POLICY BRIEF

Improving water management in rural communities - Key findings for Policy in Solomon Islands

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International WaterCentre
Griffith UNIVERSITY Queensland, Australia
USP THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC
SINU SOLOMON ISLANDS NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
Water For Women
Australian Aid

KEY MESSAGES FOR POLICY-MAKERS

1. **Communities need ongoing support for good water management**, which is necessary to support safe, resilient and inclusive WASH outcomes.

2. Water (or WASH) Committees are central to the sustainability of community-managed water systems and WASH outcomes, and **support should focus on supporting Water Committees**.
   - Water Committees do benefit from some technical support – more in relation to proactive management of risks, as well as some operational requirements of water systems (capacities to respond to minor technical problems is mostly sufficient).
   - Water Committees also need mentoring & motivating, through ongoing support to "backstop" governance & management, and through monitoring and reporting to encourage both accountability and recognition of progress.

3. More careful **consideration needs to be given to the nature of support offered to communities**, for sustainable water management outcomes.
   - Project-based support is appropriate for providing some place-based support, such as with the design and installation of infrastructure. However, the backstopping of Water Committees requires ongoing and regular support, beyond a project life cycle.
   - Support needs to be provided in ways that encourages the initiative and self-efficacy of Water Committees, such as by mentoring and developing capacities to solve technical, management or governance problems. A reliance on external organisations to fix problems has created a culture of dependency and delimits a Water Committee's self-belief and motivation to take action, and, reduces their authority and agency within their community.
   - Support for community water management needs to encompass more than educational objectives – whilst some capacity development of Water Committees is needed, there is also a need to influence behaviours (of Water Committees and community members). Complementing educational approaches with social marketing approaches offers a more holistic approach to influence action.

4. While many smaller villages and settlements have strong social cohesion across the whole community, many villages and settlements do not – the strongest levels of social cohesion often exist at smaller levels within villages/settlements. **External organisations and Water Committees should seek to "*work with the grain*" by engaging with existing levels of social cohesion**, including social structures and networks, such as tribe, zones or groups/clusters of households, and social groups).

PACWAM+ RESEARCH PROGRAM

The Pacific Community Water Management Plus (PaCWaM+) research objective was to investigate how governments and Civil Society Organisations (CSO) can better enable rural community water management to improve SDG6 outcomes: specifically WASH outcomes that are resilient to natural hazards and disasters, that are sustainable (exist for the long-term), and that are inclusive (meet the needs of everyone).

This study provides regionally appropriate evidence about what kinds of support are needed to complement and improve community capacities for water management across different village, island and country contexts in the Fiji and Solomon Islands**.**

The research involved two phases. PHASE 1 research sought to identify what the 'plus' factors might look like in two Pacific Island countries – what type of support is needed by communities, and how that support might be achieved. PHASE 2 activities focussed on further exploring and – where possible – piloting, some potential 'plus' approaches.

Based on this 4-year research program, several key lessons have emerged for practitioners and policymakers in Fiji. This Policy brief outlines some of the most important.

More information about the research program can be found here:

www.watercentre.org/research/pcwm

5. The social networks of communities extend beyond the boundaries of the village or settlements, with most having community members residing in towns or cities elsewhere in Solomon Islands or overseas. **External organisations could leverage existing informal social networks that connect rural villages with towns**, as innovative ways to provide support to rural communities. Town-based community members and connections are potentially rich agents for knowledge transfer and acquiring resources for supporting improved **WASH outcomes.**

6. Although Water Committees are central to sustained community water management, all community members have important roles to play. **Water is Everyone's Business** and collective action is required by everyone. The way that individuals and households use and impact water, affects the sustainability of the water supplies – **Water Committees need to influence the actions and behaviours of community members**. And, **community members need to participate in collective action** such as conducting minor maintenance activities, assisting with larger maintenance and repair activities, and by paying water fees.

7. Structural and contextual factors, such as physical and social factors, influence local water management and WASH situations. These can be specific to each community, and so the problems encountered by a Water Committee, the types of support they need, and the suitability of different ways to provide that support, are not the same for every community. An **awareness of local factors and histories is important to enable supporting organisations to offer appropriate support to Water Committees**.

COMMUNITY WATER MANAGEMENT PLUS (CWM+) IS NECESSARY

Government and private sector water services to rural populations in PICs are limited and likely to remain so. Consequently, community water management (CWM) will remain the dominant model for rural water service delivery into the future, as reflected in many Pacific government WASH policies.

However, evidence from the Pacific and elsewhere indicated that basic models of CWM, in which communities bear full responsibility to manage water systems after their installation, typically have low sustainability (Clarke et.al., 2014; Bond et.al., 2014; Hutchings et al., 2015; World Bank, 2017). This leads to poor WASH outcomes, such as inadequate accessibility, quality, and reliability of water and compromised hygiene practices.

The balance of responsibility for operations and maintenance for water supply systems has to shift "*…away from rural communities that have for too long been overburdened with the expectation that they should be independently successful 'public service managers'*" (Hutchings et al., 2017:166).

The community water management plus (CWM+) model is considered a viable improvement to the basic CWM model (Baumann, 2006; Hutchings et al., 2015, 2017). The CWM+ model includes long-term support from external organisations or people following the initial hand-over of water infrastructure to a community.

Pacific governments already appreciate that further support is required to support CWM, and, do provide support to communities. However, the rate of progress of access to safe water services by rural communities is slow indicating that existing support is insufficient.

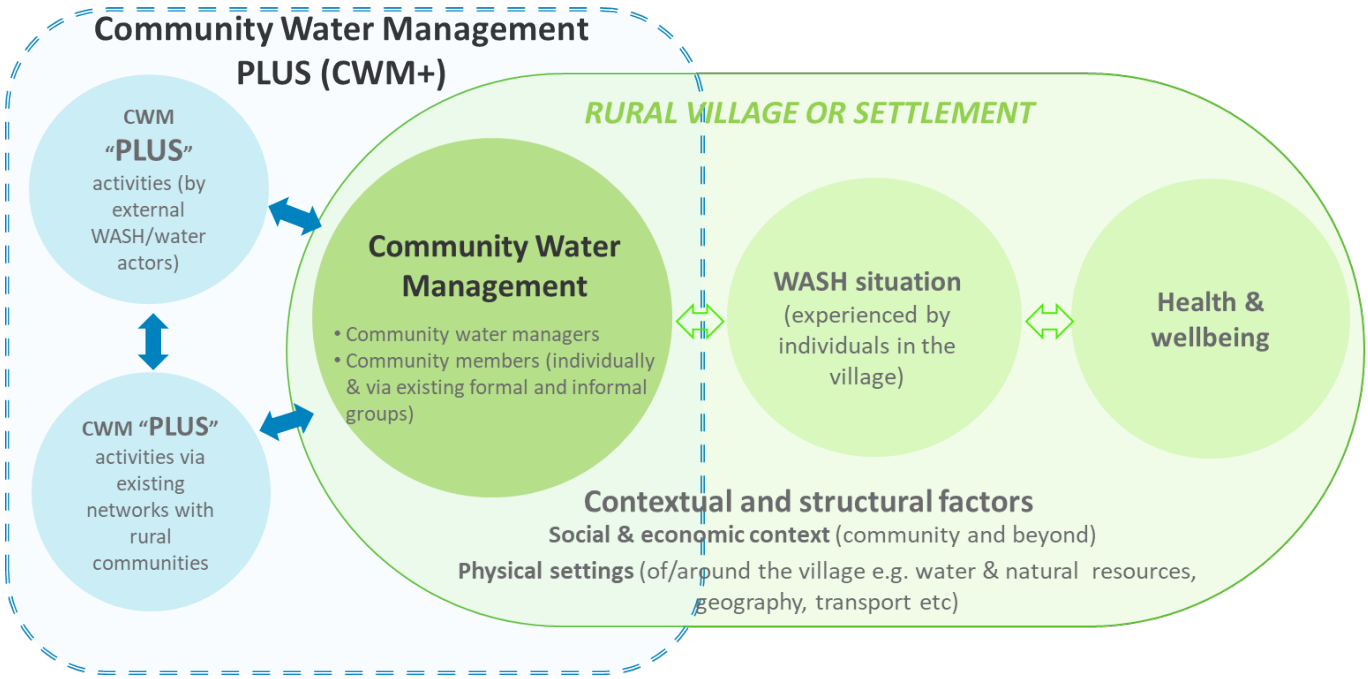
The PaCWaM+ program indicated that most community Water Committees were struggling, without support, to remain active and effective water managers.

Enabling actors such as CSOs and provincial and national governments must provide some kind of further advisory and practical support if the community water management model is to lead to safe, reliable and adequate WASH services.

Image: Hulavu village, North Guadalcanal (Collin Benjamin - SINU - with members of the Hulavu water committee)

Cover photo by: Diana Gonzalez

Figure 1: Community Water Management Plus model. Community Water Management is necessary for the achievement of WASH services, and the health and wellbeing benefits they provide. But Community Water Management requires ongoing support from organisations and individuals – either through direct engagement with Water committees in communities, or indirectly via existing social networks connected with communities. The type of support required, and the way that support is provided, needs to suit the local contextual and structural factors, and therefore might need to be different between different communities.



This support could be direct with support from government, CSOs provided to Water Committees. Or it could be indirect, such as through leveraging town-community social networks (Figure 1). Irrespective of the mode of support, it is clear that communities do, and will, continue to face challenges – both technical and governance in nature. Any such ongoing support needs to be pragmatic and place-based, whereby a balance is struck between fostering dependency (undesirable) encouraging self-help (desirable).

This key lesson – that Water Committees need follow-up visits and ongoing support in order to manage their water systems for the long-term – is similar to the lessons learned from sanitation programs such as CLTS. Follow-up support is key to keeping communities on track with water, sanitation and hygiene services and behaviours.

STRUCTURAL FACTORS AFFECT HOW BEST TO SUPPORT GOOD COMMUINTY WATER MANAGEMENT

A range of structural factors that affect CWM and WASH were identified in Solomon Islands. These are local factors that can't be (easily) changed, especially in a short time period. These structural factors influence the ways in which "good community water management" is best supported and achieved in each community. Understanding such factors, and how they inform CWM and WASH-outcomes, is important.

Some key structural factors, as identified and explored in the research, include demographic factors (*e.g., Population and size of the community; number of tribes),* governance, potential water management group members (*e.g., age, inclusiveness*), WASH history, cultural norms, extant social issues (*e.g., "community disharmony*") and physical settings.

Government and CSO engagement in the sector need to focus on improving factors that can be influenced in a short-medium timeframe, whilst navigating around foundational factors that require longer-term changes. To do this, the specific foundational / structural factors of a given locale need to first be assessed.

WHAT DOES 'GOOD' COMMUNITY WATER MANAGEMENT LOOK LIKE?

Based on existing literature, our key research questions and the results from our Phase 1 research, we identified key features of what constitutes 'good' water management, based on the strengths observed and problems encountered in our case study sites (i.e., evidence of inadequate WASH, or factors identified by community members). These features of 'good' water management are grouped under three core areas.

i) **Actions by a water management group (*e.g., Water Committee*).** The existence of an organised group of community members to drive community water management actions is critical. There are many functions this group would perform for ideal water management outcomes, and thus the capacity of this group is also critical; a diverse membership is important, not only from the perspective of increasing representation and inclusion within communities, but also to increase the diversity of skills and knowledge needed in managing water systems, as well as creating some redundancy and spreading responsibilities amongst more people to ensure continuity of water services.

ii) **Actions by all water users (across different socio-spatial levels)**

In addition to actions by a water management group, all water users have a role to play in achieving resilient, inclusive and sustainable community water systems. Collective action is required on several levels – individual, HH's/family, group/area, community-wide

iii) **External actors' role (in each community relating to WM).** In addition to maintaining a supportive enabling / governance environment, external actor's such as government, civil society, and the private sector, have a role to play in assisting with managing community water systems directly.

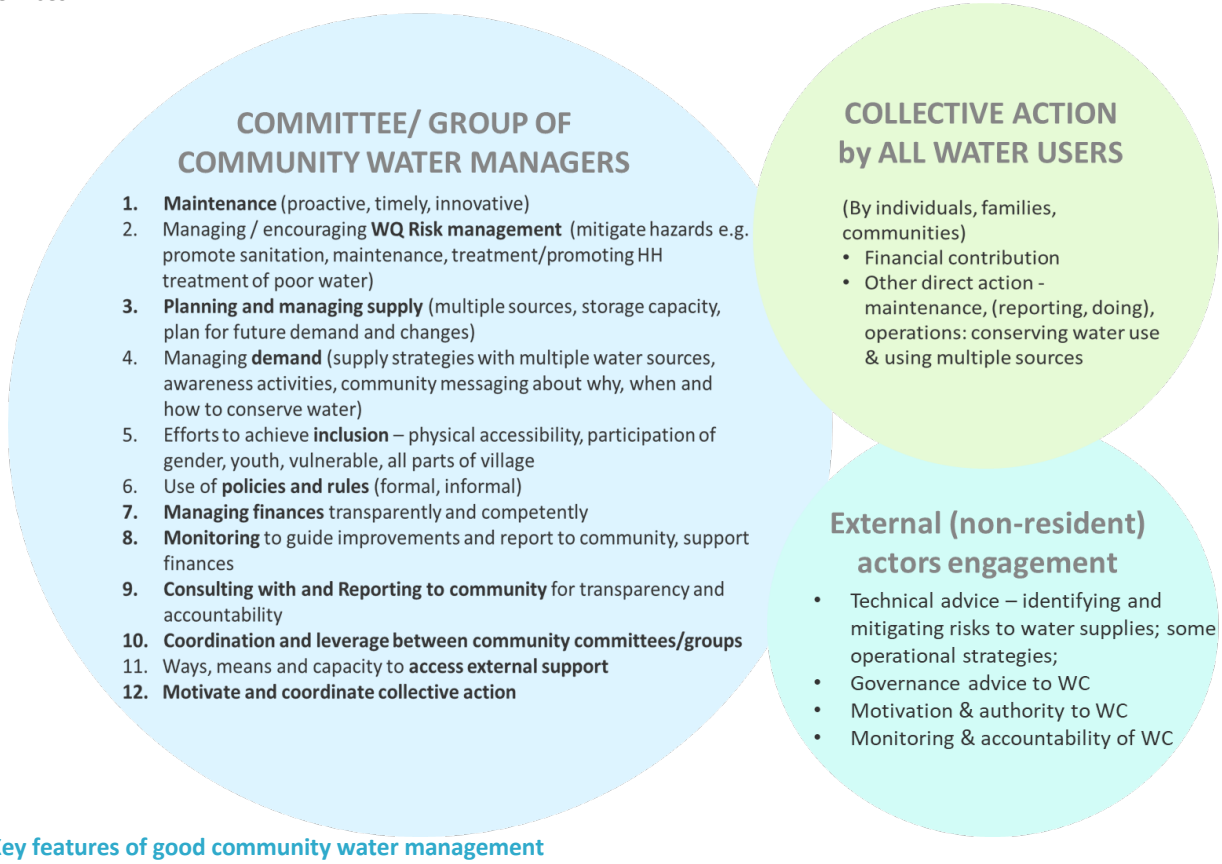


Figure 2: Key features of good community water management

APPROACHES TO SUPPORT WATER COMMITTEES AND COMMUNITIES in SOLOMON ISLANDS

The Phase 1 Pacific Community Water Management Plus (PaCWaM+) research investigated how Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and governments can better enable rural community water management to improve SDG6 outcomes: specifically WASH outcomes that are resilient to natural hazards and disasters, that are sustainable (exist for the long-term), and that are inclusive (meet the needs of everyone). The Phase 2 work focused on developing and piloting approaches and tools that CSOs, Governments or any relevant stakeholders can use to strengthen the community engagement, support and governance for CWM.

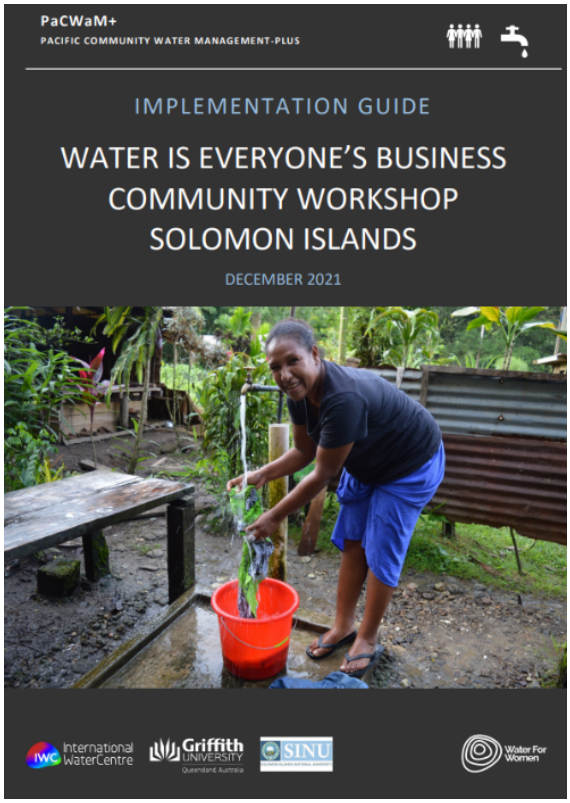
These CWM plus tools and approaches were built on the following guiding principles:

- Work with the grain
  - existing levels of social cohesion for action planning and representation
  - town-cousin networks
  - pedagogies/learning styles
- Acknowledge village diversity (modular approaches) and different social-governance contexts
- Mix of educational and motivational (social marketing) approaches
- Complement existing actions by CSOs & Government.

MOTIVATING COLLECTIVE ACTION: Water is Everyone's Business

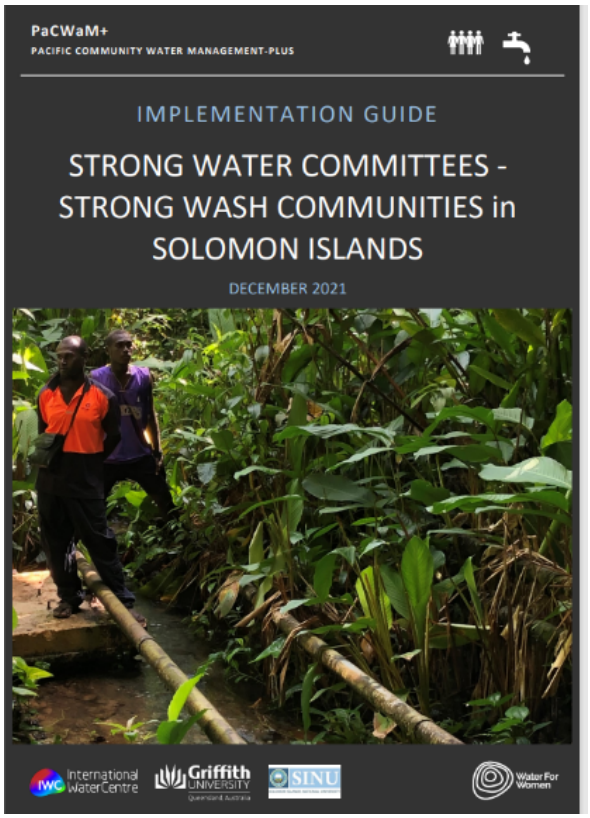
This community meeting/*tok stori* activity is designed to raise water issues and management as a greater community priority and motivate interest amongst community members in meeting their collective responsibilities to manage community water, and to provide some awareness about actions they can take.

The three short video stories emphasise the importance of youth and women involvement in water management, and of self-reliance. The videos feature community members from a range of villages sharing their stories on the positive things happening in their communities. This community engagement tool, "Water is everyone's business" should be incorporated into a broader set of community engagement activities – it is designed to complement approaches such as the Strong WASH Committees – Strong WASH Communities approach above.



STRENGTHENING WATER COMMITTEES: STRONG WASH COMMITTEES – STRONG WATER COMMUNITIES

Research indicated that sustaining the membership and the activeness of Water Committees remains a significant challenge; Governments, CSOs and utilities can provide some encouragement and support to committees to enable them to become stronger (Refer to Additional reading for references of these research reports). This research formed the basis of the Strong Water Committees – Strong WASH Communities Implementation Guide.



The purpose of this approach is to motivate and encourage Water Committees to reflect on how they can make their committee stronger and work better with the whole community and advocate for greater collective action.

The *Strong Water Committees – Strong WASH Communities* approach is designed to complement the existing guidance provided by Governments and CSOs to committees, which focus on roles and responsibilities and strengthening the technical capacity of the committee. These topics are not addressed in the Strong Water Committees – Strong WASH Communities guide and need to be addressed separately**.**

The key activities include

- *TokStori* session supported by video stories: "Strong WASH Committees" – which includes real interviews with Water Committee members from other villages in Solomon Islands, discussing some key challenges and the ways other Committees are addressing these challenges. These are designed to motivate Water Committees to organise themselves well and to take action, by raising awareness that other Water Committees are taking positive actions rather than waiting for support to arrive from outside.
- Workshop activities to encourage discussion of how the Water Committee engages with its community members in planning and management
- *Water is Everyone's Business* session – to discuss the activities in the activity (see below) and how they will be shared with the community

COMMUNITY-BASED WATER SECURITY IMPROVEMENT PLANNING (CWSIP) - a Water Safety Planning approach designed for Solomon Islands village systems

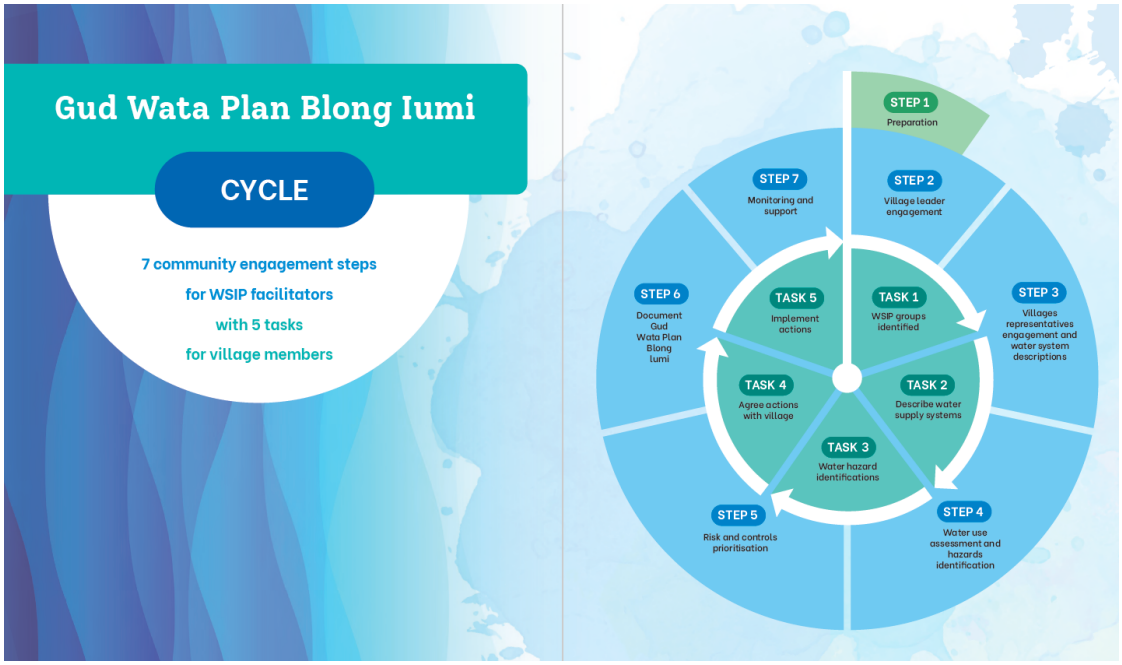
The IWC and SINU worked with Plan International Australia, Plan International Pacific and Live and Learn Environmental Education, to develop locally-appropriate, risk-based planning guide for use by government and civil society community facilitators in rural communities of the Solomon Islands.

The approach involves visits spread over 1-3 months. This has proven critical because it is not possible to build sufficient capacity of Water Committees to undertake complex tasks such as risk assessments, community assessments with intensive 2–3 day training. The recommended approach to building capacity is to divide the training into shorter sessions of training and hands-on learning, allowing participants to more effectively absorb new information and skills, and to discuss with other participants which helps to reenforce learning.

Some of the changes made, compared with a typical Water Safety Planning, to make the approach more suited locally include:

- Considering water quantity as well as quality
- Additional training on water cycles and pathways of impacts to water supplies (to support sanitary and risk assessments)
- Suited to Solomon Islands social & environmental settings
- Designed to build community capacities: Learning-by-doing, not too intensive (1-3 months)
- Supports self-reliance (explicit attention to individual and HH actions, and maintenance)
- Designed to support greater social inclusion (meeting needs of all; inclusive governance), such as by involving zones or other social levels in both assessing existing access, and in identifying future actions
- Consider climate change hazards
- Encouraging not only infrastructure actions as part of the planning process, but also behavioural actions at individual and household levels
- Encouraging the Water Committee to assess their membership and ways of engaging and communicating with the Community for collective action.

The implementation of this CWSIP approach requires a similar total time spent in communities to more typical Water Safety Planning, but the visits are more spread out over time. To assist with cost-effectiveness, the recommendation is to organise community visits to spend a day or two in each community, and visit several communities on one mission. This is not very different from the sanitation implementation processes of CLTS in Solomon Islands, where multiple visits are planned to each community, to allow the community time to discuss key messages and take actions.



STRENGTHENING WATER COMMITTEES: BACKSTOPPING WATER COMMITTEES

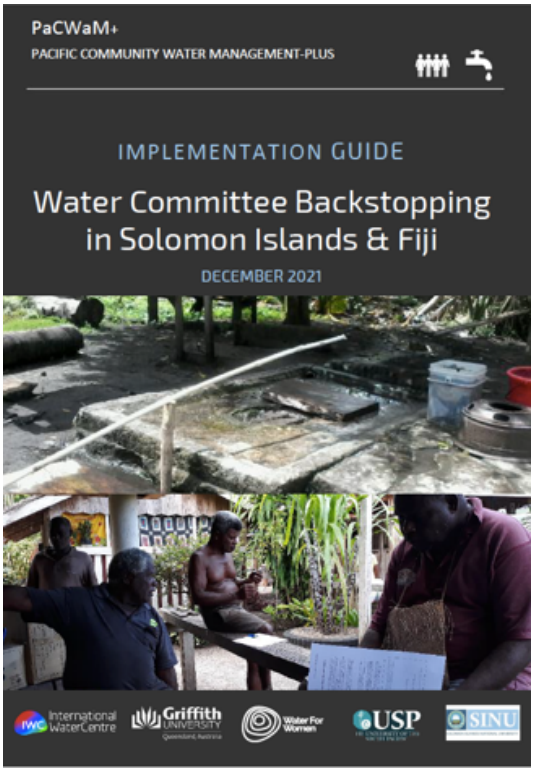
Research indicated that communities would benefit from access to technical and non-technical advice to better manage their water systems. Furthermore, discussion with Water Authority Fiji (WAF) technicians found that communities generally had sufficient know-how to address minor repairs and maintenance, but were struggling with:

- Management issues
- Understanding the roles and responsibilities of the Water Committee
- Ensuring adequate funds are available for repairs
- Facilitating some collective water management actions.

The purpose of the backstopping approach is to provide Water Committees with the opportunity to receive technical and non-technical support and advice about operating and maintaining their water system helps to improve the water system service. The backstopping should be carried out by a Water, WASH or related Technician or Officer or from a relevant government agency or utility.

The Technician's role is to be a "backstop" (similar to baseball 'backstop' whose role it is to catch the ball when the batter misses it – here the batter is the Water Committee). This involves providing technical and non-technical advice that is suited to the community situation – that is, it is specific to the water system, environment, and social and cultural context of the community.

The key activities of the Technician is to regularly visit Water Committees (e.g. every few months) to enhance skills and knowledge about water management, build confidence, clarify roles and responsibilities, and help motivate the Water Committee. This may involve showing/teaching people how to do repairs, maintenance or operate the water system. It may also involve sharing the technicians' experience about what good water management looks like in other parts. It does not entail fixing things for the community.



The Water Committee Backstopping approach should:

- Maximise capacity building and learning through regular 2-3 monthly community visits, preferably by the same set of Technicians (who develop familiarity with a community setting), and involve engagement with a regular group of Water Committee members to progressively build new capacities, using hands-on and storytelling teaching approaches
- Include operational, technical management and some maintenance issues aspects (e.g., identifying and mitigating risks to water quality and quantity, proactive maintenance)
- Include discussions with Water Committees about ways of working more actively with their community, encouraging collective action and raising funds for the water systems
- Recognise communities have different water systems with different social and environmental settings, and therefore have unique problems and capacity needs
- Maximise logistical efficiency and reduce the cost of visiting remote communities by clustering community Backstopping visits: for example, spending half a day in 10 villages in one week.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The PaCWaM+ research project has produced a range of documents describing the **research findings** to support Pacific Community Water Management Plus, which are available from the PaCWaM+ webpage: www.watercentre.org/research/pcwm. These include:

- Solomon Islands Synthesis Report Phase 1 Research
- PaCWaM+ Research Brief-Phase 1 Key Findings
- Learning Brief on "The benefits of strong Gender and Social Inclusion in the management of village water systems in Melanesia"
- Policy Brief on "Governance to support Integrated Water Management in the Solomon Islands"
- Backstopping Rural Community Water Management – Lessons from Solomon Islands and Fiji – A Research and Practice Brief
- Community-Based Water Security Improvement Planning (Solomon Islands) – *case study*

A range of **implementation guides and resources** to support Pacific Community Water Management Plus can be accessed from the PaCWaM+ webpage: www.watercentre.org/research/pcwm. These include:

- Strong Water Committees – Strong WASH Communities in Solomon Islands – Implementation Guide. Including associated resources:
  - Video Strong Water Committees – Strong WASH Communities (standalone copies can obtained from iwc@griffithedu.au (with or without English subtitles), or viewed on the webpage: www.watercentre.org/research/pcwm)
- Water is Everyone's Business – Community workshop in Solomon Islands – Implementation Guide. Including associated resources
  - Video: Water is everyone's business
  - Video: Youth and Water
  - Video: Women and Water
  - Poster: Water is Everyone's Business
- Water Committee Backstopping in Solomon Islands and Fiji – Implementation Guide
- Community-based Water Security Improvement Planning – Solomon Islands – implementation guide (3 volumes)

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Cover photo: Hulavu village, North Guadalcanal. Photo by Diana Gonzalez

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Image: CWSIP step 4 activity in Vatukola, Guadalcanal. Photo by Collin Benjamin

Image: Munda, Western Province. Photo by Regina Souter

RESEARCH PARTNERS

International WaterCentre
Griffith University, Queensland, Australia
USP The University of the South Pacific
SINU Solomon Islands National University
PLAN International
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