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Locally Led Opportunities for Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Climate Change and Gender Equality Partnerships in the Blue Pacific

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Abstract: Partnerships between water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and rights-holder organisations (RHOs) have become more common, important and impactful in the international development sector, and they have been driven by aligned agendas, mutual benefits and the pursuit of locally owned and inclusive development agendas. There are opportunities to broaden partnerships and coalitions to include climate change advocacy, adaptation and mitigation organisations given the increased focus on the links between WASH, resilience and climate change action. This article takes a first step in addressing the question: How can the experience of WASH, gender equality and climate organisation partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific inform the WASH sector in its growing support of and investment in diverse partnerships in support of localism? We conducted a systematic scoping review to identify the literature on gender equality, WASH and climate change-related partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific. Three key themes emerged from the systematic scoping review based on 23 studies published from 1996 to 2024. Firstly, partnerships and coalitions are part of a critical localism agenda, though care needs to be taken by potential partners and donors to understand and manage power dynamics between actors and organisations working within and across sectors. Secondly, a range of benefits and success factors have been documented on partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific, including support for emerging leadership, leveraging policy outcomes, facilitating learning and the sharing of frameworks and tools between partners. Thirdly, like all parts of the community and governance ecosystem, gender dynamics and social norms inform and influence partnerships and coalitions. At the same time, partnerships are important for informing and driving gender equality and inclusion at the local and regional levels including within the WASH sector. This article is useful for local actors, donors and civil society organisations wishing to pursue the mutually beneficial goals of WASH, gender equality, climate change action and localisation in the Blue Pacific.

Keywords: partnerships; water; gender; localisation; climate change; South Pacific

1. Introduction

International development challenges are "collective action" problems, given that they require support and change from multiple actors to benefit society as a whole [1,2]. Collective action involves working together for mutual benefit, underpinned by an awareness of the interconnectedness of each other's futures [3]. Collective action is, therefore, counter to the well-known concept of "tragedy of the commons", which asserts that people act individually for perceived self-interest rather than for the commons (such as water, natural resources and the air) [4]. Social movements are larger-scale expressions of collective action, and they play an essential role in addressing environmental and human rights challenges and infringements, including combatting the causes and threats of climate change [5]. Partnerships between water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and rights-holder organisations (RHOs) are one such form of collective action and have become more prevalent in recent years [6]. This article focusses on partnerships between WASH civil society organisations

(CSOs), climate change action and development organisations, and women's and gender-equality organisations as key actors in the WASH ecosystem. Drivers of such partnerships include strengthening mutual gender equality and inclusion goals, changing social norms in society towards greater equality and access to essential services, and enhancing advocacy efforts together [6–9].

One of the world's greatest collective action challenges is climate change and the water and sanitation impacts that stem from it. There is increasing recognition of the need to address water and WASH issues and challenges with greater attention to climate change trends and threats (and vice versa) in order to drive holistic approaches and manage the many water-related impacts of climate change, including floods, drought, WASH infrastructure damaged from extreme weather events and saline intrusion into groundwater [10,11]. WASH organisations are increasingly considering climate change within their programs, largely from the perspectives of adaptation and community resilience, so as to take climate change impacts into account in the design of WASH services and integrate them with broader climate resilience and finance policies [12–14].

Extreme weather events, saltwater intrusion, floods and drought, which have been made more common and more intense due to climate change, impact negatively on WASH infrastructure and services, undermining previous gains for communities and endangering health. Climate change projections for countries in the Blue Pacific indicate uncertainty and variability, with the IPCC Sixth Assessment concluding with high confidence that small island states are "increasingly affected by increases in temperature, the growing impacts of tropical cyclones (TCs), storm surges, droughts, changing precipitation patterns, sea level rise (SLR), coral bleaching and invasive species, all of which are already detectable across both natural and human systems (very high confidence)" [15] (p. 2034). In the Blue Pacific, climate change is having severe impacts on WASH, including saltwater intrusion into groundwater as a result of climate change-induced weather events, such as tropical cyclones and droughts [16,17]. Sources of potable water such as rainwater tanks and streams are polluted or destroyed during droughts and tropical cyclones, as are sanitation infrastructure, leading to disease outbreaks and increased costs for people to find alternative water sources [16]. For example, following Tropical Cyclone Pam in 2015, water sources in both rural and urban areas were damaged or contaminated [18,19]. Climate change-related impacts on WASH impact on women and girls and people with disabilities more severely, which leads to those parts of the community disproportionately experiencing negative impacts which can be long-term [20].

Perceptions of and responses to climate change differ across the Blue Pacific, but what is common is that the islands of the region are all on the "front line" of climate change and are bearing disproportionate and catastrophic impacts [21] (p. 304). Actors in the Blue Pacific, including politicians, civil society organisations, private sector, academics and communities, are leading global awareness of and action on the importance of climate change mitigation and adaptation [22]. To inform, strengthen and build the capacity and successes of the WASH sector in responding to climate change, we propose that diverse civil society partnerships, including those between WASH, climate-change and gender-equality actors, government agencies and organisations will be needed. Such partnerships will be required to meaningfully enact transformational approaches to climate impacts, as opposed to short-term reactive approaches. Diverse partnerships with local organisations are also in line with and give substance to emerging trends in locally led, or "localisation", agendas.

Though the ideas of locally led development are not new, the language of localisation re-emerged through the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit and Grand Bargain, and this language is increasingly being promoted by development actors. The *Pacific 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent* commits to a well-connected region through partnerships and sharing of information and communication services and seeks to "strengthen involvement by all Pacific peoples, including non-state actors, to ensure their cultural values and traditional knowledge are reflected in measures to conserve the ocean and land-based environment" [23] (p. 27). Localisation discourse is now common in aid and develop-

ment discourse, with donors such as United States Agency for International Development (USAID) senior officials calling for actors to "embrace the widely-held and resounding consensus that locally-led development–an approach that prioritizes and elevates the roles of organizations, institutions and people of the countries we serve..." [24] (p. 1). Similarly, Australia's International Development Policy launched in 2023 commits to supporting "local leadership, solutions and accountability, including by channelling funding to local actors". Moreover, the policy recognises the importance of civil society to the localism agenda: "Australia recognises the value of civil society, and that civic space is shrinking in many parts of the world. Direct support for, and engagement with, civil society organisations will continue to be an integral part of how Australia implements its development program" [25] (p. 33).

Climate action driven by civil society in the Blue Pacific has called for meaningful and locally driven responses to climate change, but this aim has not yet been achieved due to long-term power dynamics between the Global North and South. Localism responses include diverse and decolonised partnerships; agendas set by local actors; climate adaptation activities grounded in an appreciation of local cultures, Indigenous knowledges and the understanding of connection to place; and mitigation of emissions by Northern countries [21,26–31]. Localism is underpinned by bottom-up local leadership and involves a broad set of stakeholders. With reference to leadership and change in the Asia–Pacific region, Hudson et al. [32] (p. 131) emphasise the collective nature of change-making: "Leadership is best understood as a collective process involving motivated agents overcoming barriers to cooperation to form coalitions that have enough power, legitimacy and influence to transform institutions". With respect to forms of collective action, Nazneen [1] summarises how the literature differentiates three key types: coalitions (diverse set of groups or networks with aligned interests), collective action (undertaken by one or more coalitions) and social movements (interactive processes of collective action).

Coalitions comprising Global South civil society organisations are an influential form of South–South cooperation and can contribute meaningfully to localisation agendas if regional power dynamics and interests are taken into account by actors and negotiated. Newell [33] considered the ways in which civil society hold national governments and international institutions to account for their responsibilities in tackling climate change. One tactic has been to form coalitions such as the Climate Action Network (CAN) in order to better coordinate activities and pool resources. In 2023, the CAN comprised more than 1900 civil society organisations in over 130 countries and drove collective and sustainable action to fight the climate crisis and champion social justice objectives [34].

North–South partnerships between states and non-government organisations (NGOs) and various combinations of these are well known in the international development sector, in part due to historical colonial ties and aid flows. Such partnerships are common in the WASH sector and, in recent years, have shifted towards strengthening WASH systems that are led and sustained by government and community actors, rather than one-off externally driven infrastructure interventions. An example of multilateral North–South engagement is the Sanitation and Water for All (SWA) initiative. SWA is a multi-stakeholder partnership of government and their partners from civil society, the private sector, United Nations agencies, research and learning institutions, development banks and the donor community [35]. Through its convening power, partners aim to galvanize political leadership for improved WASH and jointly advocate and coordinate action on issues such as WASH financing, accountability, and climate smart water and sanitation [35].

The heightened focus on ensuring that WASH projects and programs respond to the burgeoning threats of climate change and support the resilience of communities to unpredictable weather events highlights the need to consider the opportunities that exist for WASH organisations to engage in diverse partnerships to drive climate resilience and manage climate risks. This scoping review draws together the literature related to WASH, gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), and climate change organisation partnerships and networks in the Blue Pacific. We aim to inform future partnerships and

coalitions seeking to practice localisation. This study is the first of its kind to draw together and analyse research related to partnerships within and across these three distinct but interrelated sub-sectors of civil society. Studies have been conducted on women's coalitions and partnerships in the Blue Pacific [36,37], youth leadership and coalitions [38,39], WASH and GEDSI partnerships [6–8] and climate change NGO coalitions and partnerships [40,41]. Further relevant studies have been conducted on cross-sector partnerships [42], WASH and RHO partnerships [6,9] and leadership in the Blue Pacific [32]. Yet, no study, until now, has looked across these sectoral partnership approaches to inform localised WASH programs in the Blue Pacific. This gap is exemplified by a systematic review of all English-language papers (published before February 2015) on WASH in Pacific Island countries (a total of 121 papers) which found minimal discussion of the social factors affecting water management, despite the importance of society and social dynamics to the Pacific context [43]. The academic literature is, therefore, nascent, in part due to the way in which knowledge is shared and captured in the Blue Pacific.

To begin to fill the identified knowledge gap, we conducted a systematic scoping review on Blue Pacific coalitions and partnerships in relation to WASH as part of a broader localisation agenda. We believe that addressing this gap will be useful to those organisations wishing to support localisation and build more diverse and cross-sector partnerships, especially with RHOs and those working on climate change issues in the Blue Pacific. The question guiding this systematic scoping review was as follows: How can experience and knowledge of coalitions, gender equality partnerships, climate change partnerships and WASH sector partnerships in the Blue Pacific inform the WASH sector in its growing interest and investment in diverse alliances and partnerships in support of localisation?

2. Methods

Systematic scoping reviews are used to determine the "scope or coverage of a body of literature on a given topic and give a clear indication of the volume of literature and studies available as well as an overview (broad or detailed) of its focus" [44] (p. 2). The scoping review process was chosen for this study in order to leverage the benefits of the approach, including to identify the types of available evidence, clarify key concepts in the literature, examine how research is conducted on the topic and identify and analyse knowledge gaps [44]. Scoping reviews are used to identify and map the available evidence; they are a useful precursor to a systematic review. A systematic scoping review can have a broad disciplinary scope and, therefore, allows for the inclusion of a wide range of studies from different epistemological traditions [45]. Our review is systematic in that it was undertaken according to a fixed plan, system or method; in this case, the review was performed in accordance with the steps of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Figure 1).

The scoping review commenced with the identification of English-language literature relating to coalitions and partnerships in the Blue Pacific, with a specific focus on the WASH sector and the sector's interest in applying locally led approaches (localisation). The scoping review compiled insights from relevant published studies undertaken from 1996 to 2023 to elucidate the factors that led to successful social justice partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific (especially those related to gender equality, climate change and sustainability). The scoping review was designed to identify strengths and opportunities for WASH sector actors in particular, informed by an understanding of Blue Pacific cultures and leadership. The scoping review also sought to identify points of tension, issues and challenges related to coalitions and partnerships in the Blue Pacific.
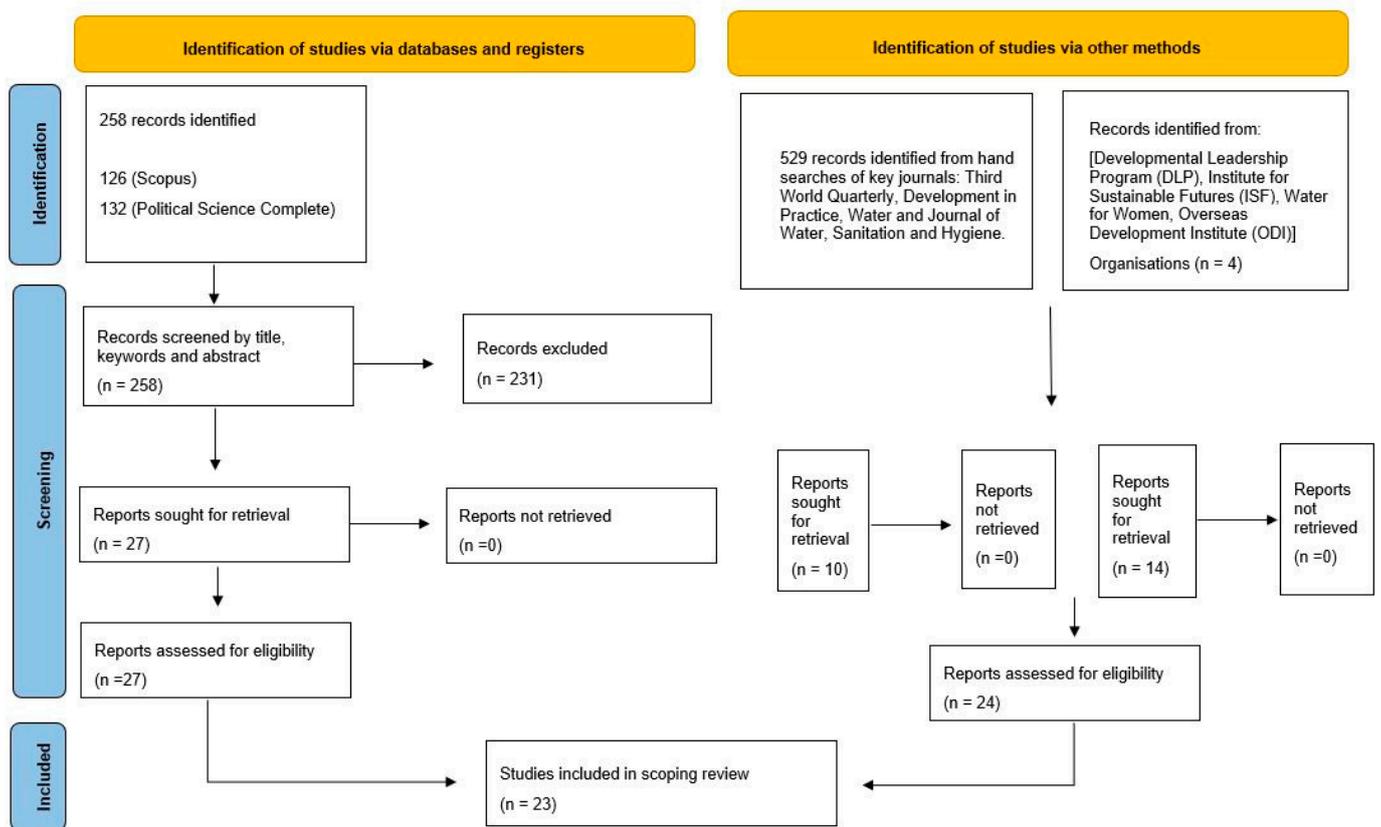
Figure 1. Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart.

Search Approach

A four-step literature search approach was adopted, as recommended by Waddington et al. [46]. This approach included a review of academic literature identified through (a) electronic databases, (b) hand searching, (c) literature snowballing and (d) grey literature searches. We also spoke to sector experts working in the Blue Pacific to further test the search strategy. Selected specialist journals (*Third World Quarterly*; *Development in Practice*; *Water* and *Journal of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene*) were hand-searched. The databases utilised for the literature search included Scopus and Political Science Complete. The grey literature was also searched for relevant material, including self-published reports. The grey literature search focussed on research institutes and development agencies who have conducted research in the Blue Pacific on social movements, gender equality leadership and North–South partnerships and coalition building. The search primarily focussed on studies situated in the Blue Pacific, including Vanuatu, Fiji, Solomon Islands, Samoa and Papua New Guinea written in English (see Appendix A for a full list of countries and search terms). The time period for publication was between 1990 and 2023. The PRISMA flowchart of the search process is shown in Figure 1.

Once the relevant articles had been identified and read, an inductive thematic analysis was undertaken. This led to the identification of commonalities across studies, and key themes emerged from the literature, as described in Section 3, Results.

3. Results

The literature search identified 23 highly relevant studies pertaining to WASH, GEDSI and climate change partnerships and coalitions, noting that there were very few studies that sat in the nexus of these three areas. These 23 studies provide insights for WASH sector organisations and donors wishing to pursue locally led agendas in terms of working increasingly through local systems and partners and supporting local agendas and priorities in the Blue Pacific. The results of the scoping review are presented in relation to four key topics: (1) coalitions, (2) gender

equality partnerships, (3) climate change partnerships and (4) WASH sector partnerships in the Blue Pacific, in line with the key aspects of the research question.

3.1. Coalitions in the Blue Pacific

Eight research papers dealt with coalitions in the Blue Pacific. Included studies described coalitions as important to a localism agenda. Yet, participation in civil society organisations for some parts of the community can be limited by traditional gender- and age-related norms. The strength of civil society across Blue Pacific communities varies based on traditional, gendered and social norms that can limit citizens' active participation in civil society [39]. However, this is changing, largely as a result of young people playing more roles in civil society, despite the continued structural minimisation of the roles they play, as Craney observes: "Across the Pacific, the power imbalances divided along age and status lines are prevalent across all aspects of society" [39] (p. 115). Development experts and practitioners consider civil society networks and coalitions to be a potentially effective and necessary means to support a localism agenda: "NGOs will need to move beyond unique partnerships as bilateral relationships with a single 'partner' or counterpart, but rather become simultaneously engaged with multiple actors through networks, coalitions and alliances" [47] (p. 116). One study found that coalitions were considered particularly important to local communities when they were "working on issues that attempted to change cultural norms. They [interviewees] viewed this as particularly important in the Pacific, where cultural values are strong and there is an increasing distance between urban decision-makers and the rural majority" [48] (p. 365).

The studies conducted on coalitions in the Blue Pacific identified a range of success factors to achieve positive outcomes for members and communities. One study found that coalitions succeeded when they were formed in response to local events and critical junctures; were locally driven and owned; shared a common purpose, interests and sometimes values (or were able to navigate between conflicting values); and had adaptive and distributed leadership that was regularly renegotiated [36]. In their review of how leaders collectively influence institutions, Nazneen [1] found that the way in which coalitions can bring about positive change is influenced by their financial resources, organisational strength and their ability to shape ideas.

Coalitions are likely to be more successful if they are able to seize a key moment, engage in learning and apply this learning to influence policy. In their analysis of how the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) has been applied to climate change, Gabehart, Nam and Weible [49] identified characteristics of coalitions and how they behave, change policy and learn. The ACF explores how individuals form coalitions and engage in various political strategies to learn and influence policy [50]. Gabehart, Nam and Weible [49] found that coalitions were more successful when they took advantage of a critical juncture or policy window which could be as a result of a crisis or opportunity. The authors also noted the work of Ruysschaert and Hufty [51], which found that the success of coalitions depended on sustained action over a decade, acknowledgement of and learning from past mistakes, taking timely advantage of opportunities and ensuring knowledge-sharing and learning [49].

Social change coalitions may be highly structured and formalised or more organic and informal, with implications for meeting donor expectations and monitoring and evaluation systems. Coalitions in the Pacific may take on modalities and ways of working that might be different from the expectations of donors and how they are accustomed to funding projects. An example of a coalition developed in the Blue Pacific that is not bound to any one theme or topic is the Green Growth Leaders' Coalition, which was established in 2012 and was funded by international donors but structured to be locally led [52,53]. The coalition comprised a range of types of individual leaders, including political, regional, private sector, civil society and other influential actors. The focus was for each actor to increase its influential potential within its particular realm across the Blue Pacific, rather than on joint initiatives or projects. This coalition has shared numerous successes through its membership, such as influencing the Vanuatu 2030 People's Plan, which reflected

sustainability ambitions; and the Green Growth Framework for Fiji, which incorporated culture, sustainable development and economic growth targets [52]. The lack of formal joint projects, statements and policy positions for this particular coalition led scholars to identify several challenges, including in the management of donors' expectations and the monitoring and evaluation of influence and change due to the long-term and political nature of the types of changes worked on by coalition members [52]. Such challenges are an example of the dilemma of moving towards localisation—where modalities and ways of working might be different to how donors usually fund projects, and as such, funding programs will require new ways of monitoring, evaluating and learning.

While coalitions can and do play a role in driving gender equality and inclusion in society, they are not necessarily inclusive within themselves and, rather, may be led by or comprise elite decision-makers and/or those with access to power and resources which will need to be managed by coalition leaders and members. This phenomenon is known as "elite capture", whereby the views of local elites are conflated with those affected by development activities at the grassroots level, and often these are well-educated and well-connected men [38]. The regional Pacific Leadership Program, funded by Australia's aid program (2008–2017), provided insights into social justice coalitions in the Blue Pacific, especially in relation to the origins and membership, and their impacts on successes and challenges. Denney and Mclaren [53] found that coalitions could be organic or more proactively nurtured; however, the authors noted that there was no consensus around the role of donors in coalitions and whether or not donors can create (or should only support) those grown locally [53] (p. 13). Coalition membership may also be fluid and evolving, and in the Blue Pacific, this may mirror the highly interconnected nature of societies and social norms related to power and access to decision-makers. While this interconnectedness is a great strength, it also brings challenges related to interpersonal issues, inclusion and the "multiple hats" that some people need to navigate [39,53]. In sum, donors and coalitions themselves will need to be conscious of who makes up the coalition and consider inter- and intra-organisational inclusion while advocating for greater inclusion in societies.

Coalitions have developed in response to climate change impacts, with a focus on collective action, mitigation and adaptation. The importance of locally led development is demonstrated by studies that have found that relocation of people from the Blue Pacific (moving people from their lands due to climate risks) should be the last resort given people's connections to land and the cultural and family histories related to place [28]. With access to this local knowledge, CSOs and their coalitions have played a role in supporting communities to respond and adapt to climate changes from where they live, rather than moving away (for example, from low-lying coastal areas) in the first instance.

3.2. Gender Equality Partnerships and Coalitions in the Blue Pacific

Effective partnerships and coalitions to advance gender equality in the Blue Pacific are founded upon trust and women's leadership. Spark and Lee [54] identified that (a) long-term engagement, (b) sensitivity to potential challenges and the socio-political terrain and (c) strong bonds built on trust underpin successful women's coalitions in Papua New Guinea and Malaysia. In these cases, the coalitions were driven by the leaders who sustained them, thereby being dependent on these leaders and their long-term commitment to the coalitions [54]. The importance of trust identified in these case studies led the authors to recommend that donors seeking to invest in women's coalitions should be conscious of the importance of trust between the members and leadership and must ensure that funding arrangements do not undermine this or unintentionally disrupt social bonds, which are core to the success of the coalition [54].

While there are some examples of successful partnerships and coalitions working towards gender equality, challenges have also been identified in relation to gender norms, power dynamics and the degree of local ownership. Collective action itself is gendered and can result in the reinforcement of gendered norms around male leadership and career/political advancement. Measures to increase inclusion and diversity within collective-

action efforts are, therefore, important to drive these goals in broader society [26,55]. While there is a need to pay attention to how and if coalitions and partnerships might be reinforcing gender norms around power, voice and decision-making, coalitions and partnerships also have great potential to promote women's and minorities' leadership and work to shift gender norms [9,56]. For example, a study involving the Pacific Feminist Forum and the We Rise Coalition revealed the importance of alliance-building in creating a form of "negotiated sisterhood" and in promoting intersectional Pacific feminism [57] (p. 235). The authors found that "working together as a regional alliance increases the impact of advocacy for including feminist voices in dialogues with regional institutions" [57] (p. 229). Notwithstanding, as Barbara and Baker observed, "effective gender-focused coalitions in the Pacific are invariably locally led, locally designed, and informed by the local cultural context. Yet, this does not always guarantee success, especially in transforming deep-seated gender norms and beliefs" [55] (p. 996). To address and shift deep-seated gender norms, a range of strategies will be required, including co-production, co-learning, diverse partnerships and supporting minorities to be in leadership positions [9,31].

In all contexts, strong social norms limiting women's leadership and voices (such as who has the right to speak, make decisions and take up leadership roles) will influence the way in which coalitions function. Such norms can result in fewer women leaders and/or those leaders not being provided platforms and opportunities that their male counterparts may be offered. Another way in which social norms may influence women's leadership is by keeping their activities within societal expectations, as described by a case study of the Vanuatu-based Northern Islands Market Vendor's Association (NIMVA). The NIMVA was established in 2015 with the support of United Nations (UN) Women and aimed to support market vendors in Fiji, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu. It focussed on improving working conditions, enhancing leadership capabilities and increasing the income potential of its members and partners [55]. As a result of patriarchal norms in the societies that the NIMVA worked in, creating space for progressive female leadership was difficult and influenced the level of ambition of the political reforms that were pursued [55]. In this case, the strategies and activities were informed by the gendered space within which the NIMVA operated. As the authors of the study observed, the NIMVA can be considered an example of "permitted empowerment", in that it did not overtly challenge entrenched male political interests [55] (p. 1002).

As described above, the shifting of gender norms in any context is challenging and multifaceted, and coalitions are part of navigating this aspect of social change. Five case studies of women's coalitions in the Blue Pacific revealed that the role of coalitions and collective action in driving transformational change was influential and could be a strong predictor of changes in gender equality laws and policies [36]. The case studies included the Talitha Project in Tonga, Women in Sustainable Enterprises in Tonga, a women's handicraft cooperative (Nei Nibarara) in Kiribati, "Response to sorcery-related violence" in Papua New Guinea (PNG) and a group working to promote human rights in Fiji [36]. The study found that a coalition's effectiveness was defined by "the degree to which the coalition's agenda is locally owned and its ways of working are politically salient" [36] (p. 27).

Success factors for women's CSO partnerships have been found to include the power of leaders, strategic framing of issues based on the context and opportunities available, and change strategy employed. While not a CSO partnership, an example of a women's coalition driven by elite public servants was the Women in Shared Decision-making (WISDM) in Vanuatu, which campaigned to have Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) in Vanuatu adopted to increase the number of women in parliament. The campaign was successful, and Rousseau and Kenneth-Watson [58] identified three main factors that led to the policy change: (a) the leadership and composition of the coalition (being powerful), (b) the strategic framing of the issue in terms of being technocratic electoral reform rather than a gender reform project, and (c) the modest and incremental scale of the reforms [58].

North–South Gender Equality Organisation Partnerships

Beyond the effectiveness, successes and benefits of gender equality coalitions and partnerships documented in the available literature, challenges and factors reinforcing North–South power dynamics have also been described. A study on power dynamics between North and South women's movements and organisations in the Blue Pacific found that Global North organisations often lacked contextual and cultural understanding of the Pacific country and communities and tended to follow their own agendas, with little input from local organisations [37]. The study found that "elite feminism" was apparent through the favouring of well-established organisations, and that Global South organisations faced uncertain financial sustainability, where donor-and-beneficiary dynamics were perpetuated [37] (p. 35). There were also cases of accountability and transparency being viewed as one way only, rather than mutual accountability [37] (p. 13). In order to advance localisation and equitable partnerships, the author calls for people and organisations to nurture the 'vā' (space) which gives meaning to things, and "co-creation, co-design, co-responsibility and co-accountability between Global North organisations and women's rights organisations" [37] (p. 15).

3.3. Climate Change Partnerships and Coalitions in the Blue Pacific

Climate-related partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific appear to have emerged around two main directions, described in six relevant studies—firstly, with an external focus, bringing local voices to international debates; and secondly, with a focus on locally led solutions and conceptions of resilience as ways to address the burgeoning impacts of climate change in the Pacific. The latter cases demonstrate how shared learning and research translation offered important contributions from the relevant coalitions to their members. These two areas are now described with examples.

Blue Pacific island states, individually and collectively, have been pivotal players in climate change discourse, activism and global politics [22]. As part of this, CSOs have played important roles in raising the level of concern about climate change impacts in the Blue Pacific and have been effective in elevating these concerns given their mandate and proximity to affected communities [59]. Central to the approach of Pacific peoples is the concept of '*banua', which has been described as an "expansive concept, inclusive of people and their place, attentive to both mobility and immobility, and distributed across the Pacific Islands region . . . essential for the existential security of Pacific people and central to contemporary climate activism" [60] (p. 298). Locally led and regional approaches to addressing climate change are considered important by scholars who have analysed health equity partnerships in light of climate change in the Pacific. In one case, a regional health-focused coalition incorporated cultural systems of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to include Indigenous perspectives in health equity policy and practice [27].

Another example of a climate change-focused coalition from the Blue Pacific was the Yumi Stap Redi Long Climate Change Program, led by six ni-Vanuatu and international development and humanitarian organisations from 2012 to 2014. The program supported 37 communities on 11 islands in four provinces to increase resilience to climate change [61]. The Vanuatu Climate Adaptation Network (VCAN) was also established at this time to facilitate the sharing of lessons and good practice for adaptation [61]. The consortium partners worked together to create a resilience framework, drawing on a plethora of community-based adaptation (CBA) tools and guidance available globally, and they found that the co-development of the framework laid the ground for ongoing collaboration. The framework identified the core elements of what a resilient community in Vanuatu looked like and included elements such as basic needs being met, diverse livelihood assets, and fair and inclusive decision-making [61]. Commitment to cross-learning was a key part of the program design, and the consortium members found that defining resilience together was a unifying process that brought people from a range of disciplines and fields of practice together. Using the shared vision of resilience, partners could use their own tools and approaches while working together towards a shared goal, including developing shared tools and approaches [61].

3.4. WASH Sector Partnerships in the Blue Pacific

The literature on partnerships between WASH organisations and other types of organisations in the Blue Pacific region is scant, with most studies related to WASH and gender equality and inclusion partnerships in Timor-Leste [6,7] (which is included in this study as being part of the Blue Pacific region, see Appendix A). The study from Timor-Leste found that fourteen distinct benefits of WASH and gender equality and social inclusion partnerships were identified by research participants, relating to three main areas: (1) increasing participation and inclusion of women in WASH programs and related decisions; (2) mutual learning and capacity building, advocacy opportunities and connections with government; and (3) shifts in gender norms (changing perceptions of roles and responsibilities related to WASH). There were challenges to the partnerships as well. Challenges were broadly related to three main factors: (1) organisational and operational barriers that prevented realisation of outcomes, especially when staff changed (2) weak links in the WASH system due to siloing and (3) power dynamics and challenges to organisational and interpersonal relationships [7].

Examples of WASH and rights-holder organisation partnerships can be found in the grey literature, such as the guidance provided by the Australian Government-funded Water for Women program [6]. In this guidance, examples are provided, such as WaterAid's partnership with the women's organisation Grupu Feto Foinsa'e Timor-Leste (GFFTL). In this case, GFFTL led community awareness-raising sessions for more equal distribution of WASH-related domestic labour between men and women. The partnership provided evidence of positive changes for women, such as increased representation in national and municipal forums [6]. In this case, community experiences of rural gender and WASH issues were brought to the Women's Parliamentary Group of Timor-Leste, the State Secretary for Equity and Inclusion and the National Women's Network (Rede Feto) which demonstrated increased advocacy and influence through the partnership [6].

3.5. Thematic Analysis of Included Studies

An inductive thematic analysis of the literature identified key themes relevant to WASH, gender, and climate change partnerships (Table 1). These are discussed with reference to the broader literature in the following Section 4, Discussion.

Table 1. Themes emerging from the literature.

Theme	Summary	Example References
1. Partnerships and coalitions are part of a critical localism agenda.	Critical localism can and does involve civil society connections and pathways. Discourse around localism incorporates civil society partnerships, social movements and collectivism as ways to support locally led development. Critical localism can be summarised as a form of locally led development which has a focus on inclusion and addresses power dynamics within society to avoid elite capture and/or perpetuating inequalities for people and communities.	[7,32]
	Critical localism in the Pacific is an alternative to colonial development models. Localism has developed in response to top-down and Northern-led development priorities, processes and modalities and requires a change in policy and practice. Some proponents prefer the term "locally led".	[37,62]
	Collective action can be neo-colonial. Power dynamics between North and South women's movements and organisations in the Blue Pacific can include Global North organisations lacking contextual and cultural understanding of the focus country and communities and following their own agendas with little input from local organisations.	[37]
	The strength of civil society across Blue Pacific communities varies given traditional, gendered and social norms limiting citizens' active participation in civil society. Yet, this is changing, largely as a result of young people playing more roles in civil society, despite the continued structural minimisation of the roles they play.	[39]

Table 1. *Cont.*

Theme	Summary	Example References
2. Documented success factors and benefits of partnerships and coalitions are useful for maximising the impact of collective action.	A range of factors influence the success of coalitions. Coalition success factors in the Blue Pacific include local events and critical junctures; being locally driven and owned; sharing a common purpose, interests and sometimes values (or are able to navigate between conflicting values); and having adaptive and distributed leadership that is regularly renegotiated. The success of a coalition is also influenced by factors such as material power (e.g., wealth), organisational power (e.g., collective strength) and ideational factors (e.g., ability to shape ideas). Factors for success may include sustaining long-term action (for over a decade), learning from past mistakes, taking timely advantage of opportunities and engaging in knowledge and learning.	[1,36,49]
	Coalitions in the Blue Pacific are sometimes flexible and undefined in their core focus but provide important avenues for leadership and leveraging outcomes. Some coalitions, such as the Green Growth Coalition, have not tried to define their targets and outcomes or focus too narrowly, which can challenge traditional development funding, monitoring and evaluation, and partnership arrangements.	[52,53]
	CSO climate change coalitions can facilitate learning and the co-creation and sharing of influential frameworks and ways of working across sectors. Climate change-focused coalitions from the Blue Pacific have worked together to co-create resilience frameworks and share learning around community-based adaptation approaches. The co-development of the framework was a key ingredient for partnership success.	[61]
	Partnerships benefit from being based on friendship and trust. Friendship and solidarity are development strategies that can promote a long-term commitment built on trust and mutual responsibility.	[54,63]
3. Partnerships and coalitions drive GEDSI but are also influenced by gender norms.	Diverse partnerships can advance GEDSI and WASH outcomes. Partnering with diverse rights-holder organisations has become part of a broader trend within the rural water sector, as a way to achieve mutual and interrelated benefits of GEDSI and WASH and to realise more integrated service delivery models.	[6,7]
	Women's and feminist alliances can increase impact at the regional level. Working together in regional alliances has been found to increase the impact of advocacy for the inclusion of feminist voices in dialogues with regional institutions.	[57]
	Collective action is gendered. Collective action is gendered and can result in the reinforcement of gendered norms around male leadership and career/political advancement. Measures to increase inclusion and diversity within collective action efforts are, therefore, important to drive these goals in broader society, including locally led partnerships.	[55]

4. Discussion

The analysis of the literature presented in the Section 3, Results, above found three key themes across GEDSI, WASH and climate change partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific. Firstly, partnerships and coalitions are part of and key to a broader critical localism agenda, though there are power dynamics within and between actors and organisations working across sectors. Secondly, a range of factors that promote the success of partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific have been documented, including that they support emerging leadership, leverage policy outcomes, and facilitate learning and the sharing of frameworks and tools. Thirdly, like all parts of the community and governance ecosystem, gender dynamics and social norms inform and influence partnerships and coalitions; at the same time, collective action, in its various forms, is important for driving inclusion in WASH and climate change fora at local and regional levels. Each of these is explained below with reference to the broader literature and summarised in Table 1 in the Section 3, Results.

4.1. Partnerships and Coalitions Are Part of a Critical Localism Agenda

Critical localism can and does involve civil society partnerships and coalitions, as demonstrated by studies from the Blue Pacific [7,36,39,48,62]. In response to weak applications of the concept of localism and existing power dynamics being perpetuated through partnerships with local actors, the concept of "critical localism" has emerged [37,62,64]. Critical localism challenges tokenistic attempts to engage or empower local actors and questions over-validating place-based notions of local at the expense of more flexible and activity-oriented interpretations of local [65]. Proponents of critical localism warn that localism discourse has been dominated by "the local" being considered in opposition to "the international", which may not be helpful and does not consider local power dynamics [66]. A simplistic localisation agenda runs the risk of becoming another method of domination and control, states Roepstorff [67], unless issues such as power dynamics within partnerships, understanding whose knowledge counts, unpacking subcontracting arrangements, and paying attention to the engagement with elites rather than affected people are adequately addressed.

Drawing on the work of McCulloch and Piron [67] and Booth and Unsworth [68], Roche et al. define locally led development as "driven by a group of local actors who are committed to a reform agenda and would pursue it regardless of external support" and "who are local in the sense of not being mere implementers of a donor agenda" [62] (p. 137). In studying gender equality efforts at the local level, Acosta et al. [69] suggested that the local should be seen as a deliberative space where a range of organisations, including local feminist organisations, critically engage, assess and address local challenges, including gender inequalities. The literature on partnerships in the Pacific speaks to the concerns that the critical localism agenda has raised. In their report titled "*Creating Equitable South-North Partnerships: Nurturing the Vā and Voyaging the Audacious Ocean Together*", Guttenbeil-Likiliki [37] found that collective action can also be neo-colonial if power dynamics are not addressed and shifted; in this case, between North and South civil society feminist organisations. Craney [38] similarly cautions development actors to not assume that all local actors can represent local perspectives due to the phenomenon of "elite capture".

Partnering with diverse rights-holder organisations has become part of a broader trend within the rural water sector in low- and middle-income countries, in an attempt to move away from infrastructure-focused models and towards more integrated service delivery models. Service delivery models are conscious of the combined effect of a range of factors and actors and how a range of governance and behavioural dynamics impact WASH delivery and success [6,70] Community-led responses to climate change are necessary in terms of localised impacts and adaptation requirements [71].

Externally led development interventions are often poorly informed by local knowledge in terms of language, culture, history and politics as a result of colonial legacies, funding sources and the way in which aid is connected to foreign affairs and trade interests [72]. The critical localism agenda seeks to remedy these systemic problems by enhancing local leadership and working more through local systems and partners in order to improve aid effectiveness and sustainability. Development programs related to climate change, gender equality and inclusion, as well as WASH, require deep contextual knowledge and engagement, and this can be accessed in part from environmental, youth-based and social movements.

4.2. Success Factors for Locally Led Partnerships

The documented success factors and benefits of partnerships and coalitions are useful for maximising the impact of collective action and for donors looking to support localisation. A range of factors have been found to influence the success of coalitions in the Blue Pacific—from trust and friendship [54,63,73] to seizing key moments and providing learning opportunities for members [49]. For example, CSO climate change coalitions can facilitate learning and the co-creation and sharing of influential frameworks and ways of working across sectors [61]. Coalitions are sometimes flexible and undefined in their core focus but provide important avenues for leadership and leveraging policy and practice outcomes [38,53].

4.3. Gender within Partnerships, Partnerships Contributing to Gender Equality

Partnerships and coalitions drive gender equality and inclusion in Blue Pacific countries, but these networks and organisations are also influenced by prevailing gender norms, which may be exclusionary. Studies across the Pacific have found that diverse partnerships can advance GEDSI and WASH outcomes and support mutual and interlinked benefits [6,7]. Women's and feminist "sisterhood" alliances can increase the impact at the regional level [57]. Nevertheless, care must be taken to listen to and take the lead from local women and experts in order to contextualise broader social change aims (such as gender equality) into locally appropriate actions and priorities [37]. Studies have found that, like all domains in society, collective action and its various formations itself can be gendered, so coalitions and organisations need to consciously consider and challenge harmful norms within their membership and ways of working [55].

5. Conclusions

This systematic scoping study aimed to contribute to a conversation about how the experience of WASH, gender equality and climate organisation partnerships and coalitions in the Blue Pacific can inform the WASH sector in its growing support of and investment in diverse partnerships. The studies included in this literature review reveal opportunities to support local actors to undertake collective action as part of a broader critical localisation agenda and that understanding documented success factors and challenges is a useful exercise. Few studies addressed all three key dimensions related to our research question—WASH, GEDSI and climate-change collective action, partnerships and coalitions—and most addressed only one sector or theme demonstrating opportunities for increased collaboration. With increased calls for locally led approaches, the results provided a range of insights for donors, CSOs, Blue Pacific leaders and other actors involved in WASH, climate change and gender equality program and policy development.

Given the minimal number of studies that address this broad theme in the Blue Pacific, we expected that a scoping review would only provide part of the overall picture, with empirical work needed to supplement the study in the future. Empirical work could include, but is not limited to, mapping civil society organisations, coalitions and partnerships within countries of the Blue Pacific, as well as those that are bilateral and regional. Such research and mapping exercises would serve to support local organisations, international CSOs and regional bodies wishing to partner for increased impact. They would also support donors to implement localisation agendas informed by evidence and recognition of the strengths that are within existing partnerships and coalitions. Associations such as the Pacific Islands Association of Non-governmental Organisations (PIANGO), the Pacific Water and Wastewater Association (PWWA) and The Pacific Community (SPC) would provide immense value to such a future research agenda.

By conducting a systematic scoping review of the literature related to WASH, gender equality and climate change organisations in the Blue Pacific, we contributed to discourse in relation to what "locally led" development means and looks like. We synthesised learnings and recommendations for actors, coalitions and partnerships in the Blue Pacific as one step in the process towards greater collaboration, alliance building and ways of addressing collective challenges stemming from causes and impacts of climate change.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Appendix A

Table A1. Search Terms for Articles, Books and Grey Literature Published between 1996 and 2023.

"Blue Pacific"		
"French Polynesia"		
"Marshall Islands"		
"New Caledonia"		
"Solomon Islands"	"Climate change"	
"South Pacific"	"Social inclusion"	
Pacific	Disabil *	
Fiji	Equality	"Civil Society Organisations"
Futuna	GEDSI	"Collective action"
Kiribati	Gender	"Social movements"
Melanesia	Sanitation	Coalitions
Micronesia	WASH	NGOs
Nauru	Water	Partnerships
Oceani *	Women	
Palau	Youth	
Timor-Leste		
Tonga		
Tuvalu		
Vanuatu		
Wallis		

Note: An asterisk (*) is used for multiple character searching.

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