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FEATURE ARTICLE

Empowering Fijian Consumers for a Just and Sustainable Future

World Consumer Rights Day, observed annually on March 15th, highlights key consumer protection issues and advocates for stronger consumer rights worldwide. In 2025, the theme, "A Just Transition to Sustainable Lifestyles," calls for an inclusive approach to sustainability—one that ensures fairness and accessibility for all, particularly in nations like Fiji, where climate change and economic challenges intersect.

This feature article explores how Fijian consumers can actively drive sustainability efforts, the systemic challenges they face, and the role of businesses and policymakers in creating an equitable transition. While sustainability often feels like a global issue dominated by major economies, small island states like Fiji have unique circumstances that require local solutions.

Understanding a Just Transition in the Fijian Context

A "just transition" ensures that sustainability does not come at the cost of economic hardship, inequality, or social exclusion. For Fijian consumers, this means making eco-friendly choices should not be a privilege limited to the wealthy but an accessible and affordable option for all.

The push toward sustainable living is particularly critical for Fiji, where the effects of climate change—rising sea levels, natural disasters, and food security threats—are already evident. However, moving toward greener lifestyles must be balanced with economic realities. Many Fijians rely on affordable imported goods, and the transition to locally made, eco-friendly alternatives must be economically viable.

Challenges Facing Fijian Consumers in Adopting Sustainable Lifestyles

1. Cost Barriers and Market Access

Sustainable products, such as organic food, biodegradable packaging, and solar energy solutions, often come at a higher price than conventional alternatives. Many consumers cannot afford these options, despite their long-term benefits. For instance, while solar-powered appliances reduce electricity bills over time, the initial investment remains out of reach for many low-income households.

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Similarly, sustainable farming techniques can increase food security but require investment in training and resources. Unless affordability is addressed, sustainable options will remain inaccessible to most Fijians.

2. Misinformation and Greenwashing

Many consumers struggle to distinguish between truly sustainable products and those marketed as "green" without genuine eco-friendly benefits. Greenwashing—when businesses falsely claim environmental responsibility—has made it harder for consumers to make informed choices. Clear labelling, public awareness campaigns, and stronger regulations are needed to ensure that sustainability claims are credible and backed by proper certifications.

3. Infrastructure and Policy Gaps

A lack of recycling facilities, insufficient waste management systems, and weak enforcement of environmental policies hinder Fiji's transition toward sustainable consumption. While plastic bans and conservation efforts have gained momentum, challenges remain in waste disposal and sustainable product availability. Improved infrastructure, such as better recycling programs and incentives for businesses to adopt eco-friendly packaging, can help bridge this gap.

How Fiji Can Support a Just Transition for Consumers

While challenges persist, a collective effort from consumers, businesses, and policymakers can accelerate the shift toward sustainability in a way that benefits all Fijians.

1. Strengthening Consumer Rights and Awareness

Educating consumers about their rights, available eco-friendly options, and the impact of their choices is essential. The Consumer Council of Fiji has played a crucial role in advocating for transparency in product labelling and holding businesses accountable for misleading claims. Expanding consumer education through schools, social media, and community programs can further empower individuals to make informed decisions.

2. Making Sustainable Products More Affordable

The government and private sector must work together to reduce the cost of sustainable goods. Potential measures include:

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- Subsidizing eco-friendly products to make them more competitive with conventional alternatives.
- Tax incentives for businesses that adopt sustainable practices, encouraging wider adoption of green products.
- Investing in local production of sustainable goods, reducing reliance on expensive imports.

By implementing these strategies, sustainable options can become more accessible to the average Fijian household.

3. Encouraging Community-Led Sustainability Initiatives

Local initiatives have the potential to drive impactful change. Programs such as community gardens, shared transportation services, and recycling drives can help make sustainability more practical and affordable. Supporting small businesses that prioritize sustainability—such as Fijian artisans who create biodegradable products—can also strengthen local economies while reducing environmental impact.

Communities can also establish cooperative models for sustainable farming, where groups of farmers pool resources to invest in organic practices, benefiting both the environment and their financial stability. These community-led solutions foster a sense of ownership and long-term commitment to sustainability.

4. Strengthening Government Regulations and Corporate Accountability

The Fijian government must continue enforcing strict environmental regulations, such as:

- Holding businesses accountable for waste management and plastic reduction.
- Mandating sustainability reporting for companies, ensuring transparency in their environmental impact.
- Expanding renewable energy incentives to make solar and wind power more accessible to households and businesses.

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Government-backed programs should also work toward developing sustainable public transportation options, reducing reliance on fossil fuels, and promoting electric vehicles with incentives for consumers.

The Role of Businesses in a Just Transition

Businesses play a crucial role in promoting sustainability by:

- **Adopting Green Practices:** Companies can reduce their carbon footprint by switching to renewable energy sources, minimizing plastic use, and implementing sustainable supply chain management.
- **Providing Affordable Eco-Friendly Options:** Retailers and manufacturers can collaborate with the government to ensure that sustainable products are competitively priced and widely available.
- **Engaging in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Initiatives:** Businesses can partner with communities and NGOs to drive sustainability programs, such as waste collection drives, environmental education campaigns, and tree-planting efforts.

By embedding sustainability into their business models, companies can contribute significantly to Fiji's transition toward a greener economy.

Conclusion: The Power of Collective Action

As Fiji navigates the path toward a just transition, every stakeholder—consumers, businesses, policymakers, and community leaders—must play their part. The journey to sustainable lifestyles must not exclude those with fewer resources, and solutions must be tailored to Fiji's unique economic and environmental realities.

By making informed choices, supporting ethical businesses, and advocating for stronger sustainability policies, Fijian consumers can drive long-term positive change. Whether it's choosing local produce, reducing plastic waste, or investing in clean energy, small actions collectively contribute to a more just and sustainable future.

World Consumer Rights Day 2025 serves as a reminder that true sustainability is not just about environmental responsibility—it's about ensuring that all consumers, regardless of income level, can participate in and benefit from the transition. Through collaborative efforts, Fiji can

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Consumer Council of Fiji



www.consumersfiji.org



Mobile App

lead by example, showing the world that sustainable living and economic progress can go hand in hand.

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