

## **Unpacking the Power of Landcare: Lessons for Local Action and Global Impact**

*(Review by Ali Attaran, HOPE researcher ACT)*

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research ACIAR Monograph No. 219, "Building global sustainability through local self-reliance: lessons from landcare" 2022 report dives deep into the heart of what makes Landcare work and why it's so relevant today, not just for farmers and conservationists, but for communities facing challenges worldwide. This article provides an overview of the report's key insights, drawing directly from the experiences shared by authors who have been deeply involved in the Landcare movement.

### **Landcare: More Than Just Fences and Trees**

The report emphasizes that Landcare isn't just about natural resource management (NRM), sustainable agriculture, or sustainable living. It's fundamentally about an ethic, a movement, and a model. At its core is the philosophy of caring for the land, put into practice by local community volunteers (the movement), supported by a range of mechanisms including groups, networks, facilitators, and partnerships with government and others (the model). It's about empowering people to be a valued part of addressing the changes affecting their local environment and community.

### **Born from Local Need**

Landcare didn't start as a grand government plan based on theories. It emerged endogenously in Australia in the early 1980s because farmers recognized that problems like salinity, pests, and weeds didn't stop at the farm gate; they needed collective action at a neighbourhood, district, or catchment scale. Governments at the time also saw the value in supporting these voluntary community efforts, shifting their role from providing individual advice or imposing regulations to one of facilitation and support, harnessing local energies and credibility.

This fundamental idea of community ownership of problems and solutions is central to Landcare's effectiveness. It reflects the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. tackling issues at the level closest to the people involved.

### **Building Community, Building Resilience**

While Landcare is renowned for its on-ground environmental work, the report highlights that its primary focus is on building resilient and sustainable communities. Landcare groups are social resources that build capacity, self-reliance, and social capital within communities. Examples from South Africa's Koupe region and New Zealand's Aorere River catchment show how farmer-led initiatives, supported by Landcare principles and partners, successfully addressed complex issues like predation and water quality by working together and taking ownership.

The report strongly emphasizes Landcare's potential role in disaster risk reduction and recovery. Landcarers' local knowledge of landscapes and networks, combined with their capacity for organized action, makes them vital partners before, during, and after disasters like bushfires, floods, and droughts. The report suggests that formalizing Landcare's role in emergency management frameworks, as promoted by international initiatives like Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 which aims at reducing disaster risks and losses by 2030, could significantly enhance community resilience and recovery efforts.

### **A Global Movement**

Landcare is no longer just an Australian story. It has spread to many countries across Africa, Asia, the Pacific, Europe, and North America. The report shows how the Landcare approach has been adapted in places like Uganda and the Philippines to improve livelihoods and food security among smallholder farmers. The report concludes that the core ideas and principles of Landcare are transferable and adaptable to communities facing diverse challenges globally. It offers a powerful model for local action that contributes to global sustainability goals, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **Ingredients for Success and the Way Forward**

The report identifies several key elements contributing to Landcare's success, such as bringing like-minded people together, democratic processes, government and non-government support, effective communication (including using technology), and the crucial roles played by volunteers and paid coordinators/facilitators.

However, it also notes challenges, such as ensuring consistent resources, preventing marginalization by higher-level governance systems, and effectively sharing the invaluable "social knowledge" of how groups organize and work with partners.

Looking ahead, the report calls for the Landcare movement to continue advocating for its role, particularly in policy and disaster management. It highlights the need for better ways to share the wealth of knowledge held within Landcare communities, including the idea of a global online platform or "Landcare Lab" to make practical knowledge, case studies, and research accessible to everyone. This requires collaboration between practitioners and researchers to document and share both successes and lessons learned from challenges.

In conclusion, ACIAR's new report provides a comprehensive look at the Landcare experience, confirming its value as a model for local self-reliance that is vital for building resilient communities and contributing to a more sustainable world. It offers valuable insights and encouragement for everyone involved in Landcare and farming communities about the power of collective action and the importance of their role in shaping a better future.

*(Information for article sourced from <https://www.aciar.gov.au/publication/lessons-global-landcare>)*