

New International Development Policy – Public Submission

**Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade**

The work of Global Landcare focuses on sustainable land management with community development. An Australia-based internationally focussed community body we have board members from eight countries, including New Zealand, Fiji, Japan, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Uganda. Global Landcare promotes the international take-up of Landcare philosophies, projects and values; organises training activities and conferences; publishes a website and other material on Landcare; networks extensively with government and other NGOs; and runs a small projects fund that has dispersed over \$130,000 to scores of community based projects in 22 countries since 2013.

Global Landcare itself was launched in 2020, merging several related and similar entities from across the globe. Many of our members have been involved in Landcare at policy, program, and operational levels for more than 30 years. They have worked in various landscapes in many countries and bring international, regional, national and grassroots experience in agricultural, forestry, humanitarian and environmental management.

*At the International Conference of Landcare Studies – Global resilience through local self-reliance – the Landcare model*, in Nagoya, Japan 2017, Landcare practitioners and academics from 11 countries declared it vital to expand the relationships and sharing of knowledge from this conference to create a global network. They determined that:

*“Landcare values and principles could significantly contribute to grassroots activities for sustainable agriculture, climate adaptation and mitigation, social and environmental wellbeing, and could therefore contribute significantly to the achievements of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).”*

The proceedings of this conference were collated in a book with support from the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research (ACIAR). This publication, [\*Building global sustainability through local self-reliance; Lessons from landcare\*](#), was co-launched with ACIAR in August 2022.

The Global Landcare network facilitates strategic partnerships, collaborations, and the provision of resources (knowledge, skills, information, training etc.) to deliver capacity building at local, regional, national and global levels.

We appreciate the opportunity in this submission to contribute our experience and learning to help shape the future of Australia’s international development work and, critically, our partnership with our neighbours, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region.

***What key trends or challenges will shape Australia's engagement in our region and globally over the next five to ten years? What risks and opportunities does this present for Australia's development assistance?***

Global Landcare’s submission responds to the expression and impact of geo-political relations and climate change in communities at the grassroots. In international partner community groups, we see their vulnerabilities exposed and exacerbated in the nexus of issues around food and nutrition security, agricultural productivity, environmental decline, biodiversity loss, protection of culture, heritage and inclusive community participation.

We underline the importance of grassroots engagement, knowledge and action within local communities for genuine progress against key challenges and trends. Our experience is that enduring impactful action will



only be embraced where place-based and context-specific responses align with national and regional scale policy.

For example, action on global climate change requires that individuals, businesses and local communities address their own carbon emissions. Effective preparation and response to climate-related disasters (wildfires, drought, cyclones, floods and sea-level rise) means building resilience and self-reliance at local scales. Global poverty reduction demands microstrategies for economic development at local scales and within local enterprises, particularly at community level. Securing sustainable agriculture and reducing global biodiversity loss will rely on the development of realistic, local decisions and actions. These issues are deeply intertwined; at the local level, they are inseparable.<sup>1</sup>

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### *What development capabilities will Australia need to respond to these challenges?*

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Our response acknowledges the importance of subsidiarity: appropriate decisions need to be made at the appropriate scale. The early formalisation of these ideas in the Australian context through the emergence and endurance of the Landcare movement, wherein locally motivated and organised landholders and communities devised locally specific solutions and practical actions, provides a foundational example of subsidiarity in action.

Landcare envisages, and in many cases has successfully achieved, a strong policy framework aimed specifically at supporting or standing behind the grassroots community groups that seek to improve the sustainability of Australian landscapes and food production systems. These concepts have slowly infused their way into thinking about and work on regional and rural landscapes in many countries and more recently across Europe, and have delivered economic, social and environmental benefits to participating communities.

Global Landcare recognises subsidiarity as an essential principle in the design of public policy and programs responding to complex challenges with place-based dimensions.<sup>2</sup> Effective global and national policymaking has subsidiarity embedded in policy design and delivery. Strong subsidiarity in governance systems means more responsive policymaking. The issues being faced at a local level become bottom-up drivers, rather than nations developing divergent or siloed policies at global, national, provincial and regional scales. Subsidiarity drives policy responsiveness. When policy is framed and decisions are made with appropriate levels of engagement, communities become more self-reliant, and ultimately more resilient; moreover government and its machinery at regional, national and international levels becomes more informed and more adaptable, agile and effective.

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### *How can Australia best utilise its national strengths to enhance the impact of our development program and address multidimensional vulnerabilities?*

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Since the late 1980s in Australia, Landcare has been a significant contributor to the national discourse, raising awareness and influencing farming and land management practices, for nature-positive outcomes across the landscape. The experience of Global Landcare has been that others, particularly agriculturally based communities and countries, are hungry for this knowledge and experience.

Global Landcare's focus is not on undertaking on-ground activities or exporting 'solutions', but on building the knowledge and skills to enhance capacity for those communities to design and deliver their own solutions.

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<sup>1</sup> Dale A, Curnow J, Campbell A and Seigel M (2022) "Introduction to subsidiarity and landcare: building local self-reliance for global change" in Dale A, Curnow J, Campbell A and Seigel M (eds.) *Building global sustainability through local self-reliance; Lessons from Landcare*, ACIAR Monograph No. 219, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Canberra.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*

Landcare is place-based. Community empowerment and collective action drive and deliver solutions with social, economic and environmental benefits. Landcare is founded on caring for the land through stewardship and volunteerism. While community-driven it is often supported by government, but recognises individual and community agency. Built on these Australian foundational principles, Global Landcare's *raison d'être* is collating and sharing knowledge about practices that improve livelihoods whilst conserving and protecting natural resources and helping landscapes and people adapt to climate change. The Landcare approach is underpinned by recognition of the indivisibility of impacts of land, water and climate management issues at the farm scale and in the landscape.<sup>3</sup>

*How should the new policy reflect the Government's commitments to build stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region, founded on mutual trust and respect and shared values of fairness and equality?*

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We re-emphasise the core principle of subsidiarity as a positive driver for stronger and more meaningful partnerships in our region allowing appropriate decisions to be made at the appropriate scale. The early successes of Landcare in the Australian context provide a powerful example of subsidiarity in action. In many instances across diverse landscapes and productive sectors (from dairy, large-scale horticulture, to wheat, cotton, cattle, cane) local landcare groups have successfully built and engaged grassroots communities with policy discussion and practical action to improve the sustainability of catchments and associated primary production enterprises.

An example of the expression of these types of approaches can be seen in practice, through a current brokered South South cooperation project which is strengthening the trilateral cooperation between the Philippines, Fiji and Australia, through testing the sharing of agriculture and community developments models developed from Landcare principles<sup>4</sup>.

Policy with embedded subsidiarity is effective, relevant and responsive to the realities of those it governs. A high degree of subsidiarity will create empowered local decision-making that is partnered and supported by strong policy, planning and facilitative resource allocation at higher scales.<sup>5</sup>

*What lessons from Australia's past development efforts should inform the policy? What is Australia seen to be doing comparatively well?*

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The Australian Landcare model has spread internationally, primarily by word of mouth through our Landcare champions and networks, many of whom have been deployed professionally and/or as volunteers in international contexts - sometimes as part of formal Australian development assistance efforts through multi-lateral agencies, bilateral programs and through NGOs. In this way, the 'landcare' ethos has largely spread organically.

Global Landcare seeks to bring intentional strategic support to this for more effective scaling-up and collaboration with appropriate institutions and agencies. Evidence of Landcare approaches now exists in more than 30 countries with varied social conditions and political environments, alongside a myriad of government and non-government projects, programmes and initiatives.

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3 Johnson M and Muller C (2020) Investigating the potential of international Landcare, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) Report FR2020-010

4 Landcare – an agricultural extension and community development model at district and national scale in Fiji, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research project SSS/2019/140 - <https://www.aciar.gov.au/project/sss-2019-140>

5 Dale A, Curnow J, Campbell A and Seigel M (2022) "Introduction to subsidiarity and landcare: building local self-reliance for global change" in Dale A, Curnow J, Campbell A and Seigel M (eds.) *Building global sustainability through local self-reliance; Lessons from Landcare*, ACIAR Monograph No. 219, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Canberra.

With climate change mitigation and climate change adaptation holding an increasingly central place in the global discourse, the lessons learned through the policy and practice of landcare over the last four decades can be applied to great effect. In the southern Philippines, it has helped support post-conflict reconciliation between communities.<sup>3</sup>

With its focus on empowering communities and farmers, Landcare in the international context has delivered a viable and complementary approach to other interventions to build sustainable livelihoods, better natural resource management and climate change adaptation. Landcare programmes at the local and country level are both different and similar, as each approach has been adapted to meet local conditions and local needs.<sup>6</sup>

In Uganda, for example, the Landcare approach has been adopted vigorously by landholders, by schools, students and by communities with active participation nationally growing to over 1000 groups since the ideas were introduced 15-20 years ago in 2001<sup>7</sup>. Landcare Uganda promotes innovative school programmes and information sharing, encouraging social action by land managers for change at the grassroots. By engaging all land users within the landscape, ownership of the actions and outcomes has supported adoption of sustainable practices, including climate change adaptation strategies, household food security and biodiversity conservation.

Central to this success is the importance placed on improving livelihoods and the natural resources they depend on, paying attention to communal traditions and social, economic, environmental and cultural sustainability.<sup>8</sup>

*How should the performance and delivery systems be designed to promote transparency and accountability, as well as effectiveness and learning, in Australia's development assistance?*

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There are many levels at which the transparency and accountability of ODA investments needs to be effective. A strong program logic will demonstrate a clear relationship between prioritisation of investments for development assistance, Australian foreign policy objectives and desired aid or assistance objectives and outcomes. It would be expected that there would be evident alignment between Australia's substantive objectives and the articulated development goals of the countries where we engage.

Building on that logic – in which we maintain the principle of subsidiarity must necessarily be embedded – program monitoring and indicators, evaluation protocols, reporting procedures and improvement or learning opportunities will be locally responsive, adaptable and flexible.

Global Landcare, and, we believe the Australian public, sees the need in our international assistance efforts for strong complementarity between the various investment channels utilised by ODA, especially between significant bi- and multi-lateral investments, to create a synergy across, for example, assistance directed through bilateral channels into government sponsored projects in receiving nations and Australia's positions articulated in UN fora, Pacific Islands Forum Leaders Meetings, and at APEC or COP.

This policy agreement should be demonstrated in investments channelled through funded work by Australia's NGOs and the for-purpose sector: humanitarian, community development, education or environmental.

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6 Prior J and Johnson M (2009) 'The rise and rise of international Landcare: what trajectory could be possible?' National Landcare Conference, 2009, Sydney, Australia

7 Muller C and Tukahirwa J (2022) 'How can landcare contribute to household development outcomes in Uganda?' in Dale A, Curnow J, Campbell A and Seigel M (eds.) *Building global sustainability through local self-reliance; Lessons from Landcare*, ACIAR Monograph No. 219, Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Canberra.

8 Catacutan D, Muller, C, Johnson, M, & Garrity, D (2015) 'Landcare-a landscape approach at scale' in P Minang, M van Noordwijk, O Freeman, CM Bow, J de Leeuw & D Catacutan (eds.), *Climate-Smart Landscapes: Multifunctionality in Practice*, World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF), Nairobi, Kenya, p.151.

## *How should the new policy address the role of ODA and non-ODA in supporting the development of our regional partners?*

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Drawing together our experience and observations, Global Landcare identifies that the key blockage to be removed is silo-ing of decisions, international engagements and investments across different sectors and investment levels. This might mean, for example, high level engagement for defence purposes, or for development of key export markets, cuts across or even contradicts the substantive purpose of a humanitarian or development assistance intervention. Coherence, consistency and complementarity are key challenges

NGOs and philanthropists working for and with governments at the grass roots level offer well managed, lower cost, more humanitarian programs with medium to long-term values and connections – these interpersonal connections at all levels of our engagement are key to building trust and confidence with our neighbours and allies.

Our geographic location and island status create special cost challenges for travel and people-to- people contact that must be factored in. While online training programmes could counter some of these challenges’ we contend these need to be scaffolded through face-to-face and on-ground learning.

Australia’s national character and strengths should be central in our engagements. We are practical, flexible, friendly, integrated, multidisciplinary people who significantly benefit from a strong education system.

### *What can Global Landcare do?*

Global Landcare is a network that connects Australian expertise, technical skill and professional and practical know-how to a global network of similarly motivated and engaged community leaders and influencers. Through this network Global Landcare can offer to facilitate and coordinate training in and planning of community-based projects, especially at local, catchment and regional levels. Global Landcare’s particular focus is to improve agricultural sustainability in tandem with protecting biodiversity, fostering practical educational programs in schools and with farmer-led groups, and encouraging local community enterprises to improve livelihoods.

Our experience is that these people-to-people engagements build social capital, strengthen connections and enhance community resilience; accordingly, those people and communities are better prepared and equipped to respond to the challenges of an uncertain future.

Global Landcare has an ambitious vision to ensure the export of the knowledge and know-how built through the domestic Landcare network to contribute to practical accessible and effective actions. These can change outcomes and deliver benefits through sustainable practices, climate change adaptation strategies, improved household food security and biodiversity conservation.

Work is already taking place on Global Landcare’s second Global Conference: Research and Learning Exchange. We see a strong alignment with the new ODA direction emerging for opportunities to build sustainable development, to strengthen community resilience, to make strong connections through research, learning and collaboration, and to work for collective action at many levels to address the global challenges facing our region.

We are eager to explore how our network and knowledge can be effectively harnessed in a refocused Australian development program.

*Andrea Mason*

Chair, Global Landcare