

# Fostering WaSH marketing exchange systems in informal

# Melanesian communities:

# Building on existing marketing exchanges in Melanesian informal settlements to improve WaSH

## PROGRAMMERS' BRIEF

**Who is this brief for?** WaSH practitioners and programmers who aim to improve WaSH in informal settlements by fostering marketing exchanges.

**Purpose of this brief:** In informal settlements, we observed all of the four main marketing exchange types: market-based (i.e. monetary), non-market-based (i.e., philanthropic), command-based (i.e., regulatory) and culturally-determined (i.e., social) marketing exchanges (shown in Figure 1 below). Yet, recent efforts to improve WaSH through marketing approaches have focused only on market-based exchanges. A broader approach that builds upon the range of already existing marketing exchanges may help enhance WaSH and well-being for all in informal settlements, rather than only for those that can engage with market-based exchanges.

**Recommendation 1:** WaSH practitioners and programmers should consider seeking out pre-existing marketing exchanges and supporting them such that they help to meet WaSH needs (many of these marketing exchanges may already be related to WaSH).

**Recommendation 2:** WaSH practitioners and programmers should consider learning about local motivations for engaging in WaSH marketing exchanges and leverage these toward achieving the WaSH aspirations of the target population.

## Background

### *WaSH in urban and peri-urban Melanesia*

Urban migration for employment and education has substantially increased urban and peri-urban populations in Melanesian countries. The low affordability of urban housing, combined with the complex and often conflict-prone land tenure system in the region, has led to an increase in informal settlements<sup>1</sup>.

Informal settlements in Melanesia are often on urban fringes, are not planned by government, are on private, government or custom-owned land so that residents have insecure land tenure, and lack basic infrastructure<sup>1</sup>. Residents generally earn little or no income. Some settlements are on the boundaries of city council and provincial administrations, and so, fall between urban and rural policies. Their rapid growth has exacerbated the challenge for WaSH service provision<sup>1</sup>.

Most settlements lack connections to mains water and sewerage lines, due to the land tenure, and cannot access council solid waste collection programs. Water-related diseases are common, leading to compromised health and wellbeing<sup>1</sup>.

## Research approach

We used participatory action research (PAR), where the researchers, residents of informal settlements, businesses and enabling actors, work together to define a problem, design a solution, and implement change<sup>2</sup>. We worked with two informal settlements in each of Suva (Fiji), Port Vila (Vanuatu) and Honiara (Solomon Islands). An abbreviated research activity was undertaken in one settlement in Madang (PNG). Residents of these settlements had expressed a desire to improve their WaSH situation.

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We also worked in partnership with WaSH enabling actors (e.g., private actors, civil society organisations (CSOs), multi-lateral organisations, government agencies, water and sanitation utilities, educational institutions).

We used participatory activities to investigate how people in the settlements currently meet their WaSH needs. We investigated existing WaSH exchanges in the six settlements through transect walks, WaSH mapping, WaSH priority lists, household WaSH systems mapping and gendered focus groups. We collected photographs of WaSH infrastructure, drawings, maps, and lists created by research participants, audio and video recordings of research activities and researchers' daily field notes and post-fieldwork summaries. We analysed the data to determine what types of WaSH marketing exchanges occur and why people choose to engage in different types.

**Finding 1: Residents of Melanesian informal settlements use diverse marketing exchanges, often in hybrid combinations, to meet their WaSH needs.**

In all of the informal settlements we studied, we found that residents engaged in a range of different types of marketing exchange to meet their WaSH needs. These marketing exchanges fall into four categories, according to marketing theory<sup>3</sup>:

**Market-based exchange:** A buyer and a seller transact in products and services on the basis of a pricing mechanism established by competitive markets or negotiation;

**Command-based exchange:** A regulated institutional authority makes available products and designs prices and services by a provision motive;

**Culturally-determined exchange:** A provider and recipient exchange value in ways sanctioned by local traditions and social norms;

**Non-market-based exchange:** a supplier donates products or services to help in some circumstance of disadvantage and receives no explicit payment. Note, Command-based and Culturally-determined exchanges are also non-market-based exchanges; for the purposes of this communication 'non-market' refers to other types of non-market exchanges, such as donations and charitable exchanges.

The four types of exchange were not always mutually exclusively; we often found that combinations of the types were used. Figure 2 summarises some examples of hybrid exchanges that we observed were being used in informal settlements by residents to meet their WaSH needs.

Identifying the diverse ways in which people use marketing exchanges to meet their WaSH needs can assist WaSH practitioners in leveraging these exchanges to meet other WaSH needs. For example, if some residents of a settlement engage in culturally-determined exchange to manage communal water standpoints, practitioners might explore whether a similar exchange could be fostered to manage communal bathroom facilities.

Our findings suggest that popular WaSH interventions, like sanitation marketing, may be limiting their impact by adopting a narrow focus on market-based exchanges. Although the emphasis placed in sanitation marketing on being driven by demand and building an entire supply chain are promising, our finding about the hybridity of



**Figure 1: The WaSH marketing exchange system.** WaSH marketing exchange systems are comprised of functions, performed by actors using rules, which creates assets that enable all types of WaSH marketing exchanges, which should generate not only access to WaSH, but also wellbeing impacts. Note, Command-based and Culturally-determined exchanges are also non-market-based exchanges; for the purposes of this communication 'non-market' refers to other types of non-market exchanges, such as donations and charitable exchanges.

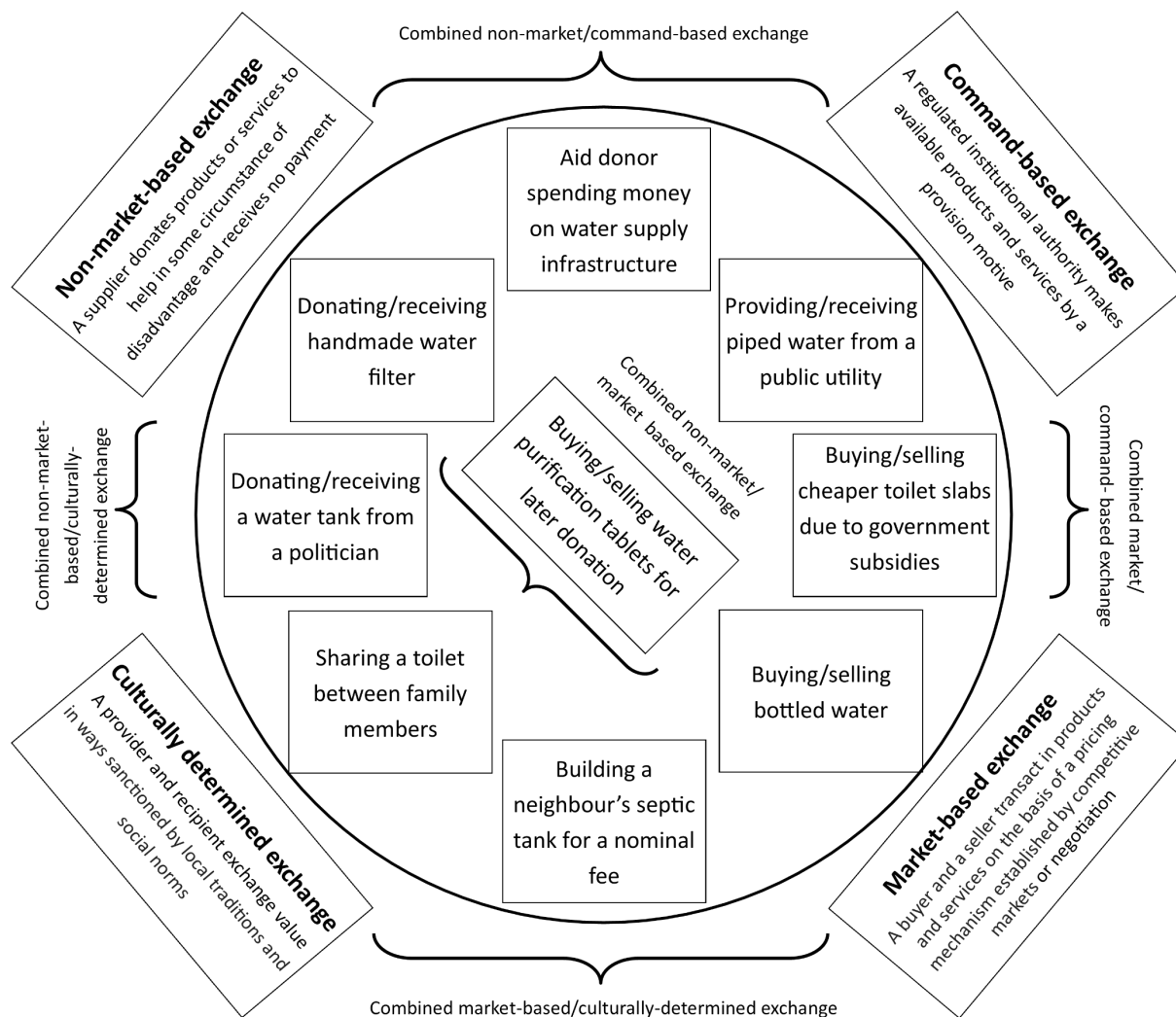


Figure 2: Examples of WaSH marketing exchanges. The text outside of the circle defines the four archetypes of exchanges and the inner text gives examples of WaSH exchanges that are often observed in developing countries<sup>3</sup>.

WaSH exchanges emphasise that not all residents of informal settlements use market-based exchanges, because they prefer not or are not able to. Allowing for, and even facilitating other types of marketing exchanges in combination with marketing-based approaches such as sanitation marketing would mean WaSH benefits are more likely to reach more people in ways that suit them.

### Finding 2: Residents of Melanesian informal settlements have various motivations for participating in WaSH marketing exchanges.

Residents of the informal settlements identified four major motivations for engaging in different types of marketing exchange to meet their WaSH needs:

**Social custom:** Residents often referred to the importance of their rural cultural traditions, and expressed a desire to create an urban version of communal practices reflecting those traditions. They reported the sharing of common WaSH resources between households as an example. These practices not only helped with WaSH needs but also helped retain some traditional elements of community and culture, which seemed an important value.

**Empathetic economics:** The settlements often had subsistence entrepreneurs selling WaSH products (e.g., water, soap) along with other groceries, in small community shops. These entrepreneurs reported trading WaSH products because they understood their importance for healthy living in that settlement, because they shared the experience of adversity with their customers by virtue of living in the same settlement. Similarly, we identified some residents with water connections on-selling water to neighbours. These residents reported identifying themselves as part of the larger community and hence wanting to help those in need. In both cases, shared life circumstances and common life goals appeared to trigger an empathetic form of economic activity.

*"I thought \$10 that these 10 families pay each month will pay off my water bills. I want to improve my own family's well-being and also help the other family which is why I suggested \$10 so that it will be fair for everyone."*

Water on-seller, Fiji

**Product service or quality:** Acquiring fit-for-purpose WaSH products and services was an important motivation when engaging in marketing exchanges. Residents identified that drinking ‘cleaner’ water, or using ‘better’ sanitation would improve health. Residents did not always use the highest quality WaSH products and services for every activity; they made choices to use a level of quality that they felt optimised health and wellbeing outcomes.

**Financial management:** How residents chose to procure their water did not always depend on price. In some cases, consumers chose a more expensive option if it enabled them to access the water in a way they were more comfortable with. In other cases, consumers acquired the cheapest water they felt optimised health and their household finances. The focus was on avoiding immediate disaster due to lack of, or poor quality, water; improving long-term financial security did not seem to be as great a concern.

WaSH programmers that plan to improve WaSH by fostering marketing exchanges should identify the motivators of people who use different types of exchanges to acquire different WaSH products and services. This knowledge can be used to design WaSH programs that build on those motivators by expanding the accessibility of those specific marketing exchanges to residents who still have unmet WaSH needs, and by considering whether some of those types of exchanges are appropriate for new types of WaSH products and services.

## References

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This project has included work completed by Semisi Meo towards the attainment of a Doctorate of Philosophy.

## Want to know more?

This brief describes findings from the project “Water and Sanitation Markets in the Pacific: Understanding Demand and Fostering Sustainable WaSH Marketplaces”. For more information, please contact Project Manager, Dr Regina Souter, at [r.souter@watercentre.org](mailto:r.souter@watercentre.org).

A variety of outputs from this project are available from [www.watercentre.org/portfolio/pacific-wash-marketing](http://www.watercentre.org/portfolio/pacific-wash-marketing)

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