



CASE STUDY

Learning to grow

By Julia Marango + Elissa Webster

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

CARE International in Vanuatu is helping communities across Tafea to build their resilience to disasters and climate change. The Resilience program includes a project to build demonstration vegetable gardens in schools to introduce young people and their communities to new crops and farming techniques to improve food security for the future.

Meet Kalgy

It's been dry in Isavai on the island of Aniwa for last couple of years – ever since Tropical Cyclone Pam tore through Vanuatu in March 2015, leaving an El Nino-induced drought in its wake. A dry phase is bad news for farmers anywhere, but in Aniwa, where there is no constant water source and the only water supply comes almost exclusively from harvesting rain into tanks, it's disastrous.

Without water, crops can't be irrigated. Without irrigation, crops are much more likely to fail. And when crops fail, food becomes more scarce, nutrition decreases, and health declines. To combat this cycle, CARE International is working with communities across Tanna, Erromango and Aniwa – including Isavai – to help build resistance to the impacts of droughts, disasters and other climate shocks by diversifying crops and improving farming techniques to increase food security.

For Kalgy, an agriculture teacher in Isavai, it's a project close to heart. He has been working with students at the Irumori Primary School in Isavai to share his knowledge about farming using a teacher's garden, a long walk away from the classrooms. The garden lies in full sun. It has rained only once since he planted it and there hasn't been enough water for watering the seedlings. Teaching agriculture has been tough – but since CARE began building demonstration gardens in Aniwa in May 2016, things are getting easier.

In partnership with the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) and with the support of USAID, CARE has introduced 10 communities in Tafea province in southern Vanuatu to a range of new agricultural methods by establishing demonstration gardens. The communities provide lots of land, either in schools or elsewhere within the community, DARD provides a range of hybrid



Demonstration gardens with an array of vegetables are being established in communities across Tafea province. © Mark Chew/CARE

plants, which have been especially produced to require minimal water to flourish, and CARE provides seeds for a range of vegetables, most of which are varieties that are not currently grown in the community's gardens.

Over two days of training in each community, a DARD officer and CARE staff work with local community members to clear the land and build fences using the timber removed from the plots, or other locally sourced materials, then plant the plants and seeds, using the Climate Smart Agriculture Handbook, developed by DARD, CARE and Vanuatu Agriculture and Research and Training Centre (VARTC), as a guide. The demonstration gardens include a nursery for small seedlings, made from layers of readily available coconut husks, and an array of vegetables, including yam, taro, kumala, cabbage, beans, tomato and lettuce. Providing a wide assortment of varieties enables the community to experiment to see which will survive and thrive in their area. Once the crops have been harvested, community members are able to use seedlings, root stock and grafts from the successful varieties to diversify their own gardens.

In Isavai, one of the demonstration gardens is inside the school boundary and students as well as teachers, members of the school committee and the wider community helped to build it. The experience has been eye-opening for many, especially the students.

"The children never knew how to raise a tomato because every time they see a tomato, it has been brought from Tanna," says Kalgy. "But now, they can observe a tomato from seed till harvest. The children know now how to look after the vegetables."

According to Kalgy, the students are now leading the way in putting their new skills into action – ensuring their climate-responsive knowledge will impact the community far beyond today.

"It has been interesting to watch the children enjoying their time planting the vegetables without the support of teachers or adults. The children are taking charge of mulching, composting and pruning in the demonstration plot without the supervision of a teacher, and they seem to be doing it perfectly well."

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