

Unsettled:

Water and Sanitation in Urban Settlement Communities of the Pacific

Report Summary
November 2015



Urbanization is occurring rapidly in Melanesia at 3-4% per annum. Due to unaffordable land and housing in formal urban areas, new migrants settle on marginal land without formal legal titles (“informal settlements”). These settlements are growing and new settlements are emerging within and on the outskirts of towns and cities across Melanesia, at a rate that outpaces efforts to serve them. Settlements in the Melanesian capitals of Suva, Port Vila, Honiara, and Port Moresby comprise 20%-45% of the city population and at current urbanization rates will be between 30% and 65% by 2023.

Information about informal settlements is scarce. This report provides a rapid review of water and sanitation services in the informal settlements in and around the capital cities of Solomon Islands, Fiji, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea.

Informal settlements lack formal services such as water, sanitation, electricity, waste management, drainage, and roads, although the situation in Fiji is better than elsewhere. Settlements are expanding rapidly, as families grow and extended family members from home islands and villages move in, compounding the health and social problems. Water supply is typified by crowded standpipes with an irregular unpredictable supply, low

pressure, illegal connections, or unimproved sources such as open wells. Settlement sanitation is mostly provided through shared or private dry pit latrines that are unsanitary and uncovered, or no latrines at all. The use of shared or private unimproved latrines and open defecation is over 40% in the urban areas of PNG, 35% in Vanuatu, 19% in Solomon Islands, and 8% in Fiji, implying proportionally higher rates in the informal settlements where sewerage is unavailable.

The impact of poor water and sanitation services falls disproportionately on women who bear responsibility for water and sanitation tasks such as cleaning, cooking, washing, caring for children and the sick. The burden on women includes time and physical labor required to collect water (often 20-30 kilograms/load) from water sources. The risks and fear of sexual and physical violence from collecting water or defecating away from home late at night or early morning is real. Men are the main decision makers and influencers in the household, in settlement community leadership, and in local government.

Utilities are constrained by technical, financial and legal barriers to serve informal settlements. Utilities underprovide these services, partly because they do not have an obligation to serve informal settlements and in

some cities do not have the authority to do so. In the four countries, no utility or government body had an obligation or budget to provide sanitation services to informal settlements. Where a mandate exists, utilities tend not to prioritize these services because they are technically, legally, and commercially challenging. Utility investments are influenced by internal, Government, and donor preferences that tend to favor investments in piped water infrastructure systems to formal areas.

Where water and sanitation services are provided, settlement households often cannot access them due to land tenure and financial obstacles such as household financial constraints and land tenure requirements. For instance, rural migrants are unaccustomed to paying for water and sanitation services. Many households are therefore forced to use ad hoc alternatives—particularly for sanitation—that are poor quality, unsafe and can be more costly than utility provided services. The public health and environmental costs from the lack of services drain resources, create public health hazards and damages that extend into the entire urban area.

There are promising initiatives to improve water service provision that are worth studying further, replicating or scaling up. **Small scale sanitation improvements were identified** but unfortunately, no country in the review demonstrated meaningful efforts to deliver sanitation services to support comprehensive city-wide fecal sludge management. Even where residents construct improved toilets, virtually none of the waste appears to be safely removed, transported, and treated or reused.

International examples provide approaches and lessons that are relevant to Melanesia. There are rich examples of water and sewerage utilities, and other stakeholders partnering to improve services for similar settlements situations and low income households Africa,

South America, the Caribbean and Southeast Asia. Evidence-based advocacy to government to secure policy and financial commitment for services to settlements is a critical first step.

Solutions and recommendations are challenging as they need to respond to the particular circumstances of each settlement, and be implemented with relatively limited financial and technical resources. Recommendations include:

- Central Governments to establish national mandates for service delivery, clarify organizational authority and their obligations to implement services, and set service level targets for existing and new settlements
- Stakeholders to incorporate settlements into existing or emerging sector investment plans
- Partnerships to be explored between Local Government or the utility and NGOs and/or the private sector
- Performance monitoring and evaluation to be associated with payment-based performance incentives
- Development partners to support settlement inclusion through technical assistance, analysis, and financing. For example: cost benefit analysis of investments; advocacy; policy development and strategic planning; research of technical options and piloting with NGOs and community-based organizations; private sector support; peer-to-peer knowledge exchange; and innovative financing.

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