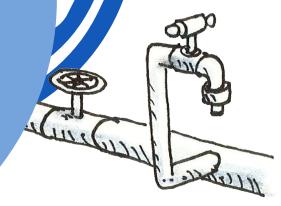
Community-Based Water Security Improvement Planning in Solomon Islands CASE STUDY













Water, sanitation and hygiene statistics for rural Solomon Islands are some of the worst in the world with access to an improved water source at only 54% and access to improved sanitation at 13%. According to the World Bank, stunting is reportedly impacting 32% of children. While the World Health Organisation Solomon Islands Statistical Profile states that 7% of child under-5 mortalities result from diarrhoea. Access to a water supply and improved sanitation was highlighted as the highest priority need, particularly in rural areas, during the provincial consultation process for Solomon Islands. National Development Strategy (NDS) 2016–2035. The NDS articulates commitment to meet Sustainable Development Goal targets, including Goal 6, to achieve 'water and sanitation for all' (universal access) by 2030.

With funding from Australian Government's Water for Women Fund, Plan International Australia in partnership with Live & Learn Environmental Education and in collaboration with International WaterCentre has drawn on existing evidence and approaches to develop a contextualised Community-based Water Security Improvement Planning (CWSIP) guide for Solomon Islands.

The CWSIP tool aims to:

 Support community-led water management through knowledge sharing and provision of a practical process

 Promote 'access for all' by amplifying the voices of marginalised community members and prompting decision makers to consider WASH inequalities in water management

 Provides a risk-based approach to community-led water management including specific risks related to climate change



The need for a contextualised approach in the Solomon Islands

Despite a solid sector policy and strategic plan, the need for evidence-based, effective and sustainable approaches to WASH in Solomon Islands is significant. The mandated community operation and maintenance of rural water supply systems is currently ineffective and requires contextualised approaches to support community skills development. To date, there is no evidence of holistic water management approaches, including water safety planning, implemented to improve rural water supply in Solomon Islands. Many projects focus on improving a single water source/system, overlooking other water sources that provide much needed redundancy for resilience. In the Solomon Islands, there is an opportunity for improvements in water security and resilience through protection and improvement of multiple sources in each community.



CWSIP is designed to respond to the need for improved community-based water management and to build on a growing movement towards holistic water management and strengthening of climate resilience. The approach was developed to support government and civil society implementers of WASH projects, to improve the sustainability, inclusivity and resilience of rural water supplies in Solomon Islands.

The approach to better community-based water management and improved practices

The CWSIP approach builds on and contextualises existing Water Safety Planning and Water Security Improvement approaches, specifically adopting and adapting the most relevant aspects to respond to the added complexities posed by environmental change, natural disasters, community capacities, demographic change and social marginalisation in Solomon Islands. The approach was specifically designed to strengthen social inclusion through the process.

The CWSIP adopts the main concepts of Water Safety/Security Planning, in particular, the approach to describe community water systems, identify risks, identify and prioritise controls and actions, and prepare an incremental, community water security improvement plan. Importantly, the steps have been adapted to suit the local context in rural Solomon Islands and incorporate consideration for both climate change and social inclusion.

The process was developed drawing mostly from the following approaches:

- UNICEF Climate Resilient WASH Guidelines
- WHO Climate Resilient Water Safety Planning
- WHO Equitable Water Safety Planning
- Sustainable Water Partnership's Water Security Improvement Process



Community inclusion from the outset

Rather than relying on outside experts developing a plan in consultation with a community during one intensive visit, the CWSIP is a scaffolded, cyclical, action-learning exercise undertaken over multiple visits. This better suits village rhythms and allows for more experiential and incremental learning and improvement. Local people are not just participants but actively involved in gathering and sharing information and stories with other members of the community though the process. The approach centres on oral rather than written communication to suit local knowledge-sharing preferences, builds on local knowledge and governance systems, and is deeply informed by a social and historical understanding of the contextual factors and emerging research by IWC on community-based water management in the Solomon Islands.



Community engagement activities have been informed by Rapid Rural Appraisal/ Participatory Rural Appraisal approaches and broader community development processes, which acknowledge that the energy a community will put into any activity will be in proportion to their involvement in the planning of that activity.

One of the key aspects of the approach is not necessarily working at the village-wide level with a suite of village representatives, but rather, working with a broader cross-section of a community at smaller levels – namely, zone/group and household levels. This better reflects the cultural and material reality of local life-ways, where a village or 'community' is not a homogenous, undifferentiated 'whole' but rather made of 'communities within communities'. Social cohesion and collective action are much stronger at this more micro-level, reflecting familial/cultural ties and also corresponds with the micro-particulars of the WASH situation.

CWISP Process

The piloting of the CWSIP is ongoing and at various stages in different communities. There are however, already, tangible impacts in some communities and a strong sense from project officers and community members that the process is valuable. Promising initial results include, improved understanding on water cycle, risk and hazards within communities, pro-active actions to improve water access for all, and development of community water security improvement plans.



As with other water safety planning approaches, the CWSIP process is cyclical, following a continuous cycle of assess, plan, act, monitor. As such, there is no definitive end point at which to make an absolute evaluation and it is expected that more significant action points (e.g. expansion or upgrade of piped water system) will require some time to achieve (i.e. maybe several years).

Outcomes and Results - so far

- Increased understanding from community members on the water cycle. This is done by using pre-drawn diagrams of the water cycle and by eliminating complex language
- The routine testing of community water supplies occurs onsite, giving instant feedback to community members
- Improvement of household water storage practices
- Community members are able to identify their own risks and hazards, enabling them to understand and consider their options
- Increased community capacity to encourage engagement and ownership of the project. This includes enabling community members to conduct their own household surveys
- Improved community dialogue and the amplification of the voice and agency of marginalised groups
- Further engagement of 'zone' representatives, who are responsible for gathering and cascading
 information and sharing it with the broader community
- Improved water quality and access to water sources through practical improvements and changes in behaviour



What Next?

While piloting continues, there is a strong sense from field staff that the CWSIP guide is a powerful and useful tool for the WASH sector. Although delayed by Tropical Cyclone Harold responses and COVID 19 preparations, the piloting of the project has continued in 2020. Once the refined CWSIP process is finalised for publishing it will be circulated within the Solomon Islands WASH sector and implementation will be expanded to further communities in West Guadalcanal province.

The CWSIP process is an integral component of International WaterCentre, Plan and Live & Learn's research into community based water management in Solomon Islands. The research will test the efficacy of the CWSIP approach as well as the added impacts of supplementary activities, such as technical trainings and backstopping for water committees and provision of inspiring storytelling ans sharing to motivate community action, that will be tested in FY21. End-line monitoring of the research is scheduled for June 2021 with results published thereafter.