

# EVENT SNAPSHOT

## EVENT DETAILS

### The Role of Water Utilities in Supporting Rural WASH

05 July 2023

#### Speakers

**Alisi Senikuta**

Community Engagement Officer  
Water Authority Fiji

**Ana 'I K M 'Ake**

Tonga National Consultant  
Asian Development Bank

**Marieke Adank**

Senior Programme Officer  
Change Hub, IRC WASH

**Dean Taylor - Facilitator**

Utility Advisor  
Asian Development Bank

Event recording and resources available [here](#).

Water Utilities are playing an increasingly important role in the management of rural WASH around the world. This webinar explored the unique challenges in managing WASH in rural areas and how water utilities are engaging in this space to support WASH management.

#### Webinar Overview

In the Pacific, rural WASH is often managed at a community level by Village Water Committees, local government or similar. Water utilities are supporting rural WASH to varying degrees across the region, reflecting the global trend of increasing utility engagement in rural water services. Globally, this is driven by factors including population growth and increasing urbanization, the service delivery and performance capacity of utilities, and a strong enabling environment. The ADB Pacific WASH Technical Assistance (REG TA-6551), in association with the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association (PWWA), hosted an online discussion in July to explore the trend of water utilities supporting rural WASH and how these services are being managed, and the role water utilities can play. The webinar highlighted the complexities of rural WASH and community-managed water supply in Tonga through a pilot with three Village Water Committees, along with how the Water Authority of Fiji is supporting rural WASH with their rainwater harvesting tank initiative. The event was attended by 33 participants, including 13 from 8 Pacific countries.



#### The webinar explored several key topics:

- Global trends in blurring boundaries between utility managed urban water and community (or local government) managed rural water supply
- The challenges with community-managed rural water supply and opportunities for utility engagement
- How utilities are supporting rural WASH with other stakeholders in the Pacific

#### Utilities support rural WASH around the world

Utilities are playing an increasing role in the provision of rural water and sanitation services around the world. While [research from the IRC](#) highlights that the global trend of utility-managed rural water services is improving rural coverage, often with more reliable services, there are still limitations and challenges facing utilities and communities. Utility management is not a 'panacea' for overcoming rural water supply challenges and support is needed to strengthen service delivery performance, especially relating to regulatory and financial systems, for successful management regardless of the service delivery model. While we expect to see utilities playing an increasing role in the provision of water services in the years to come, addressing equity issues, financial and capacity constraints, and strengthening the enabling environment through partnerships, capacity building and strong regulatory and financial systems is needed to improve rural WASH for all.



Figure 1 Water testing in pilot communities in Tonga (ADB, 2023).

## Case Study: Fiji

The Water Authority of Fiji (WAF) has been supporting sustainable access to water supply through the Government-supported Rainwater Harvesting Tank Initiative since 2016. Since then, 4,769 rainwater tanks have been delivered to rural community members. Guided by Fiji's National Rural Water and Sanitation Policy, WAF is committed to supporting communities improve their water supply through a lens of capacity building, advocating for community resilience and sustainable projects. A cornerstone of the Rainwater Harvesting Tank initiative is the community-led nature of the project and continuous correspondence with community members. Customers living in rural areas and Intermittent Supply Areas on the mainland and maritime islands of Fiji can apply at no cost for the rainwater tanks. In return they commit to constructing a tank base and installing the guttering and WAF ensures they are taught how to care and maintain the tanks.

The Initiative has proven highly successful in the seven provinces it covers. It has improved water storage capacity and reduced WAF's carting services in rural areas, especially during heavy rainfall, ensures access to water for everyone and enables safe hygiene.

Fiji's constitution states that every Fijian has the right to clean and safe drinking water. This initiative is a successful example of a government-supported, utility-led project enabling rural communities to improve their water supply and take ownership of their water management.



Figure 2 Tank base and gutters installed to meet requirements for the WAF Rainwater Tank (Water Authority Fiji)

## Case Study: Tonga

Understanding rural water supply challenges was a priority outcome of Tonga's first National WASH Convention organized by the National WASH Cluster in 2022. To support this, a pilot study on three villages' drinking water sources was undertaken in early 2023 with support from the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Lands, Survey and Natural Resources Geology Department, the Tonga Water Board and Asian Development Bank.

The pilot identified a number of water security challenges for the villages, including high levels of contaminants in household tank water used for drinking, and the need to address regulatory and financial gaps in management. This includes the need for a review of the Water Supply Regulation under the Public Health Act 1963 to amend from 10 men to 10 members to formalize the inclusion of women on village water committees.

Importantly, the pilot demonstrated that with coordination across responsible ministries and groups, monitoring data and information can be collected for villages to empower them to manage their water supply more effectively. There is opportunity for community engagement and education around water source protection, tank care and maintenance, and community water management.

Short summaries for each pilot village will be published for Town Officers, offering a one-pager on the assets of their water committees and community water use – the first of its kind. This information is the first step in raising awareness of how water is used, managed and needs to be protected in each community, and will support communities better understand how they can engage with relevant management bodies to improve their water supply systems.

## Learning Snapshots

- *Utility management of rural water services is not a panacea for overcoming rural water supply challenges. Support is needed to strengthen service delivery, particularly around regulatory and financial mechanisms.*
- *Communities, Village Water Committees and Town Officers need to be empowered with the right information and data to support their advocacy for improved WASH services. This requires strong partnerships and collaboration between the various stakeholders often responsible for rural WASH services.*
- *Water utilities will play an increasing role in the provision of rural water services in the years to come. Utilities, government, communities and development partners will need to work together to develop the best models for service delivery to improve rural coverage.*

## Upcoming Events



To register your interest for future 2023 Webinars, please contact: [llfernando@adb.org](mailto:llfernando@adb.org). Past ADB Pacific WASH webinars can be accessed here: [Pacific WASH Webinars](#)

**ADB continues to support government and water service providers in the region to build resilience, capacity and knowledge to manage threats in our changing world.**