



22 August 2025

FEATURE ARTICLE

Share to Sustain, Building Stronger, Greener Communities in Fiji

Fiji, like many other Pacific nations, is facing mounting challenges when it comes to sustainability, waste management, and environmental protection. Landfills are filling up at an alarming pace, and villages in the rural areas of Fiji are grappling with limited waste services, and consumer habits are driving unsustainable levels of food waste. While these problems might seem daunting, they also present an opportunity: by reviving traditional practices, fostering community collaboration, and encouraging smarter consumer choices, Fiji can move toward a more sustainable future.

This feature article sheds light on how the **Consumer Council of Fiji** is taking a proactive stance with its “Share to Sustain” initiative. The project focuses on empowering communities particularly those in villages, through awareness, education, and hands-on engagement. By creating sharing hubs, promoting composting, and equipping communities with tools and knowledge, the Council is working to tackle food waste at its roots while strengthening local resilience.

The Growing Problem of Food Waste in Fiji

Food waste is not simply about discarding leftovers; it is a problem with far-reaching environmental, social, and economic consequences. When organic matter ends up in landfills, it decomposes without proper oxygen, releasing methane, a greenhouse gas far more potent than carbon dioxide. This worsens climate change and undermines Fiji’s national sustainability goals. From an economic perspective, every bag of rotting food tossed into the bin represents wasted money. For many households, especially in villages, this financial loss can have a significant impact. On a societal level, food waste is deeply troubling in a country where many families still struggle to access adequate and nutritious meals.

Despite these challenges, many low-cost and traditional practices that could ease the burden of food waste such as composting, drying, and smoking food remain underused in modern Fiji. Reviving these practices while creating space for new, community-led approaches is therefore critical. This is where the **Share to Sustain** project comes in.

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The “Share to Sustain” Project

Launched by the Consumer Council of Fiji, “Share to Sustain” is a community-driven initiative designed to raise awareness about food waste and equip communities with sustainable solutions. The project focuses on **three main pillars**:

1. **Awareness and Education** – Hosting interactive workshops that teach residents about waste reduction, composting, and food preservation.
2. **Community Sharing Hubs** – Encouraging the exchange of surplus food, household items, and sustainable living practices.
3. **Practical Engagement** – Establishing composting sites, providing materials, and ensuring knowledge transfer so that communities can continue the work long after workshops conclude.

Funded by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation through the Green Action Fund, the initiative recognizes that combating food waste is not only about individual action but also about collective responsibility and knowledge sharing. By bringing people together, reviving Indigenous practices, and shifting consumer attitudes, the project creates ripple effects that can benefit entire communities.

Taking Action: Community Engagement

To put its vision into practice, the Council visited three villages in different regions of the country. Each visit involved community consultations, hands-on training, and the establishment of shared composting centers. While the approach was the same, each community’s unique context highlighted the flexibility and importance of grassroots engagement.

1. Nabena Village, Naitasiri

The journey began in Nabena Village, Naitasiri, where the Council kicked off its awareness sessions in the lead-up to Green Action Week. This village, like many other rural communities in Fiji, faces challenges in waste disposal due to its distance from municipal waste services. Here, food scraps often end up either dumped in open spaces or burnt both of which have damaging effects on health and the environment.

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During the workshop, participants were introduced to the fundamentals of composting. The council representatives explained the types of household waste that can be composted vegetable peels, fruit scraps, and garden waste and emphasized how composting not only diverts waste from landfills but also enriches soil for farming.

Villagers eagerly participated in demonstrations, showing a strong interest in applying these methods to their daily lives. To ensure sustainability, the workshop concluded with the official handover of three compost bins to the community. These bins will serve as the foundation for a shared composting system, helping residents reduce waste while producing natural fertilizer for their crops. This first visit set the tone for the project: a collaborative, hands-on approach that empowered communities with knowledge and tangible tools.

2. Dranikula, Galoa

The second stop was Dranikula Village in Galoa, where the focus shifted from basic composting to community-led management. The Council engaged village leaders and representatives in meaningful dialogue on how to strengthen waste management systems while reviving traditional food preservation practices. Food preservation was a particularly important theme here. The workshop also highlighted the importance of collective responsibility in maintaining shared compost sites. Participants brainstormed how to allocate responsibilities, rotate tasks, and involve households in monitoring and upkeep. This collaborative spirit was cemented when the Council officially handed over **three compost sites** to the community.

Sustainability is strongest when it is rooted in community cooperation. By working together, villages can not only manage waste more effectively but also rekindle cultural practices that align with environmental stewardship.

3. Sawakasa Village, Tailevu

The final stop was **Sawakasa Village in Tailevu**, where the Council wrapped up its Green Action Week activities. Sawakasa is a vibrant community with strong leadership structures, making it an ideal partner for long-term sustainability efforts. Here, the workshop focused on equipping community representatives particularly elders and leaders with hands-on training in composting techniques. The training was designed to create a ripple effect, enabling those leaders to transfer knowledge to other households within the village.

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The handover of compost bins marked not just the end of the visit but also the beginning of a new chapter for Sawakasa. With trained leaders and practical resources in place, the village is now well-positioned to become a role model in mobilizing composting practices.

Conclusion

The “Share to Sustain” initiative demonstrates that tackling food waste is not just an environmental necessity but also a social opportunity. By working with communities in Nabena, Dranikula, and Sawakasa, the Consumer Council of Fiji has shown that practical, community-driven action can bring lasting change.

Food waste may be a pressing challenge, but solutions exist in the form of revived traditions, shared responsibility, and empowered communities. As Fiji continues its journey toward sustainability, projects like “Share to Sustain” remind us that real progress begins at the grassroots level with people, communities, and the simple yet powerful act of sharing.



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