

28. IMPROVED AND SAFE WATER AND SANITATION AT THE CENTER OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA FOR PACIFIC SMALL ISLANDS DEVELOPING STATES

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SUMMARY

Access to safe drinking water is a critical sustainable development issue for Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTs), with profound implications for economic growth, human rights, public health and the environment. Small island states face particular challenges in securing drinking water supplies, including small communities spread over vast distances, limited and fragile water resources, limited human and financial resources, and a heightened vulnerability to climate variability and natural hazards such as drought and floods.

The Pacific Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Water Management (Pacific RAP) was endorsed by Pacific Island Ministers and Heads of States in 2002 as a regional policy document capturing areas of priority actions to address issues we face in the sector. Although the Pacific RAP is still very relevant SOPAC-SPC have initiated a process to support PICTs in the identification of the most critical current and emerging threats and opportunities in the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation across the Pacific.

In this regard, some messages drawn from the recent Regional Water and Sanitation Consultations at the Pacific Disaster Platform 2012¹ follow:

- Significantly increased efforts are required by all to secure the fundamental human right to access to safe drinking water and sanitation for the people of the Pacific;
- Despite good progress on the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation services, in general these efforts have been offset by mounting pressures affecting the region, including population growth, urbanisation and economic development, compounded by the impacts of climate variability and natural hazards, and further exacerbated by the emerging impacts of climate change;
- An integrated approach to the management of disaster risk, climate change and water and sanitation is far more effective than individual sector approaches, and Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) provides an important mechanism to bring the components of disaster, climate change and water management together;
- Community ownership and engagement are crucial to the success of water and sanitation improvement efforts, and the design and implementation of water and sanitation solutions should include measures to enable the effective participation of communities at all stages;
- The need to improve data gathering, management and communication is critical, as a lack of useful data is limiting the ability to provide effective advice on risks and their management, and a greater commitment is required to improving this function;
- Reporting on MDG water and sanitation indicators and the post-2015 sustainable development indicators are important to countries in the region and stakeholders, however there is a need for more support to countries on how to better report on these indicators and how this may be achieved through the national and regional indicator frameworks.

KEY ISSUES

Access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a critical development issue for Pacific Island Countries and Territories, with profound implications for economic growth, human rights, public health and the environment. Although progress has been made against the Sustainable

Development agenda as a whole, progress in water and sanitation has been hindered by several factors elaborated on below.

Pacific Island governments face a set of unique challenges, including small communities spread over vast distances, limited and fragile water resources, limited human and financial resources, and a heightened vulnerability to climate variability and natural hazards. These challenges are further compounded by the emerging impacts of climate change, of which water is a primary medium.

In particular, atoll countries face particularly difficult challenges due to their very limited and ephemeral freshwater resources, isolated communities, rapidly growing urban centres and vulnerability to climate variability and climate change.

Furthermore, improving efficiency in water use and safe disposal of wastewater can provide economic and social benefits whereby reductions in the use and loss of water (non-revenue water) can reduce the amount of electricity used for pumping water. Additionally, improvements in the treatment of wastewater can improve the health of the population and reduce risks associated with the degradation of local water courses and lagoons. They can also reduce the health impacts of untreated effluent affecting local fisheries and improve the visual amenity that is important for tourism.

The urgency of ensuring effective regional support on water and sanitation issues is highlighted by the increasing impacts of water crises such as drought, floods and water-borne disease. Additionally, data shows that improvement to water and sanitation services are not keeping pace with socio-economic changes such as urbanisation and population growth.

In addition, the region is collectively not on track to meet many of the regional and international targets set for achieving water security, including those of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) due in 2015 and that, in general, reporting on MDG water and sanitation indicators and the post-2015 sustainable development indicators are important to countries in the region and stakeholders, however there is a need for more support to countries on how to better report on these indicators and how this may be achieved through the national and regional indicator frameworks

Finally, the urgency for island members to address their serious water and sanitation issues is key, given the responsibilities associated with the United Nations declaration that access to safe drinking water and sanitation is a fundamental human right.

BACKGROUND

It has been reported that PICTs have shown progress against actions called for in the Mauritius Strategy for further implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) agreed to in Barbados in 1994. It has been reported however, that although progress has been made against the Sustainable Development agenda as a whole, progress in the water and sanitation has been hindered by several factors elaborated on below.

MDG targets on water and sanitation aims to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation. The most recent WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) data for the Oceania region shows 54% coverage for use of improved drinking water sources and 55% coverage for improved sanitation facilities extrapolated from 2010 data. The JMP Report states however, that data from the Pacific are limited with a small number of data points, many of which date back several years, making it difficult to prepare robust estimates for 2010.² It is clear that increased efforts are required to achieve the MDG targets of halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015 including targets of the post 2015 framework as well.

Since 2001, the Pacific region has been guided by three high-level endorsed regional strategies which have identified challenges and constraints to improved water and sanitation management and these include the Pacific Wastewater Policy Statement and Framework for Action (2001), the Pacific RAP (2002) and the Drinking Water Quality and Health Framework for Action (2005).

While a range of national and regional programmes exist to address specific water and sanitation issues in the Pacific, guided by these three key strategic regional strategies, there is now a clear need for the Pacific community to review, update and refresh the actions and commitments made under these agreements, and to ensure these are reflected in the next iteration of the Pacific Plan shortly due for consideration by Pacific leaders.

To this end, the Pacific region is undertaking a series of consultation processes over the next few years to secure ownership and endorsement at highest political levels of water and sanitation status and response planning targeted to accelerate progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals, strengthen the ability of the Pacific to meet obligations of the UN resolution 64/292 which declares the access to safe drinking-water and sanitation as a human right and to mainstream adaptation efforts to climate variability and change.³ An outcome of these consultations will be revised Pacific Framework for Water, Sanitation and Climate that will articulate these messages and calls for action.

This work also links in with the Pacific Partnership Initiative on Sustainable Water Management to bring partners together as part of the consultation process for a more structured and inclusive approach to defining commitments and actions for the region. This Partnership was established as part of the work for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and the Rio+20 process provided an opportunity to reflect on the partnership and successes and areas to strengthen.

The recent Rio+20 outcomes also reaffirmed and validated efforts currently underway in the region, focusing the attention of leaders in bringing water and sanitation within the development agenda and highlighting the need to take an Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) approach currently being carried out nationally and regionally through the Pacific IWRM Programme. The outcomes also focuses attention on commitments regarding the rights to water and sanitation through ongoing policy and planning efforts, and highlights the need to adopt measures to address floods, droughts and water scarcity. This aligns well with work already underway in the region positioning the water and sanitation sector against the integrated agenda of Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change.⁴

In September 2012, a Pacific Regional Water and Sanitation Consultation (RWSC) was held alongside the 4th Disaster Platform meeting to provide an opportunity for the representatives of both the disaster and water/sanitation communities to interact and discuss crosscutting issues in dealing with disasters, water management and climate risk. Stakeholders also renewed commitment to the management of water and sanitation across the Pacific and initiated a revision of the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Water Management.

The outcomes of the RWSC as part of the Pacific Disaster Platform meeting progressed efforts towards a revised Regional Framework for Water, Sanitation and Climate as well planning around disaster risk management, climate change and water and sanitation with some considerations on items such as early warning systems, floods and droughts etc. These will also support in developing the sector position against the Integrated Strategy for Disaster Risk Management and Climate Change, post-2015 framework.

KEY DOCUMENTS & HYPERLINKS

- Joint Outcome Statement from the 4th Session of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management & Pacific Regional Water and Sanitation Consultations 17th–21st September SPC Headquarters, Noumea, New Caledonia

http://www.pacificdisaster.net/pdnadmin/data/original/PPDRM2012_Final_Outcome_Statement_Eng.pdf

- Pacific Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Water Management (PACIFIC RAP), SOPAC, ADB, 2003. <http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Pacific%20RAP%20on%20SWM.pdf>
- Pacific Dialogue on Water and Climate, SOPAC 2003, Fiji, http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Pacific%20Dialogue%20on%20Water%20and%20Climate%20Synthesis%20Report_pdf.pdf
- Pacific Framework for Action on Drinking Water Quality and Health, Water Quality Monitoring and Framework for Health, Fiji, 2005. <http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/water%20publication/FFA%20on%20DWQ%20and%20Health%20-%20FINAL2.pdf>
- Pacific Wastewater Policy and Framework for Action, Majuro, RMI, 2001. <http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Pacific%20Regional%20Wasterwater%20Policy%20Statement%20and%20Framework.pdf>

1st Asia Pacific Water Summit (APWS) – 2007

- Asia Pacific Water Summit Beppu Declaration, Beppu, Japan, 2007. www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Message_from_Beppu_071204.pdf
- Asia Pacific Water Forum Policy Brief, Beppu, Japan, 2007. <http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Policy%20Brief%202007.pdf>

3rd World Water Forum (3WWF) – 2003

- Water in Small Island Countries Session Statement, 2003 Kyoto, Japan. <http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Water%20in%20Small%20Island%20Countries%20Session%20Statement.pdf>
- Water in Small Island Countries Portfolio of Water Actions, Kyoto, Japan. <http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Water%20in%20Small%20Island%20Countires%20Portfolio%20of%20Water%20Actions.pdf>
- Joint Caribbean Pacific Programme for Water Actions. <http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/Joint%20Caribbean%20Pacific%20Programme%20for%20Action.pdf>

OTHER KEY RESOURCES

Converting Commitment into Action – Sanitation, hygiene and drinking-water in the Pacific island countries, WHO/SOPAC (2008), Manila.

http://www.pacificwater.org/userfiles/file/water%20publication/PacificReport_Final%20Version%206.pdf

¹ SOPAC/SPC & UNISDR, 2012. *Joint Outcome Statement from the 4th Session of the Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management & Pacific Regional Water and Sanitation Consultations*. 17th–21st September SPC Headquarters, Noumea, New Caledonia.

² UNICEF & WHO, 2012. *Progress on Drinking Water and Sanitation 2012 update*. WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme for Water Supply and Sanitation.

³ United Nations, 2010. *The Human Right to Water and Sanitation*. UN A/RES/64/292. United Nations General Assembly, New York, USA.

⁴ United Nations, 2012. *The Future we want*. UN A/RES/66/288. United National General Assembly, New York, USA.