



Australian Government  
Australian Centre for  
International Agricultural Research

# 10-Year

## Strategy 2018–2027

Research that works for developing  
countries and Australia

2nd edition - October 2022





**As Australia's Foreign Minister, I am delighted that the Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio has a specialist agency supporting research: the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, ACIAR.**

Forty years ago, the Australian Parliament passed the ACIAR Act, establishing this expert statutory agency, to invest Australian development assistance in research to be conducted in the partner countries of our region. From the outset, it was envisaged that Australian scientists would work with their counterparts in partner countries to 'solve agricultural problems' to reduce poverty and improve food security.

The drivers for the establishment of ACIAR are now more compelling than ever.

In 2022, the world is grappling with a new food security crisis, with far too many people hungry, starving or lacking critical nutrients in their diet. Climate change is amplifying the challenges for farmers: both in terms of making extreme weather more extreme, and disrupting underlying seasonal rhythms and baselines. Water resources are under ever more pressure, and pests and diseases are both undermining the productivity of our neighbours, and threatening Australian industries. COVID-19 is a potent reminder that in order to protect human health, we need to better understand interactions with animal health and environmental health.

Finding solutions to these challenges means looking at agrifood systems as a whole, from ecosystems to farmers to consumers, and from science to policy to markets.

This in turn underlines the importance of partnerships, both in undertaking research so that knowledge is shared between Australian scientists and their counterparts overseas, and in maximising the likelihood that research will be relevant, timely and influential.

This refreshed ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–27, shows how ACIAR interprets its mandate broadly – encompassing agriculture, fisheries, forestry, land and water management, biosecurity, and human health and nutrition – all in the context of mitigating and adapting to climate change.

This strategy is emblematic of the Australian Government's commitment to building a more stable, prosperous and resilient region. Science partnerships with our neighbours are delivering real solutions to reduce poverty, improve food and water security, manage biosecurity risks, tackle climate change, boost human nutrition, and empower women and girls.

I have already seen first-hand the benefits of ACIAR work in the field, and I look forward to seeing much more as the second half of this 10-year strategy is implemented.

**Senator the Hon Penny Wong**  
Minister for Foreign Affairs

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# Foreword

**Since 2018, the world has changed considerably with the COVID-19 pandemic, a mounting climate crisis and resurgent food security concerns.**

In response to these challenges, the Commission for International Agricultural Research initiated an independent mid-term review of the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–27. The review, chaired by Dr Wendy Craik, found the strategy remains fit-for-purpose and recommended changes to its implementation to reflect our changing world. In this second edition of the strategy, we address the findings. The findings and the ACIAR response, including the 6 strategic changes, are published on the ACIAR website.

All countries in the Indo-Pacific region are grappling with the complex and intersecting challenges of how to grow more food and reduce poverty – moreover how to feed more people healthier food more efficiently – using less land, water, energy and inputs per unit of output, while substantially reducing carbon emissions.

Many countries in our region confront the ‘triple burden’ of simultaneously having significant sections of their population facing chronic hunger, and nutrient deficiency, while growing numbers of people are consuming excess calories and suffering from obesity and associated non-communicable diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

ACIAR is making a significant contribution to meeting these challenges.

Australia has great strengths in agriculture, fisheries, forestry, and management of land and water resources, underpinned by our excellence in research. Australian science has much to offer countries in our region as they seek to improve their food security, by increasing agricultural productivity, sustainability and food system resilience, against a backdrop of climate change.

Australian farmers and rural industries and communities have long had to contend with high levels of climate variability and extreme weather events. Australian climate change science, in mitigation and adaptation, is highly regarded internationally. This strategy sharpens focus on climate change across the research portfolio, in a dedicated program, in new transformational initiatives, and also in multilateral collaborations and capacity building investments.

In low-income countries, achieving productivity gains in agriculture, ensuring that women have equal access to resources and decision-making, and improving market access or developing new markets for smallholder farmers, are still the most effective ways to lift people out of poverty, improve livelihoods, and reduce hunger and malnutrition.

The ACIAR budget appropriation comes from Australia’s foreign aid budget. Our investments are guided by our enabling legislation and consistent with the Australian Official Development Assistance program.

This updated strategy sets out high-level, strategic directions and priorities for ACIAR. It identifies prospective new areas of research, and refinements in our research management. Over the last 40 years, ACIAR has evolved a robust business model as a trusted broker of, and hands-on investor in, research partnerships between Australia and developing countries in our region. This strategy seeks to strengthen and build on that model, not to replace it.

We are strongly committed to the implementation of this strategy, and to building on our 40-year record of scientific excellence through mutually beneficial research partnerships in our region.



**Mrs Fiona Simson**  
Chair, Commission for International Agricultural Research



**Professor Andrew Campbell**  
Chief Executive Officer, ACIAR





# Mission

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



# Vision

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

We occupy a unique position in helping to make this global vision more realistic. Over the decade of this strategy, it will be widely acknowledged that ACIAR:

- » is **building a knowledge base** for tackling the biggest and most complex challenges of our time
  - » is **a trusted science partner** in the Indo-Pacific region
  - » fosters **effective and innovative research collaborations**, underpinning far-sighted policy, community and industry responses to complex challenges
  - » sustains and reinforces the **invaluable social capital** of its alumni and partners network through informal and formal collaborations
- » is a **preferred funder within the Australian science community**, offering opportunities for early, mid and late-career scientists to make a difference
  - » is a **skilled broker of collaborations** between governments, educational institutions and industry
  - » is a crucial asset in Australia's **science diplomacy**
  - » provides **rich learning opportunities** for Australian researchers, and helps build and maintain agricultural, fisheries and forestry research capability in Australia
  - » is a recognised **leader in maximising, measuring and communicating** the value and impact of agricultural research-for-development.



# Strategic objectives

**Six high-level strategic objectives guide our research portfolio in the Indo-Pacific Region.**

These objectives are consistent with the purpose of ACIAR under our enabling legislation. They reflect the Australian Government's aid policy and the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

ACIAR brokers and invests in research partnerships in developing countries to build the knowledge base that supports crucial development objectives:

In pursuing these objectives, ACIAR works to ensure that our research programs pay particular attention to:



1 Improving food security and reducing poverty among smallholder farmers and rural communities



2 Managing natural resources and producing food more sustainably, adapting to climate variability and mitigating climate change



3 Enhancing human nutrition and reducing risks to human health.



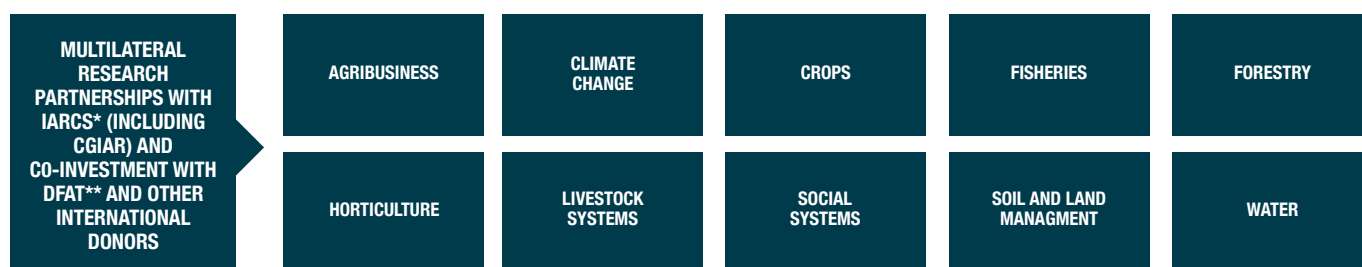
4 Improving gender equity and empowerment of women and girls



5 Fostering more inclusive agrifood and forestry value chains, engaging the private sector where possible



6 Building scientific and policy capability within our partner countries.



**ACIAR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES contributing to:**



\*International Agricultural Research Centres (IARCs)  
 \*\*Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

# Delivering on our mission

**ACIAR is an investor, broker and manager of strategic partnerships in agricultural research-for-development. We evaluate and communicate research findings. This refreshed strategy aims to strengthen that model, not to change it.**

Our partnership model ensures that partner countries have input to, and ownership of, research priorities and the delivery of research programs.

This approach helps to maximise the relevance of the research undertaken and the likelihood that outputs and findings are used to make a difference in our region, including Australia.

Photo: Jeffrey Maitem

## Focusing research partnerships

**The core business of ACIAR is to identify research priorities with partner countries, commission research and broker partnerships to tackle those priorities. We manage and monitor these investments to maximise impact and return on investment.**

Since its inception in 1982, ACIAR has evolved three research partnerships models:

- » bilateral country partnerships
- » multilateral research collaborations
- » co-investment with research and development partners.

### Bilateral country partnerships

Bilateral partnerships between ACIAR and partner countries dominate the current research portfolio. Within these partnerships, ACIAR undertakes regular in-country consultations, and commissions research from Australian scientists (in universities, CSIRO, state government agencies or private firms) and international agricultural research centres to deliver research projects consistent with agreed priorities.

Bilateral country partnerships will continue to be an important, distinctive element of the ACIAR portfolio, accounting for around half of our research investment.

Over the decade of this strategy, we will work with partner agencies to develop complementary long term (up to 10 years) research collaborations in each of our main country programs. Our partner countries share our desire to move towards fewer, larger research projects in each country.

Our 11 country offices are playing an increasingly vital role in facilitating ACIAR-funded research on the ground. They have a close understanding of local contexts and emerging local issues that have implications for Australian aid policy and ACIAR research investments at country and regional levels. We will ensure that each office has the necessary people and resources to play an effective role in the development and implementation of the country strategies it supports.

### Multilateral research collaborations

As part of our statutory mandate, ACIAR manages Australia's investment in the global agricultural research system, the largest element of which is the CGIAR. ACIAR staff are involved in the highest levels of governance of the CGIAR system, and Australians are prominent in the leadership of CGIAR Research Centers.





Photo: Conor Ashleigh

The CGIAR manages gene banks for most of the world's important food crops, undertaking multilateral research initiatives that are more efficiently delivered across multiple countries. This work delivers significant benefits to Australian rural industries, and it is important that Australia contributes to these global public goods.

ACIAR will work through the CGIAR System Council and other multilateral partnerships, such as the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institutions (APAARI), The World Vegetable Centre and the Pacific Community (SPC), to progress our 6 strategic objectives. We will also explore new multilateral partnerships, including with the International Centre for Insect Physiology and Ecology (icipe).

## Research co-investment with development partners

Co-investment partnerships signify strong trust between institutions. This pathway enables ACIAR to leverage our resources, access complementary expertise, as well as engage in larger and more ambitious research programs than we could fund alone. As initiatives mature, our focus changes from research for development, to research in development.

While ACIAR is primarily a broker and investor in research partnerships, the ACIAR Act also directs us to invest in the development of research outputs – taking research findings to scale. For a given research project, the investment required to translate research findings into wide-scale implementation is invariably much greater than the cost of the original research. Any ACIAR investment in development needs to be highly strategic and catalytic.

A promising way of tackling this challenge is for ACIAR to invest jointly with larger development donors in co-designed and co-managed initiatives.

Our most important partnership is with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT). We have a range of co-investments in which ACIAR funds and manages the research effort to build a solid knowledge base for subsequent scale-out and development funded by DFAT. DFAT also co-invests in our capacity building program through the Australia Awards.

Over the last 10 years, ACIAR has had a growing partnership with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) working together on food security in Africa, and food loss in smallholder systems and One Health issues in South-East Asia.

# Synthesising research, assessing impacts and learning lessons

**ACIAR is a learning organisation. We have a strong culture of monitoring and evaluation, and review at a project level.**

Research synthesis, impact assessment and evaluation processes are integral to ongoing improvement in how we design, implement and extend our portfolio of research.

Quantitative independent analysis has shown that funds invested since 1982 have delivered total benefits exceeding A\$64 billion.

However, many benefits cannot be quantified and costed through economic impact assessment alone. We are continuing to expand our impact assessment tools to include mixed method approaches that can better estimate important social, capacity building and environmental benefits accruing from our research-for-development investments.

This strategy builds on long standing project-based approaches to assessing research impact by adding a greater emphasis on portfolio-level evaluation against our strategic objectives.

# Building scientific and policy capacity in Australia and the region

**Growing more and healthier food and fibre more efficiently and wasting less postharvest in more inclusive and resilient value chains requires a substantial boost in technical capacity – scientific, managerial, policy and governance – across the Indo-Pacific region.**

Building capacity to inform scientific understanding and the design and implementation of policy is core to our mandate. This strategy commits ACIAR to build on our investment in postgraduate research training for individual scientists, with more:

- » value-added training in management and leadership
- » short-course training for selected cohorts of people
- » attention to building a network of ACIAR collaborators with whom we maintain ongoing relationships.

It also places an emphasis on working with the growing alumni of ACIAR partners across the region to target our capacity building to achieve the greatest impact.







## Outreach: extending research findings

**An important priority in this 10-year strategy is to increase understanding of the impact of Australia's aid investments through ACIAR, and to ensure that more audiences can access, understand and use our research findings.**

Informing diverse stakeholders requires targeted outreach. From creating video and social media content, to engaging with Australian stakeholders face-to-face, to working with international donor organisations, and high-level policy and decision-makers. Since 2017, ACIAR has substantially increased our investment in Outreach, and coupled it with Capacity Building under a new senior executive position.

## Gender equity and social inclusion

**ACIAR is committed to improving gender equity and social inclusion. The 2017–2022 Gender Equity Policy and Strategy has guided ACIAR in delivering against gender equity and women's empowerment within the organisation and through our research and capacity building programs.**

A new Gender Equity and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy and Action Plan 2022–2027 will guide future work with the aim of integrating intersectional understandings of gender equity and broader social inclusion considerations into all aspects and stages of research, capacity building, and outreach. A key feature of the GESI Strategy and Action Plan is underpinning country or regional plans that are appropriate and responsive to context.

We will introduce enhanced processes for ACIAR work that are more equitable and inclusive, and mindful of 'doing no harm' principles, and share lessons across ACIAR and with all stakeholders. Gender and social inclusion expertise within ACIAR will be increased and we will work to build our networks of gender specialists in particular throughout the Indo-Pacific.

Progress on achieving the objectives and activities outlined in the GESI Strategy and Action Plan will be measured annually.



# Achievements 2018–2022

**During the first five years of the 10-year strategy, ACIAR has continued to focus on delivering our mission through research and capacity building investments in a challenging and changing operating environment.**

## Research

The research portfolio has been consolidated from 14 to 10 programs, while adding a new Climate Change program. All programs are strongly aligned to the six development objectives outlined in this strategy.

We have made considerable progress developing a more connected portfolio with stronger program-level research strategies (Theories of Change) to deliver the development objectives.

## Co-investment partnerships

We have deepened engagement with other research and development funders, including new co-investment partnerships with Canada's International Development Research Centre (IRDC) on food loss and One Health, and overhauled our approach to private sector partnerships.

## Multilateral engagement

ACIAR has played a constructive role in the One CGIAR reform process, including (with Canada and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) being instrumental in the creation of a new CGIAR Gender Platform. The strategy has also seen new agreements with and support for the Asia-Pacific Association of Agricultural Research Institution (APAARI), The Pacific Community (SPC), WorldVeg, the Global Research Alliance for Agricultural Greenhouse Gases (GRA) and the Adaptation Research Alliance.

## Country partnerships

The strategy has led to a change in the:

- » funding by region, with a shift of resources from west to east
- » mandate and capabilities of the country network, from operational to partnership brokering functions
- » way we develop and maintain partnerships in-country
- » nature and breadth of partnerships with countries.

## Capacity building

The 10-year strategy has added to existing valued programs, including the John Allwright Fellowship, John Dillon Fellowship and Pacific Scholarship schemes, through:

- » John Allwright Fellowship Executive Leadership Program – since 2019, 58 fellows (30 women and 28 men) have completed the program
- » Meryl Williams Fellowship – since 2019, 42 women working in agricultural research across the Indo-Pacific have been accepted into the fellowship
- » Alumni Research Support Facility – since 2020, 65 research projects have been supported
- » ACIAR Alumni Network – in 2021, there were 630 active alumni across the Indo-Pacific region and 72 dedicated alumni networking events
- » ACIAR Learn – an online capacity building platform launched in 2022 can be accessed through mobile devices.

## Portfolio planning and impact evaluation

As a result of the strategy, we have:

- » developed portfolio level approaches to planning, assessment, learning and reporting
- » established the ACIAR Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisory Panel

- » expanded the range of evaluation methods used to assess and communicate our impact
- » improved our capacity to learn from our experience in commissioning research and share this knowledge with others.

## Outreach

A significant increase in investment has facilitated the delivery of a high quality outreach program, staffed by professional communicators. Information about ACIAR is communicated through:

- » scientific publications
- » an upgraded, interactive website
- » social media channels with growing international and Australian audiences
- » subscription-based magazine and online newsletter
- » face-to-face and virtual events.

ACIAR continues to be a highly regarded organisation internationally. There is growing awareness of ACIAR and its role in the agricultural innovation system within Australia.

## Organisational change

We have made changes across the agency to ensure that we are well placed to deliver the strategy, including:

- » implementation of new project management systems
- » substantially improved cybersecurity risk management
- » improved capabilities for teleworking
- » established new SES leadership positions – Chief Scientist and General Manager, Outreach and Capacity Building
- » increased the proportion of senior roles occupied by women, from 11% to 70% (now 50%), consistent with our 2017–2022 Gender Equity Policy and Strategy.



Photo:  
Paul Jones

# The next 5 years

In January 2022, the Commission for International Agricultural Research initiated a mid-term review of the 10-year strategy. An independent expert panel was established, chaired by Dr Wendy Craik. In May 2022, the panel submitted a report to the Commission which made 14 recommendations. In response, ACIAR will implement six strategic changes over the next five years.

## Strategic change 1: Transformational research initiatives for food system resilience

By July 2025, we will manage 30% of our bilateral research and capacity building investments as mission-directed, transdisciplinary and cross-program initiatives. These initiatives will target transformational change in food systems characterised by high levels of uncertainty.

## Strategic change 2: More efficient commissioning of projects

We will redesign our commissioning and contracting processes, while not compromising the quality of project design and planning, to ensure that by 2025 at least 90% of projects proceed from project concept note approval to legally committed project activity within 12 months. Current average is more than two years.

## Strategic change 3: Next generation partnerships

By 2027, we will transition our major partner country and regional relationships into new partnership models that reflect the growing research and leadership strengths of our country partners, and maximise the mutual benefit achieved from international research collaborations between Australian and country partner institutions.

## Strategic change 4: A strategic role in the Australian Government's evolving international engagement

Over the next five years we will increase our visibility in, and deepen our partnerships with, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF) and Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW). In doing so we will focus on our distinctive role in effective delivery of Official Development Assistance and informing strategic policy on global change in agriculture, food systems and climate.

## Strategic change 5: Preferred partner in the Australian innovation system

Over the next five years we will position ACIAR to be a continued partner of choice for universities, state government agencies, CSIRO, research and development corporations and the private sector. We will contribute to the continued development of the Australian agricultural innovation system through strategic research investment and brokering connections to international collaborators and opportunities.

## Strategic change 6: Maximising the value of our multilateral investments

Over the next five years we will strengthen our partnerships with multilateral agricultural research-for-development institutions, such as CGIAR, to maximise synergies between our multilateral and bilateral investments. We will broker new approaches for Australia and partner countries to access the capacity, knowledge and assets of these multilateral institutions, and to better engage the Australian innovation system.

Photo: Conor Ashleigh



*'The panel congratulates ACIAR on the development and implementation of the strategy to date particularly in the face of the many significant changes in its operating environment. Stakeholders value ACIAR and are positive about ACIAR's 10-year strategy, approach, operations and programs and, while indicating they would welcome more longer-term transformational partnerships rather than ad hoc research projects, did not want to see wholesale changes to the strategy.'*

Mid-term review of the ACIAR 10-Year Strategy 2018–2027 and its impact on organisational performance and results (Final Report, May 2022)

*'ACIAR is an institution of which Australians can be proud. Over 30 years, it has directed a program of research which, drawing on Australian and partner country expertise, has lifted agricultural productivity and benefited many farmers in developing countries, improving food security and reducing poverty. ACIAR has a strong international reputation for the results it has achieved, its research partnership model, and its record of evaluation and assessment.'*

Independent review of the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (2013)



**ACIAR**  
EST. 1982

**Australian  
Aid** 