

EVENT SNAPSHOT

EVENT DETAILS

Building Successful Utility-Landowner Partnerships for Reliable WASH Services in the Pacific

26 June 2024

Speakers

Kembo Mida Jr.
Chief Executive Officer
Chuuk Public Utility Corporation

Robert Iromalefo
National Catchment Management Officer
Solomon Water

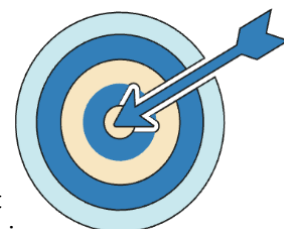
Mark Ellery - Facilitator
Water, Sanitation & Local Governance Consultant
Asian Development Bank

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

In the Pacific, up to 80% of land is vested in the stewardship of customary landowners. This often requires water utilities and government departments to work collaboratively with landowners to secure the water resources and the water assets necessary to provide safe and reliable water services to the public.

Building Utility-Landowner Partnerships

Forging successful partnerships between utilities and landowners is critical to sustain public service delivery in the Pacific. In addition to robust infrastructure and technical expertise, providing safe and reliable water services demands secure, long-term access to the land that houses water assets and water resources. Water service providers and government officials must work hand-in-hand with indigenous communities to navigate modern and traditional land and water management systems.



Webinar overview

ADB Technical Assistance (REG TA-6551), in association with the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association, hosted the third Pacific WASH Webinar for 2024 to share lessons learned and innovative practices from Solomon Islands and Chuuk State, Federated States of Micronesia. During the webinar, participants learned from Chuuk Public Utility Corporation CEO Kembo Mida Jr. on their innovative work to secure private lands for utility use by making landowners shareholders using a Benefit-Share model. Attendees also heard from Solomon Water National Catchment Management Officer, Robert Iromalefo, on their payment for ecosystems services scheme to protect the local watershed and preserve water source quality. The event was attended by 41 participants, including 22 from 6 Pacific countries.

Key themes from the webinar include:

- **Working with communities on source protection and catchment management** – mapping land ownership, building local knowledge on catchment water systems, and connecting behaviors to catchment and water source health.
- **The legal models and innovations to secure land access** – highlighting the options to secure land including lease-based agreements, eminent domain, installment payments, inflation clauses and benefit-share.
- **Building a social license to operate** – how long-term community engagement and buy-in is critical to building trust with landowners to secure land for water assets and water resources to sustain water service delivery.



Figure 1: Working with landowners for catchment protection (Image: Solomon Water)

Case Study: Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia

Chuuk Public Utility Corporation is a small utility with 500 water customers serving a population of 15,000 on the main island. Securing land for water and wastewater assets has always been a challenge for this small island country. With a grant from the Asian Development Bank, Chuuk Public Utility Corporation (CPUC) is developing new water lines, upgrading their water treatment plant, and building organizational capacity with the goal to increase their customer base from 500 to 2,000 connections. Working with landowners and community to secure land for utility assets has been a critical part of this process. Through extensive community outreach and an innovative new Benefit-Share model, CPUC has been able to secure over 90% of their assets. Landholders now look at CPUC as a partner, where they are actively seeking out the utility to renew their lease agreements ahead of time. At the moment, CPUC loses about half of the water they produce due to leaks and illegal connections. Along with the upgrading of aging infrastructure, it is anticipated that the Benefit-Share model will change perceptions around leak reporting and illegal connections within the community. By encouraging landowners to report leaks and illegal connections early, CPUC's non-revenue water losses can be reduced and more revenue will be available to landowner-shareholders.

Case Study: Solomon Islands

Solomon Water is working with communities across three catchments to protect one of Honiara's drinking water sources.

The water resources of Kongulai spring lie within a government declared catchment and the water assets of Solomon Water located here are secured via a lease agreement. Recent studies have shown how the decline in water quality from the Kongulai Spring is directly affected by the Kovi and Kohove catchments (Figure 2). Logging of customary land in the Kohove catchment affects the turbidity of the water sourced from the Kongulai spring. Solomon Water is working closely with community members in all three catchments to map land ownership and to develop detailed hydrological maps that can assist in identifying areas that should be protected from logging. This includes the raising of awareness on catchment protection and the exploration of ways to leverage behavior away from logging and towards ecosystem management. Payments for ecosystems services is one approach being trialled with identified landholders to incentivize a change in land use. Communities develop a suitable incentive they would like to receive in exchange for engaging in ecosystem services, such as tree planting and ecotourism that protect the water catchment.

The Benefit-Share Model

The Benefit-Share model turns landholders into shareholders through lease-agreements entered with the utility. In Chuuk State, CPUC forecasts their annual sales excluding non-revenue water. For every million gallons of water sold, they put \$200 into a special account that is shared among landowners in a 70-30 split at the end of every year. Landowners that own an asset, regardless of the size of their land, receive a shared 70% of the money available. The remaining 30% is split among landowners based on the size of their land. In principle, the size of the account is dependent on how much water is sold by the utility annually. Through extensive community outreach, landowners come to understand that higher water sales would translate to higher revenue shares.

The Benefit-Share model has moved landowners in Chuuk from perceiving that the utility is 'making money' off their land, to making them co-owners and partners of the utility. CPUC is now able to access and manage their assets with greater ease and the support of landholders. The vexing problems of non-revenue water, including leaks and illegal connections, are now reframed to be a common issue that requires collective action.

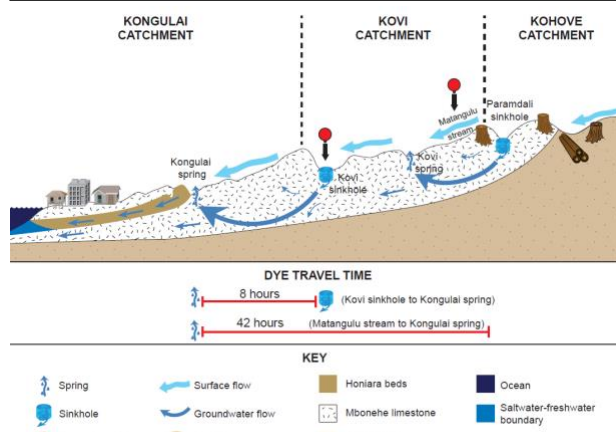


Figure 2 Honiara water source catchments (Image: Solomon Water)

Learning Snapshots

- Community outreach and positive engagement of landowners is crucial to securing access to land for water assets and water resources. Landowners who are engaged and feel respected (as shareholders or otherwise) enable utilities to maintain and secure their assets to deliver water services.
- Understanding the hydrology of your water sources and securing those catchment areas may require legal, financial and social relationships with the landowners. Using mechanisms like an "interpleader" – a collective agreement for land access with payment secured by the courts – can assist navigate access in disputed landholdings.
- Although legal frameworks for utilities to access water sources and secure land for water assets usually exist, they are often not sufficient without collective awareness and incentivizing landowner buy-in.

Pacific WASH Webinar Series



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.