) provincial staff
- Explore replacing "water fee" with "maintenance fee" or another term in training and communication
- Review the status and applicability of introducing training certification in the WASH context, including the relevance of Rural Training Centres in upscaling rural skills development to promote standardisation and professionalisation

Version note

This corrected and updated edition (September 2026, version 2) corrects typographical, formatting and referencing errors in the December 2024 edition. It also aligns the indicator ratings, respondent counts and related statements with the harmonised cross-country dataset prepared for Love et al. (in preparation), 'Decentralisation and the missing middle in rural water services in Fiji, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu' (Supplementary Data S5). Four indicator ratings were revised (funding dispersal; asset management; policy and strategy alignment; regular stakeholder meetings). As a result, budgeting is now 1.5, information and knowledge sharing 1.8 (very weak), harmonisation and coordination 1.3, and the overall mean 1.6 (very weak). Interview counts and the community engagement training figure have also been corrected. These changes do not alter the report's main findings or recommendations.

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Appendix

Table 1: Interview attributes - Isabel

ID	Position	Age	Location	Gender	Date of Interview
IS-WDC-F1	Ward Development Committee secretary & register clerk, Prov. Gov.	48	Isabel (Buala)	F	28/7/23
IS-WDC-M	Ward Development Committee Officer	45	Isabel (Buala)	M	28/7/23
IS-WDC-F2	Provincial Government Desk Officer	41	Isabel (Buala)	F	28/7/23
IS-PGP-F	Provincial planning specialist	42	Isabel (Buala)	F	28/7/23
IS-EHD-F	Senior Health Inspector	48	Isabel (Buala)	M	28/7/23

Table 2: Interview attributes - Western

ID	Position	Age	Location	Gender	Date of Interview
WP-EHD-F1	Senior Health Inspector (Interviewed Twice)	40	Western (Gizo, Honiara)	F	17/11/23 22/6/23
WP-EHD-F2	Chief Health Inspector (Rendy)	55	Western (Gizo)	F	12/6/23
WP-EHD-M1	Field Supervisor, RWASH	45	Western (Honda)	M	21/6/23
WP-EHD-M2	Principal Health Inspector, RWASH supervisor (Interviewed twice)	40	Honiara (Gizo & Baeni)	F	17/6/23 18/6/23
WP-WPG-M	Western Province Government – planning department	48	Western (Gizo)	M	12/6/23
WP-WDC-F	Ward Development Committee member	50	Western (Nusa Roviana)	F	15/6/23
WE-COM-M	Community leader	58	Western (Baeni)	M	

Table 3: Interview with attributes National level

ID	Position	Age	Location	Gender	Date of Interview
HN-RWASH-F1	Monitoring/Evaluation Officer, RWASH	32	Honiara	F	24/1/2024
HN-RWASH-M1	Manager, RWASH	48	Honiara	M	26/1/2024
HN-RWASH-F2	Training co-ordinator, RWASH	40	Honiara	F	23/1/2024

Table 4: Participants list at Pacific learning event Fiji 2023

S.N.	Name	Position	Organisation	Gender	Country
1.	Gaston Theophile	Supervisor	DoWR	Male	Vanuatu
2.	Heather Molitambe	Program Manager	USP	Male	Vanuatu
3.	Collin Benjamin	Assistant Researcher	SINU	Male	Solomon Islands
4.	Sheilla Funubo	Assistant Researcher	SINU	Female	Solomon Islands
5.	Merilyn Vana	Environmental Health Officer, Western Province	MoHM	Female	Solomon Islands
6.	Sarah Pene	Lecturer/Program Manager	USP	Female	Fiji
7.	Suliasi Batikawai	Consultant	Former MoHMS/IWC	Male	Fiji
8.	Tolu Muliana	Lecturer/Researcher	USP	Male	Fiji
9.	Peni Wanimala	Assistant Researcher	USP	Male	Fiji
10.	Mark Love	Chief Investigator	IWC	Male	Australia
11.	Sachita Shrestha	Co-Investigator	IWC	Female	Australia

End Notes

[1] Adapted from ODE (2015:1)

[2] For examples: Malawi (Lockwood & Kang, 2012), Ethiopia (UNDP, 2006: 102), and Myanmar (Kimbugwe et al., 2022).

[3] Most studies of decentralisation and rural water service delivery have been undertaken in Asia, Latin America and Africa (see refs)

[4] Implemented by the UNDP, other Specific activities of note include: i) Development of a Provincial Sector Grants Manual; ii) Provision of Sector Grants Provincial Administrations and monitoring to ensure accountable, effective service delivery to communities; and iii) Strengthening of the capacities on accountable public financial management of PGs staff and staff of Health and Education Provincial Divisions.

[5] The RDP project operated over two distinct phases, with evaluations suggesting success was 'moderate' (IED, 2016; Neelim and Vecci, 2013). To date, RDP has been the largest water supply implementor. EHD/RWASH did not (generally) undertake construction for RDP.

[6] The five key NDS Objectives – economic growth, poverty alleviation, quality health and education, environmentally sustainable development, and good governance – are linked to 15 Priorities, which align with 13 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (SIG, 2016).

[7] The same challenge was raised in Vanuatu.

[8] This partially reflects the long delay in the government approving the WATSAN Policy – RWASH is referred to as RWSS in the Policy (only mentioned once) but as RWASH in the Plan, citing the then "draft RWASH Policy 2014".

[9] This partially reflects the long delay in the government approving the WATSAN Policy – RWASH is referred to as RWSS in the Policy (only mentioned once) but as RWASH in the Plan, citing the then "draft RWASH Policy 2014".

[10] There are currently five editions of the RWASH *Design and Construction Standards* (v1. 2014, v2.1 2015, v.2.2 2017, v.3. 2017, and v.4 2019). The document provides web-links to various designs and guidelines (e.g. wells, boreholes).

[11] UNICEF (2023) reports US$1.60 per person in its text (p. 18) and US$1.30 in Figure 7 (p. 21); the figure value is used here for comparability.

[12] It is not always clear in country budget statements whether water and sanitation expenditure items were financed domestically by government (e.g., through taxes) or by donors (transfers). There is also variation in the way expenditure is presented (e.g., development budgets vs recurrent budgets; budget estimates vs actual expenditure; cash grants vs government appropriation, etc.) (UNICEF, 2023: 18).

[13] For example, in Uganda, up to 12% of conditional grants (monies channelled from central to local governments for

WASH) is dedicated to software activities only (Lockwood and Smits, 2011:114).

[14] Prior to the PGSP, provinces rarely produced financial reports, except for the one-off production of financial statements by Malaita and Temotu Province in the early nineties (Kekea, 2023).

[15] The Provincial Planning Division manages procurement for items over SBD10,000, requiring public tender and compliance monitoring by RWASH.

[16] See further: Cross et al., 2013, UNICEF and WHO, 2011, World Bank, 2017; WHO, 1991.

[17] MHMS (n.d.) *Memorandum of Understanding*. Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Environmental Health Division, Rural WASH Program (4th revision).

[18] An analysis of the [2018] RIS 'Project database' includes 36 projects funded by RCDF in three provinces: 24 Western, 2 Isabel, and 12 Central. Thirty-one of these were listed as "not completed". The fact that the six other provinces included in the RIS had no entries for any RCDF projects highlights that this has not yet become standard practice.

[19] In comparison, Vanuatu Department of Water Resources (DoWR) and the Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) both have active Facebook accounts.

[20] This includes social accountability activities aimed at strengthening the institutionalisation of citizen engagement in local and provincial planning through Provincial Performance Forums and Technical and Social Audits, which are designed to assess the quality of infrastructure and maintenance arrangements and gauge community perceptions (World Bank, 2022:32).

[21] The current form includes various typos – it still says, 'health facility project' at the top of page one (although it is clearly the 'community project verification form') – and lacks guidance and space for recording management (software) - it simply has one small box for noting 'observations on community engagement'. This is not sufficient for monitoring and addressing the core issues: a lack of proactive management and cost contribution by the water committee and community members.

[22] *RWASH Policy* aims and objective(s): Indicator: To increase and develop cooperation and coordination between all sector stakeholders; Outcome: Improved sector coordination and output through active participation of sector stakeholders in the sectors' WSG. Indicator: To promote, encourage, and develop sector alignment in technical design, hygiene promotion, community O&M and gender equity; Outcome: sector alignment by working with all stakeholders to define, implement and enforce the sector's regulations, standards, procedures and requirements (MHMS, 2014:6)

[23] The World Bank report that substantial improvements to the financial management systems of the nine provinces compared to the baseline situation of 2007 before PCDF was officially launched. Prior to that, between 1993-2008 the PGs only produced two Financial Statements out of the 135 Financial Statements required (1.5 percent) (World Bank, 2022: 14). Improvements in PG financial management should, by extension, enhance financial alignment and harmonisation and support decentralisation objectives.

[24] "Up to date information on the location and operational status of WASH schemes is essential for the planning and coordination of the sector and for M&E purposes. RWASH shall in conjunction with the National Health Information System (HIS) and the sector stakeholders develop and maintain a database. The database will record data of all stakeholders' projects in a basic format to allow for easy management and access to it by all users" (MHMS, 2015: 22).

[25] Urban Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Project (UWSSSP) seeks to improve governance and coordination in the Greater Honiara Catchment (see Solomon Times, 2019).

[26] The last publicly available MHMS annual report (2017) mentions that two staff were undergoing bachelor training at FNU on environment health (assume the examples above), another was undergoing service training at FNU for engineering, whilst another staff member had recently completed a master's degree at the University of Queensland (MHMS, 2017).

[27] The unstandardised status of Solomon Islands Pidgin – the national lingua-franca which has been codified in neighbouring Vanuatu (Bislama) and Papua New Guinea (Tok Pisin) but not Solomon Islands – also arguably hampers training, as the facilitator guides are in English but delivery is in Pidgin.

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