



## Cultivating Wellbeing: Traditional Wisdom and Sustainability in Fiji's Green Schools

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This method abstract details the Green School Program, piloted across three schools in maritime Fijian islands, addresses critical issues faced by Fijian and Pacific Island communities. These encompass malnutrition, food security, health hazards, and the urgency of integrating traditional knowledge, governance, and social-ecological systems approaches into creating healthier school environments. Non communicable diseases have emerged as a pervasive concern within Pacific Island communities, creating a challenge for public health systems, driven greatly by dietary habits<sup>(1)</sup>. This complex health landscape underscores the need to safeguard traditional knowledge and agri-food practices and develop neo-traditional approaches to local food systems<sup>(2)</sup>. Furthermore, the Green School Program recognizes the essential role of schools as community hubs, enabling enhancing healthy school environments by embracing traditional wisdom and sustainable farming practices and foods, ultimately empowering communities to address these multifaceted challenges<sup>(3)</sup>. Developing the school environment as a sustainable setting for governance framework led by women and the school administration, rooted in traditional knowledge and practices. Additionally, it aims to design facilities that support efficient organic farming while integrating these into school activities. Economic sustainability through the sale of surplus farm products, as well as the enhancement of sustainable land-use management, health, wellbeing, and cultural identity. The program unfolds within a distinctive community-based framework with the establishment of robust governance, with a notable emphasis on the leadership of women and mothers who play a pivotal role in steering the green school initiative and ensuring community ownership. Collaborative governance spans multiple stakeholders, including school management, community-based school committees, youth groups, women groups, and traditional leaders. This inclusive engagement ensures both shared responsibility in program design and ownership during implementation phases. Sustainable facilities are strategically designed to include biodigesters, water storage and irrigation systems, composting, organic fertilizers, and seedling nurseries, enhancing the program's capacity to create healthier school food environments while embracing traditional practices and values. The program has witnessed the active engagement of women in governance roles, promoting community unity and ownership. Traditional knowledge integration has enhanced crop diversity and sustainability. Economic sustainability has been achieved through surplus farm product sales, reducing dependency on external funding sources. Health improvements are evident, with reduced exposure to indoor air pollution from open fires. Cultural identity preservation and increased student engagement are also notable outcomes. The Green School Program's holistic approach, rooted in traditional knowledge and sustainable practices, has yielded positive outcomes in governance, agriculture, nutritional food security, health, and cultural identity preservation. The program's success demonstrates the potential for community-based initiatives to address critical issues and empower remote island communities. These results provide valuable insights into sustainable development approaches that prioritize community wellbeing and cultural heritage preservation in similar contexts.

**Keywords:** Healthy school environments; food security; traditional governance and wisdom; community wellbeing

### Ethics Declaration

Yes

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