

Landcare in a village in Tonga

The priorities for international Landcare in developing countries are often about sustainable food production as well as environmental protection.

People in Popua, a poor low-lying village in Tonga near the capital Nuku'alofa, chose household food gardens as a way to improve their diet and reduce the cost of family meals. Poor diets have contributed to a high incidence of diabetes and heart disease in many South Pacific countries.

In 2010 Australian Landcare International (ALI) member Bob Edgar helped initiate a Landcare project building raised garden beds and chicken houses for twenty Popua households. The work was funded by Rotary Australia and community members helped each other during the construction phase.

With the help of Tongan agriculture, environment and health departmental advisers, Bob and other ALI members arranged technical and community training in 2013 and 2014. The Crawford Fund provided financial support for this training.

The household gardens provided a range of foods including carrots, taro, sweet potato, spring onions, tropical fruits, leafy green vegetables and some traditional medicinal plants. Local chickens for meat and eggs were also raised.

The project is a great success and a household survey in 2014 showed that families:

- were happy to be able to provide healthy food to their families
- shared produce with extended family and friends
- saved an average \$30 per week on food
- enjoyed working in their gardens and felt healthier
- strengthened their village community.

In 2013, Popua village decided to be the first Landcare group in Tonga.

Following the success of the Popua project, Rotary and the NZ government have started a similar project for 300 households in three Tongan villages.



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