

## Summary of Research

Food security is recognised as a key goal for sub-Saharan Africa. Sustained increases in agricultural productivity and effective participation in the agri-food chain beyond as well as inside the farm gate are central to making progress towards this goal. The journey out of food insecure circumstances demands better use of natural resources and purchased inputs, management of pests and disease and economic development based on improved market access and information to sell surpluses, access credit and take agribusiness related decisions together with an understanding of food nutrition.

While originally developed in Australia, the community based Landcare movement has proved successful in diverse circumstances, including smallholder agriculture in East Africa where the focus has been on resource degradation and, more recently, the productivity of cropping and animal based systems. With the achievements so far, and the long lived benefits associated with the community capacity building that Landcare provides, the question arises as to whether the focus of Landcare can be extended to address other elements of the agri-food chain. Of particular interest is the potential to use an existing model to deal not only with the challenges of land, water and vegetation degradation but also to enhance farmer and community understanding of productivity increasing innovations, marketing surplus production and generally transitioning from subsistence to semi-commercial agriculture with the accompanying rural development benefits and community prosperity.

It is not envisaged that the broad-ranging and diverse challenges underlying food security can be addressed by Landcare alone. Rather, it is expected that other complementary and value-adding initiatives would be brought to bear depending on the particular focus of the community interest. One productivity-based but significant example in this regard is the Innovation Platform concept in use in the SIMLESA program where researchers and others with specialist contributions can play an important role.

The principal aim of the research project is to investigate the scope for addressing the elements of the agri-food chain underlying the achievement or progress towards food security with a view to making effective use of relevant research and expertise for each of these segments and using the Landcare model as the core of the proposed approach. The key questions for this study concern what needs to be done in conjunction with Landcare to equip East African smallholders with the wherewithal to not only manage physical resources and farm sustainably, but also to assist the transition to efficient use of purchased inputs, access to credit, improving productivity, obtaining market information and positioning for commercial engagement - all with an eye to food security for both producers and rural consumers.

An early stage of the research will be to understand what Landcare is contributing now to food security in East Africa. This requires not only an appreciation of what the Landcare community dynamic brings in its own right but also how this contribution is enhanced through partnerships with researchers and other public and private interests. An equally important part of the project would be to delineate those activities central to food security but not currently embraced by Landcare. This project will research whether these areas can potentially be addressed using Landcare as the central catalyst for community adoption and the complementary initiatives necessary to harness useful research and other interests able to contribute effectively in a community group environment. It will also identify the modalities for doing so.

The research undertaken for this project is best seen as a scoping study in nature. It is envisaged, however, that pending the results of the early work outlined above, a pilot application of the proposed approach will be undertaken.

Should the findings of this work indicate likely success with the proposed approach at an acceptable cost, the social, economic and environmental impacts at the community level could be substantial. In particular, there is the possibility of widening the focus of capacity building to address critical elements of the smallholder value adding chain and to do so with ongoing and long term benefits. While the principal beneficiaries can be expected to be smallholders and their communities, the broad range of interests involved with a 'through chain' approach to food security, including those with primarily a productivity enhancing focus behind 'the farm gate' as well as others with more of a market information and distribution and/or agribusiness orientation, can all potentially benefit from the integrated perspective of the agri-food chain. These broader interests could be research or government program focused in the public sector or might be found in the private sector with a commercial interest in the success of such an initiative.

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