An evaluation of the ACIAR Agriculture Sector Linkages Program

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ACIAR

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The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) was established in June 1982 by an Act of the Australian Parliament. ACIAR operates as part of Australia's international development assistance program, with a mission to achieve more productive and sustainable agricultural systems, for the benefit of developing countries and Australia. It commissions collaborative research between Australian and developing-country researchers in areas where Australia has special research competence. It also administers Australia's contribution to the International Agricultural Research Centres.

The Chief Executive Officer of ACIAR reports directly to the Australian Government Minister for Foreign Affairs. ACIAR operates solely on budget appropriation from Australia's Official Development Assistance (ODA).

The use of trade names constitutes neither endorsement of nor discrimination against any product by ACIAR.

Foreword

This book is the first of a new series of reports that is based on outcome evaluations of research and programs supported by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

ACIAR establishes international research partnerships between scientists from Australia and partner countries in the Indo-Pacific region to improve the productivity and sustainability of agriculture, fisheries and forestry for smallholder farmers.

As a learning organisation, ACIAR is committed to understanding the diverse outcomes delivered by the research collaborations we develop, to demonstrate the value of investment of public funds, to continuously improve research design and to increase the likelihood that ACIAR-funded research improves the lives of farming communities in our partner countries. An important mechanism for achieving our aims is to work closely with the wider Australian development assistance program to develop promising research into improved agricultural practices and profitable enterprises at scale.

This report presents a suite of evaluations of the Agriculture Sector Linkages Program, conducted in Pakistan, and co-funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and ACIAR from 2005 to 2015. The program was an opportunity for Australian agencies to partner with Pakistani researchers and ministries to advance the development of key agriculture sectors, seeking particularly to understand pathways to adoption for improved practices in Pakistan. The investment sought to strengthen learning and insights in these common areas by linking projects together into a programmatic structure.

The evaluations ultimately seek to understand the value that this programmatic structure delivered and identify lessons for future programmatic and/or place-based research-for-development investments. To inform these insights, a series of project-level outcome evaluations were conducted. These evaluations were designed to investigate the extent to which the funded projects contributed to short-term development outcomes.

Outcome evaluations adopt a largely qualitive, theory-based approach and seek to empirically test the project's articulated logic and investigate the assumptions underpinning this logic. In addition to documenting the contribution of ACIAR projects to intended outcomes, these outcome evaluations are intended to generate data for cross-case analysis that, over time, will support the elicitation of lessons regarding effective agriculture research-for-development practice.

Andrew Campbell
Chief Executive Officer, ACIAR
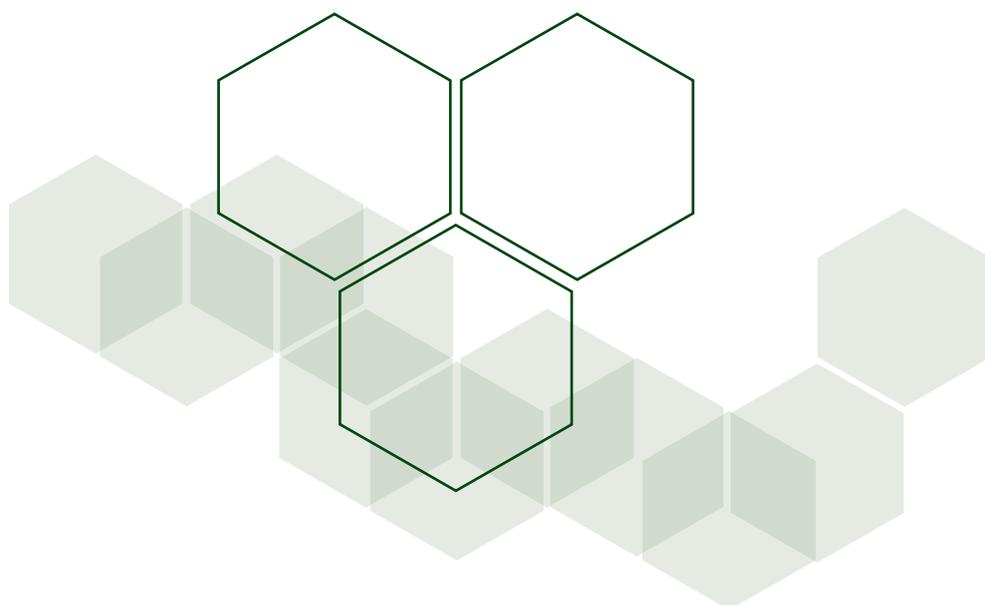
An evaluation of the ACIAR Agriculture Sector Linkages Program

Part 1: Programmatic approach

An evaluation of the
ACIAR Agriculture Sector Linkages Program

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
ASLP	Agriculture Sector Linkages Program
AUD	Australian Dollar
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AVCCR	Agriculture Value Chain Collaborative Research Program
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
M&E	Monitoring and evaluation
NARC	National Agriculture Research Centre (Pakistan)
ODA	Official development assistance
PKR	Pakistan Rupee
RPM	Research Program Manager (ACIAR)
TADEP	Transformative Agriculture and Development Enterprise Program

Acknowledgements

Part 1 contents

Summary

From 2005 to 2015, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) oversaw 2 phases of the Agriculture Sector Linkages Program (ASLP) in Pakistan, which was a research-for-development program in the Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan focused on enhancing selected agricultural value chains for the benefit of the rural poor. The program had 2 phases: Phase 1 ran from 2005 to 2010, and Phase 2 was implemented from 2011 to 2015. The program was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)[1] and was managed by ACIAR. Both phases included commodity-based projects focused on citrus, dairy and mango. Phase 2 also included:

- a social science research project which aimed to increase the pro-poor focus of, and collaboration between, other projects
- a policy enabling project which sought to understand and overcome policy constraints faced by smallholder farmers
- a range of activities focused on building agricultural capability in Pakistan.

This report, ACIAR Outcome Evaluation No. 1, summarises the outcomes of ASLP, and identifies lessons that can inform the design and implementation of future ACIAR programs.

Part 1 reports on the whole ASLP program and lessons learned from the ASLP programmatic approach. Parts 2, 3 and 4 report on evaluations of the commodity-based projects within the program, focused on citrus, dairy and mango.

A similar evaluation was conducted on the Transformative Agriculture and Enterprise Development Program (TADEP), and is reported in Outcome Evaluation No. 2.

A separate synthesis report, Outcome Evaluation No. 3, will summarise lessons from the 2 ACIAR programs, ASLP and TADEP.

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1   ASLP was originally funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), which merged with DFAT in 2013. For simplicity, the program funder is referred to as DFAT throughout this report.

Key findings

1

What was the process, timing and rationale for bringing projects together under this program?

ASLP was envisioned and designed as a program. The initial program parameters were developed during a scoping visit to Pakistan in 2005. Following this, specific projects or activities that would be implemented under the program were developed.

The choice of a program appears to have been driven by several factors. For example, there was recognition that Pakistan was an increasingly sophisticated development partner. Program designers from ACIAR and DFAT believed that there were lessons to be learned across different projects, particularly on the pathways to adoption, and so there would be a mutual learning benefit. Finally, DFAT (as the program funder) drove a program approach and ACIAR responded to this.

The ASLP program structure was different in Phases 1 and 2. Phase 1 had 4 components, 2 of which – agriculture linkages (focused on commodity-based projects) and program review – were overseen by ACIAR.[2] In Phase 2, all program components were brought under ACIAR oversight to ensure they were more closely linked. The 3 components of Phase 2 were:

- **Pro-poor value chains:** Under this component, the mango, citrus and dairy projects that commenced in Phase 1 were continued and the social science project was added.

- **Agricultural capability:** This component aimed to build capability in Pakistan's agriculture sector through a variety of activities, including scholarships and short-term training.

- **Enabling policy:** This aimed to identify policy constraints and policy options which could benefit smallholder farmers (including women) in Pakistan. It was implemented through the project 'Enabling agricultural policies for benefiting smallholders in dairy, citrus and mango industries of Pakistan' (ADP/2010/091).

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2   A trade linkages component was overseen by Austrade and a scholarships component was overseen by AusAID.

Key findings (*cont.*)

2

What is the program's theory of change? To what extent have program goals and outcomes been achieved?

In 2005 when ASLP was first designed, theory of change use was limited in Australia's aid program. Consequently, it is not surprising that the ASLP documentation does not include a theory of change.

The evaluation team suggested a theory of change, with a visual representation at Appendix 1.1. The essence of the theory of change is that participatory, high quality scientific research was expected to lead to best practice production and value chain approaches, and improved capacity of multiple actors, including growers, extension services, researchers and government. These actors were then expected to use their increased capacity to scale out the approaches identified by ASLP.

Considering the program's achievements against this theory of change, **it is clear that the program's outputs were achieved**. Project-level evaluation reports demonstrate the significant research and best practice outputs achieved by the commodity-based projects. The project 'Enabling agricultural policies for benefiting smallholders in dairy, citrus and mango industries of Pakistan' (ADP/2010/091) also identified key policy issues, albeit after the end of ASLP. There is strong evidence that ASLP was seen as credible and relevant by Pakistan partners.

At the outcome level, project-level evaluations also demonstrate that **many direct project beneficiaries adopted ASLP best practices, and experienced positive outcomes such as increased incomes as a result**. Evidence also demonstrates the **program had success in building the capacity of researchers and scientists involved in the commodity-based projects**. At the same time, there is insufficient data available to support conclusions on whether capacity of extension services and governments was built, and on whether actors used increased capacity to adopt ASLP policies and scale out ASLP best practices.

3

Benefits and challenges of the programmatic approach

This section covers the key evaluation questions:

- What are the main factors that influenced program performance?
- What benefits were realised by adopting a programmatic approach, compared to an individual project approach?
- What challenges arose from the programmatic approach?

To address these questions, the evaluation team, drawing on available literature, identified the potential benefits of adopting a programmatic approach. We also developed a rubric to assess whether ACIAR programs aimed to achieve, and ultimately realised, these benefits. The potential benefits and rubric are summarised in Appendix 1.2.

Potential benefit 1: Increasing impact

> **Medium–High:** Projects are closely connected but without a strong theory of change; projects operate independently with some collaboration

A key dimension of a programmatic approach is that it can increase impact beyond what would be achieved by individual projects. The extent to which ASLP realised this benefit is rated as **medium–high**.

The first way that ASLP sought to use a program to increase impact was by ensuring projects worked collaboratively towards shared outcomes, combining results for greater impact. In the first area, it is clear that the **ASLP projects were closely connected and aimed to work together to achieve more than the sum of their parts**. The project designs were complementary, and achieving scale out relied on outputs and outcomes being combined across multiple projects.

At the same time, a major program challenge was that the **theory of change – and particularly the final outcomes that ASLP would achieve – were not clear during the program's life**. As noted, ASLP did not have an articulated theory of change. This made it more difficult for program staff to understand the program's desired outcomes and to manage the expectations of in-country partners and funders.

The second area where ASLP sought to increase impact was to broaden the diversity of perspectives and strategies to provide a holistic response to development challenges in Pakistan. **ASLP particularly aimed to do this through the introduction of the social science project in Phase 2 of the program**. The social science project aimed to support other projects to better collaborate, and to increase their pro-poor and gender focus by providing greater insight into the needs of Pakistan communities.

The potential for the social and commodity-based projects to provide a holistic response did not reach its full potential, with the projects unable to add as much value to each other as desired. Reasons for this include:

- Context: The social science project was not added until Phase 2, making it challenging to find common ground with the established projects. The program did not dedicate sufficient time and resources to collaboration.

- Objectives and methods: There were different expectations of what success for the social science project might look like. Social and commodity-based scientists also had different research approaches and struggled to understand each other's value-add.

- Program incentives: There were few tangible incentives – such as proposal set-up and reporting, and accountability mechanisms – to compel projects to collaborate and work in the interests of the program.

Potential benefit 2: Increasing knowledge and learning

> **High:** Strong evidence of sharing and learning between projects with evidence of how this learning has strengthened project implementation

A second dimension of a programmatic approach is that it can increase knowledge and learning between its constituent parts. The extent to which this benefit was realised by ASLP is rated as **high**.

The issues with the social science project notwithstanding, ASLP achieved knowledge sharing and learning, which strengthened outcomes. There were several examples of how this took place.

While this evaluation looked specifically at learning between projects within ASLP, other forms of learning came up during the evaluation process, such as learning between different phases of the same program, and between different ACIAR programs. Interviewees presented very different views on the extent to which these types of learning took place, with some feeling that learning had featured strongly, and others reflecting that learning systems and culture were lacking in ACIAR.

Key findings (*cont.*)

Potential benefit 3: Increasing influence and adoption

> **Medium:** Some examples or evidence of the program enhancing leverage or influence with stakeholders and communicating results

A further dimension of a programmatic approach is that it can assist with increasing influence and adoption. The extent to which ASLP realised this benefit is rated as **medium**.

One strategy ASLP used to increase influence was to enhance leverage and foster sustainability through working with the partner government. This was achieved through a multifaceted approach to building close relationships with government partners.

ASLP missed an opportunity to increase its influence and adoption through strengthened communication of research findings. The program's projects produced a significant number of research outputs, including practical materials such as best practice manuals, fact sheets and training modules. However, at the end of the program, there was no institutional home for many of these materials, nor a system to ensure their ongoing maintenance and availability.

Potential benefit 4: Streamlining management

> **Medium:** Minimal benefits to streamlining reporting and donor relationships; governance and training adding value to the projects

A final dimension of a programmatic approach is that it can streamline management. The extent to which ASLP realised this benefit is rated as **medium**.

ASLP aimed to streamline management primarily through program-level interactions with DFAT, and programmatic monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and reporting. ASLP had a program coordinator responsible for managing M&E and reporting to DFAT. This created efficiencies for projects, which were not required to report directly to the funder.

However, **there were significant tensions between DFAT and ACIAR, which took time and resources to manage**, meaning ASLP did not fully achieve the streamlining benefit. ASLP's theory of change was not clear and this issue flowed through into the program's M&E and reporting. DFAT expressed dissatisfaction with program M&E and reporting, while the ACIAR view was that DFAT expectations were unrealistic and their reporting needs were unclear. A number of factors outside ASLP control – including high staff turnover at DFAT and broader challenges with ACIAR–DFAT relationships – exacerbated these tensions. In considering these issues, it is important to note that not all ACIAR programs are or will be funded by DFAT, meaning lessons on the ACIAR–DFAT relationship will not be applicable to all ACIAR programs.

Another way that **ASLP aimed to streamline management was through shared governance and budget arrangements. The program was very successful in this regard**. The ASLP Steering Committee was an effective governance mechanism. On a practical level, it was more efficient to get partner government approval for a single program than for multiple projects. The program also used an international organisation to hold program funds, thereby ensuring the program funds were easily accessible and not subject to restrictive Pakistan government processes.

The **ASLP approach also came with transaction costs**. Additional staff time was needed to oversee the program, and busy ACIAR research program managers (RPMs) and project leaders needed to put more time and effort into collaboration and coordination. However, in the context of the benefits of the programmatic approach that were achieved, and the potential for even greater benefits, these transaction costs appear to have been a worthwhile investment.

Conclusion and lessons learned

ASLP was conceived as a program and brought together complementary projects to achieve an overall set of outcomes. It achieved a significant number of outputs, as well as some outcomes for direct project participants and researchers in Pakistan. Unfortunately, the lack of systematic data means it is not possible to draw conclusions on whether capacity was built for governments and the extension system, and if increased capacity was used to scale out the program's work.

The framework at Appendix 1.2 identifies a number of potential benefits of a programmatic approach. As the ASLP has highlighted, when ACIAR uses a programmatic approach, **it needs to intentionally design, implement and resource activities which will ensure these programmatic benefits are realised**.

Examples of how this was achieved in ASLP include:

- the complementary nature of ASLP projects set up the program to achieve more than the sum of its parts
- learning between projects, particularly the mango projects, strengthened outcomes
- the multifaceted approach to building relationships assisted ASLP to enhance leverage and foster sustainability
- streamlined approval processes with the Government of Pakistan, as well as streamlined budget processes, delivered management benefits to ACIAR.

There was potential for more benefits to be achieved through the programmatic approach, but this potential was not realised. There was a lack of clarity around the program's theory of change and what it could realistically achieve by its completion, restricting the program's ability to achieve impact. The potential for the social and commodity-based projects to provide a holistic response was not realised, while there was a missed opportunity to better communicate the program's outputs. There were also considerable challenges in the ACIAR–DFAT relationship, noting these challenges will not apply to all ACIAR programs.

The ASLP experience highlights lessons for ACIAR to consider. Learning from and applying these lessons will help ensure that the ASLP experience was worthwhile, not only for the practical outputs it achieved, but for the foundation it provided for future ACIAR programs.

Lessons learned

1. Programs, and the projects under them, need monitoring systems that systematically collect data on changes in capacity and scale out to support robust conclusions on higher-level program outcomes.

2. Programs should use a theory of change to be clear on what they can achieve and their limitations. A theory of change can assist ACIAR to better manage its program, and to manage the expectations of in-country partners and any future co-funders.

3. To capitalise on diverse perspectives and create holistic responses in programs, ACIAR should ensure project teams include traits such as openness to collaboration and willingness to work in an interdisciplinary way, and that incentives compel projects to work in the interests of the program.

4. Better communication strategies and central repositories for program outputs should be considered to maximise the opportunities for program influence.

5. ACIAR may wish to revisit its approach to organisational learning and consider whether improvements are needed.

Introduction

Purpose, scope and audience

Since 1982, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) has brokered and funded research partnerships between Australian scientists and their counterparts in developing countries. As Australia's specialist international agricultural research-for-development agency, ACIAR articulates its current mission as 'achieving more productive and sustainable agricultural systems, for the benefit of developing countries and Australia, through international agricultural research partnerships'. ACIAR receives a direct funding appropriation from the official development assistance (ODA) budget, as well as contributions for specific initiatives from external sources including the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

From 2005 to 2015, ACIAR managed the Agriculture Sector Linkages Program (ASLP)[3], a research-for-development program funded by DFAT[4], in the Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan. The program focused on enhancing selected agricultural value chains for the ultimate benefit of the rural poor. There were 2 phases of the program: Phase 1 from 2005 to 2010, and Phase 2 from 2011 to 2015. Both phases included commodity-based projects focused on citrus, dairy and mango. Phase 2 also included a social science research project.

ACIAR commissioned a program-level evaluation to identify lessons that will inform the design and implementation of future ACIAR investments and improve the quality of outcomes.

Purpose

The program-level evaluation has 5 key purposes:

1. Compile performance information from each project under a program and investigate the contribution to specific project outcomes, with a particular focus on differential effects for women and men.
2. Generate project-level case studies for use in a qualitative cross-case analysis.
3. Summarise the contribution to outcomes of each program, with a particular focus on differential effects for women and men.
4. Establish how the different approaches to programmatic management adopted by each program influenced the achievement of outcomes.
5. Identify lessons related to programmatic management of agricultural research-for-development to inform future ACIAR investments.

Scope

This program-level evaluation focuses on the whole ASLP and its constituent projects. Individual evaluations have been conducted on the citrus, mango and dairy projects under ASLP. Drawing on these project evaluations, this program-level evaluation has been developed for ASLP. Note, a similar evaluation is being undertaken for the ACIAR Transformative Agriculture and Enterprise Development Program (TADEP) in Papua New Guinea (Outcome Evaluation 2), and the ASLP and TADEP evaluations will be synthesised into a final report to outline common lessons from ACIAR programs (Outcome Evaluation 3).

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3   A third phase of the Pakistan program that began in 2015 is known as the Agriculture Value Chain Collaborative Research Program (AVCCR), or Aik Saath. However, the projects to be evaluated all started under the earlier phase, known as ASLP. For simplicity, this program is referred to as ASLP in the remainder of this document.

4   ASLP was originally funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). AusAID was merged with DFAT in 2013.

This ASLP program-level evaluation was guided by the following key evaluation questions:

1. What was the process, timing (vis-à-vis constituent projects) and rationale for bringing projects together under this program?
    - How is the program structured?
2. What is the program's theory of change? To what extent have the intended program goal and outcomes been achieved?
    - What was the contribution of each project?
3. What were the main factors that influenced program performance?
    - To what extent were the program's scope, scale, structure and management arrangements appropriate?
    - How did the program's particular structure and management arrangements influence program achievements?
    - What external factors arose, for example, budgetary, natural hazards, policy settings?
4. What benefits were realised by adopting a programmatic approach, compared to an individual project approach?
    - What evidence is there of learning or cross-collaboration between projects within a program?
    - To what extent were project-level outcomes mutually reinforcing within the program?
    - Did the programmatic approach result in improved implementation strategies and/or additional resourcing, for example, on gender equality?
5. What challenges arose from the programmatic approach?
    - To what extent did the benefits outweigh the challenges?

Audience

The primary audience for this program-level evaluation is ACIAR staff with direct responsibilities for programs and/or their constituent projects. This includes Canberra-based research program managers (RPMs), and any future field-based program managers and coordinators. The ACIAR Executive and senior managers, and DFAT fund managers, are also important audiences particularly for the program-level assessments and synthesis report.
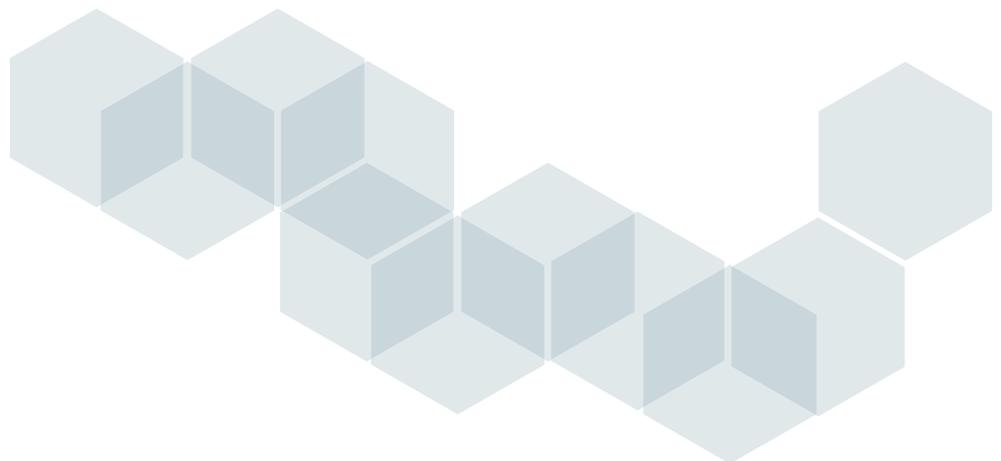
Methodology

Data collection and analysis

The ASLP evaluation collected data by:

- Reviewing project-level evaluation reports and ASLP-specific documents (for example, design documents, independent reviews, program-level reporting).
- Interviewing 8 program stakeholders via Zoom. The interviewees were intentionally selected by the evaluation team and ACIAR.

Systematic analysis of data collected was undertaken using NVivo qualitative data analysis software to distil findings. To aid this process, the evaluation team developed a framework outlining the potential benefits of a programmatic approach (see Appendix 1.2). This framework was developed drawing on literature, particularly Buffardi and Hearn (2015), as well as the evaluation team's expertise. This framework:

- Outlines the potential benefits of a programmatic approach under 4 topic areas:
  - increasing impact
  - knowledge and learning
  - influence and adoption
  - streamlining management.
- Provides a rubric to assess the extent to which an ACIAR program achieved the potential benefits. The 3 possible rubric ratings are low, medium and high.

The data analysis phase specifically focused on understanding whether ASLP aimed to achieve a potential benefit, and the extent to which it did (or didn't) achieve this benefit. Note, the Transformative Agriculture and Enterprise Development Program (TADEP) evaluation also uses this framework. This will allow for the identification of common themes and program comparison in the final synthesis report.

Preliminary findings were shared and tested in a program validation workshop involving the stakeholders previously consulted. Stakeholders were also given the opportunity to provide written comments on a draft executive summary. These activities provided the opportunity to 'ground-truth' the assessments, identify any key issues not addressed, clarify any areas of uncertainty, and correct any misinterpretations. A draft evaluation report was then prepared for review by ACIAR and finalised in accordance with feedback received.

Limitations

The evaluation relied heavily on pre-existing documentation, provided by ACIAR, which was of varying quality.

Stakeholder consultations also faced limitations. Primary data collection was restricted to online interviews, limiting the ability of evaluators to build rapport with participants and interpret non-verbal communication. In addition, the second phase of ASLP was completed in 2015 and making it challenging for interviewees to provide accurate data. In particular, it was difficult to find DFAT representatives who were involved in the ASLP, and could provide good data on the early years.

This program-wide evaluation drew heavily on the project-level evaluations of the citrus, mango, and dairy projects, with all 4 evaluations conducted by the same team. It also discusses other ASLP projects, such as the social science project and policy enabling project, which were added during Phase 2. However, the evaluation team was only able to lightly review these additional projects by drawing on ACIAR documentation and a small number of interviews. Consequently, data and findings on these other projects is less rich and robust compared to findings related to the citrus, mango and dairy projects. A further project, 'Heat stress alleviation in summer vegetables' (HORT/2012/002), was added to Phase 2 at a later point in time, but not included in this evaluation.

Ethical considerations

The evaluation was conducted in accordance with the *DFAT Monitoring and Evaluation Standards* (2017). This included considering:

- **Informed consent:** All participants in consultations were provided with a verbal overview of why they were being consulted, how the information would be used and that their participation was voluntary prior to the consultation. Consultations were only undertaken once verbal consent was obtained.
- **Privacy and confidentiality:** The identities of any project stakeholders involved in the evaluation have been protected. Key informants in professional roles may be referred to by their position title in the report where explicit consent has been obtained; otherwise they are referred to as a representative of the organisation they work with. Note, the DFAT representative who was interviewed for the evaluation asked that their name be kept confidential, given only one person from DFAT was interviewed and they felt confidentiality would enable them to provide frank data.

Overview of program

Context

In 2005, the Government of Pakistan requested Australia's assistance for its agriculture sector. An ACIAR delegation conducted a scoping mission, which included close consultations with government and industry organisations, including the Ministry for Food, Agriculture and Livestock, and the Pakistan Council for Agricultural Research. The scoping mission developed the Agriculture Sector Linkages Program (ASLP).

The program

ASLP was a research-for-development program in the Punjab and Sindh provinces of Pakistan focused on enhancing selected agricultural value chains for the ultimate benefit of the rural poor. The program had 2 phases:

- Phase 1 ran from 2005 to 2010
- Phase 2 was implemented from 2011 to 2015.

The program was funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)[5] and was managed by ACIAR. Both phases included commodity-based projects focused on citrus, dairy and mango. Phase 2 also included a social science research project, a policy enabling project, and a variety of activities focused on building agricultural capability in Pakistan.

The goals of ASLP Phase 1 (2005–2010) were:

1. To transfer Australian knowledge and expertise to key sectors of Pakistan agribusiness to increase profitability and enhance export potential.
2. To contribute to poverty alleviation of smallholder farmers through collaborative research and development.
3. To enhance the capacity of the Pakistan research, development and extension system to deliver targeted and practical research outputs to agribusiness and farmers.

The goals for the second phase were adapted, but retained a core focus on building value chains to support smallholder farms, and building technical capacity in Pakistan. The Phase 2 (2011–2015) goals were:

1. Pro-poor value chains: To support 'keystone' interventions to sustainably enhance selected value chains, and increase understanding and delivery of benefits to the rural poor through productivity improvements and market and employment opportunities.
2. Agricultural capability: To enhance agriculture capability and sustainably improve agricultural value chains by providing short-term 'smart linkages', scoping studies and other initiatives, as well as longer-term formal training, that are demand driven and catalytic, and complement the initiatives supported under other components of the program.
3. Enabling policy: To support policy analysis and interventions which improve or enable better economic and natural resource management, particularly where they underpin or strengthen pro-poor value chains and more sustainable farming systems.

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5   ASLP was originally funded by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). AusAID was merged with DFAT in 2013. For ease, DFAT is referred to as the program funder throughout this report.

Findings

1. What was the process, timing and rationale for bringing projects together under this program?

ASLP was envisioned and designed as a program, under which specific activities or projects would be implemented. Following a request from the Government of Pakistan for Australian assistance in agricultural development, a scoping visit was conducted in 2005 and the initial program parameters were developed. Then specific projects to be implemented under the program were developed.

The choice of a program appears to have been driven by several factors. For example, there was recognition that Pakistan was an increasingly sophisticated development partner, interested in long-term and holistic development modalities, rather than smaller project-based approaches. Program stakeholders believed that there were lessons to be learned across different projects, particularly on the pathways to adoption, and so projects would mutually benefit from learnings. Finally, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) (as the program funder) drove a program approach and ACIAR responded to this.

ASLP Phase 1 had 4 components:

- Market linkages: Austrade led an agriculture market feasibility mission to Pakistan for a consortium of Australian companies.
- Academic linkages: AusAID managed this component, providing 7 agriculture research scholarships to Pakistani students under the Australian Development Scholarship Program.
- Agriculture linkages: This was led by ACIAR and became the core aspect of Phase 1. It focused on 4 research projects covering production and value chains for 3 commodities: citrus, dairy and mango.
- Linkages program review: ACIAR managed the fourth component, which focused on a joint independent review of ASLP Phase 1, which was commissioned in the third year of the program.

The 2008 review of ASLP Phase 1 (the fourth component) **found some significant flaws with the program structure**. In particular, the different components were managed by different government partners, and agriculture linkages for ACIAR were much larger than linkages in the other components. The other market linkages and academic linkages components were small parts of larger Austrade and AusAID initiatives.

As a result of this, the program review found there was 'minimal ASLP strategic coordination; limited integration of program components; and a lack of coordinated Program level M&E' (ASLP 1 Program Review 2008:7).

This lack of integration was addressed in ASLP Phase 2, which ran from 2010 to 2015. The design for Phase 2 outlined a much more integrated and interdependent program with overall program oversight and management by ACIAR. ASLP Phase 2 had 3 components:

- Pro-poor value chains: The research-for-development projects which commenced under ASLP Phase 1 continued under this component. A social science project was also added. The social science project aimed to increase the engagement of rural poor who might benefit from the commodity-based projects; increase collaboration between project teams; and foster effective collaborative development in rural Pakistan.
- Agricultural capability: This component aimed to build capability by providing short-term links such as scoping studies and short-term training, as well as John Allwright Fellowships (which provide scientists from partner countries with the opportunity to obtain a postgraduate qualification in Australia) and John Dillon Fellowships (which aim to develop the leadership and management skills of mid-career professionals working in agricultural research).
- Enabling policy: This component aimed to identify policy constraints and policy options which could benefit smallholder farmers (including women) in Pakistan. It was implemented through the project, 'Enabling agricultural policies for benefiting smallholders in dairy, citrus and mango industries of Pakistan' (ADP/2010/091).

Some program structure features were common across both ASLP phases. An ASLP Reference or Steering Committee was used in both phases (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). This committee included high-level representatives from the governments of Pakistan and Australia, and provided oversight and advice to the program.

Both program phases saw ACIAR appoint an ASLP program coordinator with overall responsibility for management, finances, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting. In addition, each individual research project was managed by an ACIAR research program manager (RPM) from the relevant sectoral area in ACIAR.

**ASLP Steering Committee
(Australian and Pakistan governments)**
Chaired by AusAID; secretariat support from ACIAR

Austrade	AusAID	ACIAR program coordinator	
1 Market linkages	**2** Academic linkages	**3** Agriculture linkages	**4** Program review
		Horticulture RPM · Citrus, Mango (x2) **Livestock RPM** · Dairy	
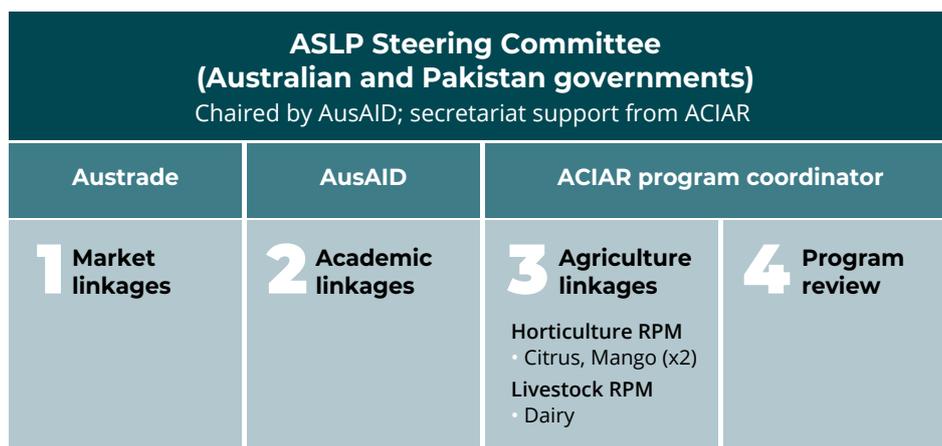
Figure 1   Program structure for ASLP Phase 1

**ASLP Reference Committee
(Australian and Pakistan governments)**

ACIAR program coordinator

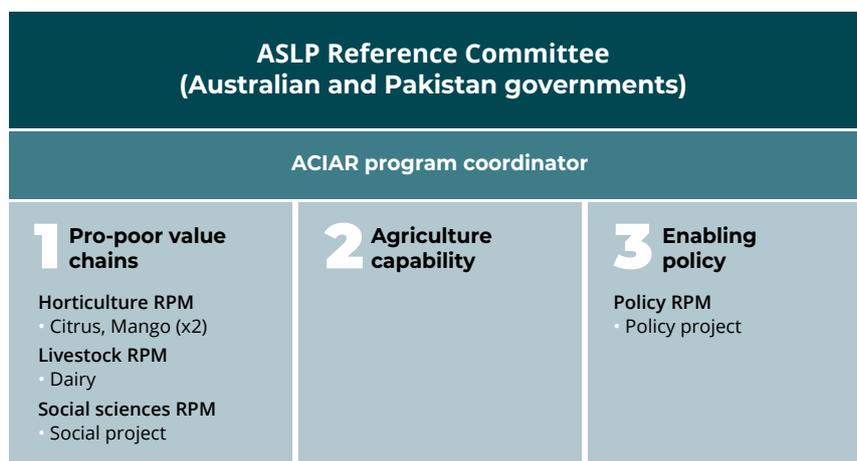| **1** Pro-poor value chains	**2** Agriculture capability	**3** Enabling policy
Horticulture RPM · Citrus, Mango (x2) **Livestock RPM** · Dairy **Social sciences RPM** · Social project		**Policy RPM** · Policy project

Figure 2   Program structure for ASLP Phase 2

2. What is the program's theory of change? To what extent have the intended program goal and outcomes been achieved?

In 2005 when ASLP was first designed, theory of change use was limited in Australia's aid program. Consequently, it is not surprising that the **ASLP documentation does not include a theory of change** to articulate how the program expected change to happen, or how activities would lead to outputs and outcomes.

Drawing on documents and discussion with stakeholders, **the evaluation team developed a suggested theory of change**. A visual representation of the theory of change is at Appendix 1.1. This theory of change is predominately for ASLP Phase 2, when ACIAR had oversight of the full program.

The ASLP theory of changes outlines that the program's activities and outputs need to link together to achieve a higher set of outcomes.

The theory of change is underpinned by the program's key activity: **participatory, high quality scientific research that responds to industry needs, builds partner capacity, and links Australian and Pakistan institutions**. It is expected that this activity is expected to identify practices or approaches that improve production and value chains in Pakistan. These practices are expected to be adopted by direct participants in the program (for example, trainees and demonstration site participants), with adoption expected to lead to outcomes such as increased incomes. Further, it is expected that participatory research will lead to the identification of policies which benefit smallholder farmers, including women.

The participatory research and outputs in practices and policies are also expected to combine to achieve a series of higher-level capacity and industry-wide outcomes. It is expected that the scientific, extension and government *capacity-building* activities implemented through participatory research will combine with other *capacity-building* activities, such as scholarships and study tours. This will lead to increased capacity of multiple actors in Pakistan, including growers, extension services, researchers and government.

Further, the increased capacity, when combined with ASLP being seen as a credible and relevant partner, is **expected to lead to actors using their increased capacity to scale out the approaches and policies identified by ASLP**. This, in turn, is expected to result in a range of high-level outcomes, such as improved production practices, improved value chains and improved policies – all of which should result in better livelihoods and reduced poverty for male and female smallholder farmers in Pakistan.

Program achievements – outputs

Looking at the extent to which the intended program goal and outcomes were achieved, we can map different achievements against the program's theory of change.

As outlined in the theory of change, one of the program's main outputs was **practices/approaches identified that improve production and value chains**. It is clear that all commodity-based projects and the social science project made strong contributions to this output. All the projects:

- researched and identified improved production and value chain approaches
- shared these approaches through multiple publications
- trained growers and orchard managers (including women) in these approaches
- supported capacity building and higher degrees for Pakistan students, researchers, and extension workers.

A summary of contributions is provided in Appendix 1.3 and more details are provided in the mango, dairy and citrus evaluations.

A second ASLP output was **policies identified which benefit smallholder farmers (including women)**. This output was achieved by 'Enabling agricultural policies for benefiting smallholders in dairy, citrus and mango industries of Pakistan' (ADP/2010/091). This project identified policy constraints for smallholder farmers in Pakistan and corresponding enabling policies in areas such as provision of credit, improved market access structure, and the expansion of cooperatives.

However, it is important to note that the dates of this project differed significantly from other ASLP projects. It commenced in November 2013 and an ACIAR monograph of the key findings wasn't published on the ACIAR website until 2019.[6] Interviewees reflected that they were using the project's results in their interactions with Government of Pakistan officials, as they were able to suggest policy areas where Pakistan could assist smallholder farmers. However, the late delivery of the project results makes it difficult to say that this project was instrumental in the achievement of ASLP's outputs and outcomes during the program's life.

The final major output was that **ASLP is seen as credible and relevant by Pakistan partners**. There is good evidence from ASLP reports that this output was achieved. Evidence suggests that the Pakistani government viewed the program as credible, effective, and relevant to their needs. For example:

- An independent review of ASLP Phase 1 noted that 'ASLP... has provided a very high profile engagement achieving a level of recognition well above what would have been expected for its modest scope and budget. Pakistani Government partners reflect that it is one of the few donor engagements where industry issues and concerns are addressed in a practical and targeted manner' (ASLP 1 Program Review 2008:35).
- The independent mid-term review of ASLP Phase 2 (ACIAR and AusAID 2013) also noted the high level of engagement from Pakistani officials and the value that Pakistani organisations saw in the program.

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6   See https://aciar.gov.au/publication/books-and-manuals/enabling-policies-developing-smallholder-agriculture-pakistan accessed on 15 April 2021.

Program achievements – outcomes

The program's theory of change envisioned that direct participants in ASLP projects (for example, those involved in demonstration sites or value chains) would adopt the practices promoted by ASLP, and through this achieve outcomes such as increased incomes. The available evidence suggests **that adoption and increased incomes for participants were largely achieved**. There is credible evidence from the dairy, mango and social science projects that direct participants adopted the improved practices and improved their incomes as a result. The contribution of specific projects is summarised in Appendix 1.3 and discussed in more detail in each of the individual commodity evaluations.

Evidence also suggests there has been **success in building the capacity of researchers and scientists**. For example:

- In the citrus projects, ongoing trials of new varieties and rootstocks beyond the projects' end suggest that the citrus projects have built ongoing scientific capacity in this area.
- In dairy, Pakistani and Australian student scientists, scientists and dairy experts who participated in the projects' *capacity-building* programs recorded a high adoption of dairy research knowledge and practices.
- In the mango projects, there is good evidence that capacity of the post-harvest research and teaching laboratory at the University of Agriculture Faisalabad was built during the projects, and has likely improved further after the projects.
- Projects were able to break down barriers between different institutions in Pakistan, enabling these institutions to better communicate and collaborate with each other. This is a significant achievement in the context of the siloed nature of institutions in Pakistan.

At the same time, **there is insufficient data available to support conclusions on whether capacity of extension services and governments was built** through ASLP. On the positive side, the dairy project impact study demonstrated increased capacity of extension workers to deliver inclusive extension services. However, for the citrus and mango projects, there is no systematic data available on changes in extension capacity. Similarly for government agencies, it has been difficult to access quality data on changes in capacity. This has been an ongoing challenge during ASLP. For example, the final independent review for the mango value chain project found that, although National Agricultural Research Council (NARC) understood the importance of value chain research and development, the independent team was unable to assess whether this translated into increased capacity to deliver value chain projects.

A further outcome in the theory of change is that actors **use their increased capacity to adopt policies and scale out practices/approaches**. Similar to the capacity outcome outlined above, **there is insufficient data available to support conclusions on whether this was achieved**.

On the positive side, the final ASLP report notes that ASLP Phases 1 and 2 'underpinned public sector investment in the form of complementary projects amounting to [PKR]17,750 million (AUD ~178 Million)' (Brettell et al. 2016:17). Interviewees also reflected that they continued to share program outputs; for example, ACIAR continues to share outputs from the policy component with senior Pakistan government officials.

At the same time, there is no systematic data available to the reviewer to support conclusions that scale out has taken place. The above quote on public sector investment, for example, wasn't verified in any of the program's independent reports. The project-level evaluations also paint a mixed picture. Some interviewees reflected that ASLP practices continued to be used and have spread in Pakistan, while others felt that, while there was a good knowledge basis in the country, project outputs were not easily available for stakeholders to access and there had not been significant widespread change. In addition, the final outputs for the policy project were delivered much later (in 2019) than the other ASLP projects, making it difficult to assign its successes to ASLP.

Given the lack of systematic data available, and the mixed evidence from interviews, this evaluation has not been able to reach defensible conclusions on the achievement (or otherwise) of higher-level outcomes on scale out of ASLP-supported practices and policies.

This points to an important lesson for ACIAR, and one which was also highlighted in project-level reports: that programs (and the projects under them) **need monitoring systems that systematically collect data on changes in capacity and scale out**. This will allow programs to understand if, during their lifetimes, they are making progress towards these higher-level outcomes. If progress is not being made, adjustments can be made as required. Systematic monitoring systems would also ensure more data is available to make a case for whether outcomes have been achieved in the long-term.

3. Benefits and challenges of the programmatic approach

This section of the report discusses the factors that influenced ASLP's performance and the benefits and challenges of ASLP's programmatic approach. It covers the key evaluation questions of:

- What are the main factors that influenced program performance?
- What benefits were realised by adopting a programmatic approach, compared to an individual project approach?
- What challenges arose from the programmatic approach?

As discussed in the methodology section of the report, to address these evaluation questions, the evaluation team developed a framework outlining the potential benefits of a programmatic approach (see Appendix 1.2). The framework identifies 4 potential ways in which a programmatic approach can add value beyond what individual projects can achieve:

- by increasing impact
- by increasing knowledge and learning
- by increasing influence and adoption
- by streamlining management.

The framework also outlines criteria to determine whether an ACIAR program realised these program benefits to a low, medium or high extent.

Potential benefit 1: Increasing impact

> **Medium–High:** Projects are closely connected but without a strong theory of change; projects operate independently with some collaboration

A key potential benefit of a programmatic approach is that **it can increase impact beyond what would be achieved by individual projects**. Specific ways that increased impact can be achieved include:

- Projects work collaboratively towards a program theory of change, combining results for greater impact.
- A program extends the reach of interventions to multiple geographic areas.
- A program broadens the diversity of perspectives and strategies to provide a holistic response to a common problem.

ASLP sought to increase impact through the strategies described in dot points one and 3 above.

The extent to which ASLP actually realised these benefits is rated as medium–high. The ASLP projects were closely connected and worked towards shared outcomes. However, the theory of change and the end-of-program outcomes were not clear. ASLP also sought to broaden the diversity of perspectives through the introduction of the social science project in Phase 2. Unfortunately, the potential for the social and commodity-based projects to achieve a holistic response was not realised due to the context, differing project methods, and the lack of incentive alignment.

As we can see from the preceding sections on the theory of change and program achievements, it is clear that **ASLP projects were closely connected and aimed to work together to achieve more than the sum of their parts**. ASLP's components and projects were complementary, and achieving higher-level outcomes relied on outputs being combined across multiple projects and areas of action (including the ACIAR engagement with the Government of Pakistan).

At the same time, a major program challenge was that **the theory of change – and particularly the final outcomes that ASLP would achieve – was not clear during the program's life**. As previously noted, ASLP did not have an articulated theory of change. A theory of change can benefit a program by articulating the desired outcomes a program wishes to achieve, unpacking individual activities which can contribute to desired outcomes, and identifying a program's limitations.

The ASLP experience highlights some clear disadvantages of not having a theory of change. ASLP did not have a clear set of outcomes that it wished to achieve. The **ASLP Phase 2 design document presents ASLP as a *development* program** and does not clearly articulate the benefits and limitations of a research-for-development approach. The design document implied that ASLP would have broad development and poverty reduction outcomes beyond those achieved for beneficiaries directly involved in program activities. For example:

- One program outcome was 'collaborate strategically to improve livelihood systems for the rural poor in Pakistan' (ACIAR 2010:44).
- Program-level indicators included 'ASLP contributes to poverty alleviation in Pakistan' and 'strengthened gender equity and environmental sustainability' (ACIAR 2010:44).
- An indicator for the program's pro-poor component was that 'ASLP led to improvements in the dairy, mango and citrus industries measurable in terms of enhanced productivity, quality and market access, and employment opportunities for the poor and marginalised' (ACIAR 2010:44).

The Phase 2 mid-term review **steps back from this position of ASLP Phase 2 achieving broad development outcomes**. It highlights that:

ASLP is clearly an agricultural research initiative with potential to develop and pilot appropriate 'proof of concept' or 'fit for purpose' technologies or approaches. Thus, ASLP is an incubator of ideas and approaches rather than a mechanism to deliver broad scaling up (ACIAR and AusAID 2013:8).

At the same, the mid-term review **highlights that ASLP was more ambitious than a traditional research-for-development program**. This is because it sought to actively address constraints to adoption and policy barriers, and wanted to ensure approaches were embedded with long-term partners who could achieve scale out. This implies that ASLP occupied a middle ground between a development program and a more standard research-for-development program.

This lack of clarity on whether ASLP was a development program or a research-for-development program created challenges. Without a clear theory of change and realistic end-of-program outcomes, it is more difficult for program staff to understand what they are trying to achieve, maximise program impact, and manage the expectations of partner organisations and funders. In particular, the lack of clarity around program outcomes created significant tension with the program funder, DFAT.

A lesson for ACIAR is that **programs should be very clear on what research-for-development programs can achieve as well as their limitations**. A clear program theory of change, which demonstrates what a research-for-development program can and can't realistically achieve, can assist ACIAR to better manage its programs and manage the expectations of in-country partners and funders.

The second area where ASLP sought to increase impact was to **broaden the diversity of perspectives and strategies to provide a holistic response to development challenges in Pakistan**. ASLP particularly aimed to do this through the introduction of the social science project into Phase 2 of the program. The social science project aimed to support other projects to better collaborate, and to increase their pro-poor and gender focus by providing greater insight into the needs of Pakistan communities. Strong engagement between the social science project and the commodity-based projects was envisioned when the Phase 2 projects were designed.

The potential for the social science and commodity-based projects to provide a holistic response to challenges in Pakistan was not realised, with the social science and commodity-based projects unable to add as much value to each other as desired. This was likely to the detriment of all projects and the program overall. Three main factors contributed to this situation:

- context
- project objectives and methods
- incentives.

In relation to **context**, the social science project did not commence until Phase 2 of ASLP. At this point the commodity-based projects, including their approaches and their geographic locations, were already well-established. This made it challenging for the different projects to adjust and identify common areas of interest where they could work together. At the same time, ASLP devoted insufficient time and effort to encouraging and facilitating collaboration between projects. Annual meetings between team leaders were held in Australia, however, interviews indicate that insufficient time was dedicated to enabling teams to deeply understand each other's approaches and perspectives to enable collaboration.

In the area of **project objectives and methods**, staff from the commodity-based projects felt the purpose of the social science project was unclear and that it was 'tacked on' to ASLP. There were also different views about what success for the social science project might look like. In addition, the social scientists and commodity-based scientists struggled to understand each other's value-add and this made collaboration more challenging. A quote from the final report for the Phase 2 mango value chain project encapsulates the issue well:

The value chain research approach was more active and interventionist while the social project's approach emphasised observation, description and reflection, with a tendency to avoid direct involvement in actions to improve situations being studied. This reliance on two different methodologies, while entirely defensible for each project, added a further layer of complexity in terms of working to mutually agreeable timetables (Collins, Sun and Ayyaz 2015:38).

The challenges of cross-project collaboration were further exacerbated by the **program and project incentives**. Interviews highlighted that the incentives for projects, ACIAR RPMs and the overall program were not always aligned. For example:

- The ACIAR project proposal system is based around individual projects, rather than around projects within a program. This means that projects are not required to outline how they will collaborate with other projects or contribute to an overall program. As a consequence, the reporting system does not automatically include reporting on such work or hold a project accountable for a lack of collaboration.

- Project managers – who are often academics – are generally incentivised to publish as much as possible. Interviewees highlighted that this is often easier when working in a single discipline compared to cross-disciplinary work, reducing incentives for project collaboration.

- The ACIAR management structure means that projects are accountable to their RPMs rather than to a program coordinator. RPMs themselves have their own large portfolio of projects to run. Their workload and focus on a particular sector means RPMs may be reluctant to engage with a program that will create additional coordination and collaboration work, or that is perceived to be focused on a different sector to their own portfolio. This appears to have been the case for the policy enabling project, where it took significant time to get the policy RPM to engage with ASLP as it was perceived to be a horticulture program.

These factors created a situation where the **ASLP coordinator could attempt to influence projects, and their RPMs, to collaborate and work together, but had little power to compel projects to collaborate**. The ASLP coordinator also had some ability to create imperatives for collaboration. For example, they controlled program budget and so could exert influence through project budget allocations. But overall, there were few clear incentives for RPMs and projects to work in the interests of ASLP.

The end result of the context, the different methods and objectives, and the lack of incentive alignment was that the **program's aspirations to use diverse perspectives to create a holistic response to program challenges was not realised**. This points to 2 lessons for ACIAR if it wishes to capitalise on diverse perspectives in future programs:

- Project, program and ACIAR team selection should consider staff traits such as openness to collaboration, good communication, and enthusiasm about working in multidisciplinary teams.

- The design and implementation of programs should ensure the incentives for programs and projects are aligned. Approaches could include, for example, developing proposal and reporting systems that ensure cross-project collaboration is planned, implemented and reported on; and ensuring program coordinators have more power to compel projects to collaborate and work in the interests of the program.
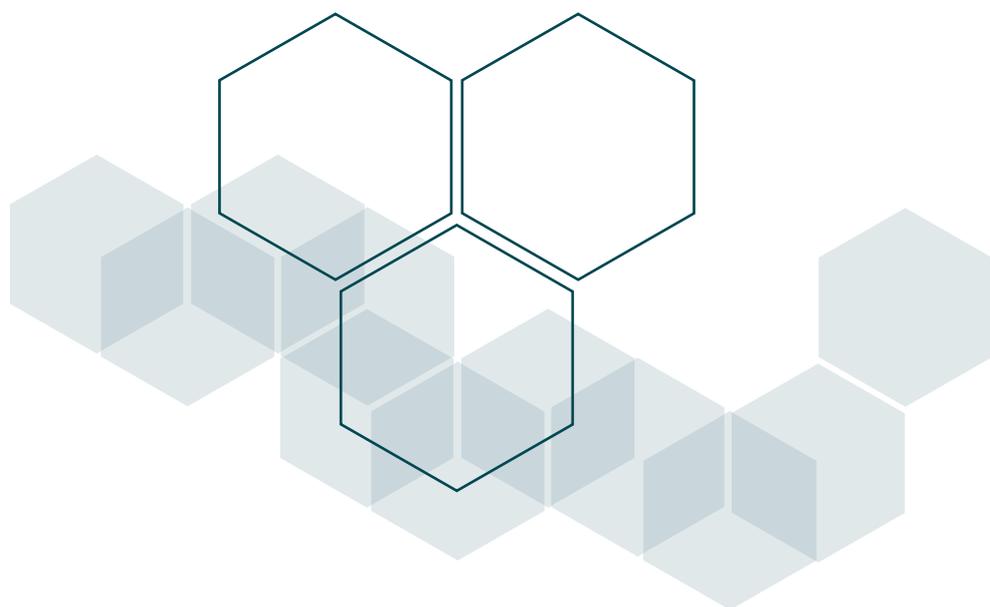
Potential benefit 2: Increasing knowledge and learning

> **High:** Strong evidence of sharing and learning between projects with evidence of how this learning has strengthened project implementation

A second potential benefit of a programmatic approach is that it can increase knowledge and learning between its constituent projects and areas of work. This can be achieved by:

- Sharing information between projects to build knowledge and strengthen outcomes.
- Comparing intervention approaches across different contexts.

ASLP focused on sharing information between projects to build knowledge and strengthen outcomes. Comparing intervention approaches was not a priority for ASLP.

The extent to which this benefit was realised is rated as high. The issues with the social science project notwithstanding, ASLP projects shared knowledge, and this strengthened outcomes. The interaction of the mango production and value chain projects provides a key example. This section highlights the divergent views expressed during the evaluation about ACIAR organisational learning systems and practices.

ASLP achieved knowledge sharing, which strengthened outcomes. A key example is that **the mango production and value chain projects were closely linked** and dependent on each other. One interviewee noted that 'all the achievements in the value chain project were really supported by the production project', with the projects working together to jointly determine what each project should focus on to avoid duplication, and referring any problems that were identified to the project best placed to address them. It is also clear that this interdependence was enabled by the projects coming under the ASLP, as the ASLP/ACIAR teams drove collaboration to ensure the projects were closely linked, for example, by facilitating the annual ASLP meetings.

Two other examples of knowledge sharing to strengthen outcomes were:

- The policy enabling project used issues identified in the commodity-based projects as the basis of its work on policy constraints for smallholder farmers.
- The citrus and mango projects collaborated on a best practice nursery manual.

This evaluation focused on sharing and learning between projects within ASLP. However, **during the course of the evaluation, other forms of programmatic and organisational learning were discussed**.

Interviewees discussed not only the extent to which projects under ASLP learned from each other, but other forms of learning such as:

- Learning within projects – for example, the extent to which recommendations from independent reviews were actioned by projects.
- Learning between different phases of a program (for example, ASLP Phase 1 learnings informing ASLP Phase 2).
- Learning between different ACIAR programs (for example, ASLP learnings informing the Transformative Agriculture and Enterprise Development Program (TADEP)).

Different interviewees provided very different views on the extent to which this learning took place. Some felt that independent project and program evaluations were taken very seriously by teams, and that recommendations were actioned. Strong learning examples were also provided, such as visits and mutual learning between ASLP and similar projects within the ACIAR program in the Philippines. Examples of where lessons from ASLP were adopted in other programs were also provided, for example, 'collaboration grants' were included in TADEP to provide a funding incentive for project teams to collaborate.

Other interviewees felt that learning was taken less seriously and was more ad hoc. Some interviewees reflected that independent evaluations were not always followed up. This position is supported by the final independent reviews of the ASLP Phase 2 projects, which map numerous recommendations from the ASLP Phase 2 mid-term review that had not been actioned at project completion. Interviewees also felt that learning between program phases and between different programs was not systematic, and that any learning that had taken place was due to the continuity of ACIAR staff with a commitment to certain programs, rather than specific learning systems or culture within ACIAR.

It is not within this evaluation's scope to fully assess learning culture and practices within ACIAR. That said, the **divergent views on organisational culture suggest that ACIAR may wish to revisit its approach to learning** and consider whether improvements are needed. This could include, for example, considering whether learning is intentional, whether there are systems and leadership in place to support a culture and practice of learning, and whether learning is broad-based or concentrated within a small number of key individuals. Any reconsideration of organisational learning could also include an examination of the incentive issues. For example, it may be helpful to consider the incentives for RPMs and projects to adjust their projects based on independent reviews, and for project leaders to make project changes in response to RPM directions.

Potential benefit 3: Increasing influence and adoption

Medium: Some examples or evidence of the program enhancing leverage or influence with stakeholders and communicating results

A further dimension of a programmatic approach is that it can assist with increasing influence and adoption. This can be done by:

- Enhancing leverage through joint action with government, market institutions or other stakeholders.
- Fostering sustainability by building relationships.
- Strengthening communication of research findings.

The extent to which this benefit was realised is rated as medium. Using a multifaceted approach, ASLP was able to foster strong relationships with government partners to enhance leverage and foster sustainability. However, ASLP missed the opportunity to increase its influence through strengthened communication of its research findings.

ASLP was effective at building relationships to increase influence, enhance leverage, and foster sustainability. The ACIAR team, including program staff based in Australia and Pakistan, focused significant time and resources on building relationships with senior Government of Pakistan officials. These efforts appear to have been successful as Pakistan partners considered ASLP to be credible and relevant.

ASLP's success in building relationships and using these for leverage and sustainability appears to have been driven by 3 factors:

- ASLP hired a highly competent Pakistan-based program staff member with a scientific background and strong networks with relevant Pakistan institutions. ASLP was able to draw on this staff member's credibility and networks to build strong relationships on behalf of the program.
- ASLP program staff focused on building one-on-one relationships with key Government of Pakistan policy makers, including through individual visits to their offices and informal socialising.
- ASLP complemented one-on-one relationship-building with a program-wide Steering Committee. This Steering Committee provided a direct line of sight – and an 'in' for the one-on-one relationships discussed above – to senior Government of Pakistan policymakers. The Steering Committee was also an effective forum for sharing ASLP's achievements and building support for ASLP.

The Steering Committee was an advisory body rather than a decision-making body, and so provided little practical support in terms of program decision-making. While a small number of interviewees felt it would have been beneficial for the Steering Committee to provide more practical support, its advisory nature also meant it was an effective forum for communication and information sharing without acting as a bureaucratic handbrake on program decision-making.

A program can add value by strengthening the communication of research findings. However, **ASLP missed an opportunity to increase its influence and adoption through strengthened communication of research findings**.

ASLP and its constituent projects identified new practices and policies, and produced a significant number of documents on these. These documents include fact sheets, good practice guides and training modules.

However, as highlighted in the project-level evaluations, **at the end of ASLP there was no institutional home for many of these materials**, and program materials were not collated into a central repository. Nor was there a plan or system to ensure these materials would be maintained and made available on an ongoing basis. The evaluation team understands that ACIAR did not collate program materials onto the ACIAR website until after ASLP Phase 2 had ended and that this was largely undertaken due to the initiative of a motivated individual. This represents a missed opportunity for ASLP, as the program's reach, sustainability, and potential for scale out by other partners could have been increased through better accessibility of program materials to a broad audience, including individuals and organisations not directly linked to ASLP.

The key lesson for ACIAR is that, for future programs, **better communication strategies and central repositories for program outputs should be considered to maximise the opportunities for program influence**.

Potential benefit 4: Streamlining management

Medium: Minimal benefits to streamlining reporting and donor relationships; governance and training adding value to the projects

A potential benefit of a programmatic approach is that it can streamline management by:

- Coordinating implementing entities and interactions with funders.
- Shared governance arrangements.
- Standardising management and specialised support (for example, M&E and reporting processes, approach to cross-cutting issues, and capacity development).

ASLP sought to maximise all of these benefits through its programmatic approach. **The extent to which ASLP realised these benefits is rated as medium**. ASLP streamlined management through coordinated governance and budget arrangements, and centralised training support to programs. ASLP also attempted to streamline the relationship with DFAT. Unfortunately the ACIAR–DFAT relationship experienced significant challenges in this regard, noting that ASLP's experience will not be applicable to all ACIAR programs.

ASLP aimed to streamline management by **coordinating program-level interactions with the program funder, DFAT**. ASLP had a program coordinator managing the DFAT relationship, including M&E and reporting to DFAT. This created efficiencies for projects not having to deal directly with DFAT.

However, **there were significant tensions between ACIAR and DFAT around ASLP, which minimised the benefit of management streamlining**. Some of these tensions were driven by ASLP-specific issues. For example, ASLP's end-of-program outcomes and the extent to which it was a development program were not clear in the program design. This issue flowed through into ASLP's M&E and reporting. Multiple documents and interviews highlighted that:

- DFAT expected that ASLP would achieve development outcomes, while ACIAR felt DFAT expectations for impact and timeframes for program achievements were unrealistic.
- DFAT was not satisfied with program reporting, which often focused on summarising project achievements rather than overall program achievements. At the same time, ACIAR believed it did not get good guidance from DFAT on the program's M&E framework and the type of reporting that would meet the needs of DFAT.

Importantly, there were tensions between DFAT and ACIAR that ASLP could not influence.

For example, there were frequent staff changes in DFAT and therefore little corporate memory about ASLP. DFAT staff in Islamabad appeared to have had minimal engagement with the program and did not visit its field sites. DFAT and ACIAR were also involved in broader, and apparently challenging, discussions around aid reporting and the need to retrofit program reporting to DFAT's (then) new aid reporting framework.

While ASLP and ACIAR experienced challenges in the relationship with DFAT, **note that not all ACIAR programs are, or will be, funded by DFAT**. Therefore issues highlighted here will not be applicable to all programs. Nor should the challenges encountered in the relationship with DFAT discourage ACIAR from pursuing programmatic approaches in the future especially when those programs are predominately funded by ACIAR.

ASLP also aimed to streamline management through **shared governance and budget arrangements. The program was successful in this regard**. ASLP's Steering Committee was an effective forum for relationship building and communication. Another area of program management that ACIAR highlighted as vital to program success was its budget system. Under this system, funds were held by an international organisation in Pakistan, rather than by a Government of Pakistan entity. This ensured the funds were not subject to restrictive government processes, such as the need to procure goods from registered government suppliers. ASLP paid a fee to the international organisation for this service, but many ACIAR interviewees considered this was worthwhile due to the flexibility provided by the international organisation.

A further benefit of the program approach was that **it streamlined approval processes with the Government of Pakistan**. ACIAR interviewees outlined that once Pakistan had approved ASLP, it was much simpler to gain approvals for individual projects, delivering an important streamlining benefit for ACIAR.

ASLP was able to centrally provide technical and training support to projects. This included, for example, support on gender and inclusion through the social science project, as well as specific training to project teams in areas such as gender, impact measurement and communications. This central support was a benefit of the program approach and was largely valued by the projects.

The **ASLP approach came with transaction costs**. Additional staff time and resources were needed to oversee the program, and busy ACIAR RPMs and project leaders needed to put more time and effort into collaboration and coordination. However, in the context of the benefits of the programmatic approach that were achieved, and the potential for even greater benefits, these transaction costs appear to be a worthwhile investment.

Conclusions and lessons learned

ASLP was conceived as a program and brought together complementary projects to achieve an overall set of outcomes. The program's projects identified new practices and policies to assist specific commodities and smallholders in Pakistan. The program was regarded as credible and relevant by the Government of Pakistan, and it increased the capacity of researchers and scientists. Unfortunately the lack of systematic data means it is not possible to draw conclusions on whether capacity was built for governments and the extension system, or whether increased capacity was used to scale out the program's work.

The framework provided in Appendix 1.2 highlights that there are a number of potential benefits of a programmatic approach. The ASLP experience demonstrates that when ACIAR uses a programmatic approach, **it needs to intentionally design, implement and resource activities to ensure these programmatic benefits are realised**. Examples of how this was achieved as part of ASLP included:

- The complementary nature of ASLP projects set up the program to achieve more than the sum of its parts.
- Learning between projects, particularly the mango projects, strengthened outcomes.
- The multifaceted approach to building relationships assisted the program to enhance leverage and foster sustainability.
- The program governance, budget and training arrangements streamlined management.

At the same time, **it was clear that there was potential for more benefits to be achieved through the programmatic approach, but this potential was not realised**. In particular, there was a lack of clarity around the program's theory of change and what could realistically be achieved by the program's completion, restricting its ability to achieve impact. The potential for the social science and commodity-based projects to provide a holistic response to challenges in Pakistan was not realised due to the late introduction of the social science project, as well as the lack of incentives for projects to collaborate, and challenges working in a multidisciplinary manner. In addition, there was a missed opportunity to better communicate the program's outputs to increase influence. There were also considerable challenges with the ACIAR–DFAT relationship, although these challenges will not apply to all ACIAR programs.

The ASLP experience highlights some lessons for ACIAR to consider. **Learning from and applying these lessons would help ensure that the ASLP experience was worthwhile, not only for the practical outputs it achieved, but for the foundation it provided for future ACIAR programs**.

Lessons learned

This evaluation highlights some general lessons for ACIAR projects and programs:

1. Programs (and the projects under them) **need monitoring systems that systematically collect data on changes in capacity and scale out**. This will allow programs to understand if, during their lifetimes, they are making progress towards these higher-level outcomes. If progress is not being made, adjustments can be made as required. Systematic monitoring systems would also ensure more data is available to make a case for whether outcomes have been achieved in the long-term.

2. **Programs should be very clear on what research-for-development programs can achieve as well as their limitations**. A clear program theory of change which demonstrates what a research-for-development can and can't realistically achieve can assist ACIAR to better manage its programs and manage the expectations of in-country partners and funders.

3. To capitalise on diverse perspectives and enable holistic responses, **project, program and ACIAR team selection should consider staff traits such as openness to collaboration, good communication, and enthusiasm about working in multidisciplinary teams**.

4. Diverse perspectives and holistic responses will be further enhanced **by ensuring the incentives for programs and projects are aligned**. Approaches could include, for example, developing proposal and reporting systems that ensure cross-project collaboration is planned, implemented and reported on; and ensuring program coordinators have more power to compel projects to collaborate and work in the interests of the program.

5. Program influence could be increased **through better communication strategies and central repositories for program outputs**, to ensure such outputs are available to a broad audience.

6. **ACIAR may wish to revisit its approach to organisational learning** and consider whether improvements are needed. This could include, for example, considering whether learning is intentional, whether there are systems and leadership in place to support a culture and practice of learning, and whether learning is broad-based or concentrated within a small number of key individuals.

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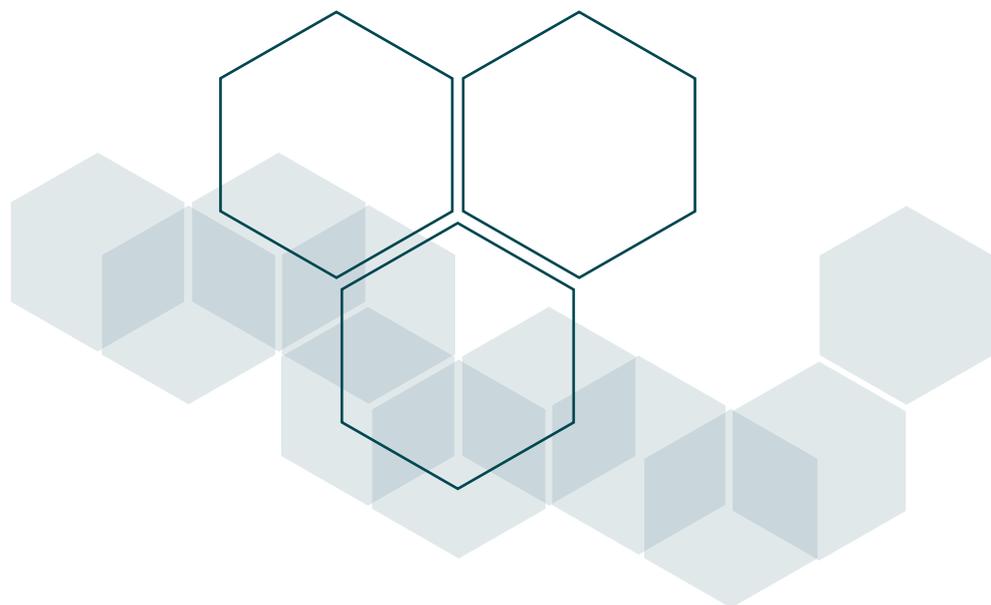
Appendixes

Appendix 1.1: Theory of change

1. IMPROVED livelihoods and reduced poverty for smallholders (including women) in Pakistan

Impacts

Outcomes
- Improved policy environment to support smallholders and women
- Improved value chains
- Improved production practices

Intermediate outcomes
- Actors use their increased capacity to adopt policies and scale out practices/approaches
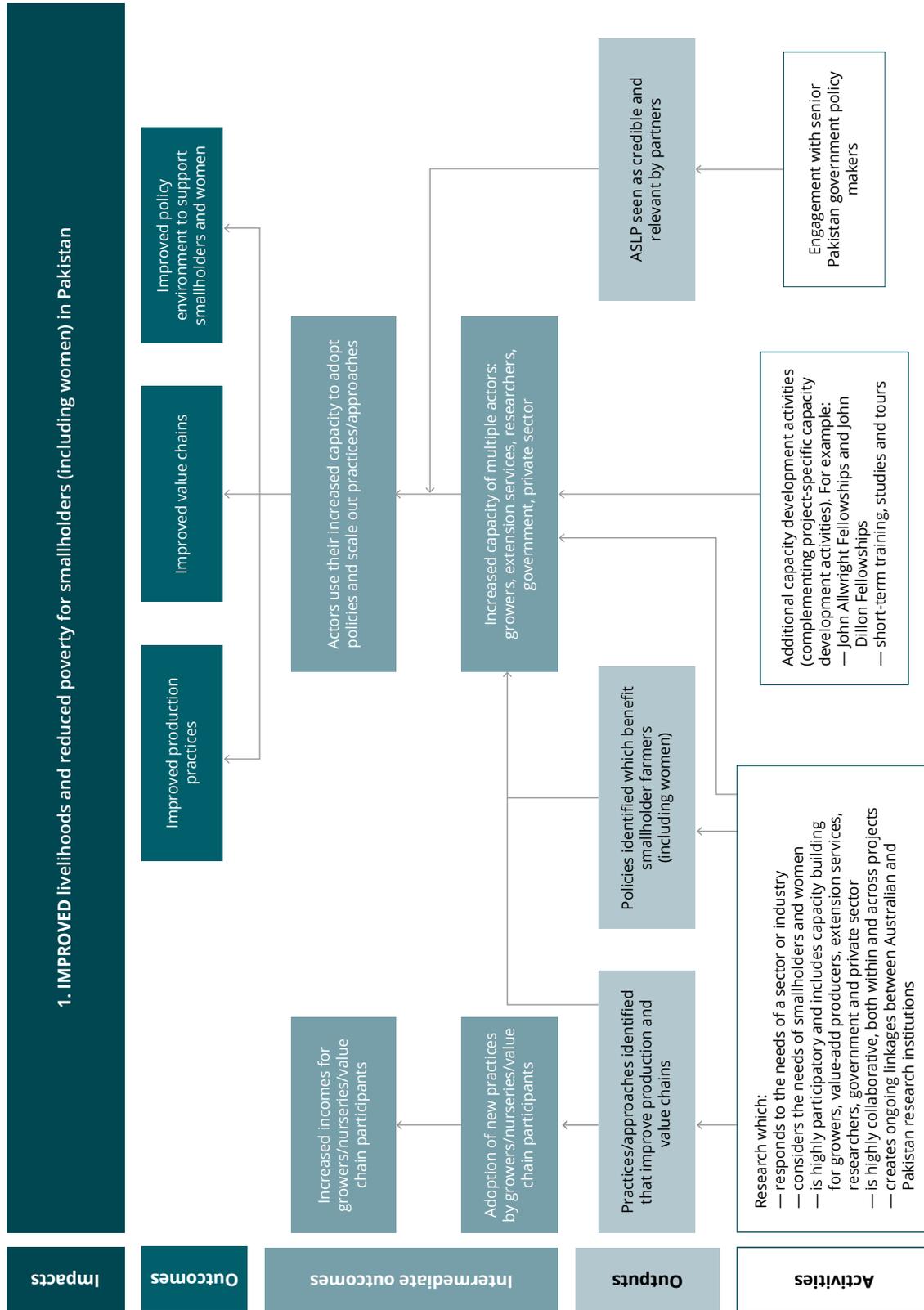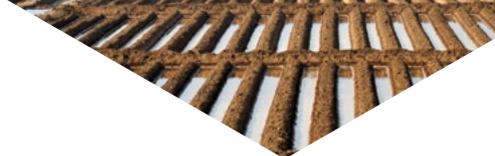- Increased capacity of multiple actors: growers, extension services, researchers, government, private sector
- Increased incomes for growers/nurseries/value chain participants
- Adoption of new practices by growers/nurseries/value chain participants

Outputs
- ASLP seen as credible and relevant by partners
- Policies identified which benefit smallholder farmers (including women)
- Practices/approaches identified that improve production and value chains

Activities
- Engagement with senior Pakistan government policy makers
- Additional capacity development activities (complementing project-specific capacity development activities). For example:
  — John Allwright Fellowships and John Dillon Fellowships
  — short-term training, studies and tours
- Research which:
  — responds to the needs of a sector or industry
  — considers the needs of smallholders and women
  — is highly participatory and includes capacity building for growers, value-add producers, extension services, researchers, government and private sector
  — is highly collaborative, both within and across projects
  — creates ongoing linkages between Australian and Pakistan research institutions

Appendix 1.2: Potential benefits of a programmatic approach and rubric

Dimension	Description of potential benefits from a programmatic approach	Extent to which benefits were realised		
		Low	Medium	High
Increasing impact	• Projects work collaboratively towards a program theory of change, combining results for greater impact. • Extending the reach of interventions to multiple geographic areas. • Broadening the diversity of perspectives and strategies to provide a holistic response to a common problem.	• Projects are loosely related to program goal objectives but operate independently. • No program level theory of change. • Geographic locations of projects are not strategic.	• Projects are closely connected to a program goal / objectives but without a strong theory of change. • Projects operate largely independently but collaborate on some activities.	• Projects are highly interdependent and complementary. • A combination of project outcomes is required to meet program goals. • A strong overarching theory of change drives selection of projects. • Projects may address different aspects of a common problem or operate in different locations to strategically broaden outcomes.
Increasing knowledge and learning	• Sharing information between projects to build knowledge and strengthen outcomes. • Comparing intervention approaches across different contexts.	• No or limited evidence of sharing and learning between projects.	• Some evidence of sharing and learning between projects. • Examples of where learning has influenced project implementation.	• Strong evidence of sharing and learning between projects with clear evidence of how this learning has strengthened project implementation.
Increasing influence and adoption	• Enhancing leverage through joint action with government, market institutions or other stakeholders. • Fostering sustainability by building relationships. • Strengthening communication of research findings.	• No or limited evidence that the program structure is being used to promote the program, or influence stakeholders.	• Some examples or evidence of the program enhancing leverage or influence with stakeholders and communicating results (over what could have been achieved by individual projects).	• The program routinely works to influence stakeholders to raise awareness of program outcomes, and increase adoption and sustainability of results. • There is evidence that this has had a positive effect.
Streamlining management	• Coordinating implementing entities and interactions with funders. • Shared governance arrangements. • Standardising management and specialised support (M&E and reporting processes, approach to cross-cutting issues, capacity development support).	• No or minimal benefits in relation to streamlining reporting or communication with funders and other stakeholders. • No or minimal support for M&E, cross cutting issues, or capacity development. • Governance provides oversight of projects, without significant value-add to the program.	• Some benefits in relation to streamlining communication with funders and reporting. • Shared M&E Framework. • Some examples of shared capacity building to projects. • Governance provides oversight of projects, with some value add to the program.	• Clear benefits achieved by streamlining communication and reporting. • Shared M&E Framework effectively used to aggregate program results. • Program structure supports projects to strengthen approach to cross-cutting themes and build capacity on common issues. • Governance contributes strongly to achievement of program-level outcomes.

Appendix 1.3: Summary of project contributions to selected outputs and outcomes

Project	Contribution	Examples of outcomes/evidence
Output: Practices/approaches identified that improve production and value chains		
Citrus	Strong	• Introduced and trialled 7 new citrus varieties and 8 new rootstocks. • Increased scientific knowledge in modern orchard and nursery management, covering areas such as pruning, fruit thinning, plant nutrition, pest control and irrigation. • Produced at least 8 training manuals, a joint nursery manual with the mango projects, and 13 peer-reviewed journal articles. • Trained at least 5,700 growers. • Trained women to conduct backyard nursery activities. • Conducted capacity building for researchers, scientists and extension workers, and supported students to obtain higher degrees.
Mango	Strong	• Identified evidence-based approaches to pruning, nutrition, disease and pest management, orchard floor management, and integration of management techniques. • Identified the source and management options for field and post-harvest diseases and pests. These included mango sudden death syndrome[a], mango malformation disease, gall midge, dendritic spots, and mango stem end rots. • Demonstrated that value chain approaches could work in Pakistan by supporting 4 value chains and associated outputs to ensure these value chains could function. • Produced at least 37 pamphlets and technical guides, a joint nursery manual with the citrus project, and 50 peer-reviewed journal articles. • Trained at least 6,000 growers. • Supported village women on a mango pickle value chain. • Conducted capacity building for researchers, scientists and extension workers, and supported students to obtain higher degrees.
Dairy	Strong	• Identified new practices for profitable smallholder dairy farming, milk value-adding and milk marketing, calf rearing and fodder production. • Identified key extension messages and developed and tested a new approach to extension, the 'whole family approach'. • Produced at least 35 modules and fact sheets, and 14 peer-reviewed journal articles. • Trained at least 1,500 farmers and worked with women on dairy value-added products. • Conducted capacity building for researchers, scientists and extension workers, and supported students to obtain higher degrees.
Social science	Good	• Established Community Service Centres in 4 focal villages as centres for training, community equipment, and meeting spaces. • Conducted training in low-income households in focal villages that responded to these household needs. For example, training for youth in commodity skills for citrus and mango villages; training for female youth in diary value addition and sewing skills. • Produced at least 9 publications.
Agricultural capability component	Good	• Supported capacity building through 16 John Allwight Fellowships for MPhil/PhD programs (7 female, 9 male) and 3 John Dillon Fellowships (3 male).

Appendix 1.3: Summary of project contributions to selected outputs and outcomes (*cont.*)

Project	Contribution	Examples of outcomes/evidence
Outcome: Adoption of new practices and incomes by direct program participants		
Citrus	Some	• The project directly trained growers and orchard managers, but no systematic data is available to support conclusions on adoption and increased incomes.
Mango	Good	• Pre-post studies showed that direct participants adopted value chain approaches and increased their incomes (including women in a mango pickle value chain).
Dairy	Strong	• A comparative study showed adoption rates of key messages ranged between 40% and 70%, with farm profits increasing by an average of 30%.
Social science	Good	• A pre-post study showed that almost 90% of male respondents and 86% of female respondents believed their project had met their needs; and 60% of respondents (both male and female) believed training had improved their knowledge and skills to earn more income. Female empowerment through involvement in household decision-making also increased substantially.

(a) The Phase 1 production project determined the causal agent for mango sudden death syndrome – a significant achievement given researchers previously had diverse views on the disease's cause.

Appendix 1.4: Stakeholders consulted

Name	Title	Organisation or location
Dr Kazmi Munawar	Project Coordinator – Production (Phase 1) ACIAR Country Manager, Pakistan (Phase 2)	ACIAR
Mr Gerard McEvilly	Aik Saath Program Coordinator	ACIAR
Dr Les Baxter	Former ASLP Program Coordinator	ACIAR (former)
Dr Peter Horne	General Manager, Country Partnerships	ACIAR
Ms Irene Kernot	Research Program Manager, Horticulture	ACIAR
Dr Jayne Curnow	Research Program Manager, Social Sciences	ACIAR
Dr John Spriggs and Ms Barbara Chambers	Project leads	Social project, ASLP Phase 2
Name confidential	Program Manager	DFAT

Appendix 1.5: Program evaluation framework

The data and process used for addressing each of the key evaluation questions (KEQs) is summarised in this table. Bold questions are high priority and were explored in more depth.

Key Evaluation Question	Evidence/information required	Data sources	Data collection and analysis approach
1. **What was the process, timing (vis-à-vis constituent projects) and rationale for bringing projects together under this program?** – How is the program structured?	• Documentation on discussion and decision processes • Perspectives of key stakeholders • Program structure documentation	• Program concept / design documents, ROUs, file notes, etc. • Key program-level stakeholders (as above)	• Documentation review, stakeholder interviews, triangulation
2. **What is the program's theory of change? To what extent have the intended program goal and outcomes been achieved?** – What was the contribution of each project?	• Documented theory of change at program commencement and/or subsequently • Documented evidence of program progress and achievements • Assessments of project-level achievements • Perspectives of key stakeholders	• Program concept / design documents, ROUs, variations • Program-level progress reporting and reviews • Project-level evaluations • Key program-level stakeholders (for example, program manager/ coordinator, ACIAR country managers, RPMs, DFAT, government partners)	• Documentation review, stakeholder interviews, triangulation • ACIAR Outcomes Framework (as relevant) • Quantitative assessments (where feasible)
3. What were the main factors that influenced program performance? – To what extent were the program's scope, scale, structure and management arrangements appropriate? – How did the program's particular structure and management arrangements influence program achievements? – What external factors arose, for example, budgetary, natural hazards, policy settings, etc.?	• Existing analyses of program achievements and contextual factors • Project-level assessments • Information on program structure and management • Perspectives of key stakeholders	• Project-level evaluations • Program documentation, for example, operational guidance, annual reports, reviews, aid quality checks • Key program-level stakeholders (for example, program manager/ coordinator, ACIAR country managers, RPMs, DFAT; government partners)	• Documentation review, stakeholder interviews, triangulation

Appendix 1.5: Program evaluation framework (*cont.*)

Key Evaluation Question	Evidence/information required	Data sources	Data collection and analysis approach
4. What benefits were realised by adopting a programmatic approach, compared to an individual project approach? – What evidence is there of learning or cross-collaboration between projects within a program? – To what extent were project level outcomes mutually reinforcing within the program? – Did the programmatic approach result in improved implementation strategies and/or additional resourcing, for example, on gender equality?	• Documented evidence of cross-project interactions (learning events etc.) • Project-level assessments • Information on program structure and management • Perspectives of key stakeholders	• Program-level progress reporting and reviews (including aid quality checks) • Project-level evaluations • Assessments of KEQs 1–3 • Key program-level stakeholders	• Documentation review, stakeholder interviews, triangulation
5. What challenges arose from the programmatic approach? – **To what extent did the benefits outweigh the challenges?**	• Documentation on challenges • Perspectives of key stakeholders	• Program-level progress reporting and reviews (including aid quality checks) • Project-level evaluations • Assessments of KEQs 1–4 • Key program-level stakeholders	• Documentation review, stakeholder interviews, triangulation • Verification workshops for each program (pertinent for all program KEQs)