

IWRM in Niue : an achievement story

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Community to Cabinet: Securing Alofi's Water Supply



Above: Gender mainstreaming activities during the development of the Village Water Management Plans

Prior to the GEF IWRM project, water management in Niue was broadly considered the responsibility of government, with very little community engagement. Household water use rates were amongst the highest in the world, reflecting a lack of understanding and ownership of water resource management. Alofi town faces issues of water supply management and one of the main problems is due to an aging water reservoir that services the whole town. To avoid the intermittent water supply situation found in other parts of Niue we embarked on developing "Community to Cabinet" Village Water Management Plans (VWMP) to enable communities to identify and address their critical water resource issues.

During 2010 we initiated the VWMP by engaging the Village Councils and communities. We visited community members and informed them of the project objectives and explained the channels of communication available, such as visiting the office, calling or emailing. Communities began to invite our staff to attend their meetings to present information. In this way we developed understanding about community issues and needs, working together for sustainable solutions. During the annual community village inspections, community members expressed how useful it was to have water and sanitation issues identified, as well explained and options presented.

The development of VWMP in both Alofi South and Alofi North has provided a mechanism for the community to communicate with its national partners including the Cabinet Ministers, as well as different groups within village communities. During development we included gender-mainstreaming activities to ensure that women, who look after the families, had their concerns heard and met. The process also increased the capacity of communities to support the implementation of drinking water safety plans. This in turn has contributed to a measured reduction in household water use.

From the VWMP the community identified and prioritised the replacement of the water reservoir servicing Alofi that was losing up to 50% of its total supply due to leakage. This loss represents more water than the community as whole uses. These priorities were fed into the National Drinking Water Safety Plan and Niue Infrastructure planning processes.

Actions to reduce water loss were prioritised and it was decided to procure and install new tanks to replace the old leaking ones. The Head of Public Works approached NZAID and GoN on a one-on-one basis to co-finance the procurement phase. Once commitments were made from NZAID and GoN, the Head of Public Works then met with Finance to determine national financial management considerations and finally submitted a Cabinet paper requesting Cabinet approval for the funding.

Once Cabinet approval was gained, IWRM made a call for expressions of interest for supply and construction of the new water reservoirs. Once Niue National Tender Board Committee approved, the tender was awarded and contracted to GoN Public Works. A joint partnership between IWRM Project, NZAid, GoN and AusAid was maintained with regular coordination and planning meetings and enabled the costs of two new reservoir water tanks to be met. The tanks were installed in 2012 and are fully functional, providing a secure and reliable water supply for the people of Alofi town.

"The VWMP provides a mechanism for the community to communicate with government about their needs and priorities".

The development of VWMP in both Alofi South and Alofi North provides a mechanism for the community to communicate with the government about their needs and priorities. It has proven to be a useful tool for addressing critical water management issues while empowering local people to take responsibility for their environment. It is a process that should be utilised across all development fields in Niue.

I attribute the success of the process to how we built robust relationships from the beginning, inclusive community engagement and open dialogue. I realised through the experience that it is important to foster regular communication between the communities, agencies and government departments so that all stakeholders are aware of issues and opportunities and generate a common understanding.