

# IWRM in Tuvalu : an achievement story

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## Finding Creative Solutions for the Introduction of Alternative Sanitation Technologies

Tuvalu is facing a critical sanitation problem. Old flush and septic systems are causing problems for the environment and public health. The IWRM Project approached the situation by suggesting the alternative of using compost toilets to tackle both sanitation and water use issues. A baseline survey conducted in 2009 highlighted concerns people had about the introduction of compost toilets. It became clear that the public held a lot of negative impressions about them. Through a prolonged community engagement campaign we managed to turn people's negative perceptions about the sanitation alternative to one of overwhelming acceptance. This is how we did it.

Through preliminary community research we discovered that amongst the community there was a perceived understanding that compost toilets were a downgrade in toilet design and thought of as no more than a pit toilet. Because of previous projects, people felt uncomfortable with the term 'compost toilet' and had many misunderstandings about its function.

We formed a Communications Committee made up of local communications specialists to investigate the cause of people's concern and find innovative ways to address them. They determined that there were two main issues. The first that the name 'compost toilet' generates unease and should be changed and secondly; that people want more education about what a compost toilet is and how it works before they are willing to have one in their home.

To address the first issue the committee organised a competition to come up with an appropriate Tuvaluan word that sums up the compost toilet. The winning submission came from Mr Maimoaga Uatea, the Deputy Director of PWD. His submission is the word "**Falevatie**" and is an abbreviation of "*Falefoliki se fakaoga vai mo tino mote enviroment*" which means "A toilet which is good for you and the environment". The slogan for the Falevatie is "*Kote ola lei tena o kaiga mote enevalomene*" and translates simply as "A sustainable toilet".

With the new branding we organised a 'Falevatie Roadshow' to take the toilet to the people and show how it works and what the new designs would look like. People were concerned they were going to get the same design from previous projects and needed to approve of the new one. As with any new product it is important that people know what they are 'buying' and are happy with how it looks and works. After all, it is a structure that will sit in their backyards and be used daily.

With the help of local volunteers and PWD staff we built a portable Falevatie, put it on the back of a truck and drove it around all



Above: The 2010 Falevatie Roadshow was instrumental in changing negative perceptions about compost toilets.

the communities of Funafuti. Dedicated local volunteers walked alongside the Falevatie Roadshow, presenting the display toilet, explaining how it works and differs from old designs, and addressing the questions and concerns raised by community members.

Through these two activities and related community consultations we hoped to increase technical understanding in the community of how the system works and the many benefits it can provide their family and the environment, as well as communicating the Tuvaluan ownership of the project and toilet design.

Through the seemingly simple idea of changing the name, falevatie are now viewed by the public as part of a sustainable future for Tuvalu, and are even enshrined in the 2012 Water and Sanitation Policy. The Falevatie Roadshow was so well received by the community that many people afterwards put their name forward to construct one, so many that there is now a 200+ waiting list. Owners of falevatie have themselves organised an Owners Group where they share their experiences on use, maintenance and benefits of falevatie with each other and the wider community, generating a truly unique Tuvaluan experience of compost toilets.

Project Managers in similar situations need to have their "ear to the ground" and be open to engaging with the community so that seemingly small issues can be picked up and dealt with at the beginning of a project, ensuring that community involvement and ownership will secure the sustainability of its goals.