

# Accelerating Water Security Action for Pacific Resilience

## A Pacific Resilience Partnership side session to the UN 2023 Water Conference

**UN 2023 Water Conference Side Event HQ48.**

**Title of Side Event: Accelerating Water Security Action for Pacific Resilience.**

**Date:** 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2023.

**Time:** 5:00 PM – 6:15 PM EST.

**Location:** Conference Room C, United Nations Headquarters:405 E 42<sup>nd</sup> St, New York, NY,10017.

**Organized by:** The Pacific Resilience Partnership (PRP), supported by three of the region’s largest regional organizations (The Pacific Community (SPC), Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), which support the political, economic, sustainable development, scientific, technical, environmental, and natural resources management need of their Pacific Island Country member governments.

### 1. Background on the event.

Too many Pacific people continue to live without access to safe and resilient water supply and sanitation and with disproportionately high exposure to the water-related risks of disaster and climate change. Recurring geohazards such as earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, and increasing frequency of hydrometeorological hazards such as flooding, storm surges, droughts, and salination pose the greatest threats to the water security of Pacific Island countries. Climate change variables and impacts have compounded these geological and hydrometeorological risks by increasing the frequency and severity of those disastrous events on water resources, infrastructures, and ecosystems. As a result, progress toward achieving SDG 6 has been impeded due to the intensity and severity of recurring disasters and climate variables. Data gathered in Pacific Island Countries indicate that approximately half of the Pacific population lives without basic drinking water facilities, and more than two-thirds live without basic sanitation. These numbers are heavily driven by the region’s significant rural and outer island populations that live outside the reach of reticulated water services and face serious water security challenges compared to their urban counterparts.

While every country in the region is active in improving the water security of their vulnerable communities, in many cases, these efforts need to catch up with the pressures of population growth and movement, disaster setbacks, and the accelerating impacts of climate change. If current trajectories persist, millions of Pacific Islanders will continue to endure water insecurity for generations, with profound implications for public health, socio-economic development, food, energy, security, the environment, and human rights. Significant contributing factors to this situation are persisting low levels of engagement in water security compared to other sectoral issues and inadequate consideration of water security issues in regional frameworks and decision-making fora. For example, while the significant economic, health, and environmental benefits of improved water and sanitation have been well demonstrated, the issue is yet to receive the levels of attention proportionate to both the scale of the challenge and its critical role in supporting Pacific resilience.

Despite these challenges, action is underway across the Pacific to strengthen community resilience through local and innovative water and sanitation solutions. The side event showcased examples of these actions, highlighted the Pacific’s unique challenges, and introduced emerging efforts to strengthen engagement in water security through the region’s multi-sectoral Pacific Resilience Partnership.

The side event strongly supported the Conference’s thematic area three: **Water for climate, resilience, and environment: Source to sea, biodiversity, climate, resilience, and DRR**. This theme is of critical importance to Pacific Island Countries, given the urgent need to accelerate water security action that is resilient to the region’s high exposure to climate and disaster risks. Our voluntary commitment is to strengthen our multi-sectoral engagement on water security through the Pacific Resilience Partnership and work inclusively with our multi-sectoral partners in accelerating water security engagements, actions, and partnerships.

Key speakers were drawn from the Pacific’s three regions of Melanesia, Polynesia, and Micronesia. It included Pacific government leaders, non-state actors, and civil society, including a strong representation of Pacific women and vulnerable groups.

### 2. Contribution to the Water Security Action Agenda.

The PRP Side Event will contribute to the Water Security Action Agenda by accelerating progress towards Goal 6, particularly the following targets:

- By 2030, expand international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries (PICTS) in water- and sanitation-related activities and programs, including water harvesting, desalination, water efficiency, wastewater treatment, recycling, and reuse technologies.
- Support and strengthen the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management.

### 3. Key Issues Discussed.

- ✓ The Pacific is off track collectively to meet the SDG 6 targets for universal safe access to water, hygiene, and sanitation. Call for urgent action to prioritize sustainable financing and innovative solutions that integrate traditional knowledge to secure the region’s water security.

- ✓ Significant disparities in access to water, hygiene, and sanitation persists between and within countries with rural populations significantly disadvantaged.
- ✓ Need for increased funding and sustained support to address the needs of the region's largely rural, remote, and informal urban communities that are outside the reach of centralized urban water supply and sanitation systems.
- ✓ Serious water security and resilience issues facing the Pacific from climate change and disaster risks impact such as threats to groundwater resources due to droughts, saltwater intrusion, increasing salination, over-abstraction, and inappropriate land use practices. Surface water is impacted by pollution, catchment degradation, mineral resource extraction, and deforestation; essential water and sanitation infrastructures are impacted by extreme climate events such as storm surges and inundation, flooding, poor asset management, and significantly increased high materials costs and transportation.
- ✓ Pacific People experienced and continue to face some of the world's highest exposures to extreme climatic events and disasters that significantly impact their water security.
- ✓ Covid 19 exacerbated and compounded the water security challenges of Pacific Island countries, with some countries responding to natural disasters in the middle of dealing with covid 19. Tropical cyclones Harold, Yasa, and Ana, the eruption of Hunga, Tonga Hunga Ha'apai volcano, and associated tsunamis. Serious droughts affect the low-lying atoll countries of Tuvalu, Kiribati, and the atolls of Melanesia.
- ✓ The critical need to build national and local technical capacity to govern, manage and operate water resources, investments (infrastructures), and practices (operations).
- ✓ Accelerating Water Security Actions for Pacific Resilience is fundamental to building a sustainable and resilient Pacific considering the conditions of existing vulnerabilities we live in and the threats of new emerging risks such as global pandemics and increasing frequencies of climatic events on our beautiful islands.
- ✓ Our Call for accelerating water security actions for Pacific Resilience is based on the call for accelerated actions on SDG 6 and anchored on Pacific Regional Frameworks such as the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific, the BOE Declaration, on countries' national strategic plans, adaptation plans, water and sanitation policies, and national communications that recognize the fundamental role of building Pacific Resilience in the face of climate change, recurring disasters & existing vulnerabilities.
- ✓ Water security in the Pacific is more than just delivering primary access, as it is also a climate resilience issue that must involve multi-stakeholder engagement and partnerships across national governments, development partners, intergovernmental organizations, non-government organizations, communities, youths, civil society organizations, vulnerable groups, women organizations, and academia to accelerate water security actions.
- ✓ The critical importance of collecting localized data to manage the region's fragile and limited water resources.
- ✓ Disproportionate impact of water on women, girls, and people living with special needs and the critical need to engage them in water security actions.
- ✓ Serious impact of wastewater on ecosystems and the critical need to improve wastewater management.

#### 4. Key Recommendations for Actions.

- Accelerated water security action is needed at all levels to secure urgent sustainable financing, data and information sharing, capacity development, and water governance.
- Promote increased, meaningful engagement in water security as a resilience issue. The newly established Pacific Resilience Partnership Multi-Sector Water Security Technical Working Group will work on a Pacific Water Security Engagement Strategy towards increasing engagements and actions on water security.
- Strengthen Water Security Actions and coordination as a key component of Pacific Resilience across all levels and across all sectors.
- A call for urgent funding from development partners to address the water security needs of the region and to address the sanitation issues of large rural populations that have been neglected for decades.
- Address the issues and recommendations raised in the communique agreed upon by Pacific Water and Wastewater Ministers in November 2023, which confirms the significant water security challenges facing the Pacific and recommendations for the Way Forward.