

Pacific High-level Dialogue on Water and Sanitation

A Call to Action

This Call to Action is the result of a high-level dialogue convened by the Director General of the Pacific Community (SPC) on 25 November 2019, in order to seek strategic advice on what is needed to accelerate action towards access to safe and resilient water and sanitation for all Pacific islanders by 2030. It calls on Pacific island governments and partners to engage in a broader dialogue, make commitments to prioritise water and sanitation investments, and take urgent and immediate action to:

1. Strengthen leadership on water and sanitation

Strengthened and re-energised leadership is required at all levels to drive accelerated action on water and sanitation as a critical component of a secure, sustainable, and resilient Pacific. The sheer magnitude of the task at hand requires a fundamental recalibration of priorities and investments, renewed commitments, and reenergised partnerships for action. At a regional level, strengthened leadership is required to guide, monitor and report the contributions of action on water and sanitation towards our regional commitments under the 2030 Agenda, Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, and the Boe Declaration on Regional Security, and to raise the priority of water and sanitation high on the agenda of Pacific leaders and partners.

2. Increase support to strengthen local capacity for resilience

For most Pacific Islanders, water and sanitation is managed at the household level, and significantly increased investment is needed to strengthen local capacities to maintain safe, secure, appropriate and affordable systems and practices, paying particular attention to the needs of isolated communities and vulnerable groups, and to the role of women and girls. Sustained and targeted support is required to build the institutional and human capacity of those agencies and organisations tasked with supporting our local communities in this role.

3. Invest in evidence-based decision-making

Decision makers at all levels require accurate and accessible information to inform action, and more is needed to strengthen, communicate and utilise scientific understanding, citizen science and traditional knowledge of water resources in order to manage risks associated with water quality, overuse and extreme events. Significant challenges remain in collecting accurate data on water and sanitation coverage across the Pacific, and tailored technical assistance is required to support national capacities to monitor and assess levels of access to safely managed facilities.

4. Harness advocacy for change

Increased and more effective advocacy for action is needed at all levels, achieved through a deeper engagement and partnership with effective agents of change such as our youth, civil society, media, private sector, and civic, religious and political leaders. More is needed to ensure that action on water and sanitation is more fully understood and utilised as an essential tool to support multiple development goals and resilience to the impacts of disaster and climate change.

5. Coordinate efforts across sectors

In the Pacific, water and sanitation is everybody's business, but greater coordination of water and sanitation efforts should be enabled at all levels to ensure that these efforts work together efficiently and effectively to enable measurable progress towards agreed targets. Integrated decision-making frameworks should be established that build upon existing governance processes and bring together sectors and stakeholders and enabling collaborative efforts towards common goals.

6. Establish effective frameworks for action

Robust policy frameworks are urgently required at the national and sectoral levels, supported by local plans for action and an overarching regional framework to guide integrated action across sectors and to report to leaders on progress made towards 2030 targets. The regional framework should integrate urgent action on water and sanitation with relevant goals for resilience, sustainable development and regional security, closely linked to other high-level regional dialogues and decision-making fora, and support action in response to this Call.

Why This Call?

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development includes a goal (SDG6) and targets for universal access to safe and affordable drinking-water, adequate and equitable sanitation and hygiene for all, and ending open defecation. SDG6 is widely recognised as an enabling goal, critical to the achievement of many other SDGs.

Far too many of our Pacific peoples continue to live without access to safe and resilient water and sanitation, and far too many live with a disproportionately high exposure to the risk of water-related disasters. The data provided by countries indicates that approximately half of the Pacific population lives without access to basic drinking water facilities, and more than two thirds live without access to basic sanitation.

If current trajectories persist, millions of Pacific islanders will continue to endure unsafe water and sanitation for generations to come, with profound implications for public health, economic development, the environment and our human rights.

Something more - something different - is needed to improve the rate, reach and effectiveness of action to meet the region's commitment to safe and resilient water and sanitation for all by 2030.

It is not that no action is being taken. Every country in the region is making progress in improving water and sanitation facilities. The issue is that in too many cases national efforts are not keeping pace with population growth, disaster setbacks and the accelerating impacts of climate change.

The disparities in access and challenges to progress in Pacific island countries vary from other regions and countries in important ways, and these differences need to be considered when discussing how the Pacific region might progress towards the SDG water and sanitation targets.

- The Pacific is home to significant rural, dispersed and isolated populations that face serious water and sanitation challenges compared to their urban counterparts.
- The region's 2030 population projection would require drinking-water facilities for approximately an additional 7 million people and sanitation facilities for an additional 12 million people.
- Much of the region relies on limited and fragile water resources that require careful management and protection from human impacts.
- Pacific communities are disproportionately vulnerable to the water-related impacts of climate change and natural hazards.
- Government and community capacity to anticipate, respond to and minimise these impacts is key to community resilience.
- Despite improvements, information on access to water and sanitation across the Pacific remains relatively poor compared to other regions.

The 2019 high-level dialogue on water and sanitation

In November 2019, the Director General of SPC hosted a one-day meeting of a cross-section of representatives of Pacific island countries and partner agencies to share their experiences and practical advice on accelerating action through strengthened partnerships and dialogue to bring about the change needed.

There are many actors and stakeholders in water and sanitation in the Pacific, and not all could be present at this initial dialogue. The intent of the one-day meeting was to seek initial advice on how to progress a broader, urgent and purposeful conversation on action towards this critical development target.

This Call to Action is has been produced on the basis of the advice received through this initial dialogue, and is intended to support our Pacific region to better work together, talk together, and most importantly, *act* to secure safe and resilient water and sanitation for all.