

Profit & Planet: Turning slash into carbon-trapping bricks



Aimee Shaw
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Slash for Cash's Thabiso Mashaba says the organisation is making a real-life impact - not just claims - when it came to sustainability [SUPPLIED]

Profit & Planet is a series profiling finalist on the Sustainable Business Awards' Next List, an annual list of the best innovators, entrepreneurs, projects and organisations in the green space. Thabiso Mashaba, Slash for Cash co-founder, jointly won this year's Transformational Leadership award.

Slash for Cash is an initiative of The Tolaga Bay Heritage Charitable Trust that transforms wood debris or any dead carbon matter into organic biochar fertiliser and smokeless charcoal briquettes. Thabiso Mashaba of Slash for Cash tells Aimee Shaw the organisation has ambitious expansion plans, fuelled by creating employment opportunities for the Tairawhiti and Wairoa communities.

What is the gap in the market your business' product or service fills?

Post Cyclone Gabrielle, more than 250 million tonnes of slash was left all over the rohe. Each time it rained it moved into water ways, destroying or harming the water ways, roads,

animals. The cyclone through flooding or water run-offs led to very significant erosion, silt accumulation in waterways, farms and properties. This also left patches on the mountains which made the soil on them unstable and prone to landslips.

We have a mobile carbonisation kiln, allowing us to clean up or remove and burn dry untreated wood, dry forestry and maize harvest waste within the Tairāwhiti and Wairoa region. This allows us to fill the market gap of wood, forest and maize waste management, and do initial sequestration of the carbon emissions trapped within the dry carbon.

Our organic biochar fertiliser products can be used for restoring eroded land, filling patches on mountains, planting forestry trees, coastal restoration, de-silting soil, growing crops, vineyards, gardens, flood control and protection from future floods. It lasts up to 20 - 30 years in the soil, unlike chemical fertilisers. It is like a permanent soil sponge that helps the land hold more water and nutrients, lets us grow more food while also locking away carbon for a stable future.



Slash for Cash [SUPPLIED]

We also supply a clean alternative energy that can be used for cooking, barbecues, heating

water or heating up homes by people staying off grid.

Our services are designed to be replicated across Tairāwhiti and Wairoa region, other parts of New Zealand and globally where there is demand for our innovative and intellectually protected mobile kiln to clean up slash, to heal and protect the land, offering an alternative clean energy source.

What are your ambitions for the business?

We hope to provide full-time employment pathways for 20 locals. We also hope to clean up, remove and burn a total of 1080 tonnes of slash by the end of this year, and a total 4320 tonnes of slash annually from next year, producing a total 180 tonnes and 240 tonnes of biochar at each of our three sites, and therefore sequestering between 8640 and 12,960 tonnes of CO2 emissions annually from 2027.

We hope to have our services and products on distribution in every corner of Tairāwhiti and Wairoa regional lands by 2028, and in other parts of New Zealand and the world from 2030.



Slash for Cash is a finalist on the Sustainable Business Awards' [SUPPLIED]

We hope to expand our one year job readiness training programme to include other communities within the Tairāwhiti and Wairoa region after 2028 and scale our operations gradually through a mobile kiln in different communities from 2029.

Does NZ do enough to ensure green businesses develop and thrive?

The NZ ecosystem does enough to unearth and spotlight potential green businesses or start-ups but does not handhold them enough to develop and thrive - so it can still do more to get them to the "investor ready" stage.

Most of those that survive the start-up stage do so due to their own resilience, a mix of strategies or following different pathways from their main mission just to survive. The ecosystem is too focused on chasing novel ideas and trendy solutions which are not necessarily holistically impactful solutions, leaving a lot of highly impactful and community-led solutions within their backyards, especially in grassroots communities where a lot of unique mātauranga Māori + science and technology initiatives are already happening.

The ecosystem can do more and better in identifying these, developing them, growing them and scaling them to other similar communities in New Zealand and across the world.

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