

Lincoln Alumni International Medal

Soane Patolo

The Alumni International Medal was instituted in 2003 on the 125th anniversary of the founding of Lincoln University. For stature and prestige, it stands equal with the university's long-established Bledisloe Medal and is awarded specifically for accomplishments by former students or past or current staff members in countries other than New Zealand.

Soane Patolo of the Kingdom of Tonga is the 23rd recipient of the medal and the first from a Pacific nation.

Soane graduated Bachelor of Resource Studies from Lincoln University in 2003 and in his career since then he has become a highly regarded international expert in Pacific Island community development.

In 2007 Soane founded the organisation *Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation (MORDI) Tonga Trust*, empowering isolated rural communities to overcome poverty through agricultural development, with particular attention to the socio-economic well-being of women and youth.

Soane is MORDI's Chief Executive Officer and in its first four years of operation, 2007-2011, its programme reached out to 22 communities and almost 2500 beneficiaries.

In 2012 Soane initiated the Tonga Rural Innovations Project, reaching 60 communities and serving nearly 17,000 beneficiaries.

MORDI's work began to attract international attention and in 2015 Soane was selected to deliver a keynote address in the Rome to the Governing Council of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), a specialised United Nations agency aimed at eliminating poverty and hunger in developing countries.

Soane's approach to community development is based on local empowerment, the importance of education and capacity building. Through MORDI he has implemented incentives for healthy eating and food hygiene, improved village sanitation, enhanced local water security and contributed to community climate change adaptations and disaster resilience.

MORDI, now with a staff of 30, serving over 120 rural communities, has become a model for other Pacific nations seeking to promote climate change awareness, disaster resilience and livelihood generation among farmers and communities.

In 2019 Soane became Adjunct Associate Professor of Rural Development at the University of Sunshine Coast, Queensland, Australia, and in 2021 he was awarded the Royal Order of the Crown by the King of Tonga.