

Policy Brief

I-Recycle-Hub Programme



INTRODUCTION

This policy brief draws on the I-Recycle Hub bins concept, designed by Waste Recyclers Fiji Ltd (WRFL) and implemented by Pacific Recycling Foundation (PRF). The brief on the recommendation of UNDP Accelerator Lab, affirms that the I-Recycle Hub bins and the program attached to it be piloted progressively within various sectors of Fiji's community, in this case the tourism industry. Fiji's tourism sector contributes about 40% to GDP making it the second most important source of income to Fiji's economy as well as one of the main contributors of recyclable waste into the environment.

The policy brief also sets out the precedence of the I-Recycle Hub bins and its program towards increasing the participating rate of recycling and augment the recovery rate of recyclables within Fiji. This practice imparts a sense of sustainability and provides employment opportunities for individuals and groups involved in the waste picking space.



1. CONVENTIONAL BACK-YARD RECYCLING

Pre-2019, recycling in Fiji was scorned as a dirty, filthy industry that is supposed to be tucked away and hidden in the backyards. This perspective of the recycling sector meant that work done at different levels of industry went unrecognized. For years, the waste management space was left virtually at the clemency of a few individuals and organizations who drove the industry, some mostly as a commercial enterprise. There was also almost no stakeholder support available to those operating in the recycling space.

The conventional view of recycling was so strong that even when WRFL and PRF core team began to talk about recycling as an advocacy to change mindset, behavior, and attitude towards recycling and those involved in waste picking, it was trivialized by several agencies.

Recyclables were, and continue to be, viewed as "rubbish" or "waste". As such, the notion is to get it out of sight as quickly as possible. Thus, when we began to talk about recyclables and in its essence, bringing the recyclables back to the table and relooking at it again, for many it was either too abhorrent or an uninteresting aspect of life.

Recycling also continued to be dropped off as an agenda item during waste management discussions and was sometimes brought in as an afterthought. The people attached to the trade, in particular those involved in informal waste picking, did not have a voice and their needs were never understood.

While there were ongoing talks about improving the recycling collection rates or increasing the lifespan of Fiji's only landfill, there was very little effort to address recycling and waste management using a holistic approach. An approach that would mean positive environmental impact, recognizing economic and financial aspects of recyclables, improving the lives of the vulnerable communities involved in waste picking (particularly women and members of the LGBTQI+ groups), and agreeing on the human rights aspects of waste management.



Game changer effort

By MELI LADDPETER

WASTE Recyclers Fiji Ltd (WRFL) is pioneering a unique approach to recycling. The company's ambassadors) to have good recycling practices that they will instill in their daily lives," said WRFL director and CEO Amitesh Deo. Mr Deo said a key component of the program was developing a sense of sustainability that would be driven by the students themselves. College, said she decided to become a ROG ambassador because she loved nature and the environment and would like to ensure people change their mindset on future leaders to learn the importance of waste management and become more responsible to protect our planet. Amitesh Deo on 992 1067 or email him on amitesh@wasterecyclers.com.fj.

This led to a change in approach and strategy by recycling advocates. PRF, as a change agent, and due to its extensive experience under WRFL working in the recycling space, developed several strategic approaches to improve recycling in Fiji. This includes working with different sectors, stakeholders, and industries in an effort to bring recycling to the forefront of discussions relating to waste management, environmental sustainability, national growth plans, and human right.

Using the same strategy and based on WRFL's 28+ years of experience in recycling, one key tool in bringing recycling to the forefront is the *I Recycle Hub Program*.



Image: Collection Pillar of Recycling, Asenate Lewabeka sorting recyclables in Vunato.

2. REVOLUTIONARY APPROACH TO BRINGING RECYCLING AS AN ADVOCACY WORK.



Image: PRF Founder, Mr. Amitesh Deo talking to CPR community in Maururu, Ba.

Since 2019, Pacific Recycling Foundation has taken some strategic steps to advocate for recycling and proper waste management, and active participation.

This was also a period of listening to the voices and giving recognition to those involved in informal waste picking, as well as laying the foundation for recycling and proper waste management programs at the grassroots level.

Global Recycling Day

The 2019 Global Recycling Day (GRD) celebrations was one of the most significant steps to mark and give visibility to recycling in Fiji, and the lives attached to it.

It was also the beginning of a journey to inculcate best practices of waste management in our homes, communities, and workplaces.



Image: Former Minister for Education, Premila Kumar giving recognition to Asinate Lewabeka who has been a CPR for over 20 years.

Following the relaxation of COVID-19 restrictions, PRF's advocacy work started to take shape in 2022 and the year began with the Global Recycling Day.

Recycling Movement - THE ROG Program

The GRD 2022 coincided with the launching of the Recycling on the Go (ROG) Ambassadors Project at Jai Narayan College in partnership with Swire Shipping.



Image: Official launching of the ROG Ambassadors Program.

A first of its kind, the ROG Ambassadors project was developed to inculcate the best practices of recycling at a school.

24 students of Jai Narayan College were selected as the ROG Ambassadors, who took up the initiative to advocate for waste management and recycling in their school and communities.

PRF provided them with comprehensive in-house training on recycling and also installed the "I-Recycle Hub" at Jai Narayan College.



Image: PRF Founder, Mr. Amitesh Deo providing training to the ROG Ambassadors.

Informal waste-pickers to CPR

2022's GRD celebration was very special as for the first time, Fiji's informal waste-picking community was recognized for their contribution to the recycling space. Following this, sixteen female informal waste pickers from Lautoka were brought to Suva for a week-long wellness and literacy workshop.



Image: CPRs from Lautoka attending workshop at PRF Head Office in Koronivia.

The workshop touched on gender, human rights, legal literacy, financial literacy and well-being for women waste pickers and also assisted them in opening bank accounts, the registration process of national identification cards, and retirement fund forms. The workshop was organised by PRF and Waste Recyclers Fiji Limited (WRFL), in partnership with the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC) and the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This event was just the beginning of a series of workshops aimed at bringing to the forefront the stigma attached to this trade, the name-calling, and the difficulties that the community faced as waste pickers.



Image: CPRs receiving their certificates following the completion of workshops.

Following these workshops, a consultation process with the same women led to the name change of informal waste pickers to Collection Pillars of Recycling. The was carried out in recognition of the deeply rooted stigma attached to the waste picking space.



Image: Women involved in informal waste picking attending consultation process for the name change of informal waste pickers.

PRF also participated in several international and locally organised dialogues and forums and brought to the attention of participants the challenges and opportunities in the waste management and recycling space as well as the need for local voices to be heard, particularly the views of those involved in informal waste picking as they also play a vital role in this space.



Image: PRF Founder, Mr. Amitesh Deo addressing participants from Fiji and the region at the Regional Blueprint Development Workshop, organised by the IUCN at the Holiday Inn, Suva.

Fiji's First Community-based Recycling Pilot Project

In partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature, PRF launched the Pilot Recycling Project in Kabutri Drive, Koronivia in the fourth quarter of 2022.



Image: I Recycle Hub in Kabutri Drive.

Similar to the ROG Ambassadors program, this community-led project is driven by recycling advocates who were provided with in-house training on recycling and waste management. The "I Recycle Hub" was also installed in this community.

And then the I Recycle Hub, at the core of all PRF's advocacy message

While most of PRF's advocacy work focused on change in attitude towards recycling and those involved in waste picking, the I Recycle Hub was a fundamental tool in terms of visible and practical participation in recycling.

Initially earmarked for hotels and resorts, the concept was rolled out in a school and a rural community setting, both in the care of the users. The I Recycle Hub

3. WHAT IS THE I RECYCLE HUB

a. The idea

28+ years in the making

The idea of the I Recycle Hub Program is hinged on PRF/WRFL's core team's 28 years of working laboriously in the recycling space. The I Recycle Hub represents years of lessons learned through the journey of WRFL as a recyclable collection and processing company.

Durability

The idea reflects an alternative to the scruffy metal frames with oversized bags and the short-lived plastic bin concepts. Instead, the I Recycle Hub bin, a brainchild of the WRFL core team, aimed at durability, particularly based on the general culture of handling bins, wear and tear as well as effects of weather.

Practical-use

The design focuses heavily on practical application as a concept. Meaning, the Hub is made with the vision that it will be practical for the user as well as the collector of recyclables. As opposed to the bags and frames, this concept as is a practical alternative to keeping recyclables dry. In the past, this was an ongoing challenge where paper and

cardboard recyclables are concerned and WRFL internal data shows that due to the regular rain experienced in Fiji, in the past, a large percentage of cardboard and paper collected would still end up in landfill and dumpsites as they were too wet to be processed for recycling.

Advocacy message and recycling to the forefront

The I Recycle Hub Program is PRF and WRFL's response to the regular push-back from different sectors that recycling concepts are not neat enough and thus must be hidden in the backyards. It provides its user not only the opportunity to participate in recycling but also to become active recycling advocates. The bin aims to serve as a visible testimony of an organization's commitment to environmental sustainability, recycling, and the waste-picking community.

b. How was it developed

The name

The name "I Recycle" is drawn from PRF/WRFL's first global recycling day theme. Throughout its journey and even until this day, the core team at PRF/WRFL believes they still have to prove their relevance. During forums and discussions, the organizers usually get 'expert advice' from foreign countries and through consultants. However, local knowledge and experience are not given importance, despite WRFL operating for over 28 years.

c. The bin design - technical details

The I-Recycle Hub bins are designed and built in-house by Waste Recyclers Fiji Ltd (WRFL).

With WRFL's extensive experience in the industry, the team at WRFL made sure that the I-Recycle Hub Bins design is able to withstand tropical weather conditions which is the main factor of wear & tear in our tropical climate.

The design phase included a 2D sketch, which was then rendered into a 3D graphic model, to give a life-like artist's impression of the I-Recycle Hub bins.

WRFL in collaboration with PRF was able to construct and implement two bins which are now being used for pilot projects within a school and in a community to catalyze awareness and advocacy on recycling practices and their importance.



Image 1: I-Recycle Hub Bin at Kabutri Community

Therefore, the name "I Recycle Hub" is aimed at bringing individual ownership to the recycling program as well as ensuring that local voices in recycling are now drowned. The program includes a set-up of a functional recycling hub, training, monitoring, and feedback. However, the ownership of the program remains with the user in terms of ensuring program sustainability and active participation.



Image 2: I-Recycle Hub bin implemented at Jai Narayan College in Suva

The materials used to construct the bins are carefully selected by our engineers from reputable hardware shops in Fiji. This is to ensure that the bins are durable and are able to take on the many recyclables that will be fed into the different compartments of the bins. The bins weigh approximately 150 to 200 kilograms and due to its size, the loading, transport, and off-loading of these bins require a hiab truck. Each bin takes 2 to 3 weeks to build, subject to materials availability.



Image: Rendered image of I Recycle Hub bins

All our bins are color coated for ease of understanding the different types of recyclables that need to be separated to go into which compartment. The paint used is suitable for all weather ensuring that it has a life span of a maximum of 10 years or more.

d. Training Program

PRF recognizes that one of the key challenges faced by the recycling industry is the lack of active participation by individuals, communities, and business houses. This challenge is because there is limited understanding and knowledge about recycling and the CPRs.

Similar to the I Recycle Hub Concept, the PRF recycling training program has been developed in-house and is based on experiences and years of engagement in the recycling space.

The training program ranges from understanding the history of recycling and its inception in the Pacific to topics of being able to discern those who call themselves “recycling” companies, to understanding why it is important to have local involvement in the space and to protect the vulnerability of CPRs who play an important role in the whole recycling ecosystem. There are also discussions on the gender element of recycling and waste management.

Recycling continues to be an afterthought in many people’s minds and discussions. Without realizing just how important this act of civic pride can influence and change the landscape of Fiji’s food security, biodiversity protection, flora and fauna preservation, improved water sources as well as the conservation of protected heritage sites; PRF will use this training to encourage and advance the foundations objectives to ensure there are more participation and recovery rate in the recycling diaspora.

PRF also acknowledges that any training in this area will always be in development stages and is never constant or final, this is based on the understanding that technology continues to advance, and more and more products are being developed which ultimately become a new line of recyclable or rubbish, new ways of recycling are being thought of trialed and introduced into society, etc., therefore, PRF training manual or guide will always be in a state of a living document.



Head ROG Ambassador Hefuhelava addressing the former Minister for Local Government Ms. Premila Kumar



Former Minister for Local Government Premila Kumar giving her motivational speech at Jai Narayan College to the 24 ROG Ambassadors



Group picture taken in front of the I-Recycle-Hub Bin setup

4. Implementation of the bin under ROG and Community Recycling

The I-Recycle Hub concept was developed specifically for the tourism industry with a vision that hotels and resorts around the country will use it as a tool to implement recycling as part of their sustainability program.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated challenges, the I-Recycle Hub concept was not introduced in hotels and resorts however was successfully piloted in schools and communities namely Jai Narayan College and the Kabutri Drive community in Koronivia.

The “Recycling on the Go” (ROG) ambassador program

The ROG ambassador program is set up in Jai Narayan College (JNC) and integrates the I-Recycle Hub program setup and concept. The program has 24 students that take the recycling advocacy message forward as ROG ambassadors.

The program is an initiative of PRF in Partnership with Swire Shipping, the ROG program was launched in March 2022 and is set to end in March 2023.

Kabutri drive recycling pilot project

In partnership with IUCN, PRF has launched a community recycling pilot project in Kabutri Drive, Koronivia. An I-Recycle Hub setup has been placed at the entrance of Kabutri Drive and through engagements with the community, 15 volunteers had come forward to be recycling advocates in the program.

This pilot project runs for 3 months under PRF.

Future I-Recycle Hub prospects

Due to its growing popularity and its effectiveness as a key tool in taking the recycling message to the forefront, the I-Recycle Hub program will be up-scaled to include another 2 schools (primary school and all-girls school). Along with this, the current program in JNC will be extended into 2023.

In 2023, PRF will also be working in partnership with a corporate agency to implement an I-Recycle Hub program in an informal settlement. Additionally, 2 x I Recycle Hubs are also scheduled to be implemented at the British American Tobacco factory in Suva.

5. Lessons Learned

PRF successfully launched a school recycling pilot program called the "Recycling on the Go" ambassador program earlier this year which uses the I-Recycle Hub program concept and setup within the program.

Towards the end of 2022, PRF also launched a community recycling pilot project in Kabutri Drive, Koronivia. Like all pilot programs, there are outcomes and learnings, and one of the key learnings that PRF has identified.

The ROG Ambassador program- deeply rooted stigma and name-calling

The ROG Ambassador program was that despite the program being in an academic setting, advocates were called all sorts of names for being ROG ambassadors. To address the name-calling that the ambassadors were facing, PRF organized a speaker to encourage the ROG ambassadors to continue their efforts in recycling and the program, and also to inform the rest of the school of the importance of the program.

Another key learning from the ROG program was that the participation rate had been good from both genders but PRF has noticed that women are taking the advocacy message forward, for e.g., the head ROG ambassador spoke about sensitive issues at a forum in front of teachers, ambassadors etc. This shows how the I-Recycle Hub's training has empowered the women and girls involved in the program to speak up and advocate for recycling and its space.

Kabutri Drive Program - Implementation timing

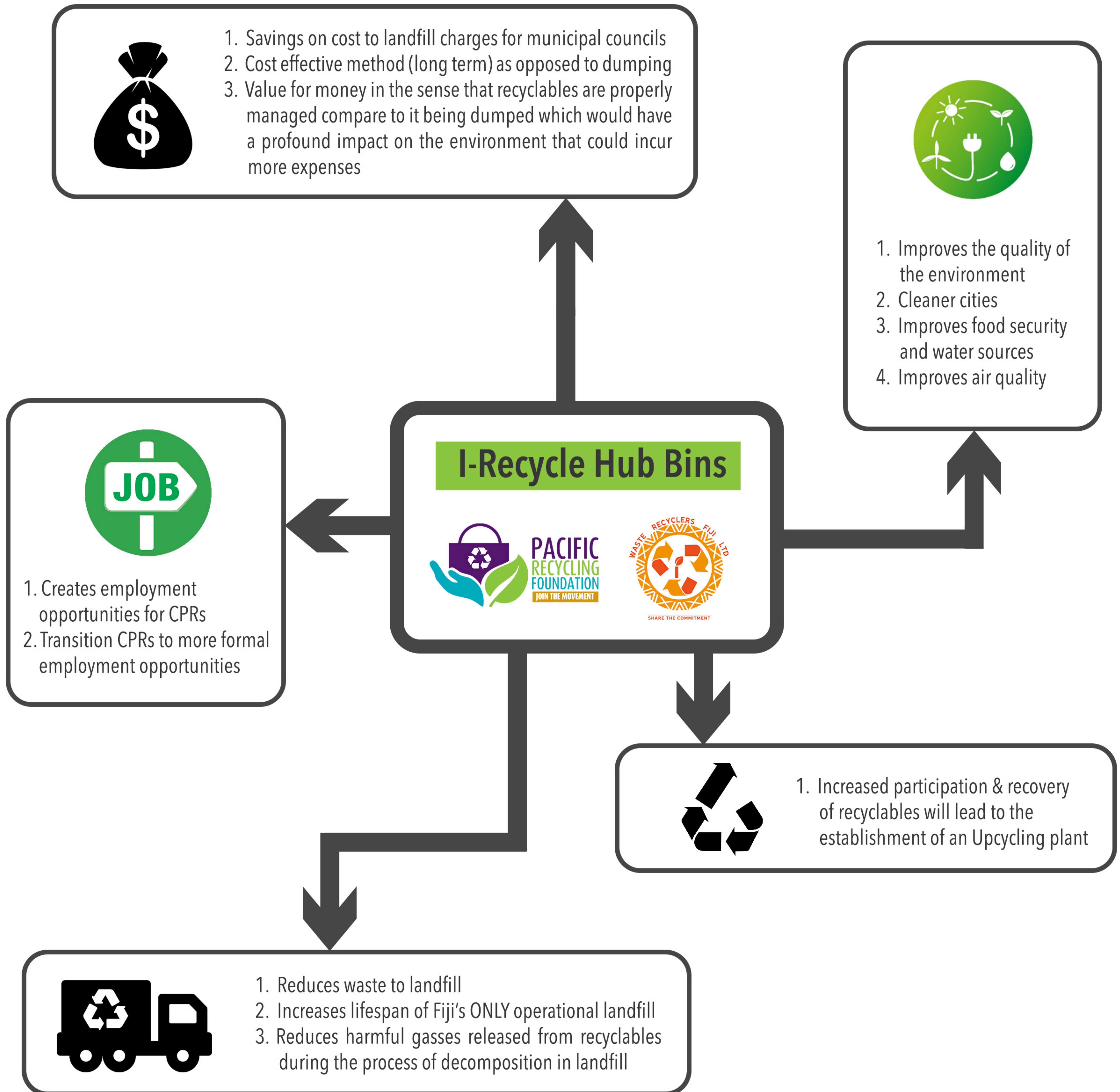
PRF has recognized that the timing of the implementation of the project plays a very important role in the rate of participation in a community pilot project. In the year 2022, the project was implemented in late October which was very near to the start of Fiji's cyclone season, the Diwali festival and the holiday season. The project also was impacted by the national election in Fiji and its related campaigns as communities were focused on political issues. Due to these various factors, PRF noticed a low participation rate from community members.

However, this is still an ongoing project and will continue into 2023 when PRF will develop campaigns, programs & training that will raise awareness that can in turn increase community participation.

Creating pools of advocates to influence large groups

At the beginning of the Kabutri Drive Pilot project, PRF decided to test the approach of involving a large community to participate in a recycling program. Invitations of participation and involvement in training received almost no traction from the large community approach. PRF then changed its strategy and asked 15 community members to volunteer and receive training to become recycling advocates. Immediate improvements were noted in community participation. Therefore, a key learning for PRF under this project has been that to influence behavior change in a large number of people, a strong small group of advocates is pivotal.

6. Long-term vision and impact of the implementation of the I Recycle Hub program (JW Write up)



The I-Recycle Hub bins and the program attached to it is aimed at primarily changing the mindset and behavior of individuals towards best practices of recycling. Fiji, like many other Pacific Island Countries (PICs) has become the dumping ground for many larger countries where low-grade products are brought into Fiji with a 1-Life use concept. This contributes to the increasing volumes of SW being dumped, buried, or burnt.

An Asian Development Bank (ADB) report on the *"Solid Waste Management in the Pacific" - Fiji Country Snapshot* done in 2014 showed that our anerobic landfill receives an average of about 184 tons of waste per day, of which council accounts for 70% and waste management companies for 30%.

This report also says that the landfill is to last at least **70 years** with an estimated cost of construction valued at F14-million (around \$7.56Million)

However, since 2005 when the landfill was built in its new location at Naboro, Permanent Secretary for Environment at that time Mr. Josua Wycliffe said in a media statement 15 years later, that Fiji's only landfill was running out of space! This is not even a fraction of the estimated lifespan indicated in the ADB report. PRF in collaboration with WRFL and UNDP will use the I-Recycle Hub bin as a proposed solution to lobby with Government in addressing Fiji's waste problem at the grassroots level.

PRF strongly believes that if people are able to have a different perspective on recycling and begin to practice it so habitually, Fijians may have a chance of enabling the landfill to live out its life much longer than stated in the ADB report.

Conclusion:

The I Recycle Hub concept is very quickly becoming an integral part of recycling and sustainability programs in communities, schools, corporate organisations as well as hotels and resorts, as it offers immediate and convenient solution to users to sort and dispose various forms of recyclables in various compartments of the bin.

This concept is straightforward, offers value for money and hassle-free, giving recycling a fresh and brand-new image and perspective against traditional and impractical practices and views associated with waste management. The I Recycle Hub is also a symbol of hope and commitment of environmental activists and further goes to represent the struggles of those that are passionately involved in recycling, particularly communities involved in informal waste picking who rely solely on the collection of recyclables as their main source of income.

<https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/42672/solid-waste-management-fiji.pdf>

<https://www.fbcnews.com.fj/news/ministry-continues-to-dig-for-new-pits-to-accommodate-waste>