

East and South-East Asia region program

Collectively, the countries that make up East and South-East Asia are the most populous in the world and the region is recognised as an economic powerhouse. Ten of these countries are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and engage closely in terms of trade and investment with east Asian countries, including China.

Cambodia and Laos receive most of their investment and aid from China, so these countries will be most affected by a marked slowdown of economic growth in China. Vietnam is the only ASEAN member state integrated into supply chains with China and is experiencing supply disruptions. Since 2009, China has become the largest trading partner of ASEAN nations and is also one of the most important sources of investment.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN economies were forecast to have some of the highest growth rates in the world over the next 5 years. The International Monetary Fund and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development had forecast an average of 5% growth per annum, a higher rate than some of the more developed economies of Europe and North America. After 5.5% growth in 2022, the ASEAN economy performed well with a combined GDP of A\$4 trillion. Noting however, some exceptions such as Laos, which is experiencing high inflation.

Economic activity in 2022 was shored up by the continued reopening of many economies after the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthening domestic consumption and investment, especially in Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. China's growth is expected to pick up, which will boost external demand for economies in the rest of the region.

With more than 100 million hectares of agricultural land, the ASEAN countries collectively are a major producer, supplier and exporter of various crops, grains (including rice) and livestock products. Although agriculture only contributes around 10% of total ASEAN GDP, it is the main sector for employment in most member states, accounting for approximately one-third of total ASEAN employment. Given its significant role, the development of the food, agriculture and forestry sectors in ASEAN countries is vital to ensuring equitable and inclusive growth in the region.

Food security, food safety and better nutrition remain priority concerns within the region. These priorities align with ASEAN's goals of agricultural cooperation. Support for women's economic empowerment, which has become a prominent approach to addressing gender gaps in economic spheres, including agriculture, continues to grow.

Drivers of regional collaboration

The principal driver of regional collaboration in the East and South-East Asia region is ASEAN, which for more than 50 years has addressed shared challenges and engaged trade and development partners, including Australia and China. Recently, regional collaboration has been driven by critical factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, geopolitics and transboundary concerns.

Trade and investment are the major drivers of economic growth in the region, aided by overseas development assistance. The ASEAN-led Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement came into force in January 2022 and is expected to help strengthen regional economic integration and provide access to a larger market, which will assist the post-pandemic recovery of the ASEAN economies.

In the agricultural research sector, ACIAR is supporting regional collaboration through support to the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI). Cross-border challenges such as plant and animal biosecurity remain prominent and are driving efforts for regional integration. In the Mekong region, plant diseases have recently spread across borders, destroying crops of cassava and banana.

Shared concerns about imminent and increasing threats posed by climate change have resulted in ASEAN creating a 'framework of ASEAN community building, with strategies and actions to enhance regional and international cooperation in supporting adaptation'. In the field of agricultural research for development, regional cooperation plays a significant role, particularly regarding increasing resilience and adaptation to climate change, natural disasters and other shocks.

The South-East Asia region is one of the most natural disaster-prone in the world. Natural disasters threaten food security and rural livelihoods and have economic consequences for the whole region, so disaster mitigation is a common interest among neighbouring countries. The ASEAN Declaration on 'One ASEAN, One Response' aims to increase the speed, scale and solidarity of disaster response in the region.

2023–24 program

Partner countries

Cambodia
China
Indonesia
Laos
Malaysia
Philippines
Thailand
Timor-Leste
Vietnam

82
projects

63
research
projects

19
small research
activities

A\$34.05 million

Investment in
agricultural research
for development



12
Agribusiness projects



4
Climate Change projects



5
Crops projects



11
Fisheries projects



4
Forestry projects



8
Horticulture projects



11
Livestock Systems projects



9
Social Systems projects



15
Soil & Land Management
projects



3
Water projects

Note: This data was current at the time of publication. Additional projects may be commissioned during 2023–24.

Regional ACIAR program

The ACIAR program in East and South-East Asia remains the largest across the 4 regions in which ACIAR operates. The nature of our engagement within the region is strongly bilateral, based on robust partnerships with national research systems, long-standing diplomatic connections, and sustained development collaboration with Australia. However, there is a growing trend towards regional collaboration between countries facing shared challenges. This is consistent with the research partnerships under ASEAN, which acknowledge that collaboration among member states is a sensible path towards addressing common challenges in the region.

The ASEAN drive towards regional economic integration and connectivity will increase demand from individual countries and regional bodies for research support that harmonises approaches to some agricultural issues across countries, including biosecurity, food safety and climate resilience. We contribute to this by funding regional research collaboration and through our support and chairing of APAARI.

Among our newer regional collaborations in the East and South-East Asia region are efforts to identify efficient biosecurity risk-management systems in the region to respond to prominent outbreaks affecting plant and animal health. For example, Indonesia, the Philippines and Laos are involved in regional research focusing on an integrated system to manage *Fusarium* wilt (Panama disease) in banana crops with components of biosecurity and disease management.

A series of projects continues throughout the region under the ACIAR-IDRC Research Program on One Health (AIRPOH). Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, the Philippines and Timor-Leste will host a portfolio of interconnected projects supporting research that aims to promote new ideas and thinking on the relationship and management of human, animal and environmental health (page 19).

Trilateral collaboration and new partnership models are emerging for ACIAR in the East and South-East Asia region. Driving these new partnership models are greater capacities that can be achieved when resources are pooled. This is translating into substantial co-investment from partners such as Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines. While bilateral relationships remain the predominant model for development cooperation in the region, trilateral collaboration is increasingly possible and desired by partner countries.

Opportunities for trilateral research collaboration with Australia in the region include varietal development to manage devastating new diseases in banana, cassava and citrus; machinery innovation for conservation agriculture among smallholder farmers; and research to develop perennial rice varieties.

The transformation of the Chinese economy has resulted in a reorientation of the ACIAR program in China. Building on decades of trusted research relationships, the ACIAR program in China has changed from bilateral research partnerships to partnerships based on substantial co-investment, either in the form of parallel investment or trilateral collaboration. Areas of current focus include rural transformation and disease management in citrus, with Australia and China both making research investments in partner countries.

ACIAR is not supporting any research collaborations in Myanmar in 2023–24. However, ACIAR continues to consult with international partners to identify potential collaboration consistent with Australian Government guidelines.

Our on-the-ground work in South-East Asia primarily occurs with 7 partner countries. However, we also work with development and coordinating organisations based in other countries in the region, collaborating on issues and programs of regional significance.




For example, in recent decades Thailand has transitioned from aid recipient to aid donor. Thailand hosts regional organisations of relevance to ACIAR programs, including APAARI (page 16), the Asian Institute of Technology and the FAO regional office. We also include Thai expertise on projects of regional significance when opportunities arise.






Region-wide cooperation on forest biosecurity



In 2023–24, we have a regional project, 'Building effective forest health and biosecurity networks in South-East Asia' (FST/2020/123), that includes partners from Thailand and Malaysia, as well as partners from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos and Vietnam.



Current and proposed projects in the East and South-East Asia region, 2023–24

Program	Project title & code	Country
	Agribusiness	
	Understanding the drivers of successful and inclusive rural regional transformation: sharing experiences and policy advice in Bangladesh, China, Indonesia and Pakistan ADP/2017/024	Bangladesh, China, Indonesia, Pakistan
	Inclusive agriculture value chain financing AGB/2016/163	Indonesia, Vietnam
	Establishing sustainable solutions to cassava diseases in mainland South-East Asia AGB/2018/172	Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam
	Increasing the sustainability, productivity and economic value of coffee and black pepper farming systems and value chains in the Central Highlands region of Vietnam AGB/2018/175	Vietnam
	Agribusiness-led inclusive value chain development for smallholder farming systems in the Philippines AGB/2018/196	Philippines
	Planning and establishing a sustainable smallholder rice chain in the Mekong Delta AGB/2019/153	Vietnam
	Integrating smallholder households and farm production systems into commercial beef supply chains in Vietnam AGB/2020/189	Vietnam
	Evaluating supply chain interventions and partnerships to sustainably grow the smallholder dairy sectors of Indonesia and the Philippines AGB/2021/124	Indonesia, Philippines
	Creating resilient communities through smallholder-inclusive tourism markets in Indonesia AGB/2021/125	Indonesia
	Digital monitoring of VietGAP compliance for high-value domestic markets and potential export in smallholder fruit value chains from the northwest of Vietnam AGB/2022/114	Vietnam
Philippines dairy AGB/2023/192	Philippines	
Food loss in the <i>Pangasius</i> catfish value chain of the Mekong River Basin CS/2020/209	Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam	
	Climate Change	
	Supporting greenhouse gas inventories and targeted rice mitigation options for Vietnam CLIM/2019/150	Vietnam
	Scoping new co-governance research in Indonesian peatlands CLIM/2022/138	Indonesia
	Defining the potential for mangrove-based agribusiness transformation in the coastal Mekong Delta CLIM/2023/190	Vietnam
Strengthening capacity to pursue systemic resilience in Philippines food systems CLIM/2023/195	Philippines	
	Crops	
	International Mungbean Improvement Network 2 CROP/2019/144	Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Kenya
	Weed management techniques for mechanised and broadcast lowland crop production systems in Cambodia and Laos CROP/2019/145	Cambodia, Laos
	Agricultural innovations for communities: intensified and diverse farming systems for Timor-Leste CROP/2021/131	Timor-Leste
	Disease-resilient and sustainable cassava production systems in the Mekong region CROP/2022/110	Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam
Addressing the rapid emergence of cassava witches broom disease in Laos CROP/2023/157	Laos	

Program	Project title & code	Country
	Fisheries	
	Increasing technical skills supporting community-based sea cucumber production in Vietnam and the Philippines FIS/2016/122	Philippines, Vietnam
	Half-pearl industry development in Tonga and Vietnam FIS/2016/126	Tonga, Vietnam
	Assessing upstream fish migration measures at Xayaburi Dam in Laos FIS/2017/017	Laos
	A nutrition-sensitive approach to fisheries management and development in Timor-Leste and Nusa Tenggara Timur Province, Indonesia FIS/2017/032	Indonesia, Timor-Leste
	Fishtech: integrating technical fisheries solutions into river development programs across South-East Asia FIS/2018/153	Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand
	Regional coral restoration networks and appropriate technologies for larger-scale coral and fish habitat restoration in the Philippines and Australia FIS/2019/123	Philippines
	Innovating fish-based livelihoods in the community economies of Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands FIS/2019/124	Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste
	Developing social and economic monitoring and evaluation systems in Indonesian tuna fisheries to assess potential impacts of alternative management measures on vulnerable communities FIS/2020/109	Indonesia
	Institutional effectiveness and political economy of coral reef restoration in the Philippines FIS/2021/112	Philippines
Extending integrated analysis for improved food system outcomes in Timor-Leste and the Pacific region FIS/2022/121	Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu	
Addressing key technical bottlenecks in the grouper supply chain in Vietnam (and Australia) through manufactured feed and hatchery developments that aim to improve SME-sector profitability FIS/2022/148	Vietnam	
	Forestry	
	Managing risk in South-East Asian forest biosecurity FST/2018/179	Indonesia, Vietnam
	Building an effective forest health and biosecurity network in South-East Asia FST/2020/123	Cambodia, Laos
	Forest restoration for economic outcomes FST/2020/137	Laos
Retaining the jewels in the crown: Kalimantan peat forest remnants FST/2021/145	Indonesia	
	Horticulture	
	Development of area-wide management approaches for fruit flies in mango for Indonesia, Philippines, Australia and the Asia-Pacific region HORT/2015/042	Indonesia, Philippines
	Developing vegetable value chains to meet evolving market expectations in the Philippines HORT/2016/188	Philippines
	An integrated management response to the spread of <i>Fusarium</i> wilt of banana in South-East Asia HORT/2018/192	Indonesia, Laos, Philippines
	Preparedness and management of huǎnglóngbīng (citrus greening disease) to safeguard the future of citrus industry in Australia, China and Indonesia HORT/2019/164	Indonesia
	Safe, fresh, year-round vegetables in Cambodia and Laos through research and development support of smallholder productivity and engagement in collaborative supply chains HORT/2021/143	Cambodia, Laos
	Scoping for the implementation of plant health support in Timor-Leste HORT/2022/127	Timor-Leste
	Scoping the opportunity for urban and peri-urban agricultural development in South-East Asia HORT/2023/147	Vietnam, Philippines
Strengthening Vietnam's citrus industry through research collaboration to build industry capacity to meet market demand HORT/2023/179	Vietnam	



Program	Project title & code	Country
	Livestock Systems	
	Investigating and developing interventions to mitigate food borne parasitic disease in production animals in Laos LS/2014/055	Laos
	Goat production systems and marketing in Laos and Vietnam LS/2017/034	Laos, Vietnam
	Understanding One Health zoonotic disease surveillance in Indonesia: a macaque, human and land use change framework LS/2019/116	Indonesia
	Asian chicken genetic gains: a platform for exploring, testing, delivering and improving chickens for enhanced livelihood outcomes in South-East Asia LS/2019/142	Cambodia, Vietnam
	Global burden of animal disease initiative: Indonesia case study LS/2020/156	Indonesia
	Bacteria enteropathy and nutrition in infants and children in Timor-Leste through a One Health approach LS/2021/126	Timor-Leste
	Rapid transformation of the Lao beef sector: biosecurity, trade and smallholders LS/2021/128	Cambodia, Laos
	Operationalising a global animal health governance network for policy impact LS/2022/143	Bangladesh, Kenya, Philippines, Vietnam
	Developing strategies to reduce brucellosis transmission in Timor-Leste based on One Health collaboration LS/2022/161	Timor-Leste
	Country research update and policy support to the Philippines' national surveillance and control programs for African swine fever, avian influenza and antimicrobial resistance: a One Health systems approach to food animal security, public health resilience LS/2022/162	Philippines
	Livestock enhancement through ecohealth/One Health assessment in South-East Asia LS/2022/163	Indonesia, Laos, Philippines
	Social Systems	
	Uptake of agricultural technologies amongst farmers in Battambang and Pailin provinces, Cambodia ASEM/2013/003	Cambodia
	Enhancing livelihoods through forest and landscape restoration ASEM/2016/103	Philippines
	Next generation agricultural extension: social relations for practice change SSS/2019/138	Cambodia
	Building the evidence base on the impacts of mobile financial services for women and men in farming households in Laos and Cambodia SSS/2020/160	Cambodia, Laos
	Towards improved livelihoods for Indonesian fishers in Nusa Tenggara Timor Province, Indonesia SSS/2022/117	Indonesia
	Indigenous food systems knowledge exchange SSS/2022/118	Timor-Leste
	Pathways for future farmers in South-East Asia SSS/2022/134	Laos, Vietnam
	Developing co-management options for sustainable peatlands in Indonesia SSS/2022/155	Indonesia
The role of agricultural and forest landscapes on human and environmental health in Cambodia SSS/2022/164	Cambodia	

Program	Project title & code	Country
	Soil & Land Management	
	Land management of diverse rubber-based systems in southern Philippines SLAM/2017/040	Philippines
	Farmer options for crops under saline conditions in the Mekong River Delta, Vietnam SLAM/2018/144	Vietnam
	Crop health and nutrient management of shallot-chilli-rice cropping systems in coastal Indonesia SLAM/2018/145	Indonesia
	Managing heavy metals and soil contaminants in vegetable production to ensure food safety and environmental health in the Philippines SLAM/2020/117	Philippines
	Understanding tradition and fostering appropriate innovation in soil management to improve farmers productivity and livelihood in Timor-Leste SLAM/2020/141	Timor-Leste
	Evaluation of livelihood zones, rural household trajectories, research and development partners and initiatives in Timor-Leste SLAM/2021/108	Timor-Leste
	Quantifying the impacts of nitrogen use and developing sustainable agricultural land management strategies in Laos rice-based farming systems SLAM/2022/102	Laos
	Cambodian soil information system supporting sustainable upland agricultural development SLAM/2022/103	Cambodia
	Meeting the biophysical information needs of peatland restoration and management stakeholders to support improved and integrated decision-making SLAM/2022/104	Indonesia
	Assessment of the adoption and adaptation of conservation agriculture and direct seeded rice in South and South-East Asia SLAM/2022/172	Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Laos, Philippines, Vietnam
	Soil microbial interactions with crop replacement options in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta SLAM/2022/175	Vietnam
	Extending findings and transferring knowledge from SMNC/2014/049 on soil management in slopping lands of northwest Vietnam and northern Laos SLAM/2023/106	Laos, Vietnam
	Assessment of soil condition for coffee, pepper and fruit tree production in the 5 provinces of the Central Highlands of Vietnam SLAM/2023/142	Vietnam
	Management practices for profitable crop livestock systems for Cambodia and Laos SMCN/2012/075	Cambodia, Laos
Land suitability assessment and site-specific soil management for Cambodian uplands SMCN/2016/237	Cambodia	
	Water	
	Water for fish and irrigation in the Mekong WAC/2021/135	Cambodia, Laos
	Support for the FAO-AWP Asia Pacific water scarcity programme – Indonesia WAC/2023/171	Indonesia
	Transformative futures for water security: South-East Asia roadmap WAC/2023/176	Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Thailand



More information about our projects is available on the ACIAR website. Search for the project title or project code.
www.aciar.gov.au