



IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

Water Committee Backstopping in Solomon Islands & Fiji

DECEMBER 2021



Research Organisations



CSO Partners



With the support of



Visit our [website](http://www.watercentre.org/research/pcwm)
www.watercentre.org/research/pcwm

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the research communities that have contributed to the PaCWaM research project, as well as Habitat for Humanity Fiji, the Water Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Health & Medical Services (Fiji), Live & Learn Environmental Education -Solomon Islands, Plan International-Australia, and the Guadalcanal provincial government (who assisted with the pilot backstopping trail and research).

Suggested citation: Love, M., Beal, C., Hagaobore, J., Benjamin, C., Panda, N., Bugoro, H and Souter, R.T. (2021) *Water Committee Backstopping – Implementation Guide for Fiji and Solomon islands*. International WaterCentre at Griffith University.

Cover images: J. Hagaobore and C. Benjamin, SINU, Solomon Islands

Contents

<i>Water Committee Backstopping – Activity Overview</i>	4
Who is this Implementation Guide for?	4
How to use this Implementation Guide	4
Purpose of Water Committee Backstopping	4
Background	5
Implementing Water Committee Backstopping.....	6
How to implement.....	6
During the first visit.....	6
During follow up visits	7
Resources and Timing.....	8
Water Committee Backstopping resources	8
Timing of Backstopping visits	8
Maximising capacity building and learning approaches	9
Further reading	10
Appendix A – Water Committee backstopping activities record.....	12

Water Committee Backstopping – Activity Overview

The International WaterCentre (IWC), at Griffith University, in partnership with the Solomon Islands National University (SINU) and the University of the South Pacific (Fiji), with input from Guadalcanal Provincial Government, Solomon Islands, have prepared this Guide for implementing Water Committee Backstopping activities in rural Solomon Islands.

WHO IS THIS IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE FOR?

This Activity Guide provides a “how to” guide for Water or WASH field officers from the relevant Pacific Island country provincial governments to undertake Water Committee technical backstopping. This guide is based on research and trials undertaken in Solomon Islands, and research and consultation with WASH sector professionals in Fiji (e.g., Water Authority of Fiji, Ministry of Health & Medical Services, non-government organisations) and communities. As such, this Guide is most tailored to Solomon Islands and Fiji but would also be applicable – with only minor modification – to some other Pacific Island country contexts (such as Vanuatu).

Specifically, Water Committee backstopping should be carried out by the WASH or related officer from the relevant provincial government. The key role of the WASH Officer is to provide information on a regular basis to enhance skills and knowledge about water management, build confidence, clarify roles and responsibilities, and help motivate the WASH or Water Committee, or informal water managers, in community.

HOW TO USE THIS IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

This guide contains the steps required for planning and conducting WASH Committee Backstopping activities. There are also a number of recommendations, based on field pilot trials, for government field officers to observe in order to maximise the beneficial outcomes from backstopping activities.

Appendix A provides a site visit record template for the field WASH Officers.

PURPOSE OF WATER COMMITTEE BACKSTOPPING

Research conducted by IWC, USP and SINU, in Fiji and Solomon Islands, has indicated that following the handover of water supply systems to communities for their management, WASH Committees tasked with this responsibility face unfamiliar challenges they struggle to manage without support. The research also indicated that regular support visits by enabling actors, such as Governments, CSOs and utilities, could provide the ongoing support that would enable WASH Committees to deliver more sustainable and inclusive water supplies.

Technical Backstopping is an approach that provides on-site **advisory support**, rather than hands-on service delivery or provision of infrastructure such as spare parts. It involves providing advice on managing technical problems, either by discussing or demonstrating operational or maintenance actions, or management strategies including monitoring and risk assessment, that are specific to the system, and the local social and physical environment.

In the WASH sector, technical backstopping specifically refers to agencies providing on-going technical support (or 'backstopping') to solve technical problems and maximise water system operations after their implementation and handover to communities.

BACKGROUND

In the Pacific Islands, it is typical for village members to be responsible for operating and maintaining their own water systems. Often, they have received some assistance in paying for the water system and constructing the system and, usually, some training in operating and maintaining the system. The training is often a few days only and there may be some manuals or documents to provide additional information on operation and maintenance. After this training, it is up to the community to operate and maintain the water system.

Global evidence suggests, however, that communities require assistance to fully realise successful water management. There are many reasons for this, but one is that every water system is different and can have its own problems, and that the few days of training that was given at system implementation is not enough for the community to be able to solve all water system maintenance and management problems. Maintaining water supply systems has proven to be more difficult than constructing new systems; thus, it is increasingly recognised that agencies must focus on postconstruction support and monitoring if the CWM model of service delivery is to be successful and sustainable.

Structured follow-up support or 'backstopping' by government or NGOs after water system installation is limited in Pacific Island countries. If community-based water management (CWM) is to remain the dominant water service model in the region, improved Water or WASH Committee training and ongoing follow-up support is required for countries to achieve universal access to safe water and satisfy SDG6 targets.

Our research indicates that a modified version of Technical Backstopping, termed Water Committee Backstopping, has the potential to provide the support that communities and Water committees need to achieve safe and reliable water supplies.

For readability, we use the term 'Water Committee' to also encompass 'WASH Committees' (as they are often called in Solomon Islands).

Photo: Spring-dam with overflow, Western Province, Solomon islands (R. Souter, IWC)



Implementing Water Committee Backstopping

HOW TO IMPLEMENT

The WASH Officer's role is to be a "backstop" - think of it being like a baseball 'backstop' whose role it is to catch the ball when the batter misses it, and stop it from getting away – but they don't step-up and take over the batting. So the WASH Officer is catching the problems the Water Committee didn't manage to resolve on their own – but they don't take over and resolve the problem themselves – the Officer provides advice to the Water Committee to resolve the problem, and ways to best manage their water system. Usually this will involve discussing problems the community currently has with their system, or discussing problems that might occur. Or, it may involve showing/teaching people how to do repairs, maintenance or operate the water system.

DURING THE FIRST VISIT

The first visit to a community is to establish an initial relationship with the community leaders and Water Committee, and seek their commitment and approval to participate in a Backstopping program. The following are key steps during this first visit:

1. **Meet with community leaders to:**
 - i. explain the role of the WASH Officer
 - ii. to identify the key people will be involved in the backstopping activity over time
2. **Identify the 'water managers'** who are currently looking after the water system. This may be a committee (or in the absence of a formal committee it may be 1 or 2 people who have taken the responsibility to manage the water system).
3. **Meet with the current 'water managers' to:**
 - i. Explain the activity and the role of the WASH Officer, the role of the water managers
 - ii. Identify what type is the water system, where are the main infrastructure (dams, spring boxes, pipes, etc)
 - iii. Ask how well the system works, and identify any problems.
 - iv. Inspect the system to discuss current problems, or possible future problems
 - v. Give advice on actions to improve these problems.
4. **Complete the Water Committee Backstopping checklist and activities record** (Appendix A). Keep these records on file and review before the next visit, as a way to remember the community's water system and challenges.

DURING FOLLOW UP VISITS

After gaining approval from community leaders and the Water Committee, the subsequent visits focus on direct engagement with the Water Committee. Try to get commitment that the same (or all) Water Committee members will meet with the WASH Officer during these visits.

The following are key steps during the follow up visits:

1. **Meet with the Water Committee** and discuss the water system generally – how well it is performing and any problems. Include a discussion on management issues, and ways these could be addressed.

For management issues, the WASH Officer might consider running specific workshops with the Committee to address these problems. A range of guides exist to address specific problems, including some produced by the Solomon Islands Government, and other produced from the Pacific Community Water Management Plus project (e.g. Strong Water Committees). The types of management problems commonly experienced by Water Committees include

- Lack of financial contributions from water users
- Lack of diversity and too small WASH Committee (not enough youth and women)
- Not enough, clear communication with community members and water users about the activities of the Committee, spending of financial contributions.

Identify any technical problems and, during the inspection (next step), consider what the causes of these problems might be.

2. **Inspect the water system** with (some) Water Committee members – look for existing problems, or possible future problems and discuss ways to manage or prevent these problems. This might mean discussing
 - i. **Reactive maintenance** – best ways to fix or make repairs to the system
 - ii. **Proactive maintenance and managing risks** – maintenance activities that should be done regularly to prevent problems that cause damage to the water system, or cause it not to work properly. For example, fencing around the dam to prevent animals entering and damaging pipes, cleaning the dam or reservoir, cleaning roofs and guttering collecting rainwater, protecting pipes (burying them deep enough to avoid damage, marking where pipes are to prevent damage from digging etc), planning ahead for festivals and other times when there will be many people in the village (by reducing water use beforehand to save up water in the reservoir).
 - iii. **Operational improvements** – changes to the way the system is operated to improve the quality or reliability of water supplies, for example, managing water pressure by turning of the stop cock/reservoir tap to allow water to build up in the reservoir, encouraging water users to save drinking water for drinking and cooking and using other water for non-drinking needs such as washing clothes, cleaning houses, water for animals and gardening.
3. **Complete** the Water Committee Backstopping checklist and activities record. Keep these records on file and review before the next visit, as a way to remember the community's water system and challenges.

RESOURCES AND TIMING

WATER COMMITTEE BACKSTOPPING RESOURCES

The WASH Officer should bring the following for each community visit:

- The Water Committee Backstopping Implementation Guide (this document)
- Blank Water Committee Backstopping activities record sheet (Appendix A)
- Water Committee Backstopping Activities records from previous visits
- If possible a camera / smart phone to take photos of the system – these should be taken so that there can be easy comparison made over time to identify improvements.
- Notebook and pens to fill out site visit record sheet (Appendix A)
- Simple toolkit container basic tools (spanners, hammer, screwdrivers). Reminder: it is not in the scope of the activity to do moderate or major repairs – see below section on Activity Scope).

TIMING OF BACKSTOPPING VISITS

Water Committee backstopping will be most effective if there is regular visits (e.g. every 2-3 months) to each community, and potentially more regularly if there are some major challenges to providing safe and reliable water (e.g. following system break down, damage from storm/flood, repeat failure of water system components, reports of water-borne illnesses). Regular visits will allow a clear picture of the issues and characteristics of each water system, which can differ a lot between communities.

Each site visit should be planned for **at least ½ to 1 day** in each community. There needs to be sufficient time to reach water supplies that may be some distance away from the community, and to understand the existing water system issues across the breadth of the community.

To maximize logistical efficiency and reduce the cost of visiting remote communities, it is recommended to try and **cluster the backstopping visits**, for example, spending half a day in 10 villages in one week.

MAXIMISING CAPACITY BUILDING AND LEARNING APPROACHES

WASH officers conducting the backstopping activities must recognise that communities have different water systems with different social and environmental settings, and therefore have unique problems and capacity needs. The backstopping approach needs to not only focus on the technical aspects but should also have **the intention of building the capacity, confidence and motivation of a water committee.**

Some key points are:

- through **regular 2-3 monthly** visits
- preferably by **regular set of WASH officers** (who develop familiarity with a community setting)
- engagement with a **regular group of water committee** members (or other water 'managers').

Learning approaches to progressively build new capacities should reflect each Water committee's socio-cultural ways of teaching and communicating, such as:

- Using hands-on participatory techniques (this could include physically mapping out the community water systems together, discussing and inspecting key risks to water quality and water quantity from common water system failures, and so on)
- Encouraging storytelling (*Tok stori, Talanoa*) between water committee members and the WASH officers. These may involve sharing experiences from other water committee members to illustrate ways of fixing water system issues and also water saving practices during the dry season
- Drawing on previous examples of water committee strengths and capabilities, such as how the water committee maintains the water system through a prolonged dry season, or cyclone, or other examples of resilience through disaster events.

FURTHER READING

- Love, M., Bugoro, H., Panda, N., Benjamin, C., Hagabore, J., and Souter, R.T. (2022). Backstopping rural community water management: lessons from Solomon Islands and Fiji. Research Brief, Pacific Community Water Management Plus (PaCWaM+), December, 2021 International WaterCentre / Griffith University: Brisbane, Australia; Solomon Islands National University: Honiara, Solomon Islands
- Love, M., Beal, C., Gonzalez-Botero, D., Bugoro, H., Panda, N., Roiko, A., Benjamin, C., Hagabore, J., Ooi, J., Magreth, C., Pene, S. and Souter, R.T. (2021). Improving water management in rural communities: Synthesis of Phase 1 findings, Solomon Islands and Fiji. Research Brief, December 2021. International WaterCentre / Griffith University: Brisbane, Australia; Solomon Islands National University: Honiara, Solomon Islands; University of the South Pacific: Fiji.
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/dpr.12597>
- Love, M., Beal, C., Gonzalez-Botero, D., Bugoro, H., Panda, N., Roiko, A., Benjamin, C., Hagabore, J., Ooi, J., Magreth, C., and Souter, R.T. (2020). Pacific Community Water Management Plus: Phase 1 Findings Report for Solomon Islands. International WaterCentre / Griffith University: Brisbane, Australia; Solomon Islands National University: Honiara, Solomon Islands.
https://www.watercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/PaCWaM-Sol-Is-Country-Report_FINAL.pdf
- Love, M., Souter, R., Gonzalez Botero, D., Pene, S., and Beal C., 2021. Pacific Community Water Management Plus: Phase 1 Findings Report for Fiji. International WaterCentre, Griffith University. Nathan: Australia
https://www.watercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/PaCWaM-Fiji-Country-Report_FINAL.pdf
- Molea, R., & Souter, R. (2019). Governance To Support Integrated Water Management In Solomon Islands: Assessment Of Instruments Supporting Integration Between WASH And Water Resources Management. International WaterCentre, Griffith University
<https://www.watercentre.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/WRM-WASH-governance-in-Solomon-islands-Policy-Brief-Molea-and-Souter-2019.pdf>
- SIG (2020) Solomon Islands Rural Community Engagement Guidelines: Village WASH Committee Coaching Guide. Rural WASH Program, Environmental Health Division, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Solomon Islands Government (SIG), August 2020.
https://sirwash.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/7/6/42764129/ce_village_water_committee_coaching_guide_2020.09_.pdf
- SIG (2020) Solomon Islands Rural Community Engagement Guidelines: Village WASH Committee Monitoring Guide. Rural WASH Program, Environmental Health Division, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Solomon Islands Government (SIG), August 2020.
https://sirwash.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/7/6/42764129/ce_village_water_committee_monitoring_guide_2020.09_.pdf
- SIG (2020) Solomon Islands Rural Community Engagement Guidelines: Community WASH Committee Manual. Rural WASH Program, Environmental Health Division, Ministry of Health and Medical Services, Solomon Islands Government (SIG), August 2020.
https://sirwash.weebly.com/uploads/4/2/7/6/42764129/community_manual_-_wash_committee_2020.08_.pdf

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

- **Strong Water Committees – Strong WASH Communities in Fiji – Implementation Guide**
- **Water is Everyone’s Business poster** – Fiji (Fijian and English versions)
- **Strong Water Committees – Strong WASH Communities in Solomon Islands – Implementation Guide.**
Including associated resources:
 - o **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:
 - o **Video: Water is everyone's business**
 - o **Video: Youth and Water**
 - o **Video: Women and Water**
 - o **Poster: Water is Everyone’s Business**
- **Water Committee Backstopping in Solomon Islands and Fiji – Implementation Guide**
- **Supplementary activities for Drinking Water and Security Planning (DWSSP) in Fiji - Implementation guide**
- **Community-based Water Security Improvement Planning – Solomon islands – implementation guide (3 volumes)**

APPENDIX A – WATER COMMITTEE BACKSTOPPING ACTIVITIES RECORD

Each community will have a separate WASH Committee Backstopping activities record for the WASH Officer/s to add to as a record of activities and progress.

COMMUNITY NAME	DATE VISITED and VISIT NUMBER	WASH Committee members met with	ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED	TOPICS DISCUSSED	CHANGES / OBSERVATIONS SINCE LAST VISIT
<i>Example: Bareho</i>	<i>Mon 8th March 3rd Visit</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 females - 2 males 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Met with people in the village - Talked about technical backstopping - Given out tech back stopping information sheet and next visits timetable - Walking around village to see 2 tap stands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ways to look after and manage water - How to fix taps but not in detail / Maintenance and repair - Preventing debris at dam / Use of rain water tank - Role of the WASH Committee - Responsibility of everyone that has tap stands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - WC had cleaned dam - Water pressure improved

COMMUNITY NAME	DATE VISITED and VISIT NUMBER	WASH Committee members met with	ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED	TOPICS DISCUSSED	CHANGES / OBSERVATIONS SINCE LAST VISIT