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Author(s): Michael S. Poustie, Niki Frantzeskaki, Rebekah R. Brown

The ability of urban centres in developing countries to rapidly transition to sustainable practises will be critical for human health and environmental sustainability as the world progresses into the twenty-first century. Sustainability transitions in the urban water sector in developing countries have received limited scholarly attention, with very few studies demonstrating methodologies offering potential for promoting and enabling “leapfrog” transitions. This paper presents an adapted transition management process which demonstrates the importance of establishing a future vision and strategic agenda for promoting a leapfrogging trajectory. Utilising the case study of the urban water sector in Port Vila, Vanuatu, empirical evidence draws from transition management workshops, supported by in-depth interviews and mediated participation. Results suggest that the desire in Vanuatu is for the development of a sustainable urban water future, and that there is untapped latent energy which can be better utilised to assist in guiding the direction of change and promoting sustainable alternatives. The paper concludes by providing critical insights into enabling leapfrogging in other developing contexts highlighting the importance of targeted institutional capacity development, the role of purchaser–provider relationships between governments and international development banks, and the potential for visions to stimulate leapfrogging trajectories.

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