ACIAR ACTION

The value of ‘scientific diplomacy’—in which agricultural research for development helps build bridges and cooperation between nations—has received increasing recognition within Australia. The Order of Australia (OA) is the pre-eminent award that recognises the achievements and service of Australians. Long-time ACIAR collaborator Rob Williams received a Medal of the Order of Australia in 2012 for services to overseas humanitarian aid projects, particularly his dedication to rebuilding East Timor’s agricultural sector as part of ACIAR’s Seeds of Life program. This program introduced high-yielding seed varieties of five staple crops—maize, rice, sweetpotato, peanuts and cassava—to replace those destroyed or lost during the struggle for independence. About 3,000 East Timorese farms took part in the initial participatory research, providing feedback on the varieties’ yields, storage abilities, taste and returns at the market. By 2009, about 100 tonnes of seed was distributed through the program to 20,000 farming families. Currently, the program is in its third phase and targeting varieties to more than 150,000 farming families. Rob Williams follows in the footsteps of Dr Harry Nesbitt, who was also involved in Seeds of Life. Dr Nesbitt was recognised in 2003 for extraordinary contributions to avert famine in Cambodia following the fall of the Khmer Rouge regime and as part of the Cambodia International Rice Research Institute–Australia Project. In 2011, Dr Robyn Alders was also honoured for distinguished service to the Australian poultry industry and to the maintenance of food security in developing countries, especially Africa, through disease-control programs.

ACIAR’S VISION

ACIAR looks to a world where poverty has been reduced and the livelihoods of many improved through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research.

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) operates as part of Australia’s international development cooperation program, with a mission to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems for the benefit of developing countries and Australia. ACIAR commissions collaborative research between Australian and developing-country researchers in areas where Australia has special research competence. It also administers Australia’s contribution to the International Agricultural Research Centres.