Pacific Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Coalition addressing sanitation in the region

AS member of the global Water Supplies and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), the Fiji Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) has taken a lead in the region to coordinate activities in the Pacific on water supply, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and established the Pacific WASH Coalition.

The International Year of Sanitation 2008, creates an opportunity to strengthen collaboration between a wide range of relevant stakeholders. Relevant agencies to improve delivery of water supply, sanitation and hygiene activities. Partners in the Coalition include the Foundation of the People of the South Pacific International (FSPIL), the Fiji School of Medicine (FSMed), the Fiji Environmental Education Unit (FEEU), the Water Resources Management Organization (WHO), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), and the International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC). Increasing the visibility of sanitation issues will help to raise the profile of sanitation and the problem of open defecation, which is a major public health problem in many of the region’s rural areas. The Coalition will work towards mobilizing resources under the MDGs and the development of regional and member country plans.

Live and Learn Environmental Education (LLEE) is a non-profit, non-governmental organization which promotes ecological understanding and action toward human and environmental sustainability through education and dialogue building. Live and Learn Fiji works in collaboration with SOPAC to develop school and community education material for World Water Day for the Pacific region and participates in relevant educational projects with a focus often on water.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world’s largest humanitarian organization, with 186 member National Societies. All its work is guided by seven fundamental principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and voluntariness. The Solomons Islands Red Cross is currently being supported by the Federation and other national societies in improving water and sanitation provision damaged during the tsunami of April last year. Also during the recent response to Tropical Cyclone Cucu, the Papua New Guinea Red Cross was supported by Australian Red Cross in supplying the local hospital with an emergency safe water supply. The national societies of the Pacific are currently developing plans that will expand their activities in water and sanitation in several countries during the next two years.

World Health Organization (WHO) is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and training and monitoring and assessing health trends. The WHO, in partnership with SOPAC and New Zealand Ministry of Health is currently implementing regional initiatives to improve drinking water safety and quality for Pacific Island Communities.

The Fiji School of Medicine (FSMed) is a Tertiary Health Institution striving towards Excellence in Training and Education of Health Professionals in the South Pacific. Fiji School of Medicine is based on the DRC, with institutions both at undergraduate and postgraduate level on the importance of water and sanitation in the cause of communicable diseases. This includes a number of courses for Public Health programmes and Medical programmes throughout the six years of training. These courses are mainly community based where students conduct community assessment and look at a number of health issues that contribute to ill health including water quantity and quality for drinking and bathing and sanitation arrangements in various communities. Research students during Health research have in the past conducted a number of studies to look at the relationship between water and sanitation to a number of communicable diseases.

The WASH Coalition and its partners are working with partners to provide safe drinking water and proper sanitation and hygiene facilities in the Western and Choisaur provinces. Sanitary facilities for internally displaced people, water purification tablets, bathing soaps, water containers and water pumps were provided by UNICEF during the tsunami recovery phase.

In Fiji, UNICEF plans to work with relevant Ministries and partners to provide safe drinking water and proper sanitation and hygiene facilities in schools.

Clean water, proper sanitation and hygiene are linked in many ways to people’s livelihoods and sustainable development in general. It is an important input not just for Targets 10 of Millennium Development Goal 7, which is to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation but for all of the Millennium Development Goals.

Through strategic coordination within country programs, UNICEF can make significant contributions to the health and environment objectives of the Millennium Agenda.

SOPAC in the Pacific Islands Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) is an intergovernmental, regional organization providing support to Pacific member countries in the field of geosciences. Under its Community Lifelines Programme, SOPAC provides technical support to country counterparts in the field of water resources management, water services and water governance. The water sector programme has established a multi-year programme with other partners funded by a variety of donor organizations, including among others: AusAID, NZAID, ADB, EU, Taiwan ROC and Japan.

The water sector is currently implementing regional programmes covering community participation, gender, water supply and sanitation, awareness, water resources assessment and monitoring, water quality monitoring, water demand management, water safety planning and integrated water resources management and has currently 65 staff members.

The achievements of the Coalition include:

Submitted a Pacific WASH proposed to Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) to upscale work in the area of water and sanitation, especially on advocacy and media campaigns. For 2008, WASH campaigns will be carried out in Tonga and Vanuatu.

Information exchange and better collaboration have already begun in many Pacific island countries.

Joint activities in the areas of water, sanitation and hygiene within members of the Coalition are foreseen.