

**Climate Resilience Pathways Conference:
Water Security & WASH in Asia Pacific (29 April – 1 May, Suva Fiji)**

Decentralisation and rural water service delivery in Pacific Island Countries (PICs) – Exploring challenges, opportunities and pathways forward

Lead Convenor: Mark Love (IWC/GU)

Co-convenors: Sarah Pene (USP-Fiji), Suliasi Batikawai (IWC/GU), Erie Sami (DoWR – Vanuatu), Collin Benjamin (SINU), Nixon Panda (SINU) and Regina Souter (IWC/GU)

This session explored the current state of decentralisation and rural water service delivery in Fiji, Vanuatu, and Solomon Islands.

In rural areas with limited government and private sector presence, community water management (CWM) remains the dominant model, but studies show most water committees struggle sustainably, leading to system failure and poor WASH outcomes. Since the 2000s, there has been increasing recognition of the need for ongoing support post-infrastructure installation, known as "community water management plus" (CWM+), which includes governance, cost recovery, operations, maintenance, and institutional support. While some PICs, including Fiji and Vanuatu, have taken steps toward CWM+ – such as outsourcing training and enhancing legal powers at the community level – but systematic post-construction monitoring and support are lacking. Decentralisation is promoted in each countries key policies and strategies, but in practice, it remains weak. When done well, decentralisation can better align services to local needs, empower local decision-making, support long-term infrastructure sustainability, and build accountability and citizen engagement; however, when inadequately resourced, it can lead to a deterioration of the WASH situation. There has been no systematic analysis of decentralisation and rural water services in the Pacific Island Country context.

Based on 18 months of desk-top analysis and interviews at national, subnational and community levels and stakeholder validation workshops in each country, the session presented the results of the research through the prism of a shared analytical framework, which identified 6 key “elements” or “building blocks” of effective decentralisation.

Mark provided an introduction into decentralisation and rural water service delivery, followed by an overview of the studies methodology and the framework. Co-convenors then presented the results for each country – Sarah Pene, (USP-Fiji), Collin Benjamin and Nixon Panda (SINU-Solomon Islands) and Erie Sami (DoWR-Vanuatu). Mark provided a brief wrap-up before the presenters took questions. A planned structured talanoa session was ultimately not possible due to run-over in some sub-session sections.

The session promoted questions from a range of conference participants (e.g., Solomon Islands and Fiji attendees) [unfortunately none of us took notes]. The departmental siloing and data sharing challenges were identified in all three countries, as well as coordination and communication issues between government and NGOS, was widely acknowledged by participants. After the presentation, numerous participants from other Pacific Island countries where especially interested in, and impressed by, the reforms and initiatives that Vanuatu have enacted over the last decade.