

## **Raising community awareness to address point-diffuse water pollution problems in a coastal Fijian village – Lessons from the Wai Votua project.**

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The WaiVotua project is a collaborative project funded by NZAid to develop and demonstrate sustainable community water supply and wastewater treatment solutions for coastal Fijian villages that protect public health and reduce contaminant loadings to coastal waters. Social, scientific and engineering approaches have been integrated with local and indigenous knowledge, resources and infrastructure to engage the local community and build capacity at village level. In particular, raising community awareness of water pollution and the linkages between water and health has been crucial in engaging the village particularly women and promoting improved management at village-scale of human and environmental health issues related to water and waste.

Throughout the project, health and hygiene have been discussed at community level (focussing on women, children, and water and health committee members) using dialogue and a variety of participatory-based activities. Visual narrative in particular has proven to be an effective tool in enhancing local capacity at village-scale to understand the linkage between water provision and use, wastewater management, health risks and environmental quality.

Examples of this have been village participation in water quality monitoring (surface and drinking water) and analysis using several simple, low cost methods for water testing. "Seeing the science" and the impact of septage from drains and small scale piggeries on water contamination has proven successful in facilitating village awareness of their accountability for water degradation rather than blaming "upstream" users. Photos taken by villagers using disposable cameras to document healthy and unhealthy practices within the village have generated a greater awareness of the connection between village activities and various point-diffuse sources of pollution in the catchment.

These participatory activities have also promoted a keener interest in taking on responsibility for environmental management. Transfer and extension of knowledge gained from village participation back to the community has strengthened the engagement of the village in the project and assisted in identifying priorities for local remedial action. Combining village-wide awareness-raising of water pollution issues with capacity-building programmes has been of great value in supporting sustainable implementation of water and wastewater infrastructure developments to address point-diffuse sources of pollution in the coastal village of Votua, Fiji.