Building global sustainability through local self-reliance

Lessons from landcare

Monograph 219

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ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
AMAEP	ACIAR Mindanao Agricultural Extension Project
AT Uganda	Appropriate Technology Uganda
CAO	City Agriculture Office
CBDRR	community-based disaster risk reduction
CBRM	community-based resource management
CENRO	City Environment and Natural Resources Office
CGIAR	formerly the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research
CLEA	Community Learning for Environmental Action
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
FAC Net	Fire Adapted Communities Learning Network
GDP	gross domestic product
ICM	integrated catchment management
ICRAF	International Centre for Research in Agroforestry
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KADLACC	Kapchorwa District Landcare Chapter
KCLID	Kagawa Canal Land Improvement District
Landcare Australia	Landcare Australia Limited
LID	land improvement district
LIFE	Livelihood Improvement through Facilitated Extension
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NAADS	National (Uganda) Agricultural Advisory Services
NRM	natural resource management
NUISE	Nanzan University Institute for Social Ethics
OBLA	Olo-clofe B'laan Landcare Association
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PCAARRD	Philippines Council for Agriculture, Aquatic and Natural Resources and Development
PULL	PCAARRD-UP Mindanao-Landcare LIFE
ROCP	Regional Onsite Conservation Program
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
TOFA	Tuban Organic Farmers Association
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNU-LRT	United Nations University Land Restoration Training Programme
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
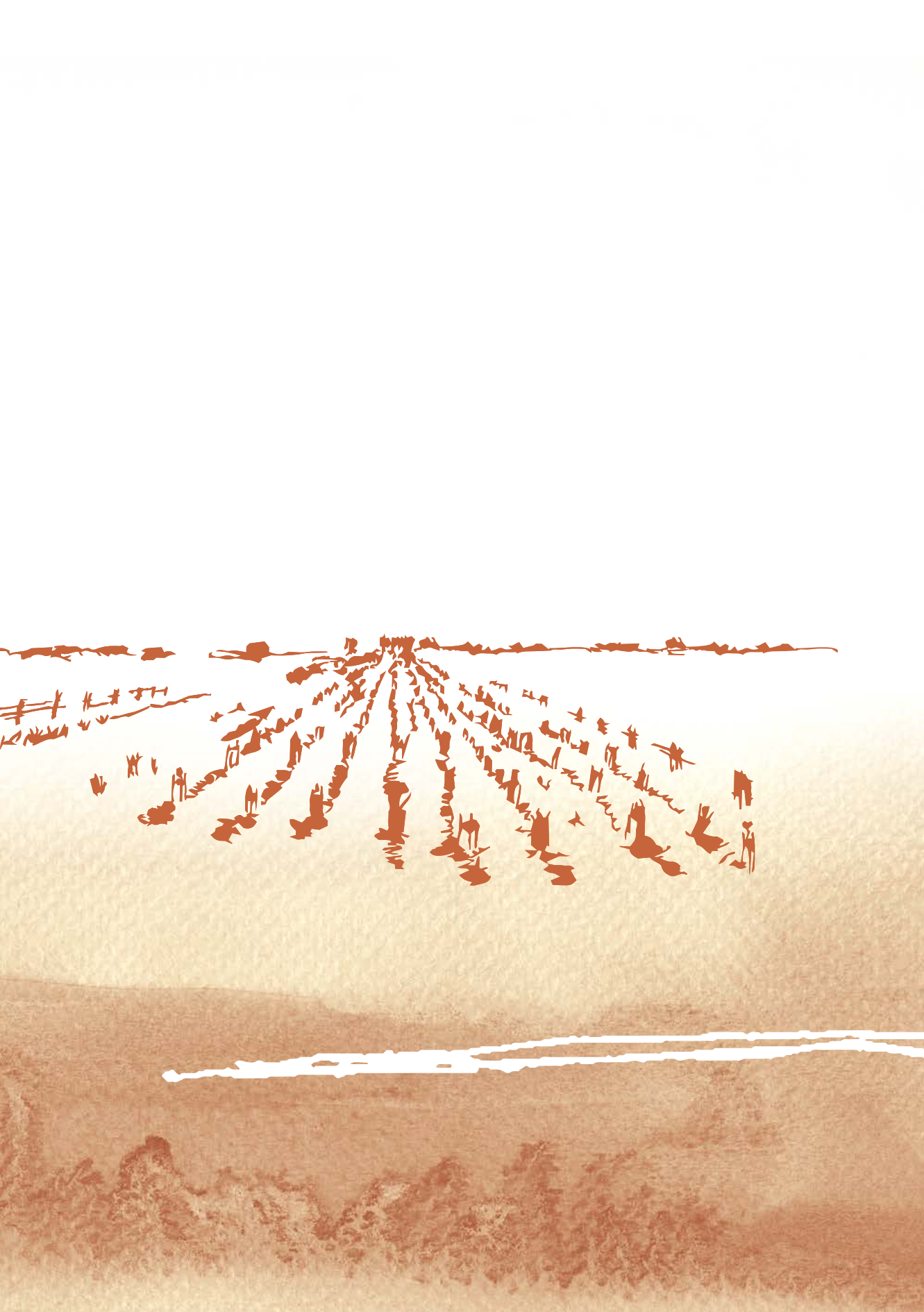
PART A

Introduction to subsidiarity and landcare concepts

Photo: Conor Ashleigh

CHAPTER 1

Introduction to subsidiarity and landcare: building local self-reliance for global change

Allan Dale, Jayne Curnow, Andrew Campbell and Michael Seigel

Abstract

From addressing climate change and associated disasters to overcoming poverty, societies across the globe are currently tackling deep and complex problems that require grassroots action in local communities as a basis for making genuine progress. Despite this, decision-making power has become more centralised in many governance systems. This chapter makes the case for the principle of subsidiarity in the development of healthy governance systems that aim to deliver sound social, economic and environmental outcomes for society. Subsidiarity requires effective and appropriate decision-making at all scales in complex polycentric governance systems, from global to local scales. It also requires a strong focus on empowered local decision-making that is partnered and supported by strong policy, planning and facilitative resource allocation at higher scales. This principle underpins this book's focus and interest in the role of subsidiarity in governance to deliver strong community resilience and local self-reliance in the face of change. This chapter also outlines why this book uses the landcare movement as an exemplar of decision-making on environmental issues with a high level of subsidiarity.

Introduction

Societies across the globe are currently tackling deep, complex problems that require grassroots action in local communities if genuine progress is to be achieved. As just one example, emerging success across the globe in neutralising the COVID-19 pandemic has required the informed action of individuals, families and communities to prevent the spread of a new, unpredictable and terrible disease. Tackling the global problem of climate change has required individuals, businesses and local communities to address their own carbon emissions. Coping with climate-related disasters (for example, wildfires, cyclones, floods and sea-level rise) will mean building resilience and self-reliance at local scales. Ongoing poverty reduction across the globe will continue to require the development of microstrategies for economic development at local scales and within local enterprises. Securing sustainable agriculture and reducing global biodiversity loss will rely on the development of realistic and local decisions and actions. Importantly, all of these issues are deeply intertwined; at the local level, they are inseparable.

While global, national, provincial and local governments need to set the vertically integrated policies that are needed to enable us to deal with these unprecedented problems within incredibly short timelines, centralising power in the decision-making process will hinder the capacity of local communities to think, plan, act and review the actions that they need to deliver necessary global change. Despite this, there has been a growing tendency across nations to centralise decision-making, reducing the flexibility, resources and autonomy needed for purposeful action that delivers results locally. At the same time, in all walks of policy life, there are signs of declining trust in governments. This is a clear indicator that communities and individuals feel that they have less autonomy in the way they operate locally. The likely result of this will be grand policies and lofty global agreements, and even substantive government expenditures, that fail to deliver change on the ground as envisaged by policy.

The dominant approach to reviewing policy failure, however, often fails to explore the key principles of good societal governance needed to achieve positive outcomes. Commissions, reviews and audits of systemic policy failure often suggest that the way to achieve better results is to further centralise decision-making power and intensify the micromanagement of key program activities at higher levels of decision-making (see Dale 2015). Accountabilities for policy and program failure are often pushed further up the decision-making chain, rather than being spread across the many scales (global, regional, national, provincial, local and even business and family levels) at which decisions and actions are required. This could drive a vicious cycle of worsening policy outcomes and further divide governments and their grassroots constituencies, creating a more fractured and fractious society.

If the concept of subsidiarity was applied as a measure of good governance in any of these areas of critical policy importance, a very different management trend might emerge. The delivery arrangements designed to deliver on key policy visions might be better positioned to achieve their intended outcomes. Governments would rebuild trust among their constituent local communities. At the local scale, economic, social and environmental resilience would become intertwined and inseparable. Some people think of subsidiarity as just being about the devolution of power. However, we view subsidiarity as the need for appropriate decisions to be made at the appropriate scale. Relative to the subsidiarity principle, centralising power will generally deliver poorer policy and program

outcomes. At the same time, simply devolving decision-making to local scales could result in fragmentation, duplication, powerlessness and a loss of policy focus. Building subsidiarity means strong and integrated decision-making at global, national, provincial and local and/or community scales, with constant feedback up and down that polycentric chain. By focusing on the subsidiarity principle, local communities are likely to become more self-reliant while genuinely delivering on intended global, national and provincial policy settings. Policymakers can also become more strategic and less bound by the micromanagement of local effort.

We view subsidiarity as the need for appropriate decisions to be made at the appropriate scale.

The emergence of landcare and the early formalisation of these ideas in the Australian context provides a foundational exemplar 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 are looking to improve the sustainability of Australian landscapes and food production systems. These concepts have slowly infused their way into regional and rural landscapes in more than a dozen countries across the globe, delivering economic, social and environmental benefits to participating communities. This book seeks to recognise and celebrate the potential application of the subsidiarity concept in helping to deal with many complex contemporary challenges. It uses landcare to explore how this principle can be usefully applied. It suggests that this principle has value in tackling multiple global problems, from climate change and public health improvement to post-disaster recovery and resilience building.

Part of the motivation and intention behind this book is the lack of recent critical exploration of landcare and other global subsidiarity-based movements for local action in contexts as diverse as disaster recovery, post-conflict reconciliation, public health, sustainability and poverty reduction. This is despite the fact that emerging global crises will rely on governance systems that are deeply and richly infused with subsidiarity-based concepts and designs. This book seeks to bring together the voices of academics and practitioners from a range of countries. While we will mainly explore these concepts through the landcare lens, we will also turn our attention and analysis to landcare-like approaches in other fields of endeavour and in other regions and localities across the globe.

This first chapter introduces the concept of subsidiarity and its key role in delivering global, national and provincial policies, while also improving self-reliance within communities. We then explore why we consider that the Australian concept of landcare, and its increasingly international application, provides an exemplar worthy of discussion and analysis. We discuss the potential for international aid (from Australia and other countries) in building local self-reliance, particularly the capacity of local communities to identify, assess and respond to the many global challenges they face.

Subsidiarity in governance: the key to local self-reliance

Most national policy aspirations and efforts can only be achieved through the cumulative impact of thousands of purposeful actions of individuals, families, businesses and, most importantly, local communities. While having global, national, provincial and regional policies is critical in determining the key focus for action to avoid problems, centralising decision-making has two major negative impacts. It tends to constipate the decision-making processes, increasingly making community leaders at local scale less willing to make decisions and take decisive action, even if these are consistent with the higher-level policy environment. This, in turn, can undermine community self-reliance. Communities increasingly wait for decision-makers at higher levels to make decisions for them or provide them with resources. Alternatively, poorly conceived policies that don't account for the day-to-day reality and needs of local communities are likely to be resisted or even subverted at local scales. For example, environmental policies that don't account for or accommodate local economic needs are destined to face significant political resistance, fracturing broad societal consensus building.

We see subsidiarity as an essential principle in the design of any public policy and program agenda that attempts to deal with dynamic challenges that have place-based dimensions. Subsidiarity embedded in global and national policymaking sets the scene for effective policy design and delivery. Importantly, however, strong subsidiarity in governance systems results in more responsive policymaking. The issues being faced passionately by local communities become bottom-up drivers, rather than nations just responding to the policy agenda at global, national, provincial and regional scales. Subsidiarity sets the scene for policy responsiveness. High levels of subsidiarity in societal governance systems are the key to developing more self-reliant, and ultimately more resilient, communities. This buttresses the overall robustness of societal governance at all these scales.

Societies tend to fracture or break apart when local autonomy is threatened. As communities become less able to make decisions for themselves or to mobilise their own resources to respond to the challenges they face, they become less self-reliant. Less self-reliant communities in turn tend to become less resilient to environmental, social and economic shocks. It takes longer for them to recover from natural disasters. The risk of social unrest and civil conflict increases. Deep poverty and cross-generational disadvantage can emerge.

Subsidiarity, self-reliance and resilience: definitions and discussion

As Michael Seigel outlines in Chapter 3, there are many interpretations of the principle of subsidiarity. We seek to go beyond simply stipulating that, as much as possible, decision-making should be at the most local or most grassroots level feasible for a particular decision. This way of thinking about subsidiarity can often be confused with concepts or approaches to the devolution or the regionalisation/localisation of decision-making power. In our view, in a governance system that displays a high level of subsidiarity, it is very important to stress that appropriate decisions are made at all scales in the governance system, from the global scale down to local communities, enterprises, families and individuals. Another way of framing this is that, for any given decision, there is an appropriate or an optimum scale at which such a decision should be made. This generally means that higher levels in the system focus their attention on policy and strategy, middle scales focus on planning and coordination, and more localised scales focus on decisions about

actual delivery and getting things done on the ground. In a system with a high level of subsidiarity, policymaking is deeply informed by those on the ground, and those on the ground have a deep understanding of and commitment to higher level policies and plans.

With greater subsidiarity comes greater local ownership, autonomy and self-reliance. This increases the capacity of communities to take proactive action under their own steam and resources, and to respond effectively to the stresses that they face (for example, natural disasters; economic, social and environmental problems and/or opportunities). More self-reliant communities don't wait around for someone at a higher level in the governance system to tell them what to do. Their proactive, empowered responses may even prevent emerging issues from becoming major national or global policy problems. While local communities appreciate, and are enabled by, resources from the outside, they are not rendered helpless without the higher-level allocation of external resources from governments. They jump in and mobilise their own internal resources for change, as well as seeking partnerships with higher scales.

With greater subsidiarity comes greater local ownership, autonomy and self-reliance.

All of this contributes to greater community resilience in the face of change – changing climate, changing economies and changing social and cultural circumstances. Adger (2000) defines social or community resilience as the ability of communities to withstand external shocks to their social infrastructure. Just like the resilience of individual people to change, community resilience must account for the economic, institutional, cultural, social and ecological dimensions of a community in an integrated way. Consequently, and over different periods of time, community resilience in particular localities is related to the resilience of the local population; it is integrally linked to individual resilience. In this context, the concept of disaster-based recovery is important. This means considering how well people and social institutions and structures bounce back from challenge (Masten 2001). People who are resilient display a greater capacity to quickly regain their physiological, psychological and social equilibrium following stressful events, which supports community resilience. In return, healthy, adaptive communities confer a capacity for resilience to their individual constituents (Dale et al. 2011).

Subsidiarity, local self-reliance and increased community resilience are essential ingredients to the achievement of global good and the resolution of the key problems facing the future of humanity and the planet. These challenges are real and ever-present and must be tackled comprehensively. Globally, there is clear scientific consensus about the threat of increasing greenhouse gas emissions and the resultant impacts on global and local climates. The global decline of both terrestrial and marine biodiversity and bioproductivity is well understood. Ongoing global declines in the availability and quality of fresh water are understood. Global poverty reduction remains a critical humanitarian need. There is a constant threat of civil and political fracturing and the resultant risk of international terrorism and civil unrest. The current COVID-19 crisis has reminded nations of the need for local self-reliance, and more localised (but still globally integrated) agrifood value chains. These agendas cannot be tackled effectively in the absence of highly subsidiary governance systems.

Landcare as an exemplar of subsidiarity

Landcare in Australia did not emerge from an enlightened top-down policy guided by the principle of subsidiarity. Indeed, most people involved in landcare have probably never heard of the term. Rather, community-based approaches to tackling land degradation problems that extend over the boundaries of multiple farms emerged in parallel in several Australian states during the early 1980s (Campbell 1994). Problems such as dryland salinity, feral animals (for example, rabbits, foxes and wild dogs) and noxious weeds like ragwort can rarely be addressed effectively within the boundaries of a single farm, even in Australia where average farm sizes are large. They demand coordinated action across multiple farms, or whole catchments in the case of dryland salinity or river water quality problems. Most land in the agricultural zones of Australia is privately owned, and private property rights are very important in rural Australia. Farmers see themselves as tough, self-reliant, independent small businesspeople, autonomous in their decision-making. As a general rule, they resent being told what to do on their own land by other people, especially by governments.

In this context, farmers who realise that they have a land degradation problem affecting the productivity and amenity of their farm, and that they can only fix that problem if their neighbours all work on it at the same time, in a coordinated way, will be more amenable to working collaboratively in group approaches on these shared problems. However, their natural inclination is to remain in the driver's seat, especially when it comes to the actions that need to be taken on their own land. Moreover, there is a strong sense of community solidarity in most farming districts in Australia, exemplifying what the philosopher Edmund Burke, reflecting on the French Revolution, saw as our natural attachment to 'little platoons':

> To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind (Burke 1790).

In the early 1980s in Western Australia and Victoria, and to a lesser extent in other Australian states and territories, groups of farmers began to form voluntarily to work together on shared land degradation problems, especially salinity, weeds and pests. At the same time, government agencies were realising that centralised, technocratic and regulatory approaches to these problems (which also have significant public good dimensions) were not working or were no longer consistent with the smaller-government, public-management thinking that was becoming dominant within governments in the English-speaking world. State government agencies were seeking to rationalise service provision to farmers and rural communities (Campbell 1996).

In Western Australia in 1982 and Victoria in 1986, policymakers in state soil conservation agencies realised that they could harness the energies and local credibility of voluntary community groups in more organised approaches to tackle land degradation problems at a neighbourhood, district or catchment scale, with the role of government shifting from one of control to one of facilitation and support (Campbell 1994). The Land Conservation Districts program in Western Australia and the Victorian LandCare Program both highlighted the importance of 'community ownership of problems and solutions' as being central to effective responses to pervasive land degradation challenges. They did not mention subsidiarity, but their programs were explicitly designed to foster local

ownership of local problems, and local decision-making about how best to address those problems, with varying levels of technical advice and financial support from government. The principle of subsidiarity was implicit in the framing of these policies and programs, consciously or otherwise.

Campbell (1994) outlines the evolution of Australian landcare in its early years, from a disparate parallel development of subnational initiatives into a national movement with explicit support from the Australian Government, as well as state and territory governments and some large corporations. A striking feature of the early years of landcare was its joint 'ownership' by the National Farmers' Federation and the Australian Conservation Foundation (the highest-profile and most powerful lobby groups for farmers and conservationists respectively), and its bipartisan political support. At the launch of the Decade of Landcare Plan in April 1989 by prime minister Bob Hawke, it was noteworthy that the then shadow minister for agriculture, Bruce Lloyd, was also on the podium, publicly supporting the new initiative.

By 1994, there were more than 6,000 Landcare groups in Australia, involving more than one-third of all farming families (Campbell 1994). This was an extraordinary level of community engagement and buy-in compared with most government programs. Robins (2018) describes five phases of landcare in Australia, from the early 'childhood phase' covered in depth by Campbell (1994) to the current 'mid-life phase'. In Chapter 30, Lisa Robins describes the contemporary understanding of landcare as simultaneously comprising the landcare ethic (the philosophy of living in and caring for the land), the landcare movement (local community volunteers putting the philosophy into practice) and the landcare model of support mechanisms and structures, many funded by government, but with the primary role of government being seen as fostering self-reliance. In Chapter 26, Rob Youl describes many facets of the landcare model, and the lessons that have been learned along the 40-year journey of landcare in Australia about how best to support and sustain local community ownership, engagement and grassroots action.

The development of landcare in Australia has been far from linear (Curtis and Lefroy 2010; Campbell 2016; Robins 2018). Many of the original landcare leaders are now in their retirement years, and the extent to which the next generation has picked up the baton is patchy. Many Landcare groups are moribund, but others have rejuvenated, and new forms of landcare (such as those targeting demographics rather than neighbourhood groups) have emerged (see Megan Lee, Naomi Edwards and Peter Pigott in Chapter 27). The national landcare movement and landcare ethic have proven to be remarkably resilient in Australia.

The landcare model, however, has arguably suffered most from policy adhockery and discontinuities. Campbell (2016) describes three major reforms in natural resource management (NRM) policies and programs over the 20 years since 1995. The first was 'localism', characterised by promotion of and support for the emerging community-based landcare movement. The second was 'regionalism', which supported the emergence of a regional (subnational) NRM delivery model based around 56 catchment management/NRM organisations (Robins and Dovers 2007). The third was a return to 'centralism', based on targeted national environmental investment programs with increasing use of market-based mechanisms for allocating resources.

Campbell (2016) argued that, in principle, these three approaches could and should have been complementary and implemented in parallel, each reinforcing the others. But in

practice, with static or declining levels of overall public investment and in-built incentives for each level of government to shift costs on to the others, they were implemented in sequence. Each claimed to build on its predecessors, but in effect, each development tended to compete with and undermine the pre-existing programs. In budgetary terms, the regional NRM delivery model cannibalised Landcare funding and community leadership in the early 2000s. After a change in government in 2007, the national Caring for our Country program was funded in part by a 40% cut to the budget for regional NRM bodies. In 2013, after another change in government, $500 million was removed from the Landcare budget at the same time as the new national $480 million Green Army program was launched (Rutherfurd and Campbell 2014). In effect, this was like trying to build a tall building, with each additional storey constructed using materials removed from lower floors.

These obvious trade-offs between what should have been complementary and even synergistic NRM policy approaches led to an erosion of social capital, especially in the form of 'vertical trust' between the different layers of NRM governance. More explicit attention to the principle of subsidiarity, especially if resource allocation to each level of governance was not seen as a zero sum '*Hunger games*' exercise, would have sought to sustain and build vertical trust up and down the system, strengthening the whole system.

Despite fragmented, inconsistent and sometimes unhelpful changes in the policy and institutional context within which Landcare has operated in Australia over the last 40 years, it has proven to be resilient at a community level in many parts of Australia, and appears to be enjoying a resurgence of political support. For example, the Victorian Government recently committed a further $13 million funding for 80 part-time Landcare facilitators that support 650 voluntary Landcare groups and networks in a program that has been running since 2011 and has been estimated to generate a benefit:cost ratio of more than 7:1 (Landcare Victoria 2021). New legislation is being enacted (for example, the *Landscape South Australia Act 2019*) that attempts to integrate voluntary community involvement with more formal planning and regulatory functions for the management of land, water and marine resources across all tenures (DEWSA 2021). At the national level, a new Parliamentary Friends of Landcare group was launched in 2020, which has representatives from all political parties who are eager to align themselves with landcare and community volunteerism.

Moreover, as many chapters in this book attest, the principles of Australian Landcare have inspired and informed landcare-like approaches in at least 20 other countries, with limited promotion or assistance from Australia. As Youl observes in Chapter 26, the Secretariat for International Landcare and Australian Landcare International have facilitated visits and provided moral and technical support to local landcare leaders in the South Pacific, New Zealand, Africa, the Philippines, India, Indonesia, the Caribbean and North America. ACIAR has funded research into the application of landcare principles in resource-poor and conflict-vulnerable contexts, particularly in the Philippines (Mary Johnson and Evy Elago-Carusos in Chapter 17; Metcalfe 2004; ACIAR 2009; Vock 2021) and more generically (Johnson and Muller 2020). That research suggests that landcare principles, exemplifying subsidiarity, have much to offer in meeting the contemporary challenges of improving food and water security, human health and nutrition, and biosecurity – all issues that are amplified by climate change.

Intent and structure of this book

We want this book to illuminate the importance of subsidiarity in the development of strong governance systems across the global policy and practice discourse. We consider that subsidiarity in governance systems drives local self-reliance and community-scale resilience in the face of change. We focus our attention on landcare as an Australian concept with global reach that provides an exemplar worthy of analysis and discussion. In responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, managing economic recovery and tackling climate change, there could not be a better time to revisit past and present successes and failures in the landcare system in Australia and internationally. In line with landcare principles, this monograph brings together policy thinkers, local practitioners and academics in a shared dialogue.

- **Part A: Introduction to subsidiarity and landcare concepts** unpacks the concept of subsidiarity and its relationship to local self-reliance and community resilience in the face of change. This section strongly aligns the landcare concept with the subsidiarity principle.

- **Part B: Developing local resilience and sustainability** explores the importance of self-reliance building as the foundation for local resilience, particularly if we are to achieve global sustainability.

- **Part C: Landcare as an integrative concept** celebrates the value of the landcare approach as an integrative concept in local communities that brings together environmental, social, economic and social needs and opportunities.

- **Part D: Landcare as a transformative agent in crises** explores the role of landcare and similar approaches to subsidiarity for transformative recovery in crises such as natural disasters and civil conflict.

- **Part E: Developing community learning and social cohesion** explores the role of landcare-style approaches in developing community learning and promoting social cohesion.

- **Part F: Laying the groundwork for landcare's future** explores the opportunity to further enhance landcare in the future.

- **Part G: Landcare's message for the wider world** unpacks what all this means for the achievement of global public goods.

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Photo: Andrew Campbell

CHAPTER 2

Landcare: exemplifying subsidiarity as a governance principle for the Anthropocene

Andrew Campbell
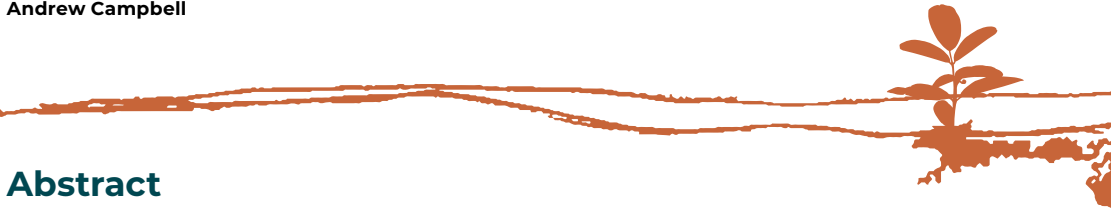
Abstract

The Anthropocene is the name of a new geological epoch. It is based on the proposition that the influence of human behaviour on the composition of Earth's atmosphere and the basic biogeochemical cycles of the planet is now so pervasive and profound that humanity itself is the dominant force shaping the planet. The most obvious manifestation of the Anthropocene is anthropogenic global warming causing global climate change and ocean acidification. There are, however, many others, including deforestation, groundwater depletion, eutrophication of rivers, nitrification of aquifers, pollution of oceans, biodiversity loss and accelerated rates of species extinction.

Halting and reversing these processes to maintain a 'safe operating space for humanity' will require changes in human behaviour at all levels. Those changes will be deeply contextual, varying across ecosystems, societies and cultures. The dynamic and disruptive nature of processes such as climate change and associated extreme weather events, and zoonotic pandemics (like COVID-19) mean that highly centralised, 'top-down' responses are increasingly ineffective and often counterproductive. Decisions need to be made and responses designed at multiple levels, often quickly.

This chapter proposes that, in the Anthropocene, we need to revisit and explore the concept of subsidiarity in governance (the notion that decisions need to be made and resources allocated at the right level for a given context). It also suggests that landcare, whether purposefully or not, at its best, exemplifies subsidiarity. Landcare approaches have enormous potential, well beyond their antecedents in local environmental management and sustainable agriculture. We can learn from four decades of landcare lessons to develop subsidiary governance models to build sustainability and resilience for these challenging times.

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 1, landcare in Australia emerged endogenously and in parallel in several jurisdictions in the 1980s (Campbell 1994:344). It emerged as farmers sought to work collectively in neighbourhood groups to tackle shared environmental problems, and as state governments sought to rationalise agricultural extension services, favouring group approaches over the provision of free advice to individual farmers. Agricultural policymakers in Victoria and Western Australia were no doubt aware of contemporary literature around participatory 'bottom-up' and 'farmer-first' models of agricultural research and community development (for example, Chambers 1983). The early landcare approaches in Australia, however, were pragmatic responses to the opportunities and urgent needs of the time, rather than being top-down prescriptions informed by theories emanating from scientific literature.

As the first National Landcare Facilitator, and later as a postgraduate student trying to make sense of this exciting period, I cannot recall any mention of subsidiarity in the early days of Landcare in Australia. Yet in our language about getting the right balance between bottom-up community voluntarism and top-down public policy frameworks and resource allocation, we were unconsciously navigating the contours of the subsidiarity principle as articulated in Chapter 1.

I have previously argued (Campbell 2016) that Australia has, at various times and in various places, developed all the essential ingredients for a world-leading framework for managing natural resources sustainably in a highly variable climate, improving food security and building community resilience in the face of extreme events. In this idealised formulation, voluntary local Landcare groups and associated citizen science, schools-based education and community education programs all provide a place-based framework for people of all ages to get involved in hands-on learning and action on matters that directly affect them and their communities, thus building social capital. Regional (subnational) natural resource management (NRM) and catchment bodies develop strategies and secure resources for managing environmental problems (water, biodiversity and vegetation management) at appropriate ecological scales that guide local actions, so that, in aggregate, they achieve the agreed objectives. State and national governments establish policy and institutional frameworks (for example, planning, laws, regulations, taxes, markets, property rights and incentives) that reward activities that enhance sustainability and penalise activities that cause pollution and degradation. Global agreements ensure that countries work together on global problems (like climate change and COVID-19) that cannot be solved by individual nations on their own, and that rich countries assist low-income and middle-income countries.

As discussed in Campbell (2016), unfortunately this idealised formulation is just that. In reality, in Australia at least, these ingredients have rarely operated together in the same place for long enough to demonstrate their transformative potential to gain traction against complex, contested, multidecadal, intractable challenges. All the pixels for a beautiful big picture have been demonstrated in various places at various times, but they have never been brought together at one time, at sufficient scale for long enough, to work their magic.

Why is subsidiarity important?

In such a formulation, each level of agency (local, subnational, national, regional, global) is empowered to make decisions that are best made at that level. Each level of agency allocates resources to and enables appropriate decision-making at the levels below it, trusting lower levels to make wise decisions and getting out of their way. This is not just about benign paternalism from top to bottom, it also relies on each level of agency informing, supporting and making demands of the levels above it. The concept of subsidiarity is thus not just about decision-making happening at appropriate levels, and each level being empowered and resourced to be able to make the decisions it is best suited to make. It is equally about interactions and relationships up and down the hierarchy, and about the levels of vertical trust in the whole system. Subsidiarity implies that higher levels of agency deliberately create the space and authority to authorise, or at least enable, institutions at lower levels of agency to exercise their own autonomy. This means policy and institutional frameworks that are enabling and empowering, not disabling and disempowering.

In the Australian context, local Landcare group leaders often also 'move up' to leadership roles, for example, by sitting on the boards of regional catchment/NRM bodies, and on state and national level advisory groups. This is a good mechanism for ensuring that local concerns inform higher-level policies, decisions and resource allocation, and that local community groups are able to get a firsthand perspective on how and why policies and decisions at higher levels are made. Such vertical cross-fertilisation is more likely to be sustained where the subsidiarity principle is understood, observed and honoured. If there is meaningful resource allocation to and empowerment of the grassroots level, talented community members are more likely to stay engaged at that level. But if power is concentrated at higher levels, talented, ambitious people will gravitate to those levels, hollowing out lower levels and reinforcing a vicious circle of disempowerment. This reduces vertical trust in the system and leaves local communities less receptive to suasive policy instruments designed centrally and delivered from above.

In the 1980s, it was already obvious to some Australian farmers that there were some environmental problems that they could only solve through coordinated action with their neighbours at a district scale. It was also obvious to policymakers that they could not deliver their policy objectives around rural sustainability and agricultural extension with technocratic, top-down approaches targeted at leading farmers – they needed voluntary behaviour change across whole communities. If your policy objective is simply to increase aggregate agricultural production, working with the top 20% of farmers will get you a long way. But land degradation problems are not disproportionally 'owned' by the biggest or most productive farmers. In fact, in some contexts, the opposite may apply. Landcare emerged from neighbourhood groups that were trying to involve all landholders within a district, albeit voluntarily, blending top-down and bottom-up approaches and accidentally exemplifying subsidiarity.

The Anthropocene

A concept that was previously an arcane proposition among a handful of theoretical ecologists and atmospheric chemists in the 1980s is now entering popular discourse. The Anthropocene is the proposition that the influence of human behaviour on the composition of Earth's atmosphere and the basic biogeochemical cycles of the planet is now so pervasive and so profound that it constitutes a new geological epoch (Crutzen and Stoermer 2000; Steffen et al. 2007). The most obvious manifestation of the Anthropocene is anthropogenic global warming causing global climate change and ocean acidification. But there are many others, including deforestation, groundwater depletion, eutrophication of rivers, nitrification of aquifers, pollution of oceans, biodiversity loss and accelerated rates of species extinction. Habitat loss and fragmentation, and the reliance of forest-dwelling people on wild-caught 'bushfoods', is increasing contact between humans and other species, and consequently the risks of zoonotic diseases like Ebola, SARS, MERS and now of course COVID-19. In a seminal paper, Rockstrom et al. (2009) proposed the related concept of planetary boundaries: the notion that the Earth has finite resources and a finite capacity to absorb pollution, with thresholds for each that together define a 'safe operating space for humanity'. They argued (since consolidated by Steffen et al. 2015) that human activities have already exceeded two of these thresholds and are approaching several others, in effect, contending that human activities are an existential threat to humanity itself.

The Anthropocene foregrounds human activities and human behaviour at all scales as being the primary drivers of the living conditions for human beings, and consequently for other species as well. The Anthropocene is also characterised by uncertainty and surprise, for example, the increasing frequency, scale and intensity of extreme events such as cyclones and hurricanes, floods, wildfires and droughts. COVID-19, commonly referred to as a 'once in a century' event, is in fact the sixth zoonotic pandemic since 1980. Extreme weather events and associated food and water security crises are among the primary causes of unregulated mass movements of people, and consequently of regional conflict. The Anthropocene is seeing regional food security, water security, biosecurity and health security problems morph into national security threats. The Anthropocene is also posing fundamental challenges to the relatively open markets and integrated global economy that evolved from the late 20th century into the early 2000s. The vulnerabilities associated with open borders, convoluted global supply chains, centralised energy grids and 'just in time' inventory management have all been exposed by COVID-19 and increasing climate volatility (Sanderson et al. 2020). In such a context, concepts such as sovereignty, self-sufficiency, self-reliance and decentralisation are finding new advocates, and interest in resilience as an essential complement to sustainability has intensified.

For the purposes of this discussion, sustainability is about living within our environmental means over the very long term, leaving options open for future generations and focusing innovation and technology on the replacement of depletable resources and depleting/polluting processes, with renewable resources and regenerative/restorative processes. Resilience is about the ability of a given system to bounce back or recover from a major shock or disturbance (whether climatic, environmental or sociopolitical) without changing to a fundamentally different state. I see sustainability and resilience as equally important and complementary concepts. Developing new farming systems that are more 'sustainable' in a narrow sense around nutrients, water, energy or carbon, is of little use if they collapse in severe drought or flood events. Having systems that are highly resistant to shocks, but reliant on ongoing resource depletion, is equally unhelpful in the long run.

Landcare and the Anthropocene

In thinking about the Anthropocene and the notion of living within 'a safe operating space for humanity', it quickly becomes clear that agriculture is central. Growing, processing, distributing and consuming food and fibre is the single biggest thing that humans do on planet Earth. Agriculture, forestry and pastoralism uses most of the ice-free, non-desert land and consumes about two-thirds of diverted freshwater. It is the biggest driver of deforestation, and hence biodiversity loss, and is the biggest contributor to eutrophication of streams and nitrification of groundwater (Willett et al. 2019). The boundaries of the agrifood sector are fuzzy, but most analyses suggest that its global greenhouse gas emissions are one of the three largest contributing sectors, along with stationary energy and transport.

Encouragingly, emissions intensity is already starting to decline in energy and transport, but this is not the case in the agrifood sector (IPCC 2019). The centrality of agriculture means that most of the agreed Sustainable Development Goals under the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (as discussed by Lisa Robins in Chapter 30) cannot be achieved without a transformation of the global agrifood system. Given that around half the world's food is produced by more than 500 million smallholder farmers, who themselves make up a disproportionate share of the world's poorest people, it is equally clear that such transformation needs to 'work', not just among well-resourced leading farmers in industrialised countries, but for resource-poor smallholders in low-income countries, and everyone in-between. By 'work', I mean improving livelihoods as well as environmental and productivity metrics. Obviously, responses and solutions need to be tailored to their contexts (environmental, socioeconomic, cultural and political), so they will be highly varied and emergent within and across countries and agroecological zones.

This book is a timely stocktake of landcare approaches in diverse contexts. The perspectives presented here illustrate the parallel evolution of landcare experiences around the world, with varying types and degrees of 'top-down' government support. In most contexts, such government support has been very modest, and efforts have been sustained by a large degree of volunteerism. This could be seen as both a missed opportunity by governments, and also evidence that the landcare value proposition is robust in diverse contexts, with or without external resourcing. In contrast, in the southern Philippines, landcare has been adopted very effectively by government as a framework for a new delivery model for extension in post-conflict situations where rebuilding social capital is critical (see Chapter 17 and Vock 2021).

My contention here is that the intertwined challenges of the Anthropocene (climate change, water security, food security, energy security, biosecurity and health security) all accentuate the need for subsidiary governance and engaged citizenry. These challenges all require local communities to have agency, to be capable of making sensible, well-informed decisions and to have the resources to implement them. All this should happen within supportive policy and institutional frameworks at higher levels, informed by the best available science. Attention to subsidiarity means that each level makes the decisions appropriate to that level, while ensuring that the levels below are empowered and enabled, and the levels above are informed and supported.

Conclusion: revitalising the landcare concept

Forty years on from the emergence of the earliest Landcare groups in Australia, landcare, or at least the concept of subsidiarity, should not be seen as a tired, nostalgic, 'been there and done that' approach to agricultural and NRM extension. Rather, landcare is a durable, adaptable concept that is ripe for replenishment and rejuvenation, with compelling relevance for the Anthropocene, across a broader canvas than just agricultural and environmental extension. This is especially so if it is harnessed to and buttressed by a governance scaffolding rooted firmly in the principle of subsidiarity.

Most of the contexts presented in this book relate to sustainable agriculture, natural resources and environmental management. I think the landcare model of empowering and supporting local neighbourhood groups with a facilitative framework to harness local voluntary effort and leadership on shared problems is ripe for re-examining, rethinking, rejuvenation and reinvestment – in these contexts and across a broader canvas.

Landcare is a durable, adaptable concept that is ripe for replenishment and rejuvenation

Landcare approaches, within subsidiarity-focused governance, still have huge potential to make a positive difference in developing, promoting and extending more sustainable and resilient farming systems, and hence in improving livelihoods and food security at multiple scales. However, I believe we should be more ambitious in scope. Other compelling challenges and policy objectives would also benefit from such approaches, including:

- rethinking agricultural extension for the digital age, with digital delivery of services, including fintech and insurance
- providing a framework for grassroots environmental monitoring and management through citizen science, again made much cheaper and more sophisticated through digital technologies including global positioning systems, wi-fi, smart sensors (local and remote) and cameras
- using the above frameworks for an engaged, informed citizenry as a buffer against 'fake news' and misinformation, by giving local communities trusted local sources of information that they understand and 'own'
- promoting carbon farming, including blue carbon, where there is a need for consistent frameworks and to build trust in data and property rights, that are nevertheless relevant to diverse local contexts (i.e. one size will not fit all)
- mobilising disaster risk reduction and responses, which require mobilisation and harnessing of massive voluntary efforts in the immediate response phase, and would benefit from landcare approaches in improving preparedness and resilience ahead of events, and in sustaining recovery long after the event
- managing biosecurity, including minimising risks of zoonotic diseases through a more integrated approach to environmental, animal and human health, and coordinated efforts at local community levels
- providing a welcoming, supportive entry point for women and girls to demonstrate leadership and have their skills and abilities better recognised at local and higher levels.

Many contemporary public policy challenges are made more difficult where there is a loss of social cohesion, erosion of trust in institutions and a lack of authoritative voices informed by best available science. Having well-organised groups working together on shared problems at local levels, within supportive frameworks that enable them to access, interrogate and use data and information, some of which they have generated themselves, seems to me to be a promising avenue for rebuilding social cohesion and social capital, and ultimately the levels of vertical trust in the system that are central to subsidiarity.

The experiences and perspectives shared in this book provide encouragement that landcare approaches have stood the test of time over the last 40 years, and also that – with some imagination – landcare, complemented by subsidiary-based governance, has enormous potential to help in tackling the existential challenges of the Anthropocene.

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CHAPTER 3

Exploring landcare as a means of implementing the principle of subsidiarity

Michael Seigel

Abstract

Based on the experiences and insights of landcare, this chapter explores a preferable interpretation of the principle of subsidiarity and examines how it can be operationalised in complex governance systems. Rejecting narrow interpretations of the principle as mere decentralisation or the devolution of power to appropriate levels for decision-making, this chapter argues that subsidiarity advocates a system for organising the whole of society that should be guided by common good, and ordered towards sustaining, supporting and empowering the individual, the local, the grassroots or the communal. Experience in poverty reduction, conflict resolution and the treatment of addiction strongly suggests that the combination of autonomy and connectedness forms the specific characteristics of subsidiarity, and that, in practice, it is beneficial to tackle intractable problems.

In dealing with environmental problems, landcare provides an active and concrete model of subsidiarity as it promotes connectedness among various entities without compromising the autonomy of local people. Both networking and partnership are essential for the implementation of subsidiarity. In addition to this, the experience of landcare demonstrates the need for creating a feedback loop for good governance systems to ensure that the realities and perceptions of the grassroots are reflected at the higher governing levels of society. The experience of Australian landcare also underlines the importance of the deliberate program of government support delivered under that country's Decade of Landcare, which in turn reminds us that an alignment of policy vision, strategies and delivery systems should be polycentric and vertically integrated.

Introduction

The principle of subsidiarity strongly relates to landcare. Because subsidiarity is not defined by a standardised policy or delivery system, there is no manual to explain how it is to be implemented. Instead, it is a principle that can guide the development of policy and delivery systems that are adapted to the circumstances of each application case. There will never be one specific plan for how subsidiarity is to be implemented. However, that does not mean we have to live with vagueness and ambiguity about the concept.

Probably the best way to gain insight into how to implement the principle of subsidiarity is to look at activities where it is being explicitly implemented (consciously or not). In this chapter, I explore landcare as an example of how the principle of subsidiarity may be implemented. I will explore two practices of landcare: networking and partnership building, and what I will call the creation of a feedback loop. Both ideas are helpful, and indeed even necessary, for guiding how subsidiarity can be implemented in other policy or practice areas.

The principle of subsidiarity

The principle of subsidiarity, as a basic principle in social ethics regarding how society should be organised, was first articulated in the early 1930s in response to the rise to power of the Fascists in Italy and the Stalin regime in the Soviet Union and the increasing strength of the Nazi Party in Germany. The concept is rooted in a Christian understanding of the human being and of society, but not in any exclusive way. It has roots in various aspects of Western thought and is not strongly associated with one religion. It was brought to wider public attention when it was adopted as a guiding principle by the European Union.

Historically, the principle has a deep history within the Catholic Church in that an early formulation of the principle was made in a papal encyclical in 1931. The fact that its higher profile roots lie in one Christian denomination has probably not helped it gain wider acceptance. However, later in this chapter, I will give some examples of the implementation of the principle, including Landcare, that not only have no association with Catholicism or Christianity, but that were established without even formal awareness of the principle itself. This suggests that that the core of the principle falls within the range of good human common sense and is accessible to anyone. I will discuss the principle from two aspects – whether it is a principle that aims to point out the appropriate level at which decisions should be made, and whether it is a positive or a negative normative principle (whether it positively stipulates something that should be done or negatively stipulates something that should not be done).

The principle as defining levels of decision-making

Many interpretations of the principle of subsidiarity treat it as simply pointing to appropriate levels for decision-making, stipulating that as much as possible, decision-making should be at the most local, most grassroots level feasible for the decision. The higher governing body (for example, the central or regional government) would have the right to act only when a particular matter cannot be dealt with at a more local, more grassroots level. This is basically (not necessarily exclusively) the way the principle has been understood in the European Union.

Article 5.3 of the Treaty on European Union says that:

> Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level (European Union n.d.).

As an example at the national scale, prefectural governments in Japan also tend to define the principle in terms of appropriate levels of decision-making, arguing that it indicates that decision-making should be at the smallest scale or the most local level possible for the decision. Aichi Prefecture, for example, defines the principle as:

> a principle derived from Christian social ethics that says that decision-making should be at as close a level as possible to the citizens and communities that are affected by that decision (Aichi Prefectural Government 2004: Chapter 3(8)).

The argument of this chapter is that, while the above describes a very important dimension of the principle, it remains a highly truncated explanation. It should be remembered that support for Brexit in the United Kingdom was driven by the sense that the United Kingdom itself, and individuals and communities within it, had been disempowered by their membership in the European Union – precisely the feeling that the principle of subsidiarity should have obviated. This national sentiment could, of course, have emerged because the principle was not sufficiently implemented. But it could also be that this understanding of the principle of subsidiarity only as a matter of determining levels of decision-making was too limited. In Chapter 31, Allan and Michele Dale describe subsidiarity as 'the making of decisions at the most appropriate scale to effect positive outcomes for society', indicating that the issue of different levels of decision-making emerge as a practical implication of the principle, rather than being essential to its meaning.

A positive or negative normative principle

When understood as only defining levels of decision-making, the principle tends to become a negative principle limiting the right of a higher governing body to intervene in the levels of governance and decision-making under its jurisdiction. Ken Endo, who has written on the origins and history of the principle of subsidiarity, argues that:

> the negative concept of subsidiarity refers to the limitation of competences of the 'higher' organisation in relation to the 'lower' entity, whilst its positive concept represents the possibility or even the obligation of interventions from the higher organisation (Endo 1994:642).

Jacques Delors, who was instrumental in drawing the concept into the negotiations for the European Union, also argued for a positive understanding of the principle:

> Subsidiarity is not simply a limit to intervention by a higher authority vis-a-vis a person or a community in a position to act itself, it is also an obligation for this authority to act vis-a-vis this person or this group to see that it is given the means to achieve its ends (Delors 1991:9).

A cursory reading of the initial formulation of the principle in the papal encyclical of 1931 could, it is true, give rise to the understanding that the principle is all about levels of decision-making, and that it negatively restricts the role of the higher body. This is because the Pope's goal was to address the rise of Fascism, Nazism and Stalinism. At that time, the Pope argued:

just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do (Pope Pius XI 1931).

This indeed is a statement about levels of decision-making and management that certainly does argue that decision-making should be as close to the individual and to the grassroots as is possible, and therefore infers a negative dimension restricting the role of higher bodies. A more positive dimension of the principle, however, is immediately expressed. The sentence that follows is:

For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them (Pope Pius XI 1931).

Subsidiarity, therefore, is not just about non-interference and non-intervention, but about positive help and support. This chapter refers to the statement of Allan and Michele Dale in Chapter 31 that the issue of proper levels of decision-making are one of the main implications of the principle. This is an accurate interpretation. It is an implication that flows necessarily and inevitably from the principle, so saying that it is an implication rather than the main meaning of the principle does not weaken the imperative for decisions and actions being taken as close to the grassroots as possible. The essential content of the principle, however, is that all social bodies and social structures exist to support the individual, the local and the communal.

Subsidiarity is not just about non-interference and non-intervention, but about positive help and support.

To argue otherwise (that is, to focus only on the Pope's condemnation of the higher authority taking over what a lesser body can do) would be to ignore the context of Catholic social teaching from which this principle has come. In this teaching there is a strong emphasis on the fact that society exists for the person – both the person as an individual and the person in the multiple sets of relationships that make up that person's life. As Chaplin points out:

humans are social creatures unable to realise their ends in isolation from others. They need subsidium, the help, of society in order to be human. Society itself thus performs a 'subsidiary function' in relation to persons. A 'subsidiary' function is not a 'secondary' one but rather an indispensable auxiliary one. Society performs a subsidiary function not simply when the individual meets a crisis, but as a matter of course (Chaplin 1993:180).

Similarly, as Endo (1994) puts it, 'all societies exists [sic] for each person, and for the realisation of his/her dignity'. As such, the choice of the word 'subsidiarity' (the phrase used in the papal encyclical is 'the principle of "subsidiary function"') itself is indicative of a positive rather than a merely negative implication. The word is derived from the Latin word '*subsidium*', which means 'help, relief; reinforcement'. Ken Endo points out that 'in Latin, the word *subsidium* or *subsidiarius* initially meant something in reserve, or more specifically, reserve troops' (Endo 1994). Endo (1994) also considers that the term was then used for the

application of troop reinforcement or fresh supply of troops. Later the term acquired the broader sense of assistance or aid. In this derivation of the word, we already see that the notion of subsidiarity can contain positive connotations, as it envisaged of 'the intervention of forces for the benefit of those in trouble' (Endo 1994).

Another Catholic commentator, John Cronin, argues for the breadth of the understanding of the principle. He considers that, as well as:

> the negative but important duty of protecting smaller groups from the progressive encroachment of a giant power, whether it be private or governmental (there is also) the positive obligation of promoting self-governing functional societies on all levels (Cronin 1950:219).

and that:

> the state has the right and duty to intervene when any situation threatens the common good (Cronin 1950:534).

Again, another Catholic commentator, Scott Kelley, speaks of 'non-arrogation', or the obligation of a higher order community not to interfere in the internal life of a community of lower order, and 'empowerment' (the obligation of the higher order community to assist the lower in case of need). He also calls 'collaborative pluralism' a third constitutive element of the principle. By this, he is referring to 'the mutually beneficial relationships that emerge from interactions among various intermediary institutions' (that is, those institutions between the individual and the state) (Kelley 2010:8–9). This would seem to hint at the kind of partnership and networking practised by Landcare, which will be discussed in the final section of this chapter. For the moment, I wish to stress that the original intent of the principle was positive (active help and support) rather than merely negative (non-intervention), although that negative element also remains a necessary and inevitable implication of the principle.

This book shows the importance of local self-reliance. In Chapter 6, Graham Marshall and Lisa Lobry de Bruyn argue that evidence from researchers working in the related traditions of self-determination theory and motivation crowding theory suggests that individuals are more likely to cooperate voluntarily, or autonomously, with governance structures the more they perceive them as supportive of their autonomy rather than controlling. In Chapter 31, Allan and Michele Dale also argue that:

> national governments always run the risk of significant local disenfranchisement and indeed secessionist movements when there is not a strong interplay between national policy and programs and delivery systems that greatly enhance regional or local self-reliance.

A hierarchical or non-hierarchical concept?

The subsidiarity principle therefore does not just refer to a kind of inverted hierarchy in which central governments devolve what decision-making they can to regional governments, regional governments do the same to local governments, and local governments do the same to individuals or small groups. It is not just a form of decentralisation. An example that has been used to illustrate the difference between decentralisation or this kind of hierarchical devolution of power and the principle of subsidiarity is the action taken by the United States Federal Government and Supreme Court in overriding the authority of state governments to enforce desegregation in certain states of the United States. A prominent example of this is the *Brown v. Board of Education*

of Topeka decision of the Supreme Court in 1954. This decision determined that racially segregated schools were unconstitutional, and it required schools to integrate. This was a decision at a federal level that overrode the decision-making authority of states. In response, in 1957, the governor of Arkansas, Orval Faubus, deployed the Arkansas National Guard to block desegregation at Little Rock Central High School by physically blocking African-American students from entering the school. At the request of Woodrow Wilson Mann, the mayor of Little Rock, President Eisenhower sent in federal troops to enforce integration and protect the nine black students who were the first to enrol at the school. This was a case of a central government overriding an intermediate government in support of a more local government and in support of disempowered citizens.

It should be added that this was not a simple case of intervention from above. It was carried out at the request of the mayor of Little Rock and in liaison with the Little Rock branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), an organisation largely based on voluntary local groups. It was therefore a kind of partnership between the local community and the United States Federal Government that got around the failed subsidiarity of an intermediate level of authority on behalf of people at the grassroots level. This is clearly not consistent with decentralisation or with many forms of the devolution of power, but it is fully consistent with the principle of subsidiarity. The principle of subsidiarity is about *optimal* support for each level of society, and most importantly, for the small-scale, local grassroots level, whether this support comes from the level immediately above, or from some higher level of authority, or indeed from some non-governmental body. Further illustrating this point, in Chapter 31, Allan and Michele Dale argue that:

> subsidiarity is a significantly different concept to devolution in the policy and delivery context. Societies that just leave local and regional communities entirely to fend for themselves without demonstrable support for strong capacity building for local self-determination can often foster fractures within the relationships between the nation-state and specific geographic areas or ethnic communities.

Problematic interpretations of the principle

Not everyone interprets the subsidiarity principle in this more holistic way. David A. Bosnich from the Acton Institute, founded by a conservative Catholic priest in the United States, in describing the principle of subsidiarity states the following:

> This tenet holds that nothing should be done by a larger and more complex organization which can be done as well by a smaller and simpler organization. In other words, any activity which can be performed by a more decentralized entity should be. This principle is a bulwark of limited government and personal freedom. It conflicts with the passion for centralization and bureaucracy characteristic of the Welfare State (Bosnich 2010).

This truncated view of the principle of subsidiarity would have left the African Americans in Little Rock without any recourse. Ken Endo describes this kind of understanding of the principle as being a 'territorialized' understanding, since central governments, regional governments and local governments are territorial entities. In contrast to this, he describes such bodies as, for example, the NAACP, the nine students who were seeking to attend the high school, and the African-American community itself (and other such local communitarian groups and civil rights groups) as non-territorial. He argues that the territorial interpretation became dominant as the principle was drawn into the discussions regarding the European Union (Endo 1994). This territorial interpretation of subsidiarity can also be found in other discourses, particularly in the United States where, as with the

Acton Institute, the principle is associated with federalism and is used to argue for small government. Endo points out on the contrary that 'we can safely state that the principle of subsidiarity was born to protect and promote non-territorial associations' (Endo 1994:639). Or, as Catholic theologian Vincent Miller argues, subsidiarity:

> envisions not a small government, but a strong, limited one that encourages intermediate bodies and organizations (families, community groups, unions, businesses) to contribute to the common good. It envisions a strong government that protects individuals and small intermediate bodies from the actions of large organizations; not just the state but corporations as well (Miller 2012).

The grassroots, the small scale and the local

In conclusion, the principle of subsidiarity is not just a form of decentralisation or devolution of power, nor is it just about the appropriate levels for decision-making. Rather, it is a principle that advocates that the whole of society be ordered towards sustaining, supporting and empowering the individual, the local, the grassroots or the communal. It is a principle grounded in a view of the human being as being characterised through two fundamental dimensions. One is that, as a being with reason and free will and therefore with the capacity and the right to exercise that reason and free will, every individual has the right to exercise those attributes to the full extent, or at least to the extent that such exercise does not cause harm to others. In other words, each person is to be as autonomous as possible, and to be in charge of their own life. Only in this way can a person reach their own personal fulfilment.

The second dimension of the human being that provides a grounding for the principle of subsidiarity is the essential inter-relatedness of human beings. The human being is essentially oriented towards relatedness. The autonomy called for then is not an isolated autonomy but a very connected autonomy, consistent with the idea of a 'nested community-based system of governance' mentioned by Marshall and Lobry de Bruyn in Chapter 6. A similar combination of autonomy and connectedness applies to the various kinds of communities (for example, family, life communities such as villages and towns, and communities of interest) that people naturally form as part of any organised society. Organised society exists to serve both the individual *and* these natural groupings. It should therefore never override or displace them (except insofar as this is necessary to protect the same autonomy and interconnectedness and the wellbeing of other individuals or communities).

For this reason, subsidiarity is not just referring to the matter of how governments function. It enables consideration of human interaction among individuals, groups and communities relating to and connecting with each other while fully respecting and supporting the initiative, individuality and autonomy of the other. It does not merely apply to organisations related to state-driven governance, but to every kind of human organisation, such as, for example, groups that act for the betterment of others. It asserts that in any form of human or social interaction, respect for the autonomy and connectedness of people is essential. Further, it is not just an ideological, partisan or idealistic theory about how things ought to be. Rather, it is a criterion for making things work. Allan and Michele Dale's comment on Australian landcare in Chapter 31 is likely to apply to many other areas as well:

> Australian landcare originally emerged as a result of higher level policy failures to recognise and arrest land degradation in more developed agricultural landscapes within Australia, and most particularly to deal with soil erosion in cropping lands and the insidious spread of soil salinity. In many localities, this movement for building local

self-reliance is credited with preventing the economic, social and ecological collapse of several agricultural production systems, regions and local communities (citing Cary and Webb 2001).

In the Australian landcare case, what could not be achieved in a top-down policy manner was achieved through the nested action of autonomy of local communities. The success or failure of development in poor areas has been shown both by experience and research to hinge on the extent to which people are enabled to take control of their own affairs. This may require support, but it is this support that empowers rather than takes control. In Chapter 10, Clinton Muller and Joy Tukahirwa state:

> The nature of such development programs and initiatives have been criticised as being overly prescriptive, and lacking inductive participatory approaches that engage communities in identifying development solutions (citing Burkey 1993; Schuurman 1993).

Approaches that aim at removing impediments and making resources and, more importantly, opportunities available for people who then take control of their own development have proven to be vastly more successful than approaches that try to impose solutions from the outside. With regard to conflict resolution, the approach of the Nonviolent Peaceforce is an example. This organisation makes no attempt to bring a solution to conflicting parties. Rather, they use international witnesses to create a venue where representatives from the conflicting parties can come together in a situation in which their safety is ensured. These representatives then negotiate a solution themselves. Without outside help to create a peaceful venue, a solution is impossible, but the outside help must aim at enabling the conflicting parties to achieve their own solution, rather than trying to bring solutions to them (Nonviolent Peaceforce n.d.).

The treatment of various addictions is another case in point. While there are known problems with the approach, Alcoholics Anonymous and the many programs that are based on it, at one level support the individual to take responsibility for their own recovery. There are no rules, instructions, teachers or counsellors, no coercion or compulsion, just the experience of others to learn from. Each person takes what they choose from the experience of others and are fully in charge of their own recovery. Each group is also autonomous.

These examples of poverty, conflict and addiction are important. All three are intractable problems that have stymied the best efforts of experts and professionals. But when the combination of autonomy and connectedness is achieved, when each person or community can take charge of their own affairs – not in isolation but in supportive relatedness – change becomes possible. Neither taking over nor leaving people to their own resources provides a solution. Neither domination/subservience nor isolation/abandonment is the answer. Autonomy and connectedness, help that supports and enables but does not take over or override, is what is advocated by the principle of subsidiarity. As Muller and Tukahirwa argue in Chapter 10:

> Programs have in the past assumed that smallholder farmers are organised and capable of articulating informed demands to external service providers. However, experience indicates that without a deliberate empowerment effort, farmers are often subjected to manipulation by these external service providers, which results in limited access and outcomes from the extension services (citing Government of Uganda 2005). This emphasises the need for farmer empowerment as an important element in development of demand-driven advisory services, enabling farmers to

make their own decisions, rather than blindly adopting recommendations from others (citing Friis-Hansen and Duveskog 2012).

The impact of this approach, or one that empowers rather than absorbing, dominating or controlling, is described by Sonia Williams in Chapter 4. She argues:

> Landcare … tends to embody an ethic and process that allows for those affected by change to be a *valued* part of that change process. It represents the enabling of communities, who together, identify and understand the issues that affect themselves and their communities. Through supportive processes, Landcare helps them to develop solutions appropriate to their local situation. In aggregate, such local solutions help to meet global needs. Landcare builds trusted partnerships between all involved in dealing with the issue at hand, shares knowledge and encourages innovation … In short, it is a recognition that *the people in the landscape* constitute the most important factor in NRM [natural resource management].

Greater power centralisation within society and less local self-reliance can have significant implications for the timeliness of responses, usually leading to unnecessary escalation of the problem at hand. This might be best recognised when there are low levels of local self-reliance and when highly centralised governments are tardy in their response in post-disaster scenarios. There are countless examples in the governance literature of governments becoming increasingly inert or 'constipated' as more and more decisions are retracted closer to the top of the power tree. A second major problem simply emerges through greater inefficiencies and cost implications arising from less individual and local self-reliance. This, for example, is well understood in the context of health budgets internationally. Greater self-reliance emerges from people looking after their own personal health, and communities taking responsibility for ensuring all individuals have good nutrition and are active. Similar outcomes are understood across environmental, social and economic policy domains.

Lessons for the landcare experience

The importance of landcare for the principle of subsidiarity

The examples of the role of subsidiarity briefly referred to above work for poverty reduction, conflict resolution and the treatment of addiction. They show how beneficial the combination of autonomy and connectedness can be. While these experiences are helpful in demonstrating the value, and indeed the proper understanding of the principle, they do not shed a great deal of light on the all-important issue of how subsidiarity can be applied in complex governance systems. In fact, it must be said that there has not been a great deal of success in applying the principle within such complex systems. The institution from which the principle originally found support, the Catholic Church, certainly does not have a good record for implementation. The European Union has attempted to implement it, but Brexit happened precisely because of a sense of local disempowerment.

This is where Landcare becomes exceedingly important as an exemplar. Landcare is a form of implementation of the subsidiarity principle that links local groups with all levels of governance for landscape management in a way that maintains the autonomy of the local groups but provides them with support from government, businesses and experts. It is therefore an example of an implementation of the principle of subsidiarity that relates directly to a wider complex governance system. At least in Australia, it is a nationwide movement and includes federal, state and local government in a network of support for

local groups. To the best of my knowledge, it is one of few examples in the world of a nationwide and essentially effective implementation (with the degree of this effectiveness fluctuating according to the interest of the various levels of government at the time) of the principle of subsidiarity that incorporates multiple tiers of government in a network of support for local activities and initiatives.

As many of the authors in this book have made clear, Landcare has shown success. Landcare therefore constitutes an important example of implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. In Chapter 4, Williams points out from her experience in the Harnham Landcare group that:

> local communities became empowered to make a significant contribution to global sustainability through increased understanding and ownership of solutions to their own local issues … coordinators have been placed within host Landcare or similar networks … Where some level of support continued to exist under the regional delivery model, these groups are now regaining momentum.

Consequently, a study of how landcare in Australia works, what makes it work, what has hindered its effectiveness and what adaptations have been developed by Australian landcare in response to the problems it has encountered would be invaluable for all who are interested in seeing the principle of subsidiarity implemented more broadly in society. In a sense, this book is an attempt to achieve this. I argue in this chapter that there are two main areas in which the experience of landcare sheds light on methods of implementing the subsidiarity principle. One is the role of partnership and networking and the other is what I will call the need in governance for a feedback loop that brings the voices of the grassroots level to the awareness of the decision-making levels of society. As Allan and Michele Dale suggest in Chapter 31:

> Many complex problems facing the sustainable use of natural resources, for example, have emerged because of longstanding and outdated local philosophies and cultures that may no longer be useful in the modern context. Through people in the local community coming together around acceptance and analysis of shared problems, a social framework for the injection of scientific and new knowledge is often secured.

The role of networking and partnership

As Lisa Robins has pointed out in Chapter 30:

> The story of Landcare is one of partnerships … horizontally (within levels, like collaborations across Landcare groups or individual Landcare groups working with local businesses) and vertically (between levels, like collaborations across tiers of government) … 56% of all Landcare-type groups in Victoria were part of a larger Landcare network in 2009, and 'there was evidence that these networks substantially enhanced the capacity of groups to engage other partners … networks of groups typically engaged more landholders and volunteers, developed partnerships with other organisations, operated across larger areas, managed larger budgets, and accomplished more on-ground work across a wider range of topics' (citing Curtis et al. 2014).

In Chapter 4, Williams also sheds some light on how this networking developed:

> The social fabric developed under the Decade of Landcare included district-based support staff (facilitators or coordinators) who were often already embedded members of the community. Coordinators built networks that became trusted hubs for information exchange and program development and delivery, and they supported the

groups' drivers and champions … the success of Landcare as a widespread movement acting as a change agent within local communities was the result of a deliberate program of government support delivered under the Decade of Landcare plan. This plan provided the infrastructural support for the development and operation of groups, empowering them to face the issues that were pertinent to them.

Robins spells out the process in more detail:

> At the time of the announcement of the Decade of Landcare, the government added another partnership to the mix in the form of Landcare Australia [Landcare Australia Limited] with its mandate of promoting Landcare and seeking private sector sponsors … There now exists a National Landcare Network, formed in 2011, to 'foster a cohesive and cooperative forum to collaborate, support, advocate for and add value to Landcare and other community, volunteer natural resource management groups; foster strategic partnerships; celebrate Landcare achievements; represent community-based Landcare at the national level; and speak as the national voice in the development of Landcare and broader natural resource management policy' (citing Love 2012:50).

Robins further attests to the value of this networking and partnership, while Allan and Michele Dale in Chapter 31 also stress the importance of partnership by saying:

> Landcare builds on the principle that 'a problem shared is a problem solved'. Farmers facing rising saline water tables, for example, are simply unable to resolve such complex problems through individual actions within their own farm boundaries. Solutions to problems like these require collective and evidence-based action at the landscape scale (for example, through extensive reforestation of upper slopes and coordinated drainage).

It seems fair to say that Landcare has shown the role that networking (cooperation between Landcare and similar groups) and partnership (with other types of groups and agencies, the various levels of government, businesses, schools academics, experts, etc.) have in supporting and empowering local autonomous groups. While that includes networking and partnerships with the various levels of government and with academic institutions, experts, businesses, non-government organisations and others, it also includes networking among Landcare groups themselves. Networking with governments, experts and business can be valuable in terms of gaining information and skills. Networking with other groups brings a cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices, a clarification of understanding through dialogue, and a very empowering form of support that comes when one is not required to stand alone.

I would suggest that the Landcare experience indicates that both kinds of networking and partnership are essential for the implementation of the principle of subsidiarity. Furthermore, I concur with Allan and Michele Dale who argue in Chapter 31 that 'through Landcare-like movements building local social capital, the prospect of resolving shared problems improves, contributing a bit-part in the resolution of recognised national policy problems'. This subsidiarity-focused experience of the value of networking and partnership is relevant to many other social movements. To the extent that non-government organisations and community groups that work for the betterment of the environment or of society do so in an isolated way, they will miss out on the empowerment that can come from partnership and networking. It may be that certain individuals and groups are hesitant about partnership and networking because they fear a loss of autonomy. Landcare, however, provides an active model where connectedness can be achieved without sacrificing autonomy. It is therefore a model that removes the need to sacrifice connectedness to preserve autonomy.

The Landcare experience demonstrates how much can be experienced by governments taking up the initiative to establish networks and partnership with local autonomous groups, non-government organisations and others, particularly in the areas of social welfare and environmental protection. Further, since one of the reasons that many individuals or groups may be hesitant about networking and partnership is that they are concerned about the amount of time it will consume, there may be a place for people and groups whose goal is not to carry out some particular social or environmental activity, but rather to create the links of networking and partnership between and among individuals and groups working in a specific field. In this way, it may be possible to achieve the kind of institutions necessary for the implementation of subsidiarity in that field, even when there is no initiative or support from government bodies. Achieving this may be a way of achieving an implementation of the principle of subsidiarity from the bottom up. The system of facilitators and coordinators that Australian landcare has developed may be considered a prime example of how such networking and partnership can be implemented in support of local autonomous groups. In this publication, Muller and Tukahirwa (Chapter 10) and Andres Arnalds, Jonina Thorlaksdottir, Brian Slater and Fred Yikii (Chapter 24) have shown the effectiveness of this type of networking in Kenya and Iceland respectively. In Iceland, that extends to the generation of knowledge through partnership between researchers and on the ground practitioners.

Landcare provides an active model where connectedness can be achieved without sacrificing autonomy.

Creating a feedback loop for good governance systems

Landcare also shows that, while some governments may be very responsive to and supportive of landcare, successive governments may be less aware and less attentive. Williams points out in Chapter 4 that this is currently the case:

> This innovation has largely been forgotten in recent Australian Government investment models. Without this locally focused support, many Landcare networks and groups have withered … The trust in government programs and government staff as partners … has been lost.

This experience demonstrates the need for a system in which the voices of the smallest scale and most local levels of society can be heard at every level of government. It needs a feedback loop that effectively brings to the governing levels an awareness of societal realities, the perspectives, needs and aspirations of the other levels, and most importantly, of the grassroots level. The Victorian Landcare Council would appear to be a case in point. In 2008, Landcare members disenchanted with Landcare's marginalisation formed the advocacy-based Victorian Landcare Council in response to Landcare's loss of funding and marginalisation. The National Landcare Network was formed shortly after to do the same at national level.

That there should be ebbs and flows to the importance placed on the subsidiarity-based aspects of Landcare by various governments over time should be anticipated. In Chapter 26, Rob Youl points out that:

As governments are subject to so many requests and demands, representing the needs of Landcare in the contested arenas of national and state politics is important to ensure the movement's viability and reputation.

Given that governmental decision-making is constrained by policy frameworks, deadlines and budgets, as well as the preconceptions, preoccupations and predilections of the individuals involved, it is not enough to say that the government should simply listen to the people. Subsidiarity requires and needs to support an institutional structure for focused representation. In introducing the principle of subsidiarity, I used the example of the intervention of the Federal Government of the United States in the city of Little Rock, Arkansas. It is important to note that this intervention did not simply come out of the blue as an initiative originating from the Federal Government. Rather, it came about because of the activities of the African-American journalist Daisy Bates, the president of the Arkansas chapter of the NAACP, who kept the Federal Government informed of the situation. As mentioned, the mayor of Little Rock also appealed for federal intervention.

Without this upward process of informing and pressuring the different governing levels of society from the grassroots level, it is unlikely that the principle of subsidiarity can be effectively implemented. This seems to be borne out by the fact that such activities as those of the Victorian Landcare Council became necessary. Research on the experiences of this council and any other similar activities may help shed light on how this kind of feedback loop can become more effective. This would need to include research into the ebbs and flows in the attitudes of governments in Australia towards Landcare and into the ways that Landcare has had to adapt to less interest, less funding and at times, the establishment of other programs that overlap with Landcare. Clearly, the same problems are likely to occur for any implementation of the principle of subsidiarity that link local activities with government.

Networks supporting Landcare

The collaborations formed between Landcare groups in Australia have facilitating learnings between landholders, but there is much less attention given to facilitating learning between Landcare groups around the business of working in a local community and with government. How to organise in communities, how to develop partnerships with government agencies and industry, and how to influence agendas both locally and at a government level represent an essential social knowledge that underpins work with land managers. However, this social knowledge does not move readily beyond the localities where it develops. Landcare networks in Australia have also failed to change the regional natural resource management (NRM) governance system in which they operate. Landcare members and staff have often complained about being marginalised by decision-making organised around government and regional priorities rather than local priorities, but they have been slow to speak out and find ways to change that marginalisation.

Since 2015, Victorian Landcare's volunteer-managed services and advocacy organisation, Landcare Victoria, has sponsored a project called Community Learning for Environmental Action (CLEA) to develop peer-to-peer learning within the landcare movement. Funding has come from the Natural Resources Conservation League, a philanthropic organisation committed to capacity building in the community environment sector. CLEA has developed a multilevel strategy to strengthen peer-to-peer learning. If Landcare is to provide a useful local self-reliance approach in realising global sustainability, and in achieving the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals in particular, similar to the CLEA approach, attention and effort in other country contexts will need to extend beyond the many success

stories of individual groups to consider the status of, and how to build and sustain, the necessary supportive policy settings and institutional arrangements.

Landcare is also not, as many believe, a spontaneous community volunteer movement, even though many original groups formed this way. Rather, the success of Landcare as a widespread movement acting as a change agent within local communities (now across the globe) was the result of a deliberate program of government support delivered under the Decade of Landcare Plan, which provided the infrastructural support for the development and operation of groups, empowering them to face the issues that were pertinent to them.

This chapter suggests that in any societal governance system, there will be constant forces or tendencies seeking to centralise power and to implicitly or explicitly diminish local self-reliance. This is often seen through the development and delivery of government programs that are reactive, short-term and oriented towards influencing the voting behaviour of key political constituencies. Such programs often explicitly diminish the building of local self-reliance and eschew the principle of subsidiarity.

If Landcare is to provide a useful local self-reliance approach in realising global sustainability, and achieving the global Sustainable Development Goals in particular, attention in other country contexts will need to extend beyond the many success stories of individual groups to considering the status of, and how to build and sustain, the necessary supportive policy settings and institutional arrangements. Networking and coordination offer interesting and worthwhile jobs to many rural people, including young graduates and older women. Indeed, these experiences often create a springboard to middle-level positions and beyond, and they sometimes direct individuals into research.

Robins (2018) has cautioned that the Landcare story is not one of outright success or failure, venturing that 'it has been thwarted by misguided policy settings and associated institutional arrangements, which has undermined realisation of its full potential'. The evidence suggests that landcare could have been (and could still be) much more successful in Australia with better policy settings and institutional arrangements. The subsidiarity concept, however, reminds us that not all change has bottom-up or top-down qualities, but that an alignment of policy vision, strategies and delivery systems should be polycentric and vertically integrated, and that local self-reliance movements can inform national policy, while national policy might be able to foster and enhance the strength and resilience of local self-reliance movements.

There is some emerging insight into the increasing need for legitimate third-party advocates within the system of governance for complex governance domains (see Dale 2015). If the role of such advocates is accepted and supported by different layers of government and key stakeholders within the policy domain, then the opportunity exists for someone in the system to agitate for continuous improvements in the way the governance system operates. We refer to such a party here as a 'systems doctor' – an independent but collaborative agent charged with bringing key players in the governance system (from policymakers to service agents and clients) together to help analyse problems facing the system in delivering its intended policy outcomes. Such a party could also help those responsible for the system to design and institutionalise adaptive reform. These arrangements would need to focus on understanding healthy governance systems, and in theory, should incorporate the need to strongly build subsidiarity (and local self-reliance) into the system. While rare, such arrangements do exist, more so in some sectors than others. In the justice system of many countries, for example, the coroner's or ombudsman's office may play such a role, but these arrangements are generally not focused on 'whole

of system' analysis and the implementation of continuous reform. In New South Wales in Australia, the state's NRM portfolio recently ran a natural resources commission, while the Australian Government ran a national water commission. Both institutions have since been disbanded, suggesting that the position of such third-party arrangements can be tenuous if there is not a strong political commitment to open and accountable governance and continuous policy improvement.

In building the bigger picture concerning the wider impact of subsidiarity, Landcare-type movements frequently espouse the notion that, while the actions taken are essentially local, when viewed together, these local responses can collectively add up to effective global change, building the sense that more national or global problems can be manageably solved through building local self-reliance networks. In the context of complex national policy problems, this again reminds us of the subsidiarity principle, and particularly that the resolution of national or even global problems might have very local foundations.

Once a shared and global social narrative begins emerging around the importance of solving locally agreed problems, the diffusion of knowledge can start to seep beyond the innovators and leaders who have taken the initiative to move things forward. Landcare-like movements often actively diffuse new approaches and set the foundations for more collective action from within the community itself. Many governments have also experimented in more top-down and regulatory approaches to changing local behaviours, often with more limited success and at a much higher cost than mobilising and normalising local community action.

Conclusion

In the period from the 18th to the 20th centuries, democratic systems were introduced into most middle-income and high-income countries and many other countries with a view to creating, in the words of Abraham Lincoln, 'government of the people, by the people, for the people'. Few would argue today that the democratic system we have has achieved that. How do we get democracy out of its present stultified state and closer to the goal for which it was originally intended? I believe that the principle of subsidiarity may provide an answer to this, but only if it is understood in the positive sense and not just as some form of decentralisation, devolution of power, centralised federalism or small government. Rather, it must be understood as support for and empowerment of the small scale, the local, the grassroots. The experience of Landcare globally suggests that this can best be achieved if a real system of networking and partnership is developed that will not only strengthen and support individuals and autonomous local groups but will also serve as a feedback loop that ensures that the realities and perceptions of the grassroots are reflected at the governing levels of society.

Landcare is the best example of this that I know. By articulating what Landcare is and how it works in relation to local groups and government structures, it is probable that a great deal of light can be shed on how a society that is truly responsive to the grassroots can be achieved. To fully spell out what Landcare has to offer as an example of cohesive implementation of the principle of subsidiarity, more research is needed. The processes of Landcare itself need to be thoroughly studied as do the ebbs and flows in the attitudes towards and support for Landcare from the state and federal governments. An articulation of all this is likely to help spread Landcare to countries in which it does not yet exist. It is also likely to enable other activities for social and environmental betterment to learn from the experience of Landcare, and it may be a powerful help in finding a way to revitalise democracy.

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