

## WaSH through the Pandemic

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*Image: Local youth group members - Yugeshni Devi and Vandika Gounder stand next to a Menstrual Hygiene Management block that they have been helping build for Tataiya Primary School in Rakiraki.*

Creating Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) blocks is a new initiative for us at Habitat for Humanity Fiji (Habitat Fiji). Having good menstrual hygiene facilities in schools is an important part of helping young girls feel safe and comfortable in school. Our MHM blocks will be fitted with a shower and change space that female students can use if they have their first periods in schools or if their menses arrives unexpectedly!

Check out the MHM block story on Page 5 in this issue.

## Bula!

It's been almost a year since we last issued a newsletter and since then a lot has been happening. Under new pandemic restrictions and norms our WaSH teams continue to work on delivering training and building infrastructure in the 18 identified communities and 11 primary schools in the provinces of Ba and Ra.

## The Tippy Tap Takeover



When our WASH teams begin working in a community, we don't normally see impacts or outcomes until much later in projects. However, since we've started introducing tippy tap building demonstrations in our trainings, we have found that some of the communities we work in start erecting their own tippy taps even before our teams leave!

This is because tippy taps don't cost much to create, they don't use as much water as a running tap and can be setup anywhere making hand washing a more convenient and frequent exercise.

*Image: A young man of Navitilevu Village, Ra using a tippy tap.*

Navitilevu Village is one of 18 communities that Habitat Fiji is working with as part of the Water for Women funded Strengthening community resilience and inclusion through improved Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) services project. Between July and December every year the village faces water shortages, so water conservation has become part of daily life.

Osea Suka and his family are one of Habitat Fiji's project partners in Navitilevu Village. In February - 2021, Osea and other villagers of Navitilevu completed a 3-day water, sanitation and hygiene training where they learnt about the benefits of Tippy Taps. Osea immediately went on to make 2 Tippy Taps after the training.

"I found that it was a very simple design that I could easily build, and at home my kids love to use it and it encourages them to wash their hands frequently especially after playing outside" shared Osea.

*Image: Osea Suka using a Tippy Tap he made.*

While many villages across Fiji have piped water, taps might be shared among a few households and are sometimes located quite far from homes. Village common areas like halls may not have taps nearby. Tippy Taps have become a solution for these situations. The Community health worker of Navitilevu Village - Rasilivia Navo says: "It's easy for people to use and even for us women, we've asked our youths to install tippy taps for our homes. For me, our bathroom and sanitation facilities are located quite a distance, so I find that the tippy tap helps and encourages frequent hand washing."



Visit our website - [habitatfiji.org.fj](http://habitatfiji.org.fj) for more on this story.

## Works continue at Tataiya Primary School

Located about 12 minutes drive from Rakiraki town, Tataiya Primary School caters for 65 school students across 8 grades. The students come from the neighbouring informal settlements of Tuvavatu and Mulau. Tataiya is 1 of 11 schools that Habitat Fiji is assisting in the province of Ra and Ba. The 11 schools were identified in consultation with UNICEF and Fiji's Ministry of Education, Heritage and Arts due to water scarcity in their respective locations and their vulnerability to issues around water, sanitation and hygiene.

Works being conducted in the school by Habitat Fiji include:

### The upgrade of the school's borehole

This included creating a concrete superstructure and shelter for the existing borehole.



Image: Borehole super structure.



Image: Local volunteer Shaireen Lata standing by the borehole shelter.

### Water tanks installation



Habitat Fiji has installed 2 x 5,000 litre water tanks and a 10,000 litre water tank along with the necessary fixtures for rain water harvesting. The water tanks sit on concrete bases that were made with the assistance of local volunteers.

During natural disasters, Tataiya Primary School (like many schools in Fiji) serves as an evacuation centre for vulnerable households. Potentially these water tanks will also be catering for the neighbouring communities during climate induced emergencies.



Image: Community youth group volunteers assisting with cement work at the school.

**Menstrual Hygiene Management block** – currently under construction.

Tataiya is 1 of 6 schools where MHM blocks are being piloted.

**New pans and cisterns** – work to come.

Habitat Fiji have future plans to fix and replace the Tataiya Primary School's toilets, pans and cisterns.

Visit our website - [habitatfiji.org.fj](http://habitatfiji.org.fj) for more stories like this.

## Family of Men build a MHM block

Nalaba District School is located in the Nalawa area of the Ra province in Fiji, a one hour drive from its closest township. This is one of six schools where Habitat Fiji is piloting the build of Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) blocks. MHM blocks are fitted with a shower and change space for female students to use should they experience their first periods or menses unexpectedly while in school.



With the support of our Habitat Fiji plumbers, Nalaba District School Manager Akini Seru has been leading the build of the School's MHM block. 53 year old Akini called on his brothers and cousins who all live in a close-knit farming community near the school to come and assist with the build.

The build required a lot of commitment from the men as they had to walk a few kilometres to and from the construction site. They also had to leave their daily farming routine for the four week period of the build. However, being able to provide a space for girls to deal with their first menses in school with dignity seemed to outweigh any of the challenges this family of men faced.

38 year old volunteer Epeli Raganivatu had this to say: "Building the MHM facility is something I'm truly proud of. When I attended the school, this was something that was not promoted and girls would often get teased in school if they had their menses during school hours."



*Images (L-R): Akini Seru, Epeli Raganivatu painting the MHM block, the family of men and the MHM block.*

Menstrual hygiene is still a taboo topic in some of our communities here in Fiji. So this move by a family of men to come together to build a MHM block not only helps young girls deal with their menses in a more dignified way, but it also challenges our conservative way of discussing menstrual hygiene within our communities.

Visit our website - [habitatfiji.org.fj](http://habitatfiji.org.fj) for more stories.

## Mere helps protect her community from COVID



Image: Mere Raika, a health worker in Malevu Village, Fiji.

Mere is a health worker in Malevu Village, Fiji. Like many front-line workers Mere has been protecting her community in their fight against COVID-19. This pandemic can be a traumatic experience particularly for people living in rural and remote locations where access to affordable and quality healthcare is limited.

Mere was part of a Water, Sanitation and Hygiene training that was conducted by Habitat Fiji in Malevu Village. In this training Mere and other participants learned proper hand washing practices that can help prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. "I immediately taught my family" shared Mere.

Mere has gone on to share these proper hand washing practises with children and adults in the community through awareness sessions, village meetings, women's group gatherings and even during Sunday School lessons. Mere has noticed a huge change in hand washing practices from children and adults since completing her training.

Community-based WaSH projects being carried out by organisations like Habitat Fiji are critical in trying to win the fight against COVID-19.

Habitat Fiji, through funding from the Water for Women Fund, is working with change agents, including community health workers, in 18 communities and 11 schools within the Ba and Ra provinces in Fiji to promote resilience and inclusion through improved WaSH services.

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