BEST PRACTICE GUIDE

Sup-sup Gardens

Introduction

Growing crops well and practising sustainable land management (SLM) is important for the health of people, animals and our landscape in the Solomon Islands. The health of our land depends on what farmers do on the land. It also depends on the climate, and what other agricultural workers, such as foresters, can do on the land. Farmers can control the health of the land by using good farming practices on their gardens and plantations. These elements are crucial to food security and strengthening local communities.

Through the Sup-sup Gardens project, farmers worked with Kastom Gardens on food security programs in all nine provinces of the Solomon Islands, alongside various donors. The aim of the Sup-sup Gardens project was addressing food security and nutrition issues and improving the livelihoods of the local people. Farmer organisations were also supported by capacity-building training on good governance and strengthening income generation.

Challenges facing Solomon Islands farmers

Farmers in Solomon Islands face a range of challenges, such as:

- financial challenges
- reliability and cost of seeds
- inability to afford agriculture tools and equipment
- pests and diseases
- poor supply of a variety of planting material
- lack of ongoing support
- climate change, which includes shifting weather patterns and growing times.

In the Solomon Islands, soil fertility, or the ability of the soil to produce good crops, is declining. Valuable topsoil is also being eroded by wind and rain. Floods and drought and not looking after the soil make this worse. These problems are being exacerbated by climate change.

Additionally, farmers face financial challenges, with most sustainable land management projects short-term and not focused on building sustained commitment to better farming practices. Other economic factors, such as the cost of tools, seeds and equipment, prevent farmers from boosting their production and controlling pests and diseases. Many also face great difficulty in transporting and selling their produce at the market.

What practices were used in Sup-sup Gardens?

The health of a garden depends on what we do in the garden, and also what happens on areas around the garden or village. Good land management practices make good yields more likely.

Working in all nine provinces of the Solomon Islands, the Sup-sup Gardens project promoted a range of sustainable land management practices, including:

- ending slash-and-burning
- green manuring and composting
- growing cover crops
- crop/land rotations
- controlling soil erosion with contour planting, mulching and planting vetiver grass
- minimal tillage
- growing of trees and agroforestry.

Many of these practices focussed on looking after the soil, which is a key part of working the land for the future and essential to strengthening village-based food security in Solomon Islands.

Part of the Sup-sup Gardens project was making better use of kitchen and backyard gardens, which also enhances sustainable land management. Raised garden beds can make use of limited space, and further benefits include:

- increased availability of vegetables to those who can't participate in community garden projects
- women being able to garden while looking after children at home
- recycling household plastic waste for garden containers
- being able to protect gardens from chickens and pigs.

Project challenges

Many farmers in the Solomon Islands already practice sustainable land management techniques, but a lack of sustained investment in long-term projects and low interest in farming itself created difficulties in expanding these through the Sup-sup Gardens project. A lack of knowledge and skills in the agriculture extension officers made demonstrations of new farming technologies difficult, while the long-standing custom of fertiliser, herbicide and pesticide usage and aggressive promotion of these products by suppliers were hard to overcome.

We also saw the lack of incentives encouraging farmers to convert to ecosystems services approaches, making it harder for them to adopt such practices, given the competing demands of economic gains and environmental quality.

There were also environmental challenges to overcome, including increased crop damage from pests and diseases, high rainfall, declined soil fertility and other climate change-related impacts

Project benefits

Farmers and communities across the Solomon Islands have seen significant benefits from the Sup-sup Gardens project. Importantly, there has been an increased maintenance of soil fertility, including the prevention of soil erosion and surface water evaporation, which has led to an improvement in soil ecosystem function and services.

There has also been decreased usage of chemical fertilizers and pesticides and an enhancement of key pollinator species (e.g., bees), plus better management of pests and diseases.

Overall, the project has resulted in a sustainable supply of food for people living across the Solomon Islands – particularly in the rural villages, where they often cannot access imported foods.

How could this project be scaled up/how could others get involved?

This project could be scaled up by partnering with government, NGOs and other food security intervention groups to help implement more widespread and holistic food security interventions. This could also help deliver better technical training, involvement in policy discussions and better mapping of resources with other groups working on food security.

Working alongside and supporting other stakeholders like community groups, church organisations, women's groups and youth groups could see better adoption of these practices into communities across the Solomon Islands.