

The 2023 Inaugural National Symposium for Community Led Initiatives on Environment Sustainability

19th to the 21st of September, 2023

Holiday Inn, Suva Fiji

2023 Kauwai Communique

The 2023 National Symposium for Community led Initiatives on Environment Sustainability held in Suva from the 19th to the 21st of September, brought together representatives from 30 community groups from across Fiji. Themed “Share Your Story”, the three-day event engaged participants in storytelling, mutual learning, and relationship-building.

Over the course of these three days, we had the opportunity to exchange our experiences and achievements concerning:

1. Enhancing food security by means of community-driven sustainable fisheries and agriculture practices, aimed at creating thriving, healthy, and resilient communities.
2. Facilitating access to clean energy and energy-efficient technologies for sustainable and resilient development in rural communities.
3. Exploring sustainable urban solutions and strategies for cities towards achieving Fiji’s obligations under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Together, we celebrated our collective accomplishments, innovation, gained insights from each other, shared valuable lessons and best practices, and deepened our longstanding cultural and spiritual connections with one another and with our precious land and marine resources.

In our role as the traditional custodians of our land and marine resources, we:

- are proud of our large ocean state and the mammoth task bestowed on us as stewards of our blue continent
- acknowledge our innate connection with the natural world and our responsibility to sustainably manage and use these resources wisely, for the benefit of our present and future generations.
- acknowledge the interconnectedness of the land, rivers, and seas and understand that effectively addressing our current global crisis demands the collective cooperation and collaboration of individuals and communities from diverse sectors and backgrounds
- acknowledge the significance of the ancestral wisdom passed down through generations and the crucial role that traditional knowledge and values play in the preservation and responsible management of our land and marine resources, as well as in our interactions with community members, development partners, government leaders, and other stakeholders.

- note with serious concern the existential impacts of climate change, loss of natural habitat and pollution on our daily lives from unsustainable development
- encouraged by the inspirational stories of resilience shared by our peers from across Fiji during the three-day symposium
- conscious of our limitations and the challenges we face as grass-root communities through loss of traditional knowledge, inadequate capacity, skills, resources and inadequate policies to enable us to effectively mitigate and adapt to the accelerating and coupling impacts of climate change, nature loss and pollution that is beyond our control
- acknowledge the diversity within and in between communities, and that no two communities are the same, each with its own unique strengths, limitations, priorities and needs
- appreciate the support rendered to us by Government, Civil Society Organisations, Non-Governmental Organisations, Faith Based Organisations, Donor Agencies, Development Partners, Private Sector, Academic and Research Institutions and Religious Organisations

We do hereby, collectively pledge to:

- renew our commitment to undertake robust actions as the traditional stewards of our land and marine resources through ecosystem-based adaptation and nature-based solutions, drawing inspiration from the wisdom of our ancestors and our traditional knowledge and values, and science to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change, halt biodiversity loss, and pollution.
- strengthen our traditional leadership and governance system through inclusive and transparent decision making processes with all members of our community, including youths, women, girls, people living with disability and the elderly
- continue our collaborative spirit and strengthen our relationships with one another through meaningful partnerships, facilitating the exchange of lessons and best practices while providing mutual support.
- explore opportunities to work together to address common challenges through collective advocacy and campaigns that will serve to amplify our community voices and convey our concerns, needs and priorities to leaders and decision makers at village, district, national, regional and global level
- collaboratively strive to bridge the gap and disconnect between our unique community needs, priorities and circumstances on the ground and decisions made at the national level through meaningful dialogue
- reaffirm our commitment towards implementation of Fiji's obligations under various global frameworks such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Paris Agreement, and the Global Biodiversity Framework and others through our efforts on the ground

We call on Government and the Global community to:

- Improve communication effectiveness to ensure that relevant information, decisions and policies made at the national, regional and global levels are promptly disseminated in a manner that is easily understood by our local communities on the ground using accessible information sharing platforms
- Enhance current platforms and explore additional means through which communities can voice their priorities and share, data and best practices that can inform crucial policy and legislative changes specifically on food security, clean energy and urban solutions.
- Take real action and strengthen national policies to meaningfully include community voices in decision making processes and ensure that national plans and policies are inclusive of our community needs and priorities while recognizing the diversity amongst us and our special needs and unique circumstances
- Formally recognize the important role of traditional knowledge and values including the principles of Free, Prior and Informed Consent in national policies and legislations as effective pathways to facilitate actions on the ground towards a stable climate for people and nature positive Fiji, that are cost-effective, meaningful and impactful
- Facilitate the integration of traditional knowledge, practices and values and environmental stewardship and care into national curricula
- Facilitate and simplify national policies and processes to ensure equitable, fair and easy access to much needed sustainable financing mechanism including capacity building, technology and knowledge transfer, monitoring and mentoring programmes for our communities
- Increase government's financial commitment by allocating funds directly to community-based organizations and initiatives for environment sustainability through the national budget.