

# IWRM in Solomon Islands : an achievement story

By Isaac Lekelalu



## Capacity Building in Water Safety Planning through the Water Safety Sub-Committee



The Water Safety Sub-Committee before tackling assessments

Honiara City currently faces a serious water dilemma. Population increase, uncontrolled residential development, and a frequency of illegal connections coupled with the limited capacity to supply water while reducing source pollution is leading to frequent contamination and limitation of the town's water supply. At the end of 2012, the IWRM Project Management Unit (PMU) established a sub-committee to look into Water Safety Planning (WSP) for Honiara City. A Water Safety Sub-Committee (WSSC) was established and trained to perform risk assessments to guide the development of the Honiara Water Safety Plan and address some of their pressing water issues.

This was a timely intervention, as Ms Kim Irofufuli of the Environmental Health Division said, *"People in Honiara are becoming aware of the importance of water quality so they want safe drinking water but do not realize safe drinking water also involves the safety of the water at the source, catchment and distribution of the water. They do not realize that if the water is interfered with in any way (such as illegal connections) then water quality is compromised"*.

The WSSC team includes two women and seven men, senior staff from the Ministry of Health & Medical Services, the Environmental Health Divisions of Honiara City Council & Guadalcanal Province, the Public Health Lab, the Solomon Islands Water Authority (SIWA) and the IWRM PMU.

After confirming the WSSC, the PMU ran a series of meetings and workshops to introduce the WSP concept and the approach needed to carry out the activities. The aim of the workshops and meetings was to familiarise the WSSC with each component of the water supply system and how to assess the possible hazards and associated risks. Through practical fieldwork, members documented what they knew about the status of the water supply, the hazards and risks under current supply conditions and the need for improvement(s).

The WSP is a new approach where we are observing the system and preparing plans to avoid serious contamination situations. It was an excellent way to get members from different government agencies physically involved in observing the water catchment and learning the theory behind WSP in order to understand and appreciate the requirements of the water resource system as a whole. I had thought this approach might bore some members but because of the seriousness of our water challenges, everyone was attentive and actively involved in the process.

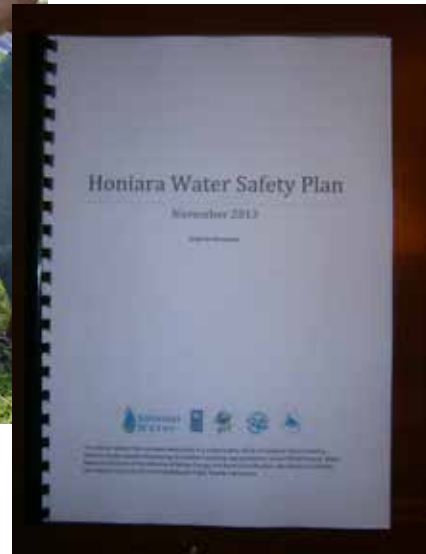
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Mr. David Hoota said, *"These activities increased my knowledge of our water supply systems and networks and their limitations. It also improved our participation in the project. As I now know how our work is linked to the overall improvement of water supply quality and water safety approach in the country"*.

We did the first hazards assessment at one of five water sources, treatment, storage and distribution system to familiarise and



Water Safety Sub-Committee members in the field assessing water supply and risks. The completed Honiara Water Safety Plan draft.



train the WSSC. During our discussions team members raised questions and comments on aspects of the assessment they were not familiar with. This open dialogue helped the team understand what to look for and assess during the second field training. The WSSC completed the remaining field assessments successfully with only minor involvement from the IWRM PMU.

After completing the workshops/meetings and the assessments, the WSSC had achieved the following:

- Gained knowledge and basic experience on how to organise and carry out the hazards & risks assessments and analyses using the multi-barrier approach to water safety and public health
- Understood and appreciate the need and importance of water safety and the challenges involved in implementing the plan
- The activities completed by the team enabled the Solomon Water to proceed with the working draft WSP document and priority areas to implement once funding is secured

The WSP approach has now raised the importance of public health using the multi-barrier method of minimizing risks to water supplies by applying it in other areas. The capacity among the WSSC has been raised significantly as they are now aware of the various hazards and risk associated with the catchment area and are now fully capable of undertaking future assessments independent of the IWRM Team. These are skills that can be easily transferred to other rural and urban water supply systems.

Ms Kim Irofufuli commented at the completion of the activities, "These have helped my understanding of the water supply

*process. Seeing the results and the coordinated effort of the stakeholders to improve Honiara's water supply has made me more confident that the water we as consumers receive in our homes is becoming safer to drink and also to use for other household needs".*

I think it was important to identify and appoint a Water Safety Sub-Committee as a first step toward Water Safety Planning and the subsequent detailed training of techniques used to develop the plans. The team has expanded now to involve staff from Solomon Water who are directly involved in the water supply distribution and water quality monitoring sections. They have now reached a stage whereby the WSSC received support from the General Manager of Solomon Water to proceed with the Honiara Water Safety Plan by prioritizing risks and costs to implement tasks under the plan.

After compiling the draft Honiara Water Safety Plan the Solomon Water team said, "Dealing with lack of resources; in many cases, we found that we knew what should happen, but also knew that this was impractical. We have tried to focus on practical and implementable actions. The work of the WSSC helped us identify these. As time goes on, these actions can be revised to a more 'ideal' situation".

Having attended a WSP workshop prior to project implementation I felt confident to lead the team and the initiative to start. I also felt that the WSSC, if endorsed by the Solomon Water Management, would be a first of its kind and the credit would be given to the team for successful completion of the job. As the IWRM Project Manager and motivator of the process I am proud and happy that it has been such a successful capacity building exercise.