



The Regeneration of Tongan People in Aotearoa

**Fakaili pulopula he
kelekele, telia na'a
mole e fonua**

Nurture the soil lest the land be lost

Maa'imoa 'a 'Ene 'Afio Kuini Salote Tupou III

**Tama Tonga ē pe'i tuli kaveinga
Taumu'a kihe fetu'u ngingila
Tama Tonga ē ma'u pe ho loto
Ke lau ē taumu'a ngaholo
Tama Tonga ē fusi a'u ho'o fuka
'Ulitu'u kihe moto ē fonua**

A composition from Her Majesty Queen Salote Tupou III

**Child of Tonga, follow the celestial
Aim the bow at the shinning stars
Child of Tonga, hold fast your heart
Count the winds, all for swift sailing
Child of Tonga, fully hoist your flag
Sail to the motto, the land and people**

Foreword: Why This Plan Matters

It is a tremendous honour to contribute this foreword to the National Tongan Plan 2025.

As a proud Tongan who has had the privilege of representing Aotearoa New Zealand on the world stage, I have always carried my culture, faith, and family at the heart of everything I do. My journey as an athlete has taught me the power of resilience, unity, and unwavering community support—values that are woven into the fabric of our people.

The Regeneration of Tongans in Aotearoa is both a vision and a call to action. This plan recognizes the strength and potential of our Tongan community and affirms the importance of holding fast to our cultural identity while embracing new opportunities. In every training session, competition, and moment of triumph or challenge, I have been guided by the wisdom and encouragement of those who came before me, and inspired by the hopes of the next generation. I see those same hopes reflected in the aspirations of this plan.

Our language, traditions, and sense of belonging are treasures that connect us across oceans and generations. By investing in our families, celebrating our achievements, and supporting one another, we create the conditions for Tongan excellence to flourish in Aotearoa and beyond.

I commend this plan to our leaders, families, and communities, as well as to all those who share in the journey of regeneration. May it be a beacon for our people, now and for generations to come.

Mālō ‘aupito,

Valerie Adams

Dame Valerie Adams, DNZM, MBE

Olympic Champion
& Proud Daughter of Tonga



Preface: Our Story Begins

Fakaili pulopula he kelekele, telia na'a mole' e fonua.

Nurture the soil lest the land be lost.

This Tongan proverb captures the heart and purpose of the National Tongan Plan 2025. It reminds us that the wellbeing of a people—our identity, culture, and collective future—is sustained only when we tend carefully to the foundations that nourish us.

This strategic plan arises from a journey of deep reflection, talanoa, and collaboration across Aotearoa. It is rooted in the proud heritage of Tongans who have built lives, families, and futures here, while maintaining an unbreakable bond to our fonua in Tonga. Guided by values of regeneration, collective responsibility, and intergenerational strength, this document reflects the voices of our elders, parents, youth, practitioners, faith leaders, community champions, and regional representatives throughout the motu.

Through extensive community engagement, national surveys, and regional fono, we heard the aspirations and challenges of our people. We witnessed the resilience that continues to carry Tongans through economic hardship, housing pressures, cultural shifts, and changing social landscapes. Yet, we also heard the determination rooted in faith and identity—to ensure that our children and grandchildren inherit a thriving, connected, and empowered future.

Tu'a 'ofa atu,

Emeline Afeaki Mafile'o

Emeline Afeaki-Mafile'o, MNZM
Fofola Consultancy Ltd



The National Tongan Plan 2025 is not merely a policy framework. It is a commitment to nurture the “soil” of our community: our culture, our language, our youth, our families, our leaders, our enterprises, and the systems that surround and support us. It affirms that when we invest in strong foundations, the whole fonua flourishes—here in Aotearoa, in Tonga, and across the global Tongan diaspora.

This plan is dedicated to every person who shared their voice, insight, or hope throughout this process. Your courage, honesty, and wisdom have shaped a strategy that is both culturally grounded and future-focused—one that honours our past while regenerating the pathways for our people to thrive.

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Sacred Acknowledgements - Fakatapu

**‘Ihe loto ‘apasia kihe ‘Otua o Langi mo mamani
Tapu mo e hau o Tonga ‘Ene ‘Afio Kingi Tupou VI
Tapu mo e fale o Tupou.
Tapu mo Hou’eiki mo Ha’a Tauhi Fonua.
Tapu mo Ha’a Taki Lotu.
Faka tapu ki he Kovana Seniale, Palemia, mo e kau taki ‘o e Pule’anga Nu’u Sila
Fakatapu ki he Tangata Whenua ‘oku ‘o nautolu ‘a e kelekele ‘o Aotearoa
Fakatapu ki he ngaahi Kainga kotoa mei he Famili Pasifiki he fonua ni.
Fakatapu ki ha’a ako mo ‘ilome’a ‘oku tau tefua fakataha he fonua ni
Faka’apa ‘apa atu ki he sola mo e vulangi ‘oku tau kaunga fakapaea ‘i Aotearoa ni**

Talangata ‘iate kimautolu ‘o fai ke tu’a mama’o, kae ‘ataa ke fakahoko atu ‘a e fatongia ni.

**Fakaili pulopula he kelekele, telia na’a mole’ e fonua.
Nurture the soil lest the land be lost.**

We acknowledge tangata whenua, the Indigenous Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand, who hold ancestral authority and enduring stewardship over this land. As a Tongan community living on the whenua, we honour the guardianship, whakapapa, and spiritual mana of Māori, recognising the deep relationship between whenua and fonua that connects us as peoples of the Pacific.

We also acknowledge the leadership of the late Hon. Dame Tariana Turia, whose vision and advocacy during the establishment of Whānau Ora and Pasefika Proud strengthened Indigenous and Pacific-led approaches within the social sector. Her work laid the foundation for Pacific communities to design solutions grounded in cultural practices, identity, and aspirations—a legacy that continues to inform this National Tongan Strategy.

Since 2012, the Ministry of Social Development’s Pasefika Proud initiative has supported Pacific communities to develop culturally grounded models of wellbeing.

This strategy builds on that movement and we acknowledge the Chief Executive Officer Debbie Power for her ongoing commitment to lifting Pacific capability and ensuring communities remain central to decision-making, alongside her Deputy Chief Executive Marama Edwards for her leadership across Māori, Communities and Partnerships; Serena Curtis, General Manager for Pacific Community and Capability Programmes, for strengthening Pacific-led service development; and Jayson Tanaki, Director Pacific, for his stewardship of Pacific frameworks that uphold dignity, resilience, and family wellbeing.

We further acknowledge the foundational work established in March 2012 through Fofola e Fala kae Talanoa e Kāinga, which was developed in collaboration with Tongan elders, leaders, and practitioners across Aotearoa. Over the past decade, this framework—strengthened through Nga Vaka o Kāiga Tapu training—has guided the development of practitioner capability, service design, and culturally anchored approaches to community wellbeing. Many of the same leaders have again contributed to this strategy through regional talanoa, survey participation, and community mobilisation.

We honour the regional leaders whose engagement ensured that this strategy reflects the experiences and aspirations of Tongan families across Aotearoa. The Auckland-based community providers Kathleen Tuai-Taufoou (Siaola), Aisea Ahokovi (Taulanga U), Anahila Kanongata'a (Consultancy), Malia Hamani (Toa Pacific), Simone Latu (One Eighty Turn), and Adi Lausii-Funaki (Affirming Works), in Wellington, Sela and Lupeti Finau, Misipa Kioa, Lotu Tu'ipulotu; in Christchurch, Siale & Milika Faitotonu, Tuilavoni Lama, in Otago Finau Taungāpeau, Losa Moata'ane, Professor Dianne Sika-Paotonu.



We further acknowledge the 302 survey participants and the leaders in these rural communities, including Tevita Faka'osi, Hastings, Siesina & Penieli Latu; Timaru, Talanoa Palu; Oamaru, Holika Uhila; Tokoroa, and Tracie Mafile'o; Palmerston North, for encouraging contributions from Tongans in your regions.

Our collective stewardship, cultural leadership, and commitment to community wellbeing have been critical in shaping this national strategy. These insights, aspirations, and lived experiences have informed the direction of this strategy. Your contributions ensure that the vision presented here is grounded in community priorities and reflects a shared commitment to ensuring thriving Tongans in Aotearoa.

Mālō fau. Your resilience, leadership, and collective wisdom continue to guide the regeneration—pulopula—of our people for generations to come.

Tu'a ofa atu,

S. Taumoepeau K Veikuni

Rev. S. Taumoepeau K Veikuni, MNZM

Chairperson of

Pulopula Aotearoa Tongan National Committee

Executive Summary

The National Tongan Plan 2025 is fundamentally people-centred, shaped directly by the lived realities, voices, and wisdom of Tongans across Aotearoa.

Fakaili pulopula he kelekele, telia na'a mole e fonua—"Nurture the soil lest the land be lost." This plan reflects the belief that when we invest in our people, our communities, and our cultural foundations, we build a thriving future for generations to come.

The plan is grounded in a community-gathered evidence base, drawing on demographic data, cultural frameworks, and—most importantly—the stories and insights shared by our people. Through focus groups, one-on-one coffees, home visits, case studies, and a national survey completed by 302 contributors, families and leaders across Aotearoa shared their hopes and challenges openly. Their contributions anchor the plan in real experience, creating a strategy that reflects both national trends and the textured realities of Tongan life in Aotearoa.

Early direction emerged through leadership-led talanoa, with Tongan leaders in Tāmaki Makaurau guiding fortnightly discussions and personal engagements. These talanoa honoured the vā—our sacred relational spaces—and ensured the plan's priorities emerged from collective discernment. Leaders spoke of the pressures facing families, the resilience of our youth, the potential of regional communities, and the need for culturally grounded services. Their stewardship ensured that the plan reflects Tongan values of 'faka'apa'apa, tauhi vā, fetokoni'aki and feveitokai'aki, aligning our collective future with our cultural roots.

The development process expanded into a national conversation across the motu, meeting the community where they were. When initial engagement in Wellington had low attendance, we adapted by shifting online to ensure no region was left behind. This flexible approach was strengthened through in-person visits to Wellington, Christchurch, Dunedin, and rural hubs. Churches, schools, youth groups, sports teams, and community organisations opened their doors, enabling Tongans nationwide—both urban and rural, young and old—to shape the plan's direction.

A strong emphasis was placed on collective strengthening for future implementation. Partnerships with KIWA and the Wilberforce Foundation brought governance training and leadership support into regional communities, helping build capability and confidence among local leaders. These partnerships ensure Tongans across the country are equipped to participate in, contribute to, and steward the plan's implementation—recognising that genuine impact requires aligned effort between community, government, funders, and national Tongan leadership.

The plan is intentionally recognised as a living commitment to regeneration—one that will evolve through continuous talanoa, ongoing refinement, and community feedback. It reflects a shared belief that the wellbeing of Tongans in Aotearoa grows from relationships, service, culture, and connection. Rooted in the values of talanoa, tauhi vā, and fakakoloa'a e kainga, the National Tongan Plan charts a collective pathway forward—one that honours our people, strengthens our identity, and nurtures the fertile soil from which future generations will flourish.

**Improving the
wellbeing,
identity, and
prosperity of
Tongan people in
Aotearoa**

Introduction: Understanding Our Foundation

As Tonga marks 150 years since the signing of its Constitution (1875)—the oldest continuing constitutional monarchy in the Pacific—this plan honours the resilience, sovereignty, and spiritual depth of a people who have held fast to their identity despite generations of global change. This milestone is more than political history. It is a reminder of the ancient foundations of fonua: the land, origins, people, lineage, and sacred cycles that bind Tongans to their ancestors and to every place they journey.

Fonua carries both physical and spiritual meaning—it is the womb that gives life, the land that sustains it, and the resting place to which all return. For Tongans in Aotearoa, fonua becomes a relational reality: they carry the fonua of Tonga within them while honouring the whenua of tangata whenua, the Indigenous people of this land. Their belonging is not divided but extended—rooted in Tonga, flourishing in Aotearoa.

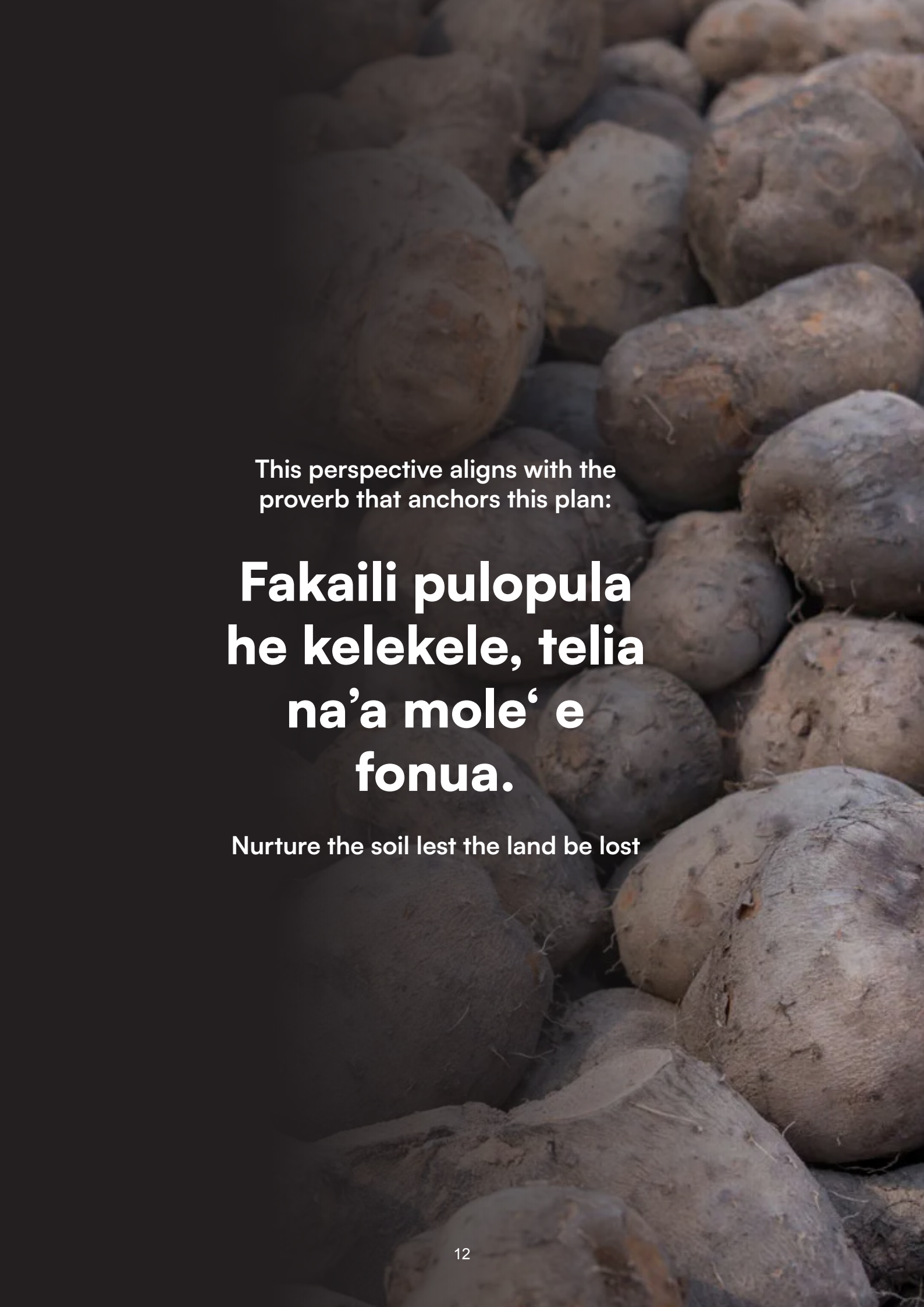
The cultural significance of the yam (‘ufi) reflects this deep interconnectedness between people and land. Historically reserved for nobility and ceremonial honour, ‘ufi symbolises prestige, service, and the profound relationship between leadership, land, and community. Its cultivation embodies values of faka’apa’apa (respect), fetokoni’aki (mutual support), and tauhi vā (relational care).

At the heart of this tradition is the pulopula—the small yam seedling or carefully cut portion of ‘ufi chosen for replanting. Though modest in size, the pulopula contains the full potential of the next season’s harvest. It represents foresight, stewardship, and regeneration.

This ancient practice offers a powerful metaphor for the Tongan experience in Aotearoa. Those who journeyed from Tonga were like pulopula—pieces of ‘ufi intentionally taken from their homeland and planted in new soil, with the hope that they would flourish and sustain future generations. Through faith, sacrifice, and service, Tongans in Aotearoa have regenerated cultural life, nourishing their identity while growing in new ways. Today, Tongan communities across Aotearoa stand as living pulopula: rooted in their heritage, nurtured by a new environment, and expanding into new expressions of strength, creativity, and contribution.

This perspective aligns with the proverb that anchors this plan:
Fakaili pulopula he kelekele, telia na’a mole e fonua
— nurture the soil lest the land be lost.
Tongans in Aotearoa nurture their cultural soil—language, faith, values, kinship—ensuring that the fonua is not lost but continually regenerated through their children and the legacy they cultivate in their new homeland.

As Tonga celebrates 150 years of constitutional sovereignty, its people—both in the Kingdom and across the diaspora—stand as symbols of endurance and renewal. This National Tongan Plan draws on the foundations of fonua and the regenerative strength of pulopula to chart a pathway toward wellbeing and prosperity for Tongans in Aotearoa. By nurturing what has been planted and tending the soil in which Tongan communities now thrive, the seeds are sown for a strong, resilient, and flourishing future for generations to come.



This perspective aligns with the
proverb that anchors this plan:

**Fakaili pulopula
he kelekele, telia
na'a mole' e
fonua.**

Nurture the soil lest the land be lost

Tongan's in Aotearoa

The 2023 Census recorded 97,824 Tongans living in Aotearoa New Zealand, representing one of the fastest-growing Pacific populations within a total national population of 4,993,923. Tongans make up approximately 2% of New Zealand's total population, a young and vibrant community with a strong cultural and linguistic identity.

Demographics and Migration

The median age of Tongans is 22.2 years, significantly younger than the national median of 38.1 years, highlighting a youthful population that will play an increasingly important role in the nation's future workforce and cultural landscape. Approximately one-third (33.5%) of Tongans were born overseas, comparable to the broader national average of 28.8%, indicating enduring transnational links with Tonga. However, 25.5% of overseas-born Tongans arrived within the last 10 years, compared to 39.6% nationally, suggesting a more established migrant community with strong family networks now in New Zealand.

Language and Culture

Tongan communities maintain a rich cultural heritage, with 38.1% of people speaking more than one language, compared to only 21.4% nationally. This bilingual strength underscores the resilience of Tongan identity, intergenerational language transmission, and cultural pride within families, churches, and schools.

Education and Income

Socioeconomic indicators reveal persistent inequities. Only 38% of adult Tongans hold a post-school qualification, which is well below the national rate of 54%. Correspondingly, the median personal income for Tongans is \$31,000, compared with \$41,500 for the total population. This income gap reflects disparities in access to higher-skilled employment and the need for targeted pathways into training, trades, and tertiary education.

Housing and Digital Access

Home ownership remains a significant area of concern: just 17.2% of Tongan adults own their home or hold it in a family trust, compared to 51.3% nationally. This highlights the ongoing housing vulnerability faced by many Tongan families, particularly in Auckland and other high-cost regions.

On a positive note, digital inclusion is relatively high, with 91.6% of Tongans having internet access, which is close to the national rate of 93.4%. This indicates a strong potential for online learning, enterprise, and connection with family and community networks both locally and abroad.



Sione's Story - A Portrait of a Tongan in Aotearoa (2023)

Sione is 22 years old — one of nearly 100,000 Tongans who now call Aotearoa New Zealand home. His story is shaped by the journey of his parents, who migrated from Tonga years ago to give their children new opportunities. Like many in the Tongan community, Sione's life reflects duality of belonging— deeply rooted in his Tongan heritage yet growing up in a nation that is now his home.

A Young, Vibrant Generation

At just 22.2 years, Sione belongs to one of the youngest populations in New Zealand, as the median age for Tongans is 22.2 years. His age reflects the energy of a generation driving change — fluent in social media, grounded in church and family, and balancing cultural identity with modern aspirations. While many of his peers across New Zealand are older (the national median is 38.1 years), Sione represents a community of potential — the future workforce, leaders, and innovators of Aotearoa.

Migration and Connection

Sione's parents were part of the one-third (33.5%) of Tongans born overseas, and although he was raised in South Auckland, his sense of kainga (family) stretches across the oceans. Their family still sends remittances to Tonga and travels back for weddings, funerals, and church gatherings. Unlike many newer migrants — only 25.5% of overseas-born Tongans arrived within the past decade — his family has built strong roots here, forming part of a well-established community that spans generations.

Language and Identity

At home, Sione switches effortlessly between the Tongan and English languages. He's among the 38.1% of Tongans who speak more than one language, compared with just 21.4% of the broader population. His bilingualism isn't just a skill — it's a bridge between worlds. It connects him to his elders, his church, and his peers, who are proud to be both Tongan and Kiwi. This linguistic richness sustains his cultural identity and pride in a fast-changing world.

Education and Opportunity

After finishing school, Sione started a vocational course rather than university. Like many Tongans, he is ambitious but faces barriers — including limited access to tertiary education, financial pressure to support his family, and a scarcity of role models in professional sectors. The data reflect this challenge: only 38% of Tongan adults have a post-school qualification, compared with 54% nationally. Yet Sione's story is one of resilience. He's determined to upskill through trades training and is drawn to pathways that connect practical skills with cultural purpose.

Work and Income

Sione works full-time at a logistics company, earning close to the median Tongan income of \$31,000, which is lower than the national median of \$41,500. He often works long hours, contributing to family expenses and church obligations. While the pay gap remains significant, Sione finds value in his work ethic and collective purpose — his success is measured not just by income, but by the service he provides to his kainga.

Housing and Belonging

Sione still lives with his parents and siblings in a crowded home in South Auckland — part of the 82.8% of Tongans who do not own their own homes (only 17.2% do). High rent and rising house prices make home ownership feel out of reach. Yet the family home is filled with warmth, laughter, and faith. The lack of financial capital is balanced by social capital — the bonds of family and community that hold them together.

Digital Connection

Online, Sione is part of the digitally connected majority — 91.6% of Tongans have internet access. He uses his phone to stay in touch with cousins overseas, manage side hustles, and watch Tongan sermons streamed live from the islands. Technology keeps him connected to both his roots and his aspirations.

Sione's Journey — A Living Statistic

Through Sione's story, we see what the numbers really mean. He represents a generation of young, bilingual, faith-centered Tongans navigating life in New Zealand with determination and pride. His challenges — lower income, fewer qualifications, limited home ownership — are matched by immense cultural strength, adaptability, and family support.

Sione's narrative calls for investment in pathways that empower Tongan youth — access to quality education, stable housing, meaningful employment, and leadership opportunities that honour cultural identity. Because when Sione thrives, so does his kainga, and so does Aotearoa. Overall, the 2023 Census reveals a young, bilingual, and community-oriented Tongan population that contributes significantly to New Zealand's social fabric, yet faces ongoing challenges in education, income, and housing equity. Strengthening cultural identity while addressing these structural inequalities—through employment, education, and housing strategies—remains essential to improving wellbeing for Tongan families nationwide.



Mele's Story - A Thriving Tongan Woman in Aotearoa (2023)

Mele is 48 years old. She migrated from Tonga to Aotearoa, New Zealand, over twenty years ago, seeking better opportunities for her children and a chance to support her family back home. She is one of the 33.5% of Tongans born overseas, who have built their lives between two worlds — Tonga, the land that formed them, and New Zealand, the land that sustains their dreams.

A Generation of Faith and Sacrifice

When Mele arrived in New Zealand, she was part of the wave of Tongans who came in search of work and education for their families. Her early years were marked by long shifts in factories and cleaning jobs, which allowed her to send money back to Tonga while raising her children in a new country.

At the time, she didn't have formal qualifications — like the 62% of Tongans today who don't hold post-school qualifications — but her education came through experience, faith, and perseverance. She represents the generation that laid the foundation for their children to succeed in a system that often didn't recognise their struggles.

Overcoming Barriers to Belonging

Housing was one of Mele's most significant challenges. For years, she rented crowded flats across South Auckland, saving bit by bit to one day buy a home. With only 17.2% of Tongans owning homes or holding them in family trusts, she understands the challenges her community faces in achieving stability in the housing market. After decades of saving and sacrifice, Mele and her husband were finally able to purchase a modest home with the help of their children — a shared dream that symbolises security and belonging. For Mele, home ownership was never just about land or property—it was about dignity, family, and the ability to pass something on.

Keeping Culture Alive

Mele's greatest pride is her language and heritage. She continues to speak Tongan fluently and encourages her children and grandchildren to do the same. She is among the 38.1% of Tongans who speak more than one language, serving as a bridge between generations.

Her home is filled with Tongan music, mats, and stories — reminders of who they are. Every Sunday, her family gathers after church for a shared meal, reinforcing the bonds of kainga (family) and lotu (faith) that keep them grounded.

Navigating Work and Wellbeing

Although Mele's income has grown over the years, she still earns close to the median Tongan income of \$31,000, lower than the national average of \$41,500. Her work in the aged-care sector gives her purpose — caring for others, providing companionship, and offering the empathy that has always defined Pacific women's contribution to Aotearoa's workforce.

She knows what it means to work twice as hard to be seen and valued, yet she measures success differently: by the education of her children, by the respect she earns in her community, and by the love she gives to those around her.

Digital and Community Connection

In recent years, Mele has embraced technology — joining her church’s Facebook livestreams, messaging family in Tonga on WhatsApp, and video calling her daughter studying in Wellington. Like 91.6% of Tongans with internet access, she has found new ways to stay connected, blending her traditional values with modern communication tools.

Reflection: From Struggle to Strength

Looking back, Mele sees how far her community has come. She remembers when they first gathered in borrowed halls for church, when few Tongans worked in offices or owned their own homes. Now she watches the next generation — young leaders like Sione — stepping into education, entrepreneurship, and leadership with confidence. Mele’s life is a story of resilience, regeneration, and faith. Her journey embodies the essence of the Tongan spirit in Aotearoa: enduring hardship with grace, sustaining identity through change, and transforming struggle into a lasting legacy.



Pulopula Framework

The Pulopula framework reframes migration and settlement as an act of cultural innovation rather than displacement. It honours:

- **The sacrifice of the first generation (like Mele),**
- **The promise of the second generation (like Sione),**
- **And responsibility Aotearoa is to ensure fertile ground for all communities to thrive.**

It calls for social investment in education, housing, and employment — not as welfare, but as watering the seeds that the Tongan people have already planted through faith, work, and love.

Sione and Mele's Legacy

Sione and Mele represent two distinct aspects of the Tongan community in New Zealand. Sione's youth represents potential; Mele's wisdom reflects perseverance. Together, they symbolise a thriving, bilingual, and faith-anchored community — navigating challenges in income, education, and housing while upholding the values of kainga, lotu, and ngaue (family, faith, and work).

They remind us that behind every statistic lies a story — and behind every story, a nation that continues to grow, regenerate, and contribute to Aotearoa.

That's a powerful and culturally anchored way to interpret these statistics — and it aligns beautifully with your concept of Pulopula regeneration, renewal, and continuity across generations. Applying this framework gives deeper meaning to Sione and Mele's stories, reframing them not as isolated experiences but as living examples of how Tongans replant the seeds of their identity and resilience in Aotearoa.

Here's how the Pulopula Framework can be applied to interpret the migrant journey and social data — illustrated through Sione and Mele's intergenerational regeneration story.

Fakaili Pulopula: Regeneration of a People in Aotearoa

Replanting cultural roots, regenerating family life, and flourishing in new fonua (lands).

In Tonga, pulopula refers to the act of cutting a small piece of the yam or setting aside part of the harvest to replant, ensuring that the crop continues into the next season. It is both a practical and spiritual act: a symbol of foresight, sacrifice, and faith in the future.

For Tongans in Aotearoa, migration itself has been a pulopula act— taking part of the family, culture, and spirit from the homeland and replanting it in a new environment. Over generations, these planted seeds have regenerated into thriving communities, weaving Tongan identity into the fabric of New Zealand society.

For Sione, Pulopula means to grow through renewal. His parents' struggles nourish his roots, and his branches reach into the opportunities of modern Aotearoa.

Pulopula ‘o e Ngaahi Matua -The First Planting — The Migrant Generation

Mele’s generation represents the first planting— those who left Tonga’s shores with limited resources but abundant faith. They carried the seeds of language, culture, and communal values, replanting them in the fertile soil of opportunity and hardship in Aotearoa.

- **Cultural regeneration:** Mele maintained the Tongan language (part of the 38.1% bilingual community) and preserved traditions through lotu (faith) and kainga (family).
- **Economic sacrifice:** Like many Tongans, her median income (\$31,000) is below the national average, but every dollar has been a seed — supporting remittances, community giving, and her children’s education.
- **Housing and belonging:** Though only 17.2% of Tongans own homes, Mele’s determination led to shared home ownership, symbolising security and legacy — her version of replanting roots.

For Mele, Pulopula means to sow through sacrifice. Her generation may not have reaped the full harvest, but they cultivated the soil of possibility for their children.

Pulopula ‘o e Fanau -The Regrowth — The Second Generation

Sione’s generation is their growth— young, bilingual, and grounded in both worlds. Their median age of 22.2 years reflects a youthful population rooted in ancestral values but growing toward new horizons.

- **Education and aspiration:** Although only 38% of Tongans hold post-school qualifications, Sione and his peers are reshaping that future, entering trades, universities, and leadership roles.
- **Identity and language:** With 38.1% speaking more than one language, the population of culture continues to sustain identity and self-worth in an environment that often pushes for assimilation.
- **Digital fonua:** 91.6% internet access among Tongans demonstrates how the younger generation utilises technology as a new platform to connect, create, and carry culture across virtual spaces.

Pulopula ‘o e Kainga Katoa -The Collective Regeneration — The Community

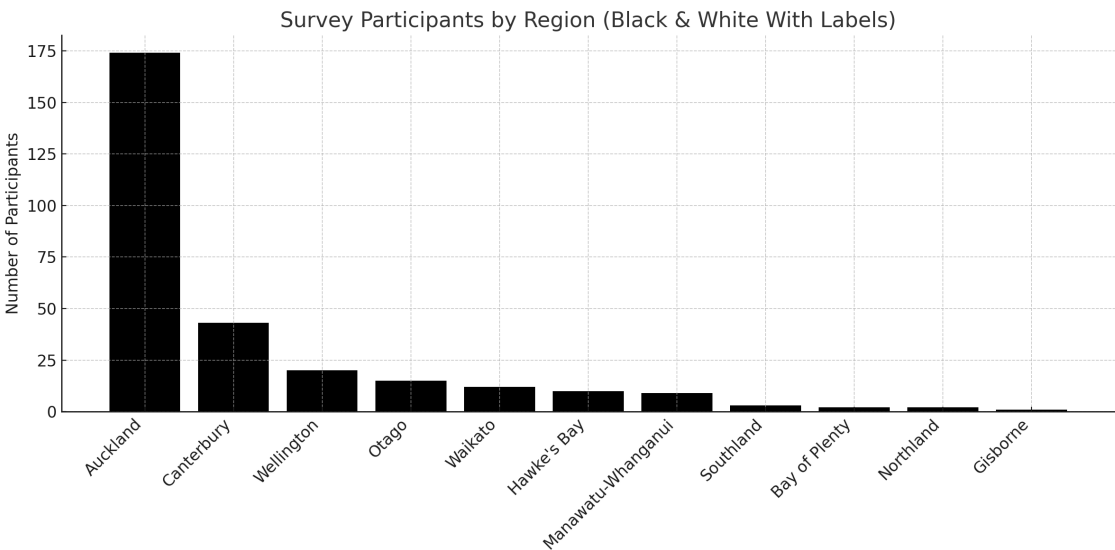
Together, Mele and Sione’s stories reveal the broader regeneration of the Tongan community in New Zealand. Despite economic inequalities and systemic barriers, Tongans have regenerated their identity through the collective strength of the kainga— families, churches, youth, and elders nurturing one another in new surroundings.

- **Demographic vitality:** With 97,824 Tongans — a youthful, rapidly growing community — the Pulopula principle ensures continuity and collective resilience.
- **Cultural wealth:** Language retention, church networks, and cultural pride serve as nutrients that sustain growth across generations.
- **Socioeconomic challenges as fertile ground:** Lower incomes, housing insecurity, and education gaps are not signs of failure, but opportunities for targeted investment — new soil in which Tongans can continue to thrive.

In the Pulopula lens, regeneration is not a one-time event — it’s a cycle. Each generation becomes both the harvest and the seed for the next.

Evidence-Informed Insights

This strategy is grounded in a robust evidence base drawn from 302 survey respondents across 12 regions and extensive talanoa with community leaders, providers, church leaders, youth, and regional representatives. The combined data — both quantitative and qualitative, as well as national and regional — presents a unified message about the needs, strengths, and aspirations of Tongans in Aotearoa. It ensures that government, philanthropy, and community stakeholders are informed directly by the voices of the Tongan people.



National Profile of Survey Contributors

A total of 302 Tongans from across Aotearoa contributed to the national survey, providing valuable insights into their lived experiences and priorities for the future. Respondents represented:

12 regions, with substantial contributions from Auckland, Canterbury, Wellington, Waikato, and Otago. Emerging regional communities in Hawke’s Bay, Manawatū—Whanganui, Southland, Bay of Plenty, Northland, and Gisborne.

This distribution reflects both long-established Tongan communities and the expanding presence of Tongans in regional New Zealand.

Together, the quantitative survey findings and qualitative talanoa narratives present a clear, unified message:

Tongans strongly expect services to be culturally grounded.

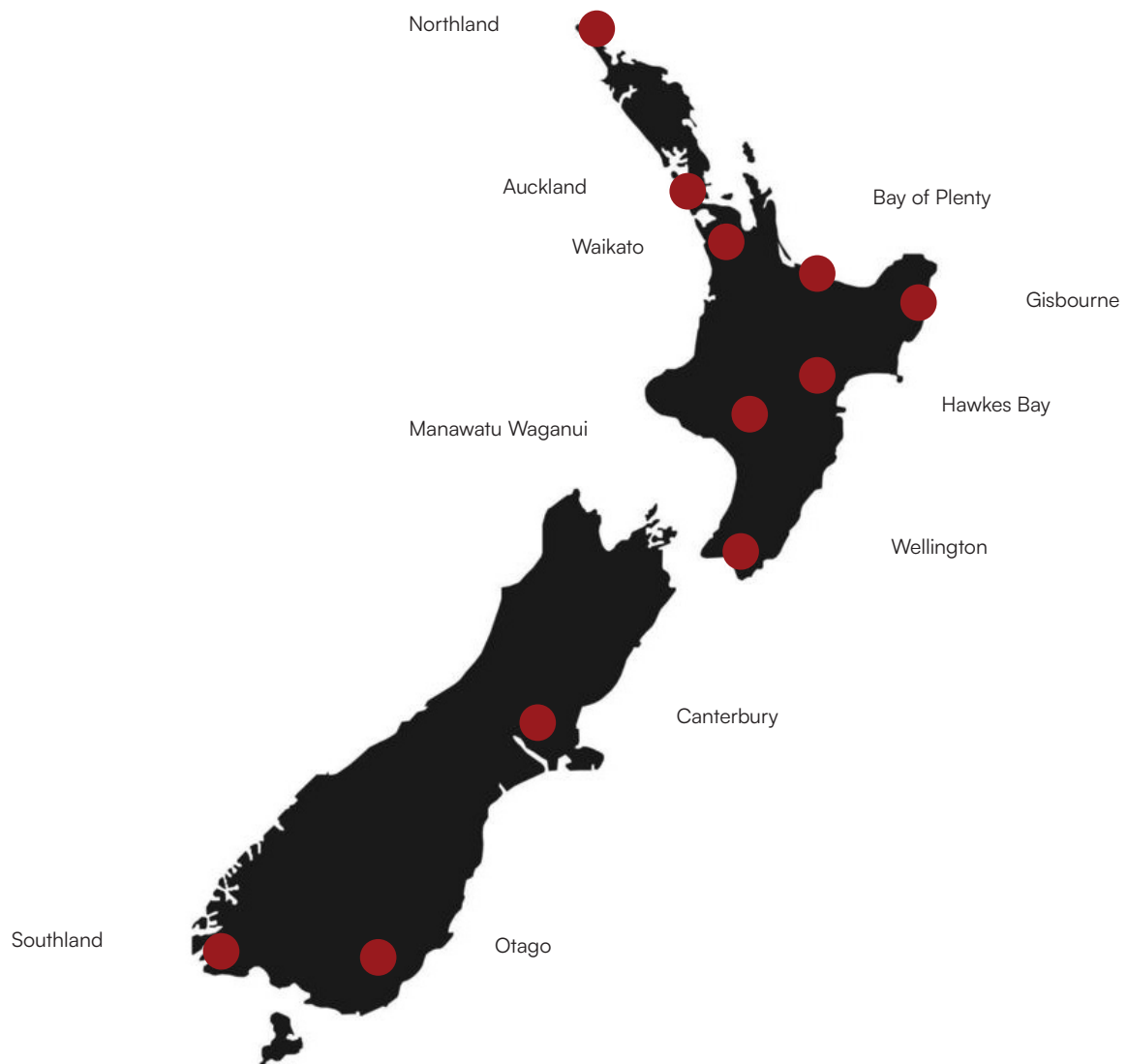
Service accessibility is uneven, with significant gaps in regional Aotearoa.

Intergenerational partnership is one of the community's greatest strengths.

Tongans are increasingly ready to take leadership roles when equipped with the proper support.

Community-led hubs and church-based sites are critical infrastructures for navigation, resilience, and wellbeing.

This evidence forms the foundation of the strategic goals outlined in Section 4. It ensures that policy direction is led by the people's voice, shaped by lived experience, and reflective of the diverse realities of Tongan families across the motu. The combined evidence from the survey and talanoa reveals five core insights shaping this strategy.



Integrated Evidence

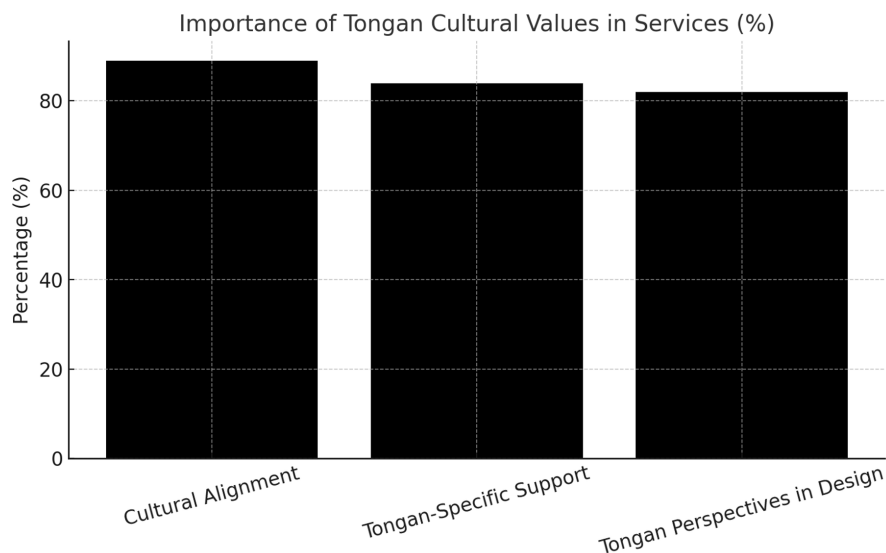
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- **Service accessibility is uneven, with significant gaps in regional Aotearoa.**
- **Intergenerational partnership is one of the community's greatest strengths.**
- **Tongans are increasingly ready to take leadership roles when equipped with the proper support.**
- **Community-led hubs and church-based sites are critical infrastructures for navigation, resilience, and wellbeing.**

Evidence

This evidence forms the foundation of the strategic goals outlined in this report. It ensures that policy direction is led by the people's voice, shaped by lived experience, and reflective of the diverse realities of Tongan families across the motu.

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Insight 1: Tongan Cultural Values Are Essential to Effective Services

Quantitative evidence:

90% of respondents rated culturally grounded services as essential.

84% want Tongan-specific support (language, cultural navigation, culturally knowledgeable staff).

82% want Tongan perspectives in service design and delivery.

Qualitative evidence (Talanoa & case studies):

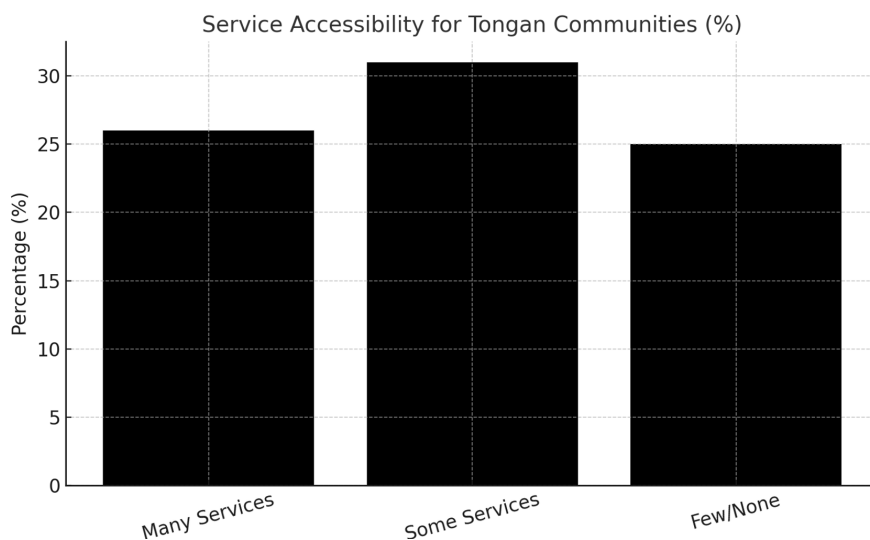
“Cultural appropriateness and understanding are essential.”

“Keeping our culture alive in community teachings is vital for wellbeing.”

Leaders emphasised that faith, family obligations, and relational balance shape how Tongans engage with services.

Implication:

Cultural alignment is not an optional enhancement — it is a core requirement for effective service delivery.



Insight 2: Service Accessibility Is Uneven and Weakest in Regional Areas

Quantitative evidence:

Only about one-quarter of respondents report easy access to services.

26% say they can access “many services.”

Just one in four Tongans feels well-supported by current service systems.

31% say they can access “some services.”

This group represents the highest proportion of respondents, indicating that most people experience partial, limited, or unpredictable access—a key indicator of system gaps.

25% report access to “few or no services.”

Respondents outside Auckland consistently experience reduced access to information, navigation support, and culturally grounded services.

Qualitative evidence (Talanoa & case studies)

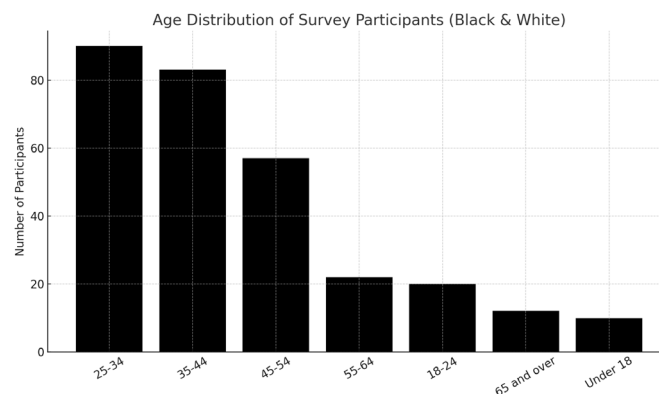
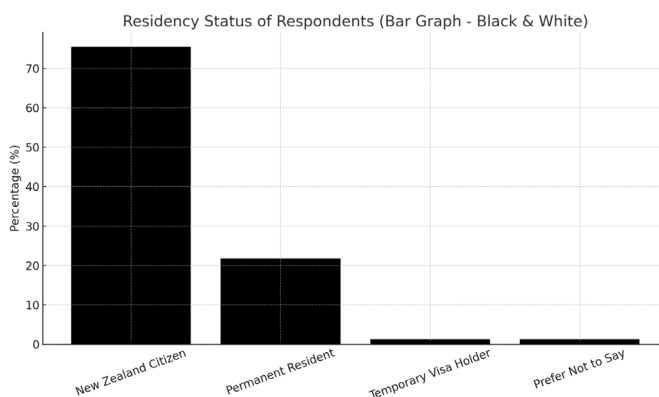
“Most information to Tongans is through word of mouth... many need to know what is out there.”

“When Tongans arrive from the Islands it’s hard to know what services are available and how to access them.”

Regional talanoa highlighted housing instability, lack of ECE centres, and unsustainable volunteer-based services, especially in Wellington, Porirua, Nelson, Hawke’s Bay, and Christchurch.

Implication:

Government investment must strengthen regional access infrastructure, information pathways, and navigation support.



Insight 3: Intergenerational Strength Is a Powerful Asset

Quantitative evidence:

Combined with the 25—34 group, 57% of respondents are between 25 and 44 years old—prime working, parenting, and leadership ages.

97.3% of respondents are either citizens or permanent residents.

Only 2.6% are temporary visa holders or prefer not to disclose.

The data reflect a well-established Tongan population in NZ, with very few being recent migrants or holding precarious visa statuses.

Qualitative evidence (Talanoa & case studies)

Elders bring cultural depth, church leadership, and relational networks.

NZ-born Tongans bring system fluency, English proficiency, and digital confidence.

Leaders consistently emphasised the need to connect these strengths to support youth, families, and emerging community leaders.

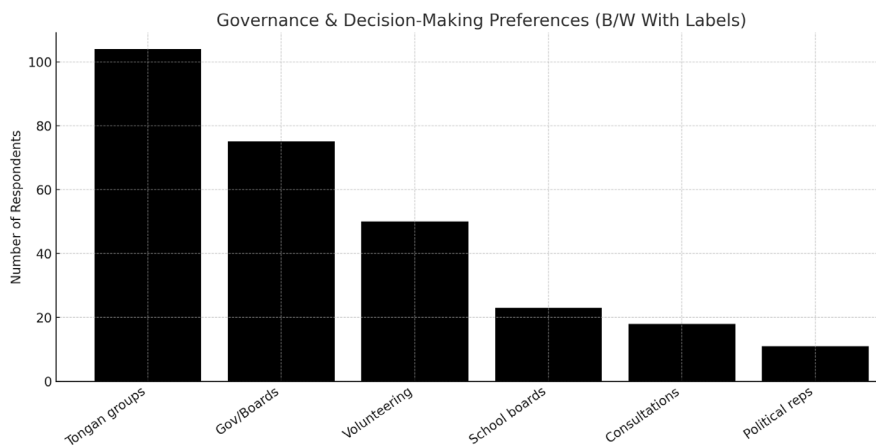
Case examples include:

180 Turnmentoring Tongan youth through culturally tailored approaches supporting behavioural change

Wellington carpentry mentors were overlooked for promotion despite their skills, yet they successfully led culturally informed youth apprenticeship pathways.

Implication:

Intergenerational models can strengthen services, workforce development, leadership succession, and cultural continuity.



Insight 4: Tongans Are Ready to Lead — But Need Structured Pathways

Quantitative evidence:

Tongan-led governance (104) is the clear top preference, showing strong desire for culturally grounded decision-making.

Mainstream boards and governance systems (75) remain important secondary pathways.

Grassroots volunteering (50) continues to be a practical entry-level civic engagement route.

Political pathways (11) are currently the least engaged, revealing future capacity building needs.

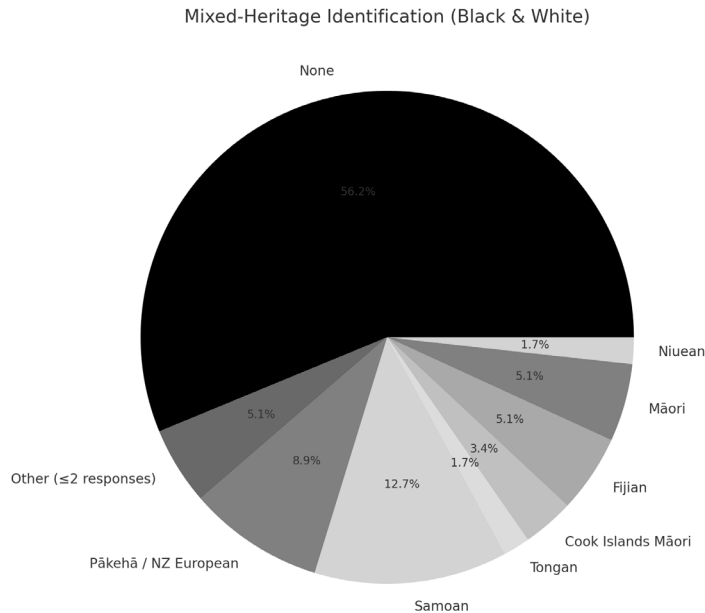
Qualitative evidence (Talanoa & case studies)

Leaders noted that governance literacy, English language barriers, and unfamiliarity with systems hinder participation.

Talanoa revealed pride and cultural dignity can prevent families from seeking help, reinforcing the need for safe, Tongan-led pathways

Implication:

Targeted investment in governance training, civic education, and youth leadership pathways is essential.



Insight 5: Community-Led, Culturally Anchored Hubs Are Critical

Quantitative evidence:

45% indicated one or more additional ethnic backgrounds.

The community is more diverse than census data normally reveals, with nearly half identifying with more than one ethnicity.

Pacific-to-Pacific mixed heritage (especially Samoan and Māori) is more common than Pacific-to-NZ European heritage.

This diversity can strengthen bicultural and multicultural competence, particularly in service design, governance, and leadership development for the Tongan community.

Qualitative evidence (Talanoa & case studies)

“Community networks and support systems are vital for the wellbeing of our people.”

Local responses, such as community services and churches, remain the strongest connectors for families, providing information, support, and a sense of cultural belonging.

Kava groups offer overlooked pathways for wellbeing and engagement among men and boys in Wellington and Auckland.

Local leaders identified untapped assets, such as skilled workers, volunteer networks, and community educators, that lack resources to scale.

Implication:

Regional hubs, anchored in Tongan values and local leadership, are essential to effective service delivery and community navigation.

Five-Year Strategic Goals

These strategic goals translate the lived experiences, aspirations, and challenges expressed through the 302 national survey responses and the talanoa with community leaders, providers, churches, youth, elders, and regional representatives into clear directions for government action, investment, and partnership. They provide a coherent national framework while enabling regional and intergenerational leadership to shape local solutions.

SG1: Culturally Grounded, Tongan-Led Services Across All Sectors

Evidence

90% of Tongans expect culturally aligned services; leaders affirmed the centrality of Lotu, Fāмили, and Tauhi vā; case studies show Tongan-specific models succeed where mainstream services struggle.

Goal

Ensure that all services accessed by Tongans — health, education, housing, family services, justice, disability, mental health — are culturally anchored, delivered by culturally competent staff, and informed by Tongan worldviews.

Actions

- Embed cultural frameworks across policy and service design.
- Expand Tongan-led programmes in mental health, youth mentoring, social services, and family wellbeing.
- Fund Tongan navigators and cultural advisors across systems.
- Recognise Tongan spirituality, language, and relational systems as central determinants of wellbeing.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Embed Tongan cultural values in all service design & delivery	Develop Tongan Cultural Framework for sectors	Governance Board	MSD, MPP, MOH, MOE, Justice, Providers	Framework adopted by 6 ministries
Expand Tongan-led mental health, youth & family supports	Pilot culturally anchored service models in 6 regions	Health NZ Pacific Teams	NGOs, Whanau ora, Churches	85% positive outcomes
Build culturally knowledgeable workforce	Cultural competency training across govt & providers	Governance Board	MOH, MSD, MOE, MPP, NGOs, Wilberforce	1,000 staff trained
Establish Tongan navigation workforce	Tongan Navigators in all regions	Regional Hubs	Health, Education, Justice, MSD	20 navigators employed

SG2: Strengthen Regional Access Through Tongan Community Hubs

Evidence

The survey revealed the weakest access outside Auckland; talanoa identified barriers in Wellington, Porirua, Nelson, Hawke's Bay, and Canterbury; communities need local, trusted access points.

Goal

Develop a network of regional Tongan hubs (church-based or community-led) to provide navigation, cultural support, intergenerational programmes, and local coordination.

Actions

Establish regional hubs governed by the Tongan community leaders in the 12 regions.

Strengthen service visibility and outreach through church networks, youth groups, and Kava Tonga leadership.

Resource and sustain local programmes rather than relying on volunteers.

Provide regional navigation support for housing, ECE, employment, health, and crisis response.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Build Tongan regional hubs	Establish hubs across 12 regions	Regional Leadership	Councils, Churches	12 hubs operational
Improve access to services & information	Rollout service visibility campaign	Hubs + Fofola, KIWA	MSD, MOH, MPP, OT	10,000 families reached
Establish local navigation & outreach systems	Train regional navigation teams	Hubs	OT, Health NZ	5,000 supported annually
Strengthen church-based service delivery	Fund church-led access points	Governance Board	All denominations	300 churches engaged

SG3: Intergenerational & Mixed-Heritage Leadership Pathways

Evidence

Talanoa emphasised that elders hold cultural knowledge; NZ-born Tongans possess system fluency; nearly half of the survey respondents are of mixed heritage; and youth seek cultural identity and belonging.

Goal

Develop intergenerational Tongan leadership pipelines that connect cultural expertise with systemic knowledge, ensuring a strong foundation for future representation and community capability.

Actions

Pair Tongan-born and NZ-born Tongans in leadership and service delivery roles.

Build pathways for mixed-heritage Tongans to strengthen confidence in identity and leadership.

Support fatherhood programmes, sibling leadership, and extended family systems.

Expand Tupu'anga-style youth mentoring, trades academies, creative industries pathways, and governance training.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Build intergenerational leadership	Pair Tongan-born & NZ-born leaders in programmes	Governance Board	Regional Hubs	500 leaders trained
Support youth identity, belonging & leadership	National identity programmes	Youth Providers	Schools, Churches, NGOs	5,000 youth engaged
Develop mixed-heritage pathways	Leadership & cultural confidence courses	Tongan Hubs	MOE, MPP, MSD	40% increase in mixed-heritage participation
Strengthen fatherhood, kāinga & sibling leadership	Family leadership retreats	Providers	Churches, NGOs, OT	1,000 families supported

SG4: Housing Stability, Homeownership & Financial Wellbeing for Tongan Families

Evidence

Talanoa revealed housing instability, shame-based barriers, long waiting periods, unsustainable emergency housing cycles, and a lack of region-specific solutions.

Goal

Improve housing security, reduce overcrowding, expand homeownership pathways, and strengthen financial capability for Tongan households across Aotearoa.

Actions

Invest in culturally appropriate housing responses in Auckland and emerging regions.

Build Tongan-specific homeownership literacy and financial wellbeing programmes.

Develop regional housing partnerships with Kāinga Ora, banks, and churches.

Support short, sharp financial literacy models that have been proven effective for Tongan communities.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Improve housing stability	National Tongan Housing Needs Scan	Governance Board	Kāinga Ora, MSD, NGOs	Report Year 1
Reduce overcrowding	Housing navigators in all regions	Regional Hubs	Kāinga Ora, Councils, NGOs	1,500 families supported
Strengthen homeownership pathways	Short, sharp financial literacy programmes	Providers	Banks, MBIE, NGOs	1,000 complete pathway
Develop regional housing solutions	6 regional housing groups	Board + Councils	Developers	6 advocacy plans complete

SG5: Education Success, Learning Pathways & Cultural Identity

Evidence

Leaders highlighted early childhood gaps, the lack of Tongan ECE centres (especially in Wellington), identity challenges faced by NZ-born youth, and the high demand for culturally anchored programmes.

Goal

Strengthen Tongan educational achievement from early childhood to tertiary, reinforcing identity, cultural belonging, and future workforce readiness.

Actions

Establish and fund Tongan ECE and bilingual learning pathways.

Invest in Tongan language and culture education across all levels.

Support youth transitions, school engagement, and tertiary participation.

Develop leadership pathways across various sectors, including trades, STEM, healthcare, education, and the creative arts.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Strengthen ECE—Tertiary engagement	Tongan ECE rollout & regional bilingual pilots	MOE + Hubs	ECE Centres,	+10% ECE participation
Expand mentoring & youth services	National Youth Mentoring	NGOs, Governance	Schools, OT, MOE, Regional	1,200 youth supported
Build future workforce pathways	Cadetships, trades & creative academies	Youth Providers, NGOs	Tertiary	700 youth in pathways
Support identity & belonging	Cultural identity programmes	Governance	MPP	8,000 youth engaged

SG6: Economic Security, Workforce Equity & Entrepreneurship

Evidence

Talanoa highlighted workplace discrimination (e.g., carpenters being overlooked for promotions), limited career mobility, and strong entrepreneurial potential across various regions.

Goal

Expand employment, entrepreneurship, and career progression opportunities while addressing wage inequities and structural barriers to Tongan economic success.

Actions

Support Tongan-led business development, trades programmes, and social enterprises.

Partner with employers to improve progression pathways for Tongan workers.

Provide entrepreneurship coaching, micro-enterprise grants, and regional business networks.

Strengthen financial mobility through culturally anchored economic capability programmes.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Increase skilled employment	Employer partnerships & Tongan workforce pipelines	MSD + Hubs, MBIE	Industry, NGOs	800 placed in skilled roles
Address wage inequities	Advocacy & workplace rights initiatives	Governance Board	Unions, MBIE	Annual reporting
Strengthen entrepreneurship	Tongan Business Accelerator	Providers + PBT	Banks, Wilberforce Other Philanthropy	300 businesses supported
Improve financial capability	Financial wellbeing short courses	Providers	NGOs, MBIE, Bank	2,000 families trained

SG7: Governance, Civic Participation & Tongan Decision-Making Power

Evidence

Survey respondents demonstrated a willingness to lead; talanoa highlighted barriers such as governance literacy, language, and unfamiliarity with the system; leaders called for a national Tongan governance structure.

Goal

Increase Tongan representation and influence in governance, policy development, advisory groups, regional leadership, and civic decision-making.

Actions

Establish a National Tongan Pulepula Board with regional branches.

Provide governance training, civic education, and policy literacy programmes.

Embed Tongan leaders in cross-agency partnerships, philanthropic alliances, and workforce planning.

Develop a Tongan data sovereignty, measurement, and accountability system.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Increase Tongan voice in policy	Establish National Tongan Governance Board	Governance Board	All Ministries	Quarterly govt engagement
Strengthen regional leadership	Activate 12 regional leadership councils	Regional Hubs	Councils, NGOs	12 active councils
Provide governance & civic literacy	Governance training academy	Board	Wilberforce	400 trained; 40% more board seats
KIWA	400 trained; 40% more board seats	Board	Philanthropy NZ	15 partnerships

SG8: A National Tongan Data, Monitoring & Learning System

Evidence

Both survey contributors and talanoa leaders emphasised the importance of long-term visibility, data sovereignty, and robust accountability mechanisms.

Goal

Develop an integrated system to monitor Tongan wellbeing, track community-led outcomes, and ensure government accountability.

Actions

Establish a Tongan-controlled data governance framework.

Create national wellbeing indicators aligned to cultural values (Lotu, Fāmili, Faka’apa’apa, Tauhi vā).

Develop regional dashboards tracking service access, education, housing, and economic outcomes.

Support research partnerships with universities, Tongan experts, and Pacific evaluation specialists.

Strategic Objective	5-Year Actions	Lead Responsibility	Key Partners	Measures / KPIs
Establish Tongan data sovereignty	Create national data governance group	Data Group	Stats NZ, Universities	Group operational Year 1
Develop annual well-being indicators	Tongan Wellbeing Index	Data Group	Academics	20 indicators tracked
Build regional dashboards	Regional reporting system	Regional Hubs	MSD, Councils	12 dashboards published
Publish annual regeneration reports	National “State of Tongan Wellbeing”	Governance Board	Ministries	5 annual reports

Monitoring and Evaluation of Plan

The Tongan People's Strategy 2025—2030 is grounded in the collective wisdom, lived realities, and cultural strength of Tongans across Aotearoa. Informed by the voices of 302 survey contributors, the talanoa of community leaders and providers, and the intergenerational insights of elders, youth, and families, the Strategy reflects a national commitment to regeneration through the Pulo-pula framework —to nurture the soil so that the land and people may flourish.

Implementation of this Strategy will be guided by the National Pulo-pula Committee, chaired by Rev. Setaita Taumoepeau K Veikune, whose leadership ensures cultural integrity, governance alignment, and stewardship of the national vision.

The Committee's members — representing all 12 regions, intergenerational voices, churches, youth, women, elders, providers, and cultural experts — form the backbone of the Strategy's success.

A nationwide journey will follow, as the Committee leads a series of regional fono and talanoa to socialise the findings, return the evidence to the communities that shaped it, and mobilise the networks required for meaningful place-based action.

Through this process, regional Tongan hubs will be established and strengthened as local engines for service navigation, leadership pathways, cultural identity, and community development.

Effective Monitoring & Evaluation requires shared responsibility across all partners:

- The National Pulo-pula Committee provides oversight, cultural stewardship, and guardianship of Tongan data sovereignty.
- Regional Tongan Leadership Groups ensure that local priorities and voices guide planning and reporting.
- Community providers and navigators gather evidence from frontline practice and whānau experiences, enabling continuous learning.
- Independent evaluators validate findings and ensure credibility and transparency.
- Government agencies uphold their commitments through long-term investment, data sharing, aligned commissioning systems, strengthened regional capability, and cross-agency coherence.
- Philanthropic partners, including the Wilberforce Foundation and KIWA, led by General Manager Jade Hohaia, contribute essential support through capability building, leadership development, and national mobilisation.

Together, these partners form a unified ecosystem of accountability — one that ensures progress is visible, culturally grounded, and responsive to the aspirations of Tongan communities across the motu.

Pulopula reminds us that regeneration is not a single event but an ongoing cycle of planting, nurturing, flourishing, and re-planting. This principle shapes the entire M&E system. Each indicator tracked, each talanoa gathered, and each regional dashboard published becomes a way of:

- honouring the past,
- measuring the present, and
- safeguarding the future.

Thus, Monitoring & Evaluation becomes more than a technical tool —it becomes a cultural promise to future generations. It ensures that the seeds planted today will yield a strong harvest for the Tongans of tomorrow.

The Strategy's success depends on an enduring partnership between the community, the church, government agencies, philanthropic groups, and regional leaders. This partnership reflects the heart of Pulopula: regeneration is only possible when all contribute, all participate, and all lead according to their strengths.

Through the combined efforts of:

- the National Committee,
- community and church leaders,
- regional providers,
- government departments,
- philanthropic foundations,
- and Tongan families across Aotearoa,

This strategy becomes a word that is a living movement.

Flourishing Future

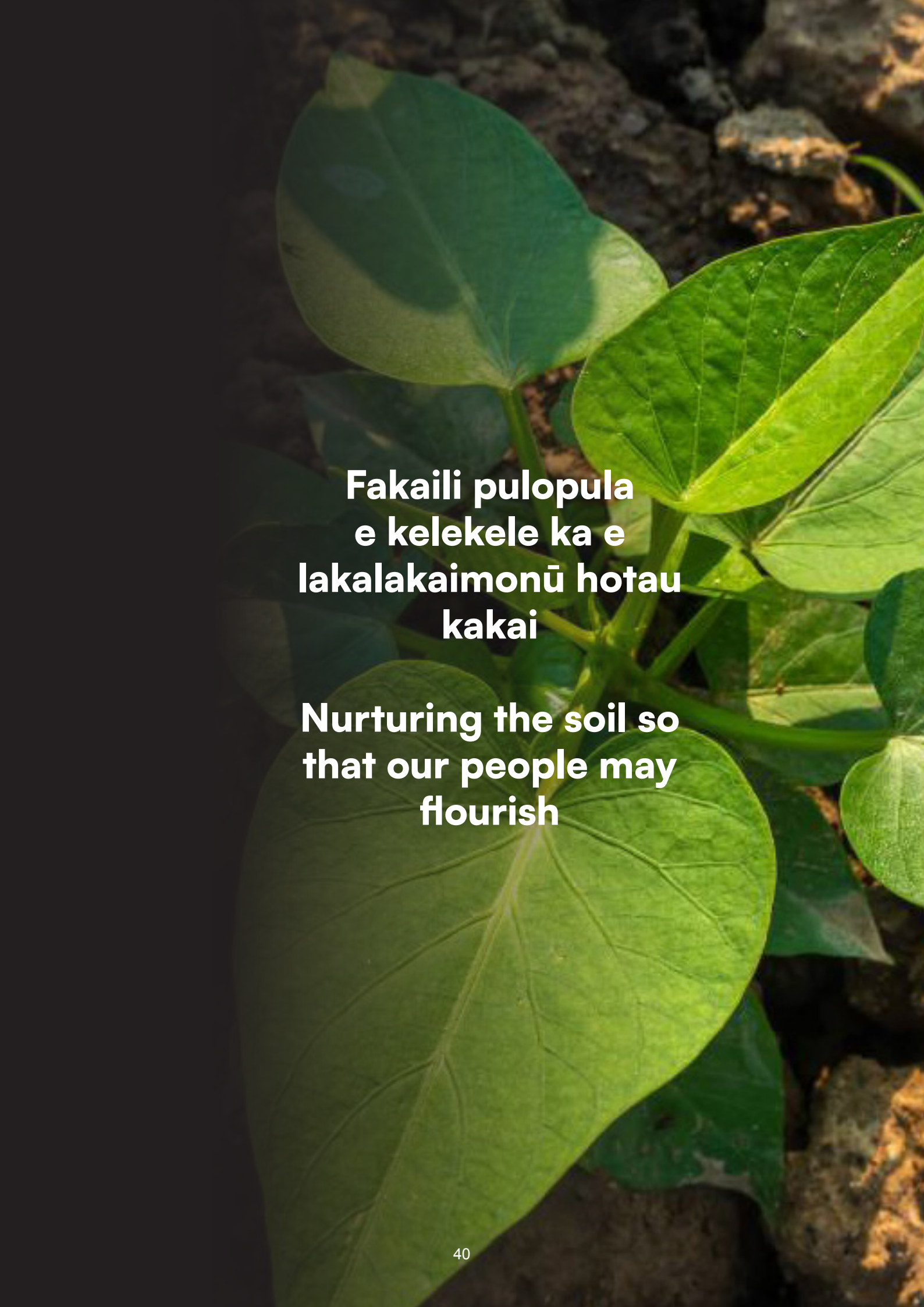
As we move forward, we do so as one—united in purpose, inspired by the courage and hope of our people, and fuelled by the collective wisdom that has shaped this strategy. We return to the voices of the community, honouring every insight offered, every story shared, and every dream for a brighter tomorrow. Through strengthened capability, equitable access, and intergenerational leadership, we lay the foundation for a future where every Tongan can thrive.

Together, we weave the tapestry of our past into the promise of our future—upholding the mana of our ancestors, uplifting our present, and nurturing the whenua and fonua for generations yet to come. Let us return to the stories of Sione and Mele, whose journeys embody the heart of this regeneration. Sione's dreams and Mele's sacrifices are not only the living seeds of pulopula, but the beacon guiding us toward a horizon of renewed hope.

Their stories remind us that the truest measure of our success is found not merely in statistics, but in the transformation of lives, the restoration of dignity, and the flourishing of every family.

The actions and insights in this plan—strengthening culturally grounded services, building regional hubs, fostering intergenerational leadership, and creating pathways for housing, education, and economic security—are more than strategic initiatives. They are the roots from which Sione, Mele, and every Tongan in Aotearoa will rise. As these seeds take root, Sione will find new doors opening on his path, and Mele will witness her legacy blossoming in the achievements and wellbeing of her children and grandchildren.

Their stories will continue to evolve, nurtured by a community that cherishes its roots and dares to imagine a future where every generation flourishes. In this way, Sione, Mele, and all Tongans in Aotearoa become not only the reason for our commitment, but the living promise of our shared and flourishing future.



**Fakaili pulopula
e kelekele ka e
lakalakaimonū hotau
kakai**

**Nurturing the soil so
that our people may
flourish**



FOFOLA
CONSULTANCY



Pulopula: The Regeneration of Tongans in Aotearoa