



Australian Government

Australian Centre for
International Agricultural Research

ACIAR

CORPORATE
PLAN
2020–21

Contents

About ACIAR	1
Statement of preparation	1
Introduction	3
Purpose	8
Key activities	11
Operating context	15
Performance	24
List of requirements	28

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ACIAR Corporate Plan 2020–21

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ACIAR Corporate Plan 2020–21

About ACIAR

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) is the Australian Government's specialist agricultural research-for-development agency. ACIAR operates solely on budget appropriation from Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA).

ACIAR is established by the *Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Act 1982* (ACIAR Act) and is an agency of the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio.

ACIAR has an executive management structure, headed by the Chief Executive Officer, who is accountable directly to the Minister for Foreign Affairs.

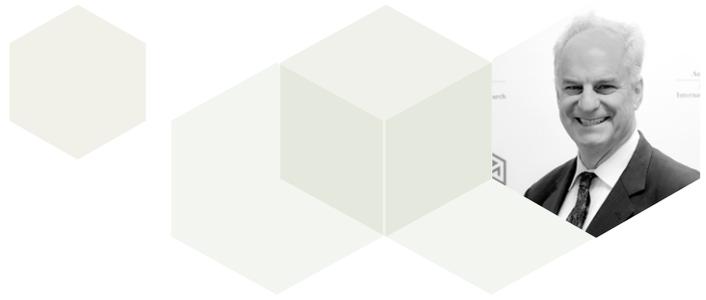
ACIAR is a non-corporate Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act). Its staff in Australia and overseas are employees of the Australian Public Service under the *Public Service Act 1999*.

Statement of preparation

I, Colin Andrew Campbell, as the accountable authority of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), present the ACIAR Corporate Plan 2020–21, which covers the 2020–21 to 2023–24 reporting periods, as required under paragraph 35(1)(b) of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*.



Andrew Campbell
Chief Executive Officer, ACIAR



Introduction

Australia is a world leader in agricultural innovation. This is a strategic national capability that ACIAR is able to mobilise to form international research partnerships. We do this to improve food security, food system resilience and the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in the Indo-Pacific region.

Our mission is to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems, for the benefit of developing countries and Australia, through international agricultural research partnerships. We broker, facilitate, invest in and manage strategic partnerships in agricultural research-for-development.

Tackling shared challenges through collaboration in agricultural, fisheries or forestry research is a compelling element of Australian soft power in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia is well equipped to play a leading role within our region and globally—disproportionate to the size of our population and our economy. Through our partnership model we support regional stability, health security, economic recovery, and build scientific and policy capabilities for more productive and sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.

The ACIAR Corporate Plan 2020–21 outlines how we will deliver on our six objectives, as set out in the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027, to achieve our purpose and mission. Three of our objectives build knowledge to underpin crucial development objectives, and three ensure that our work is equitable, inclusive and empowering. Our objectives also align with and contribute to the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the four years covered by this corporate plan, we will continue to build the partnerships, knowledge and capacity required to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems in the Indo-Pacific region, in the context of a changing climate, the triple burden of nutrition (acute hunger, malnutrition and nutrition-related disease), and the most recent global challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic.

Responding to COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic is a global health and economic crisis that will disrupt lives and livelihoods in diverse communities around the world for years to come. The pandemic is amplifying existing vulnerabilities and exposing new risks in food systems at local, national and regional levels. Understanding these risks will help mitigate future disruptions to food systems across the Indo-Pacific region.

While the global health crisis of COVID-19 is yet to precipitate a global food crisis, many international experts and agencies have highlighted that risk. In May 2020, ACIAR commenced¹ a three-stage assessment of the impacts of the pandemic, and the responses to it, on smallholder farmers and food systems in the Indo-Pacific region. The ACIAR response to the pandemic reflects the Australian Government’s policy articulated in *Partnerships for Recovery – Australia’s COVID-19 Development Response*².

1 Food systems security, resilience and emerging risks in the Indo-Pacific in the context of COVID-19: a rapid assessment. ACIAR Technical Report No. 95

2 Partnerships for Recovery — Australia’s COVID-19 Development Response

Australia is a world leader in biosecurity and One Health—the intersection of animal, human and environmental health. Like SARS, MERS, Ebola and HIV, COVID-19 is a zoonotic disease that has ‘spilled over’ from animals to humans. Strengthening a One Health approach—developing far more effective integration across the human and animal health systems in regulatory systems, surveillance, diagnostics and response—is critical if our region and the world is to prevent even more infectious and deadly zoonotic diseases. ACIAR is well-placed to harness the strengths of the Australian agricultural innovation system in these areas, to provide scientific leadership in our region, as many countries tackle the multifaceted challenge of ‘building back better’—a key aspect of which will be improving the safety and resilience of food systems.

Redesigning the way we work

On a broader scale, the work of ACIAR and its partners will be vital in the next few years, to equip smallholder farmers in the Indo-Pacific region with the knowledge, skills, technology and frameworks to restore disrupted production systems and value chains across the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors. The breadth of the ACIAR research portfolio underpins the significant and valuable contribution that we make in our region—from the sciences that support productivity, biosecurity and sustainability, to the disciplines that support the development of effective value chains and adoption processes.

In the coming 12 months, and possibly for the life of this corporate plan, we will be reshaping our traditional operating models that have depended heavily on international travel by Australian scientists to partner countries, extensive regional travel within partner countries, and travel to Australia for training by scientists from partner countries. While a global crisis accelerates this remodelling, it also presents new opportunities to experiment with new technologies and new modalities to achieve our purpose more efficiently.

The reviews, development and innovation we undertake in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, will strengthen our business models to continue working with our partners on ongoing social, economic and environmental challenges. This will almost certainly mean even closer links with the more than 800 ACIAR alumni across our region, as we seek to maintain on-ground momentum within ACIAR-funded programs and projects.



Working in a changing climate

Our second research-based objective is to build knowledge to manage natural resources and produce food more sustainably, adapting to climate variability and mitigating climate change. To focus and strengthen our capacity to work towards this objective, ACIAR will establish a new *Climate Change* research program. This program will focus on agriculture's contribution to climate change, and opportunities to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors in our region.

Many of our partner countries are interested in tapping into deep Australian expertise developed through, for example, the Carbon Farming Initiative, as they seek to meet their own nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement. Adaptation to climate change and extreme weather events is woven through all ACIAR research programs and will continue to be a cross-cutting issue throughout the portfolio.

ACIAR will consolidate Australia's reputation and expertise in climate science in agriculture, through chairing the Global Research Alliance for Agricultural Greenhouse Gases in 2020–21. The alliance of more than 60 countries acknowledges the significant challenge of meeting a dramatic increase in global food demand, while reducing the contribution of the agriculture sector to greenhouse gas emissions. The focus of the alliance is to foster research collaboration. Leading Australian researchers will play an important role in the alliance, often through ACIAR-supported projects.

Building healthier food production systems

Leaders in farming, business, science and government recognise that if the Sustainable Development Goals are to be achieved by 2030, there must be a transformation across the globe in how food is produced, processed, distributed and consumed.³

ACIAR works across the Indo-Pacific region with the objective of building knowledge to enhance human nutrition and reduce risks to human health. Across our region there are countries, and in some places, the same provinces or communities, experiencing the triple burden of nutrition—acute hunger and malnutrition (including micronutrient deficiencies), co-existing with increasing levels of obesity, and associated diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease.

Over the next four years, ACIAR will continue to develop partnerships and broker research relationships that address the many factors that influence the nutritional value of food harvested and the safety of the food production system. Our current research portfolio includes projects such as:

- ▶ analysis and policy development to address the paradox of apparently abundant fish, vegetables and root crops, but poor public health outcomes in Pacific island countries
- ▶ investigation of safe use and reduced application of pesticides in fruit and vegetable production in the Philippines
- ▶ identification of food safety interventions in the pork value chain in Vietnam.

3 CGIAR Research Program on Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

Planning for the next four years

Through ACIAR partnerships, we will continue to grow the knowledge base for farming and food systems, and in turn, improve livelihoods of smallholder farmers and fishers in our partner countries. Along the way, we will introduce new technologies, risk management and capabilities to Australian agriculture and agricultural sciences, generating a very high return on public investment.

This corporate plan is built on our work in three key areas.

- 1.** Global research collaborations—we develop and foster partnerships and relationships with other international research and development agencies, an integral partner being CGIAR. We also develop and foster partnerships with development donors and the private sector, to pursue shared goals and to ensure that ACIAR-funded research results get implemented at scale.
- 2.** Bilateral and regional research projects—we generate knowledge from ACIAR projects and programs to empower smallholder farmers, extension agents, scientists and policymakers to take on the intersecting challenges of growing more and healthier food and reducing poverty, using less land, water and energy.
- 3.** Scientific and policy capacity building—we identify and establish opportunities for individuals and institutions in partner countries to boost technical, policy and management skills in agriculture, fisheries, forestry and management of land and water resources.

The ACIAR Gender Equity Policy and Strategy 2017–2022 informs the design and implementation of our research activities with partners, and our own internal organisation. Many ACIAR projects work towards improving women’s access to resources and decision making, as this is a direct route to reducing poverty and boosting food security at family, community and societal levels.

There is increasing evidence, in public and private sectors, that organisations drawing equally on the talents of women and men at all levels outperform those that do not. Within ACIAR, the proportion of women in senior roles increased from 11% in 2016 to 58% by June 2020.

To measure performance against this corporate plan and the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027, and ensure alignment with our strategic objectives, we will continue to develop and implement our portfolio planning and impact evaluation processes. This enables us to design effective research-for-development projects and programs, and develop methods to appropriately monitor and assess the contribution of our investments to development outcomes across our whole portfolio. The process also informs our accountability to our Minister, the Australian Government and the Australian public.

Continuous review and improvement

While building knowledge and capacity to contribute to stability and prosperity in our region, it is also important that we spend time to look at our own agency and ensure it is in step with initiatives for comparable agencies across the Australian Public Service. We will achieve this through continuous review and implementation of efficiencies in the way we operate, as well as reviewing and applying robust risk management processes, overseen by the ACIAR Audit Committee.

During 2020–21, the Minister for Foreign Affairs will be appointing new Commissioners and a new Chair on the Commission for International Agricultural Research. The Commission’s critical governance role under the ACIAR Act is to provide strategic advice to the Minister and the CEO of ACIAR. The new Commission will play an important role as a sounding board and source of strategic advice for ACIAR as we develop and refine new business models in response to a radically disruptive global pandemic.

The Commission is complemented in the governance architecture of ACIAR by the Policy Advisory Council, comprising eminent international experts from our partner countries. The role of the Council under the ACIAR Act is to advise the Minister and ACIAR on the agricultural problems of developing countries, providing rich contextual detail and insight that informs the design and implementation of ACIAR-funded research. The Council has played an important role in providing feedback on the early phases of our rapid assessment of food system risks and resilience. It will be a valuable source of advice as we begin to design intervention options in response to the assessment.

The COVID-19 pandemic is still gathering momentum, around the world and in our region. This pandemic, the sixth major zoonotic disease since 1980, is a stark reminder of the centrality of food systems for human health, human economies and almost everything we do in the natural world. Growing, processing and distributing food is literally the biggest thing that humans do on the planet—using the most land and fresh water, employing the most people and on track to be producing the most greenhouse gases of any sector.

We cannot achieve the objectives of Australian development policy—regional stability, health security and economic recovery in the Indo-Pacific—without improving the productivity, sustainability, safety and resilience of food systems. That will require the intelligent application of excellent applied science, grounded in the needs and operational realities (physical, economic, cultural, social, political) of diverse contexts across our region. Ensuring that the best of Australian science can be combined with local knowledge and implemented effectively in the field, depends on the quality and durability of partnerships—between scientists and farmers, researchers and industry, government and academia. Our outstanding track record of building and sustaining deep, trusting partnerships over the last 38 years is now a great strategic asset—particularly as we seek to help partner countries meet unprecedented challenges, in the face of travel and other restrictions.

An enduring but flexible operating model

The ACIAR business model of brokering science partnerships between the Australian innovation system and neighbouring countries in our region, to generate the knowledge, tools and technologies needed to better tackle shared challenges of food and water security, food system resilience, biosecurity and human health, is even more relevant today than when ACIAR was established in 1982.

The durable, productive partnerships supported and sustained by ACIAR provide ballast in the relationships between Australia and the countries of our region. The very strength of our partnerships enables us to be flexible and responsive in transforming how we work in response to unprecedented disruption.

Over the life of this corporate plan, the ‘how’ of our work may evolve faster than in any previous period, but the ‘why’ and the ‘what’ are enduring.

Andrew Campbell

Chief Executive Officer, ACIAR

Purpose

The purpose of ACIAR is to contribute to reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of many in the Indo-Pacific region through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research.

Our purpose reflects the commitment of the Australian Government to promote Australia's national interests by contributing to sustainable economic growth and poverty reduction in our region, with a focus on economic diplomacy and women's economic empowerment. The work of ACIAR is part of Australia's broader development assistance program, supporting research collaboration while emphasising individual and institutional capacity building and private sector-led development, targeted at the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.

Our mission and vision are derived from our purpose. We work with public and private research institutions to improve the productivity and sustainability of agricultural systems and the resilience of food systems in partner countries. International agricultural partnerships are at the heart of our work. Our partnership model and areas of work have evolved strategically since the establishment of ACIAR in 1982.

Our medium-term planning is guided by our [10-Year Strategy 2018–2027](#), which sets out six high-level strategic objectives to guide and inform our partnerships and research programs. These objectives are consistent with the Australian Government's development assistance policy and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Our work provides smallholder farmers, communities, government agencies and private enterprises with the knowledge and skills to improve livelihoods dependent on agriculture, fisheries and forestry.

The collaborative international programs and partnerships underpinning ACIAR-supported research also serve to improve Australian scientific capabilities and the productivity and sustainability of agricultural systems in Australia. Improved technologies and practices identified and developed through ACIAR research programs often address the shared challenges of all farmers in the Indo-Pacific region, Australia included.

Mission

To achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems, for the benefit of developing countries and Australia, through international agricultural partnerships

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 purpose of ACIAR in relation to its strategic objectives

ENABLING LEGISLATION

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research Act 1982

AUSTRALIAN AID POLICY

Australian Aid 

2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS 

PURPOSE

To contribute to reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of many in the Indo-Pacific region through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research

ACIAR 10-YEAR STRATEGY 2018-2027

ACIAR brokers and invests in research partnerships in developing countries in the Indo-Pacific region to build knowledge to support crucial development objectives

ACIAR works to ensure that its research-for-development programs are equitable, inclusive and empowering

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES



Performance framework

Prepared as part of the Enhanced Commonwealth Performance Framework, this corporate plan is the primary planning document for ACIAR for the 2020–21 to 2023–24 period and forms the basis for our annual performance statement. This plan is usually developed after the release of the Portfolio Budget Statements, however the Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21 have been delayed due to the deferment of the Federal Budget until October 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Australian Government seeks to achieve benefits for the Australian community (outcomes) primarily through programs delivered by government entities. Our work is framed by one Australian Government outcome and delivered through one Commonwealth program. The ACIAR Corporate Plan 2020–21 sets out how ACIAR intends to achieve its purpose for the four-year period of this plan.

The relationship between ACIAR Portfolio Budget Statements, Corporate Plan and Annual Performance Statement

Portfolio Budget Statements	Outcome 1	
	To achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems for the benefit of developing countries and Australia through international agricultural research and training partnerships	
	Program 1	
	International agricultural research-for-development for more productive and sustainable agriculture	
Corporate Plan	Purpose	
	To contribute to reducing poverty and improving the livelihoods of many in the Indo-Pacific region through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research	
	Performance criteria	Target
	Delivery of programs in line with the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ global research collaborations ▶ bilateral and regional research projects through 10 research programs ▶ scientific and policy capacity building activities 	Through annual project progress reports, mid- and end-project reviews, long-term adoption studies and impact pathway analyses, case studies (quantitative and qualitative), and financial activity indicators, as appropriate to each performance criteria, ACIAR will measure the extent to which these criteria are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ exceeding expectations ▶ meeting expectations ▶ not meetings expectations
Annual Performance Statement	Report achievement of targets set for performance criteria	

Key activities

To achieve our purpose of contributing to the reduction of poverty and the improvement of livelihoods through more productive and sustainable agriculture emerging from collaborative international research, we have three key activities.

For the period of this corporate plan, 2020–21 to 2023–24, ACIAR plans its functions and work in the following areas:

- ▶ global research collaborations
- ▶ bilateral and regional research projects
- ▶ scientific and policy capacity building activities.

Our key activities broadly remain similar to previous years' work; however, our programs and processes undergo continual review, improvement and development to accommodate the changing environment in which we work.

The COVID-19 pandemic will influence the prioritisation and execution of our activities in the 2020–21 year and in the years thereafter. To better understand our future working environment, in May 2020, ACIAR commenced⁴ a three-stage assessment of the impacts of the pandemic, and the responses to it, on smallholder farmers and food systems in the Indo-Pacific region. The assessment will be complete by December 2020 and will provide the basis for ACIAR and our partners to better understand intervention opportunities and priorities. This assessment helps inform our contribution to the government's plan *Partnerships for recovery: Australia's COVID-19 development response*.

While ACIAR remains committed to its core business of activity and international partnerships, the way our work is conducted changed suddenly as a result of the pandemic. The agency has developed a business continuity plan to identify risks and opportunities in the changed environment of the pandemic; and will continue to implement internal and external changes to operations, as required. It is anticipated that new modes of operation will be maintained for a substantial time over the period of this corporate plan.

Staff and partners will work and travel according to government directives, for their own safety, and that of colleagues and communities. Management and delivery of all our programs will be reliant on virtual communication technologies to enable interaction between Australian and overseas team members; and programs and events, previously dependent on international travel, will be redeveloped for virtual delivery.

⁴ Food systems security, resilience and emerging risks in the Indo-Pacific in the context of COVID-19: a rapid assessment. ACIAR Technical Report No. 95.

Global research collaborations

Recognising that agricultural research is an international enterprise, ACIAR fosters and manages global research collaborations with multilateral partners ranging from international agricultural research centres through to privately-funded foundations.

ACIAR manages Australia's investment in the international agricultural research system, as mandated by the ACIAR Act. The major investment is in [CGIAR](#), the world's largest global agricultural innovation network that comprises 15 international agricultural research centres and 11,000 staff, working in about 70 countries.

Australia is among the larger investors in the CGIAR, with ACIAR staff involved in the highest levels of governance of the CGIAR system, and Australian scientists prominent in the leadership and governance of the 15 CGIAR centres. In addition to the CGIAR system, ACIAR also supports several other international-scale organisations or networks.

Our investment in these multilateral collaborations gives Australia 'a seat at the table'. Through these investments we seek to maintain a strong, innovative voice in international agricultural research and contribute to maintaining a coordinated partnership approach to addressing challenges in global food systems.

Additionally, ACIAR establishes programs with other investors in international agricultural research, from the public and private sector. These partnerships may be built on shared design and management of programs between all contributing donors, such as the Cultivate Africa's Future program, co-funded with Canada's International Development Research Centre. Alternatively, we have partnerships where a donor will co-fund an ACIAR project, and ACIAR is responsible for the management of the project, such as projects under the DFAT-ACIAR Record of Understanding.

Bilateral and regional research projects

ACIAR works with scientists in Australia and partner countries to improve the livelihoods and opportunities of smallholder farmers, in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors. Our core business is to identify research priorities collaboratively with partner countries and broker research partnerships to use science and technology to address those priorities.

Our priorities and portfolio of work are guided by six high-level objectives, which are articulated in the [ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018-2027](#). The work of ACIAR Research Programs is managed around key agricultural sectors (crops, fisheries, forestry, horticulture and livestock), as well as the science to sustain the resource base (soil and land management, water, and climate change) and the science to generate economic and social benefit (agribusiness and social sciences). Key cross-cutting issues such as gender, integrated farming systems, economics and policy, and the link between livestock and human health risks (One Health), are encompassed by the program.

Our research portfolio evolves in response to new research opportunities enabled by new knowledge and technologies, and in response to new research and development imperatives. We work closely with our collaborators to determine and monitor the achievement of project milestones. The impact of our work is monitored at project and portfolio level, to understand the impact of our achievements and guide future investment.

Relationships with our collaborators and in-country partners change as the economic and social circumstances of smallholders and their communities change; as partner countries undergo rural transformation and urbanisation; and as partner countries develop more capability in agricultural, forestry and fisheries research. Similarly, our approach to research prioritisation and partnership brokering changes with time, to deliver research projects consistent with jointly agreed priorities, needs and capabilities.

COVID-19 is impacting the way that our current project portfolio is delivered and priorities for future research. We are working closely with project teams to adapt how they work to deliver project outcomes in the context of travel restrictions and other disruptions from COVID-19.

Scientific and policy capacity building activities

ACIAR facilitates formal and informal programs and opportunities to build the scientific and policy capacity of individuals, organisations and institutions involved in agricultural research-for-development in the Indo-Pacific region.

The ACIAR Capacity Building Program comprises a diverse suite of activities focusing on leadership and career development, as well as supporting post-graduate studies, participation in industry events and networking opportunities. The program is devised and implemented according to our [Capacity Building Policy 2018](#).

COVID-19 is significantly impacting the delivery of many of our capacity building activities, mainly due to travel restrictions to Australia preventing face-to-face participation in our fellowship programs. In the short term, many activities are being postponed but they will resume as and when it is responsible and safe to do so. A learning management system is being developed in 2020–21 that will offer a suite of online learning modules to ACIAR Alumni and partner country project staff.

A number of formal capacity building activities are well-established, highly-regarded and ongoing, such as the John Allwright Fellowship for postgraduate training and the John Dillon Fellowship providing intensive career development training. A second round of the Meryl Williams Fellowship starts in 2020–21, which is a 15-month program designed to assist female agricultural researchers to take on greater leadership roles within their organisations.

Additionally, ACIAR works with past fellows in their home countries to build strong alumni programs to support continuous capacity building to meet self-identified needs and to create a network of professionals who support excellence in agricultural research-for-development. The Alumni Program has been strengthened through the finalisation of a strategy and delivery of a new online engagement platform. The Alumni Research Support Facility is also supporting small COVID-19 research projects led by alumni members.

An online network, to be known as ACIAR 360, will be established in 2020–21, to facilitate engagement between alumni of ACIAR capacity building programs and ACIAR staff. ACIAR is also establishing and will maintain an internet-based learning management system, to provide online training modules for ACIAR alumni and project staff.

Capacity building is also a key component of our portfolio of bilateral and regional research projects, where bespoke capacity building approaches deliver explicit support to individuals and organisations, which is adapted to individual, institutional and country circumstances. A suite of resources to guide capacity building activities within ACIAR projects is being provided to project leaders to ensure activities are built into project design from the earliest stages.

ACIAR regions and partner countries

KEY

Pacific

- 1 Fiji
- 2 Kiribati
- 3 Papua New Guinea
- 4 Samoa
- 5 Solomon Islands
- 6 Timor-Leste
- 7 Tonga
- 8 Tuvalu
- 9 Vanuatu

South Asia

- 19 Bangladesh
- 20 India
- 21 Nepal
- 22 Pakistan
- 23 Sri Lanka

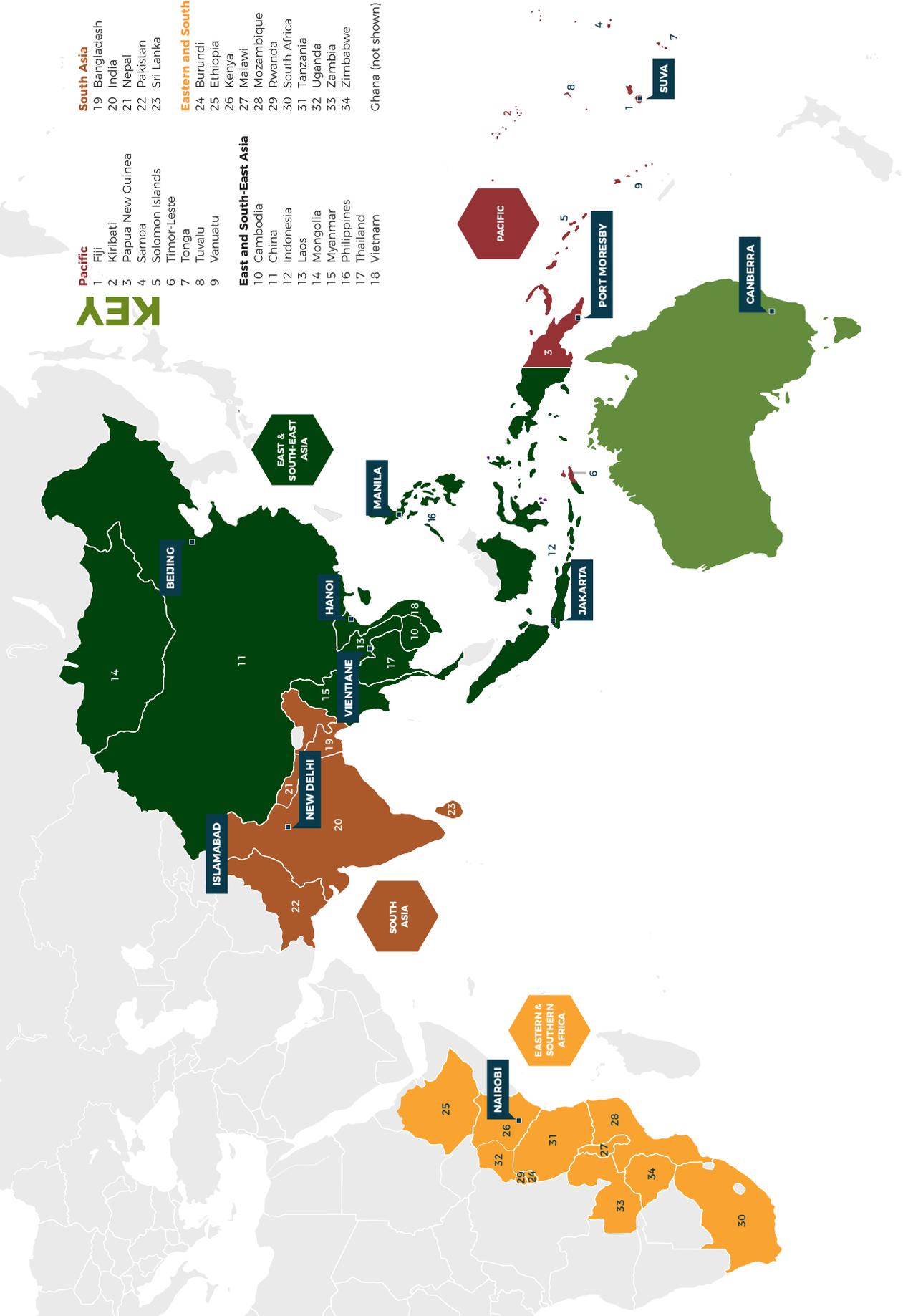
Eastern and Southern Africa

- 24 Burundi
- 25 Ethiopia
- 26 Kenya
- 27 Malawi
- 28 Mozambique
- 29 Rwanda
- 30 South Africa
- 31 Tanzania
- 32 Uganda
- 33 Zambia
- 34 Zimbabwe

East and South-East Asia

- 10 Cambodia
- 11 China
- 12 Indonesia
- 13 Laos
- 14 Mongolia
- 15 Myanmar
- 16 Philippines
- 17 Thailand
- 18 Vietnam

China (not shown)



Operating context

Environment

Our partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region are undergoing rapid social, economic and political change. International trends identified by the Australian Government *Foreign Policy White Paper 2017* have intensified in recent years and are changing the way economies and societies work.

Global trends affecting our region include competing forces of globalisation versus trade protectionism and a shift in geo-political power that is without precedent in Australia's modern history. Interwoven with social, economic and political change at global and regional levels, our partner countries grapple with the complex and intersecting challenges of growing more food and reducing poverty, using less land, water and energy. Factors that have a direct influence on these challenges include major technological advances in food production, rising urbanisation, increasing globalisation of agrifood chains, climate change, increasing challenges to food safety and biosecurity, and a natural resource base under great stress.

These challenges have been intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic, which will have impacts for years to come. At the outset of 2020–21, the pandemic is amplifying existing vulnerabilities and exposing new risks in food systems at local, national and regional levels. We also bear in mind that international experts and agencies have highlighted the potential risk of a global food crisis.

Understanding that we operate in a challenging and dynamic environment, and acknowledging there are unique research priorities within each country, ACIAR actively maintains strong in-country partnerships to ensure we can respond to the rapidly changing regional and local challenges and opportunities.

Our international relationships are managed by our in-country staff at 10 locations in our working region. Specifically, at the outset of the 2020–21 year, these staff are preparing to re-calibrate our key partnerships as key agencies emerge from the pandemic restrictions.

When addressing high-level change in our working environment, ACIAR seeks counsel from the Minister for Foreign Affairs, who is advised on these matters by the [Commission for International Agricultural Research](#) and the [Policy Advisory Council](#).

ACIAR operates in more than thirty countries, in four regions:

- ▶ Pacific
- ▶ East and South-East Asia
- ▶ South Asia
- ▶ Eastern and Southern Africa.

For the period covered by this corporate plan, 2020–21 to 2023–24, there are specific features and issues that will shape the operating environment within our regions, which are highlighted in the following sections of this plan. However, across all regions, ACIAR will need to devise and test innovative modalities for collaboration, post COVID-19.

Pacific

Australia's commitment to a more ambitious and intensified engagement with the Pacific region, as part of the *Pacific Step-up*, emphasises the importance of our ongoing and diverse program within the region. Key to that will be a renewed partnership with the Pacific Community (SPC) through which ACIAR will support SPC to deliver strategic regional public goods.

These include SPC stewarding the biennial Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry as the premier event drawing global attention to agriculture and forestry in the Pacific. The Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry will provide a forum to showcase recent R&D achievements, create opportunities for regional and international collaboration and bring together regional leaders around implications and opportunities for supporting policy.

Through the period of this corporate plan, ACIAR will launch and implement a 10-year strategy for working with the Pacific. Key features of the region during this time are listed, as follows.

- ▶ Improving food and nutritional security remains a high priority for all countries in the region. Additionally, the triple burden of food insecurity, malnutrition and a high prevalence of nutrition-related diseases
- ▶ Understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change, natural disasters and COVID-19 on food systems resilience and livelihood security is an increasing priority for many countries in the region.
- ▶ ACIAR will support the strengthening of regional biosecurity capabilities, to support the growth of import-replacement and export markets, food security and biodiversity conservation.
- ▶ Enabling inter-country collaboration through regional projects, capacity building and supporting a stronger forum for exchange of ideas and experiences through Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry.
- ▶ Implementing a long-term capacity building strategy targeted at building skills in the sciences related to agriculture is a priority in Pacific island countries.

East and South-East Asia

The East and South-East Asia region is transforming rapidly—economically, socially and politically. Many of our partner countries in the region are developing research capability that creates an opportunity for—indeed necessitates—substantially transformed partnerships with ACIAR, with a strong emphasis on significant co-investment and possibilities for trilateral collaboration within the region. This operating environment brings into focus a number of features for ACIAR.

- ▶ Capitalising on market opportunities that can transform smallholder systems as the region undergoes rapid urbanisation and globalisation of agrifood chains.
- ▶ Challenging issues related to acute poverty still affect some countries and some regions within countries. These issues require very specific targeting for research collaboration between those partner countries and ACIAR.
- ▶ Understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change on food systems and livelihood security is a very high priority for all partner countries in the region.
- ▶ Enabling regional research collaboration through specific projects and supporting the Asia Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutes.

South Asia

South Asia has the highest concentration of poor people in the world, with more than 500 million people living in extreme poverty. Half of the population of the region depends on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agriculture remains the key driver of economic growth in most countries and is under threat from a declining natural resource base, especially soils and water, and climate change. This operating environment brings into focus a number of features for ACIAR.

- ▶ Understanding and addressing the impacts of climate change on food systems and livelihood security is an increasing priority for partner countries in the region.
- ▶ Developing sustainable and equitable water management systems at the farm, community and institutional level is an ongoing priority for partner countries in South Asia.
- ▶ Intensifying cropping systems, climate resilience, and soil and water management issues continue to be a priority of partner countries, and a focus of ACIAR collaborations in the region.

Eastern and Southern Africa

Agriculture typically accounts for 30–40% of the GDP of African countries and more than 70% of the continent's poor live in rural areas. While agriculture remains a key driver of the economic growth required to deliver economic transformation for the rural poor, growth in productivity and production have broadly stagnated in the past decade.

Unlocking the potential of Africa's agricultural and food systems requires substantial investment in the agriculture sector and in research to provide the knowledge that underpins growth in agricultural productivity, especially for commercialising smallholder farming.

The ACIAR program with Africa fills a niche not addressed by many donor organisations, that is, agricultural research-for-development. Key features of the region during the period of this plan are listed as follows.

- ▶ Australian dryland and irrigated farming systems and science are highly relevant to much of Africa.
- ▶ Finance to agriculture is flowing but impacts are slowed by a lack of investment in the innovation needed to unlock the potential of smallholder agriculture.
- ▶ Sustainable crop and livestock systems, addressing the impacts of climate change, plant biosecurity and stimulating commercial options for smallholder farmers are a priority in this region.
- ▶ Co-investment with development partners, notably the Canadian International Development Research Center (IDRC), remains a feature of ACIAR work within the region.

Capability

ACIAR aims to be a valued broker and partner in agricultural research through close working relationships with stakeholders, and the provision of timely and consistent funding support. We promote the development and coordination of regional, national and international agricultural research systems in the Indo-Pacific region.

Since 1982, ACIAR has contributed significantly to improving the productivity and sustainability of agriculture, fisheries and forestry systems in our region. ACIAR maintains and builds on this success through four distinct areas of operation.

Each area functions in a unique way but with a common goal of engaging with partners to achieve our purpose. The investment and design of projects, programs and partnerships that make up the ACIAR research portfolio are guided by our high-level strategic objectives (ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027) and tested against our performance criteria and targets (ACIAR Portfolio Budget Statements 2020–21). Activities are conceived, planned and implemented as a result of consultation and input from four operational programs within ACIAR, which are:

- ▶ Multilateral Collaborations
- ▶ Country Partnerships
- ▶ Research Programs
- ▶ Capacity Building Program.

These are supported by:

- ▶ Outreach
- ▶ Corporate Services.

Multilateral Collaborations

Agricultural research is an international enterprise. Australia draws heavily on new knowledge from across the global agricultural innovation system, as well as making our own distinctive contribution to that knowledge base. Our Multilateral Collaborations program builds and manages partnerships with a range of international organisations, institutes and associations engaged in agricultural research and in the delivery of global public goods.

The program implements one of our mandated roles of funding and supporting international agricultural research centres. The Multilateral Collaborations program manages and develops our partnerships with a range of international and regional organisations—the CGIAR being the primary one. ACIAR will continue to work with partners whose objectives and investments align with ACIAR activities, such as government, private sector and donor organisations, to manage regional programs that enhance knowledge and capacity in partner countries.

Country Partnerships

Our Country Partnerships program manages strategic relationships with overseas partner countries and research agencies. This is done largely through 10 country offices across the Indo-Pacific region. These offices (all led by locally-engaged staff) support the development and regular recalibration of our bilateral country relationships. Our in-country offices play an increasingly important role in enabling research on the ground, providing logistical support for Australian researchers in-country, and keeping abreast of emerging local issues that have implications for Australian aid policy and ACIAR research investments at country and regional scales.

The strength of our partnership model is maintained through regular strategy discussions with country partners, consultation with Australian, regional and international research agencies, and continued support of the strategic capabilities of our network of country offices. We will refresh and recalibrate all our key partnerships post COVID-19 to ensure that they are responsive to the new dynamics that each agency finds itself in following the pandemic. ACIAR maintains active communication with DFAT, and Heads of Mission, Ambassadors and High Commissioners in partner countries, to ensure alignment with and relevance to Australia's broader aid initiatives and objectives.

Research Programs

Our six strategic objectives guide the ACIAR Research Programs to ensure we achieve our mission of more productive and sustainable agricultural systems. In order to design and implement a successful research portfolio, our experienced Research Program Managers work with partners to ensure the best possible research is designed to address priority issues. Due to their experience, our Research Program Managers have extensive networks within the industry and are able to bring together the most effective teams to carry out the research.

An important aspect of ACIAR work lies in strategically planning and measuring the impact of our investment in research. Our Portfolio Planning and Impact Evaluation Program is responsible for ongoing development of organisation-wide performance frameworks and medium and long-term evaluation of our investments. We implement both formal and informal processes to review, assess and learn from the work we do throughout the Indo-Pacific region. This learning builds individual and institutional knowledge from project outputs, as well as enhancing our understanding and our experience to enable continual improvement of the programs that ACIAR develops and supports.

Capacity Building

The ACIAR Capacity Building Program works with individuals and institutions in the Indo-Pacific region to enhance scientific research capability, management, policy and governance. The program facilitates post-graduate and in-service training, and supports project-based capacity building. While most of the activities in the Capacity Building Program are well established, feedback and review are continuous to ensure our work meets the changing needs and circumstances of our partners.

As the ongoing impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic become apparent, focus on and investment in the capacity of in-country partners will be required to continue and initiate work and activities previously carried out by travelling personnel. This will call for new modalities of design and delivery of capacity building programs.

Outreach

Outreach increases the understanding of stakeholders and the Australian public of the impact of Australia's aid investment through ACIAR. Many platforms and channels are used to ensure that audiences in Australia and our partner countries can access, understand and use the outputs of ACIAR-supported projects and programs.

Our outreach strategy maintains its focus on international and domestic stakeholders. Tailored communication products and programs will extend results of research to targeted groups of decision makers and potential donors in partner countries, the research community and decision makers. Through our relaunched website and enhanced social media channels, ACIAR will communicate more broadly using video and photography; as well as through improved reports, information sheets and publications. ACIAR will target Australian media to raise our profile with domestic audiences.

Corporate Services

Corporate Services provides underpinning business systems and frameworks across four departments:

- ▶ Human Resources
- ▶ Finance, Procurement and Legal
- ▶ Business Systems
- ▶ Overseas Corporate Management.

Our capability depends on the values and diversity of individuals within the organisation. Within the workplace, the way staff work and the development of workplace culture and diversity are influenced by our values of impartiality, commitment to service, accountability, and respectful and ethical conduct. These values demonstrate our commitment to upholding the APS Values and Code of Conduct.

In 2017, ACIAR introduced its [Gender Equity Policy and Strategy 2017–22](#). The internal Gender Committee will review the implementation of the strategy across all offices throughout the period of this corporate plan, with a view to redeveloping/refreshing the strategy for a new term based on learning and experience.

We will encompass the ACIAR workplace priorities through the review of the Human Resources Manual and consultation with all staff to build an inclusive and consultative culture where staff value diversity and have a voice in the process of how systems are governed within ACIAR. ACIAR will continue to encourage development through our individual development, planning and evaluations scheme and engage with young professionals through direct involvement in research projects and early career positions for agricultural graduates in ACIAR.

Continuous enhancements and development of our information and communication technology (ICT) platform (ACIAR Collaborative Environment or ACE) enables global collaboration between staff, research partners and stakeholders. The platform integrates program, project, partnership, finance, procurement, communication and stakeholder management into a single system that enables ACIAR to deliver more effectively and efficient project procurement and management.

ACIAR workplace priorities

- ▶ Enhance work health and safety systems to effectively manage risk
- ▶ Enhance capability by developing a skilled and diverse workforce
- ▶ Foster a culture of wellbeing to encourage engagement
- ▶ Maintain a workplace that embeds our values and encourages participation
- ▶ Facilitate the implementation of ACIAR Enterprise Agreements
- ▶ Ensure that staff are aware of ACIAR values
- ▶ Encourage executive management to be champions and role models
- ▶ Ensure the integration and development of both our locally engaged staff and those who work remotely
- ▶ Workforce planning to attract, develop and retain the right people in the right job at the right time

Organisational structure in 2020-21



Risk management

Risk oversight and management systems are essential for ACIAR functions and operations, underpinning the achievement of its purpose. ACIAR ensures that its activities are delivered in scope within schedule, budget and quality requirements, and in a way that reduces the likelihood of preventable risks being realised.

The nature of research and our operating environment mean there are substantial risks that need to be managed. The ACIAR Risk Management Policy and Plan 2018–21 identifies the key strategic risks to ACIAR delivering on its objectives and measures to mitigate these risks. This is a rolling document that will be reviewed six months prior to its expiry and updated for another three-year cycle.

The key strategic risks that may prevent ACIAR achieving its objectives are identified as:

- ▶ ineffective business systems—reducing the ability to effectively support agricultural research partnerships and decreasing information security
- ▶ absence of adequate records management systems—poor information management and recordkeeping resulting in an inability to fulfil organisational priorities and legal obligations
- ▶ ineffective management of relationships—including those with the Minister’s Office, the Secretary and Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, research partners, leading to poor working relationships and impacting the ability to effectively deliver on the ACIAR mandate
- ▶ compromised safety of ACIAR staff or project personnel—due to threats posed in its operational environments.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ACIAR developed a Business Continuity Plan to facilitate analysis of threats and opportunities at a range of scales, to specify agreed actions of response and to help coordinate implementation. Threats and opportunities are defined on four horizons (immediate, short term, medium term and long term) across all business units. This Business Continuity Plan is informing ACIAR operations and being reviewed as the impacts of the pandemic on our agency and its work evolve.

Risk registers are developed, maintained and owned by key functional groups within ACIAR. They are reviewed on a monthly basis by the Executive and the Audit Committee, and updated as necessary.

Noting ongoing investment in systems and processes, and investment in capabilities across the in-country office network, ACIAR has appropriate internal controls in place for the oversight and management of risks, based on sound judgment and the best information available. This supports our capacity to identify, manage and derive maximum benefits from new challenges and opportunities in international agricultural research partnerships.

All ACIAR staff are accountable for good risk management in their workplace and base their approach on an understanding of the likelihood and consequence of risks being realised when considering the impact of uncertainty on delivering ACIAR objectives.

Deteriorating security situations in some countries, generally or in localised regions, do present risks for the viability of ACIAR-funded research collaborations. These risks will be actively monitored and managed.

ACIAR will continue to invest in the capability of ACIAR staff to ensure that they are able to manage risk, and that they can engage external expertise when required to assist in effectively managing risks. ACIAR will also maintain an active internal audit program to continue to improve its approach to risk management.

Partnerships and engagement

ACIAR is a broker, investor and manager of strategic partnerships that build knowledge and capacity in agricultural research-for-development. To achieve our purpose, we are advised by and work with a diverse range of stakeholders and partners in Australia and in more than 30 countries in the Indo-Pacific region.

Purpose of engagement	Partners and stakeholders
We engage with experts and governments to ensure our work is attuned to the needs of our partner countries, embracing new methods and in step with Australian Government policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Policy Advisory Council ▶ Commission for International Agricultural Research ▶ Australian Government – Department of Foreign Affairs
We establish partnerships with Australian and international organisations to jointly address shared priorities in agricultural research-for-development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Australian Government departments, universities ▶ International research-for-development agencies ▶ International agricultural research centres ▶ Private sector and not-for-profit foundations
We commission technical experts to implement our research portfolio and capacity building programs, according to well-defined priorities and well-developed project scopes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Universities ▶ CSIRO ▶ State and Federal government departments ▶ Private-sector specialists and consultants
We facilitate the delivery of new knowledge and technologies via our commissioned research partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Smallholder farmers in partner countries ▶ Small and medium community-based enterprises in partner countries ▶ Australian agricultural industries and farmers
We communicate project news and results to extend the reach of our work, and increase our understanding of the impact of Australia’s investment in agricultural research-for-development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Project and program partners ▶ Industry peak bodies ▶ Australian public ▶ International public

Performance

Our core business is to manage long-term relationships and identify research priorities collaboratively with our partner countries, alongside brokering research partnerships and commissioning research to tackle those priorities.

We are a learning organisation that strives to build knowledge and capacity to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems for the benefit of developing countries and Australia. We also evaluate our performance on a continuous basis, to review and define our impact. We communicate our research findings to maximise the impact of our work.

Throughout the period of this corporate plan, ACIAR will manage projects and establish relationships and programs that contribute to the achievement of our targets in our three key areas of work:

- ▶ global research collaborations
- ▶ bilateral and regional research projects
- ▶ scientific and policy capacity building.

The impact of ACIAR projects, programs and partnerships is complex to measure, as it involves technological and sociological changes in developing countries in the Indo-Pacific region, which may be realised over many years, even decades, after the original research investment.

ACIAR manages and monitors its investments in research and partnerships to maximise impact and returns. We have a well-established approach to reviewing the performance of research projects, assessing adoption of research results and the subsequent impact at a project level. Together, these enable us to monitor progress and performance across the portfolio, help refine our priorities, learn lessons from current and past projects, and report accurately to our Minister, the Parliament and the Australian public.

The following sections set out the performance indicators and targets for each area of our work that contribute to our annual performance within the Enhanced Commonwealth Performance Framework.



1. Global research collaborations

Our work in global research collaborations enhances Australia's global reputation as a constructive development partner and position Australia to positively influence the international agricultural research agenda.

Work in this area is achieved mainly through:

- ▶ management of Australia's investment in the international agricultural research system, chief among which is the CGIAR, as mandated by the ACIAR Act
- ▶ establishment and management of multilateral partnerships with public and private organisations, to facilitate shared objectives or vision.

Our performance is measured by our influence as a donor, through ACIAR representation on governance bodies of our multilateral partners, and our consistency in providing financial support to partner organisations, from one year to the next.

Key performance measures for global research collaborations 2020–21 to 2023–24

Area monitored	Performance indicator	Annual target
Influence as a donor	% of supported multilateral research collaborations in which ACIAR is represented on a governance body	Rated as <i>exceeding expectations</i>
Consistency as a donor	% variation in financial support from previous financial year	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>

2. Bilateral and regional research projects

Agricultural research facilitated and implemented by ACIAR and partner countries has benefits at the farm, regional and national levels; and benefits for smallholder farmers, communities and industries. In any one year, there will be approximately 200 ACIAR-supported bilateral and regional research projects underway in the Indo-Pacific region. The research is led by a commissioned organisation (universities, CSIRO, state government agencies or private firms) and/or international agricultural research centres and is a collaboration between project leaders and in-country organisations.

Our performance is measured at the project level through targets for project management and delivery of intended outputs within the project term. We also measure the contribution of our investment to development outcomes, several years after the conclusion of the project.

Key performance measures for bilateral and regional research projects 2020–21 to 2023–24

Area monitored	Performance indicator	Annual target
Project management	% of annual deliverables submitted on schedule	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
	% of annual and final reports submitted on schedule	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
Delivery of intended project objectives	% of projects concluded during the financial year that rated as good quality or above on the effectiveness criteria in final project reviews	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
	% of projects concluded during the financial year that rated as good quality or above on the gender equity criteria in final project reviews	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
Contribution to development outcomes	% of long-term adoption studies completed during the financial year showing evidence of significant use of identified project outputs by next and/or final users	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
	% of long-term economic impact assessments completed during the financial year showing benefit–cost ratio of 3:1 or above	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>

3. Scientific and policy capacity building

The ACIAR Capacity Building Program facilitates a process of strengthening the abilities of individuals, organisations and systems to undertake agricultural research to advance development outcomes. The program works with implementation partners to deliver formal and project-based opportunities for individuals, organisations and institutions to strengthen their abilities to undertake agricultural research, influence policy and advance development outcomes.

Our performance is measured at the project level through targets for project management and delivery of intended outputs within the project term. We also measure the contribution of our investment to development outcomes, several years after the conclusion of the project.

Key performance measures for scientific and policy capacity building programs 2020–21 to 2023–24

Area monitored	Performance indicator	Annual target
Project management	% of annual deliverables submitted on schedule	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
	% of total participants identifying as female or gender diverse	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
Delivery of intended project objectives	% of total program participants successfully completing	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
	% of participants who self-assess their experience of the program as satisfactory or above at completion	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
Contribution to development outcomes	% of total program alumni profiled in qualitative case-studies annually who are engaged in relevant sectors	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>
	% of total program alumni profiled in qualitative case-studies annually who self-assess the program as a significant contribution to career development	Rated as <i>meeting expectations</i>

List of requirements

This corporate plan has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of:

- ▶ subsection 35(1) of the PGPA Act
- ▶ the PGPA Rule 2014.

The following table details the requirements met by the ACIAR Corporate Plan 2020–21 and the page references for each requirement.

Requirement	Page(s)
Introduction	3
▶ Statement of preparation	1
▶ Reporting period for which the plan is prepared	1
▶ Reporting periods covered by the plan	1
Purpose	8
Key activities	11
Operating context	15
▶ Environment	15
▶ Capability	18
▶ Risk management	22
▶ Partnerships and engagement	23
Performance	24



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