



Landcare in Africa

Agroforestry in action

World Agroforestry Centre

At a glance ...

Landcare is a revolution in land management that began in Australia, expanded into the Philippines and is now being tested under African conditions. It is both a development strategy and a farmer-led social movement. It depends on the use of appropriate technologies, effective local community groups and partnerships with governments and NGOs. Landcare

groups are self-managed and focus on land management issues that the group itself considers locally important. Governments and NGOs play a supplementary supportive role, but the key initiative lies at the local community level. The World Agroforestry Centre was closely involved with Landcare in the Philippines and is now testing the feasibility of the Landcare approach with communities in Uganda and Ethiopia.

A quiet revolution in land management is occurring—a revolution about neighbours working together to improve private and public lands. Small groups form to solve problems—soil erosion, degraded wetlands or riverbanks, or loss of biodiversity. These groups are voluntary and depend largely on their own funds. They learn from each other, and sometimes draw on government and non-governmental resources and services. This approach originated in Australia, where it came to be called Landcare. It has spread under that name to the Philippines, where it is now a “dynamic voluntary movement with ... more than 5000 farmers involved in 250 groups from five municipalities in northern, central and eastern Mindanao”.

community groups, and partnerships with governments and NGOs. Landcare groups respond to issues they consider locally important and solve problems in their own ways. In other words, Landcare depends on self-motivated communities responding to community issues rather than to issues an external agency imposes. Such grassroots approaches are more likely to bring about permanent and positive change. Landcare groups have government support and they involve networks to ensure ideas and initiatives are shared and disseminated.

What is Landcare?

Landcare is both a development strategy and a farmer-led social movement. As a development strategy, Landcare rapidly and inexpensively diffuses conservation farming technologies, agroforestry practices and other improved natural resource management systems among resource-poor farmers. As a social movement, it involves groups of people concerned about land degradation and interested in working together to improve the long-term health of the land. The core of Landcare is threefold—appropriate technologies, effective local



Community impacts

Watersheds

Biodiversity

Land regeneration

Better policies

Empowering women

Climate change

Capacity building

The World Agroforestry Centre (ICRAF) has been closely involved in the spread of Landcare in the Philippines, with a key activity being the evaluation of natural vegetative strips (NVS)—a farmer innovation that improves soil fertility and curbs erosion. But the Centre's interest in Landcare has moved beyond technology development to helping groups obtain resources, form wider Landcare associations and negotiate with other stakeholders in land management. This help does not take the form of large sums of money for projects. Indeed, a hallmark of Landcare is its reliance on self-help and internal resources.

Why Landcare and Africa?

African nations face many of the challenges that prompted farmers in Southeast Asia to become involved in Landcare—environmental degradation, lack of effective extension approaches to address environmental problems, low investment in poor communities, and few mechanisms for cooperation on land management. Most efforts to improve agricultural production and productivity have focused at the farm level, while soil and water management practices have been implemented top-down.

Now, many African countries are adopting decentralized

approaches to extension—with farmer-to-farmer extension increasingly seen as an effective way to reach large numbers. Soil and water conservation initiatives are also becoming much more participatory. These trends, although positive, may not be enough to address the complex challenge of environmental degradation. Many community-based natural resource management efforts are project-oriented and as such start with costly efforts at pilot sites that may or may not spread widely. Local or indigenous management strategies are just that—local. They may be effective in one area, but the 'model' might not fit other areas or conditions.

The Centre, Landcare and current work in East Africa

With initial funding from the Government of Italy, the World Agroforestry Centre is implementing the AGILE Programme—African grassroots innovations for livelihood and environment—to begin to answer several important questions about Landcare and Africa:

- Can Landcare provide inspiration for community land-management efforts in Africa?
- Can the introduction of Landcare be structured so

that it builds on African initiatives and innovations?

- Under what conditions would a Landcare approach 'take off' in Africa?
- What is the appropriate role of government in supporting collective action for natural resource management in the African context?
- Which types of local groups could form the nucleus of Landcare?

The Landcare approach will be tested through three African Highlands Initiative (AHI) sites, two in Uganda and one in Ethiopia. As an ecoregional programme that takes a systems approach to complex environmental and agricultural issues, AHI provides an ideal context for testing Landcare in Africa. AHI is highly participatory and consultative in selecting and implementing research and development activities. Hosted by the World Agroforestry Centre, AHI partners with a number of other centres of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and is part of ASARECA, the consortium of national agricultural research institutions in east and central Africa. This extensive network will help ensure that findings about the effectiveness and potential of Landcare will spread widely in the region.



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