



SPC media release

Pacific Islands work towards a new action plan for water and sanitation

Noumea, September 20, 2012: Ten years ago Pacific Island Ministers and Heads of State endorsed the Pacific Regional Action Plan on Sustainable Water Management (Pacific RAP) as a regional policy document with priority action to address water and sanitation issues. However Pacific Island Countries and Territories (PICTS) are still a long way from addressing many of these issues.

At this year's Pacific Platform island nations are again meeting to identify strategies to contribute to the formulation of a new regional policy framework for the sustainable management of their water resources over the next ten years.

Rhonda Robinson, Deputy Director of the Secretariat of the Pacific Community's (SPC), Water and Sanitation Programme (WSP), says that while the 2002 Pacific RAP is still very relevant in providing direction and guidance for sectoral support programmes there is a need for the Pacific Community to take stock of what has been achieved, revisit existing and identify emerging challenges and define interventions that provide solutions.

"This is the start of a process to support countries identify their most critical current and emerging threats, and opportunities, in the provision of safe drinking water and sanitation," Ms Robinson said. "We hope to elevate the level of commitment from Pacific leaders on water and sanitation issues and to secure an agreed framework for future water and sanitation management."

Most PICTS are a long way from securing adequate fresh water and sanitation for their citizens. These countries struggle against the pressures of urbanization and growing populations, limited water resources, and aging infrastructure compounded by thinly spread human resources limiting countries' ability to effectively respond.

Across the Pacific, the uncertainty and extremes of climate variability and natural disasters compound and exacerbate these management challenges. Many countries remain unprepared for the floods and extended droughts that are an ongoing feature of the region. Managing the water-related impacts of climate variability and climate change requires a risk-based approach, and adaptation to these impacts requires integration of effective risk reduction strategies across all sectors.

"Water is the primary medium through which climate change and natural disasters influence peoples' livelihoods and wellbeing, and better water management is a key element to building resilience and adaptive capacity to these impacts," Ms Robinson said. "This meeting provides an excellent opportunity for those working on either water and sanitation or disaster management to sit down and discuss cross cutting issues and formulate strategies to integrate our efforts to better deal with current problems and future threats like climate change."

The 'disaster' and 'water and sanitation' communities will come together to discuss specific issues and to find solutions to improve relations and partnerships at the regional, national and sub national levels and how disaster risk management and climate change can be integrated into the new regional policy framework for water and sanitation. This new framework will supersede the 2002 Pacific RAP.

Tuvalu's Pisi Selganiu and Fiji's Vinesh Kumar, who both run Global Environment Facility funded Integrated Water Resources Management demonstration projects in their respective countries, welcomed the opportunity.

"Water management is moving beyond the sectoral approach of just providing infrastructure or services. It is now a more integrated approach that looks at entire catchment systems and involves everyone from community to cabinet," Mr Kumar said. "We're looking at ways to mitigate the severe flooding that Nadi has experienced over the last couple of years and therefore being able to sit down



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with regional disaster managers to develop strategies and ways of working together will improve the ways these issues are dealt with in the future.'

Mr Seleganiu said that natural disasters like the severe drought Tuvalu faced last year was a point where the country needed to revisit the way water and sanitation is dealt with.

"We've had to come up with innovative infrastructure solutions, like composting toilets, in order to ensure that people have enough water for their survival," Mr Seleganiu said. "With increased climate variability and the possibility of more frequent or intense droughts we must ensure that we continue to find every way of protecting and improving our water resources."

The 4th session of Pacific Platform for Disaster Risk Management (DRM) and Pacific Regional Water & Sanitation Consultations runs from 17 – 22 September, 2012 and is co-convened by SPC in partnership with the UNISDR with support from the European Union, French Pacific Fund and other partner organisations like the Asia Foundation, United States Agency for International Development, the University of the South Pacific, Institute for Research and Development in New Caledonia, United Nations Development Programme Pacific Centre, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the World Bank Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery, AusAID, ENDS

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