

Pacific region program

The countries of the western Pacific region are set apart from the rest of the world. Many are small and geographically isolated, have limited land mass and arable land, fragile natural environments and limited land-based agricultural resources. Increasingly, they are more vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change than many other regions of the world.

Each country in this region faces specific development and agricultural challenges that hamper economic growth, including small formal economies, long distances from major markets, high costs and rapidly growing populations. Governance and capacity constraints in some countries also limit their ability to deliver services. These challenges make it difficult to respond and recover from disasters and climate change effects, which are prominent in the region.

In 2022–23, the region grappled with challenges arising from a string of civil and natural disasters that included civil unrest and demonstrations in Solomon Islands, social and election-related tensions in Papua New Guinea, volcanic eruption and tsunamis in Tonga, and flooding and landslides due to cyclones across several countries, including twin cyclones in Vanuatu. These events have ongoing impacts on local populations and influence the nature of development assistance programs.

Pacific island countries also face the consequences of the triple burden of malnutrition – a situation where undernutrition, micronutrient deficiencies and obesity coexist. Unhealthy diets, lifestyles and environment are key risk factors contributing to these non-communicable diseases.

The COVID-19 pandemic had devastating effects globally. For the past 3 years the Pacific region was affected by border closures and disruptions to supply chains, causing significant impacts on food security. Many countries have faced challenges in accessing food imports and agricultural inputs, leading to price increases and decreased availability of some products. Additionally, measures such as lockdowns and social distancing affected local food production and distribution, especially for small-scale farmers and fishers.

The Pacific region has reopened its borders; however, recovery from the pandemic is still in its early stages and the impacts remain prevalent and significant. The economy of the region has been impacted by unprecedented loss of tourism-related activities and the initial slowing of remittances. Concurrently, there is a deterioration of government finances and availability of public-sector funding.

In response to the pandemic, Pacific region countries adopted a variety of measures to address impacts, including economic stimulus packages, home gardening programs through seed distribution, farm support packages and backyard aquaculture farms. Cash transfers to the most vulnerable households were also implemented to augment loss of income.

Governments and non-government organisations in Pacific island countries continue to respond with policies and programs to support food security, such as increasing domestic production and distribution channels, food assistance programs for vulnerable populations, and facilitation of trade and transport of essential goods.

Agriculture and fresh produce have emerged as the foundation of the economy for the region and ensured food security for the population when the manufacturing sector, trade and services stalled. There is continued stress on the ability of food systems to deliver primary functions: providing food security and nutrition to growing populations; supporting livelihoods for farmers, fishers and workers along the agrifood chains; and supporting environmental sustainability and resilience.

The region continues to foster approaches with development partners to strengthen the agriculture and fisheries sectors and promote agritourism to enhance the region's economy. This has included a resurgent appreciation of importance of local agriculture, expansion of small-scale gardening, improved measures of post-harvesting techniques and improving local technical expertise. The past 3 years have increased interest in, and support for, agriculture, fisheries and forestry; enthusiasm for innovation in food systems and value chains; and the creation of new domestic market opportunities. Regional leaders have emphasised the urgency of catalysing national food systems transformation in Pacific island countries by promoting sustainable agriculture practices and diversifying food systems to ensure food security and reduce dependence on imports.

2023–24 program

Partner countries

Fiji
Kiribati
Papua New Guinea
Samoa
Solomon Islands
Tonga
Tuvalu
Vanuatu

50
projects

37
research
projects

13
small research
activities

A\$18.77 million

Investment in
agricultural research
for development



1
Agribusiness project



5
Climate Change projects



1
Crops project



11
Fisheries projects



5
Forestry projects



8
Horticulture projects



5
Livestock Systems projects



7
Social Systems projects



5
Soil & Land Management
projects



2
Water projects

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

Drivers of regional collaboration

While acknowledging the individual needs and unique research and development priorities of each partner country in the Pacific region, the scattered nature of the Pacific region nations and their small populations mean that many countries cannot address all their challenges and opportunities in agriculture alone.

The ACIAR program within the Pacific region has a strong focus on enabling regional collaboration, especially through our close relationship with the Pacific Community (SPC). SPC is the principal scientific and technical organisation supporting research for development in the region and plays a key role in communicating research outcomes of relevance across the region. Regional research programs and projects are implemented through agencies with regional capability (including SPC, the University of the South Pacific and CGIAR centres) and bilateral research and extension agencies.

Papua New Guinea is a significant partner within our Pacific region program. We have a specific strategy that highlights enabling collaboration with the entire Pacific region on issues of common interest.

Regional ACIAR program

Australia's partnerships with the Pacific region were reaffirmed by the Australia Government in the 2023 release of [Australia's International Development Policy](#). The new policy focuses on strategically secure and economically stable support for the region and emphasises helping Australia's neighbours tackle common challenges and finding solutions to improve people's lives and livelihoods.

In 2023–24, ACIAR will continue to build on its long engagement with the Pacific region, through our regional office in Fiji. We will strengthen partnerships with Pacific island countries and Papua New Guinea, and actively pursue opportunities and models that align with the research-for-development plans and priorities of partner countries.

As the Pacific region enters the post-pandemic period – a new normal – ACIAR is developing medium-term priorities under a new 10-year regional strategy, through consultation with national government partners and regional research and development agencies. We will focus our efforts on supporting the rebuilding of the agriculture sector and re-engaging with partners. ACIAR will continue to actively engage with regional strategic platforms such as the Pacific Week of Agriculture and Forestry, among others. These events enable ACIAR to meet with and listen to Pacific partners, discuss the region's priorities and plans, and identify where research can contribute to a more resilient, sustainable and food-secure region.

ACIAR continues to support the alumni of its capacity-building programs and fellowships to work hand-in-hand with Australian and international researchers, to provide insights into building the resilience of local food security against external shocks and identify strategies to ensure future food security of the Pacific region. Post-pandemic, we are supporting research that responds to the biosecurity and health threats to communities, such as One Health (the interface between human, animal and environmental health), pest and disease management, understanding food environment and links to agriculture, and improving resilience in food value chains, both within partner countries and between Australia and partner countries.





A key future focus of our program in the Pacific region will be enabling regional collaboration in research and capacity building to address common issues and opportunities. This regional approach includes projects addressing biosecurity, climate-resilient livelihoods, opportunities for stronger agribusiness development, community-based fisheries management, integrated food systems and nutrition.




Current regional projects and linked programs include:




- » fisheries (pathways to change in Pacific coastal fisheries)
- » forestry (domestication and breeding of sandalwood, agroforestry and catchment rehabilitation)
- » crops (sweetpotato, coconut, protected cropping systems and tropical fruits)
- » soil health and management
- » food systems and nutrition (food loss).



Current and proposed projects in the Pacific region, 2023–24

Program	Project title & code	Country
	Agribusiness	
	Evaluating an alternative approach to sector development in Pacific island countries AGB/2022/113	Fiji
	Climate Change	
	Transformation pathways for Pacific coastal food systems CLIM/2020/178	Kiribati, Solomon Islands
	Sustainable agricultural intensification systems for climate resilient development in Pacific island countries CLIM/2020/186	Samoa, Tonga
	Supporting greenhouse gas inventories and livestock data development in Fiji CLIM/2021/160	Fiji
	Using carbon markets to drive multiple benefits for Papua New Guinea coffee farmers CLIM/2022/109	Papua New Guinea
Scoping the governance and co-benefits of circular agrifood–energy systems governance in Pacific island countries CLIM/2022/174	Fiji, Kiribati	
	Crops	
	Finding a genetic basis for oil palm responses to basal stem rot in a long-term infected block CROP/2021/130	Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands
	Fisheries	
	Half-pearl industry development in Tonga and Vietnam FIS/2016/126	Tonga, Vietnam
	Improving peri-urban and remote inland fish farming in Papua New Guinea to benefit both community-based and commercial operators FIS/2018/154	Papua New Guinea
	Towards more profitable and sustainable mabé pearl and shell-based livelihoods in the western Pacific FIS/2019/122	Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Tonga
	Innovating fish-based livelihoods in the community economies of Timor-Leste and Solomon Islands FIS/2019/124	Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste
	Spatially integrated approach to support a portfolio of livelihoods FIS/2020/111	Solomon Islands, South Pacific general
	Coalitions for change in sustainable national community-based fisheries management programs in the Pacific FIS/2020/172	Kiribati, Solomon Islands, South Pacific general, Vanuatu
	Strengthening agricultural resilience in Western Province: developing methods for strengths-based livelihoods approach FIS/2021/113	Papua New Guinea
	Strengthening agricultural resilience in Western Province: mapping place-based strengths and assets FIS/2021/122	Papua New Guinea
	Pursuing more inclusive engagement in agrifood value chains by better understanding the roles and challenges facing people of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression in Samoa FIS/2022/119	Samoa
	Extending integrated analysis for improved food system outcomes in Timor-Leste and the Pacific region FIS/2022/121	Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Vanuatu
Supporting resilient and equitable food systems: emerging oyster and seaweed mariculture enterprises in coastal communities in Fiji and northern Australia FIS/2022/147	Fiji	

Program	Project title & code	Country
	Forestry	
	Enhancing private sector-led development of the canarium industry in Papua New Guinea – phase 2 FST/2017/038	Papua New Guinea
	Promoting smallholder teak and sandalwood plantations in Papua New Guinea and Australia FST/2018/178	Papua New Guinea
	Coconut and other non-traditional forest resources for the manufacture of engineered wood products FST/2019/128	Fiji
	Livelihoods in forest ecosystem recovery (LIFER) FST/2020/135	Solomon Islands
	Developing nut industries in Bougainville FST/2022/124	Papua New Guinea
	Horticulture	
	Adopting a gender-inclusive participatory approach to reducing horticultural food loss in the Pacific CS/2020/191	Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga
	Responding to emerging pest and disease threats to horticulture in the Pacific islands HORT/2016/185	Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga
	Safeguarding and deploying coconut diversity for improving livelihoods in the Pacific islands HORT/2017/025	Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu
	Protecting the coffee industry from coffee berry borer in Papua New Guinea and Australia HORT/2018/194	Papua New Guinea
	Improving root crop resilience and biosecurity in Pacific island countries and Australia HORT/2018/195	Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga
	Enhanced fruit systems for Tonga and Samoa (phase 2): community based citrus production HORT/2019/165	Samoa, Tonga
	PICfood: driving vegetable food environments to promote healthy diets in Pacific island countries HORT/2021/141	Fiji
Understanding school food provision in the Pacific: scoping the potential of local food systems to improve diets, nutrition and livelihoods HORT/2021/159	South Pacific general	
	Livestock Systems	
	Strengthening Pacific bee-keeping industries for improved production and livelihoods in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands LS/2014/042	Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands
	Improving small ruminant production and supply in Fiji and Samoa LS/2017/033	Fiji, Samoa
	A farm-planning approach to increase productivity and profitability of smallholder cattle systems in Vanuatu LS/2018/185	Vanuatu
	Integrated and sustainable antimicrobial surveillance networks in the Pacific LS/2019/119	Fiji, Samoa
Strengthened surveillance for vector-borne zoonotic and livestock diseases in Papua New Guinea LS/2021/158	Papua New Guinea	

Program	Project title & code	Country
Social Systems		
	Improving livelihoods of smallholder coffee communities in Papua New Guinea ASEM/2016/100	Papua New Guinea
	Climate smart agriculture opportunities for enhanced food production in Papua New Guinea ASEM/2017/026	Papua New Guinea
	Improving agricultural development opportunities for female smallholders in rural Solomon Islands SSS/2018/136	Solomon Islands
	Gender equitable agricultural extension through institutions and youth engagement in Papua New Guinea SSS/2018/137	Papua New Guinea
	Landcare: an agricultural extension and community development model at district and national scale in Fiji SSS/2019/140	Fiji
	Supporting food and nutrition security through regenerative climate-smart ridge to reef landscape and food system designs for community conservation areas and buffer zones in Vanuatu SSS/2021/120	Vanuatu
	Mitigating gender-based violence risk in international agricultural research SSS/2022/116	Papua New Guinea
Soil & Land Management		
	Better soil and land information for improving Papua New Guinea's agricultural production and integrated land use planning – building a revitalised PNGRIS2 SLAM/2019/106	Papua New Guinea
	Optimising soil management and health in Papua New Guinea integrated cocoa farming systems – phase 2 SLAM/2019/109	Papua New Guinea
	Soil management in Pacific islands: investigating nutrient dynamics and the utility of soil information for better soil and farming system management SLAM/2020/139	Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu
	A review of the soil and agronomic constraints and opportunities in Pacific food garden systems SLAM/2022/180	Fiji, Samoa, Tonga
	Assessment of the capacity and sustainability of Pacific agricultural chemistry laboratories SLAM/2022/181	Fiji, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu
Water		
	Water security for locally relocated coastal communities in the western Pacific region WAC/2022/128	Fiji, Vanuatu
	Improving water governance in Papua New Guinea WAC/2023/180	Papua New Guinea



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

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